Introduction

Although the above epigraph refers to the long series of outside contacts that have occurred throughout Vanuatu’s history it also has some relevance when reviewing the history of archaeological research in the archipelago. This chapter concentrates on a chronological review of that research and in doing so attempts to place it and the current research in historical and archaeological context. The review avoids delving in the minutiae but rather highlights general research themes and results. More comprehensive discussion is included for archaeological research which has not been fully published. On the islands where this current research has been carried out, namely Erromango, Efate and Malekula, more detail will be included in relevant chapters. In an attempt to retain contextual consistency the former colonial name for Vanuatu, the New Hebrides/Nouvelles Hébrides will be used in discussion of earlier research which took place prior to 1980. In addition the terms ‘Incised and Applied Relief’ (Golson 1968:12) and/or ‘Mangaasi’ (Garanger 1971) will also be used throughout the review when referring to ceramic traditions as, although they have recently been shown to be somewhat imprecise and all encompassing (Bedford et al. 1998; Bedford 2000a, 2000b), it was within these frameworks that much of the earlier research and discussion was conducted. Earlier researchers have also somewhat freely used and often intermixed terms such as style, ware, phase and tradition when referring to ceramic assemblages and this will again be reflected throughout this review1. All radiocarbon dates are presented in the following format; date, sample number and calibrated age at two standard deviations using the Calib. program REV 4.1.2 of Stuiver et al., 1998 with delta R as 0 for marine samples.

1. The more recently excavated Vanuatu ceramic assemblages will be referred to in the following terms. The term ‘style’ is used in a generic sense when discussing assemblages that lack detailed well-defined chronologies. Once a proposed ceramic chronology is outlined in detail (Chapter 8) the term ‘ware’ is used to refer to a distinctive class of pottery which shares a number of well defined attributes (Rice 1987:484). The term ‘phase’ is used to define homogeneous and distinct sections of a dated ceramic sequence (Rice 1987:484).
It is more than forty years since archaeological research began in Vanuatu and it must be seen in its historical context. Forty years ago and for much of the succeeding period the geology of many of the islands was virtually unknown, and archaeologically they were a complete blank as were many other areas of the Pacific. The idea that dentate stamped ceramics (later universally known as Lapita) were somehow related across different island groups and evidence of some ‘community of culture’ first became accepted only in the 1960s (Golson 1961). The full implications continue to be vigorously debated today. Other ceramic traditions and theories relating to them have been established and dismantled during the same period. Radiocarbon dating with its associated complexities and potential pitfalls, of which we have only recently become more fully aware and begun to examine in detail in the Pacific (Kirch and Hunt 1988; Spriggs 1990a, 1996a; Spriggs and Anderson 1993), was for much of the history of archaeological research in Vanuatu regarded as the definitive scientific tool which could single-handedly resolve the chronology of sites. Progress in the understanding of the Pacific longue durée will only continue through the juxtaposition of results from previous research with those from new ventures. Such is the case with this research endeavour.

The dominant theoretical framework that has characterised archaeological research in the Pacific, briefly discussed in the introductory chapter, has been that of the culture historical approach. In those areas of the Pacific where ceramics occur, they have been the major component in establishing cultural sequences. Vanuatu is no exception and consequently this review will reflect that. But although ceramics have contributed greatly to the elucidation of the archipelago’s archaeology, there are large bodies of research that have dealt with aceramic periods or ceramics were not recovered, as was the case with Garanger’s excavations of the burials on Retoka and Tongoa and the Shutler’s work in Southern Vanuatu (1968). In the case of Spriggs’ (1981) study of the intensification of agriculture on Aneityum there was not a single sherd in sight.

The first arrival of Europeans in Vanuatu and their increasing involvement and influence on the archipelago over time have been documented in a number of both general (Corris 1973; Howe 1984; Scarr 1990; Spriggs 1997) and more specific studies (Adams 1984; Guiart 1983; McClancy 1981; Shineburg 1967). The early ethnographic and historic records that survive come from a typically eclectic group ranging from the earliest explorers and observers, to ethnographers, whalers, missionaries, traders, travelers and scholars. They can provide valuable baselines from which archaeologists can either work back or forward but they become increasingly detached when dealing with deeper time. Brief mention only will be made here of a number of key figures whose passing observations have aided or influenced archaeological research strategies.

The first group of Europeans to visit Vanuatu were the crews of the Spanish ships San Pedro y Pablo, San Pedro and Los Tres Reyes (Kelly 1966:26) under the leadership of Don Pedro Fernandez de Quiros. Sailing from the northeast, they first sighted Mere Lava (27th April) in the Banks Islands before landing on Gaua on April the 28th 1606. Clearly Gaua was not their idea of a ‘great southern continent’ and they sailed further south reaching Santo and entering Big Bay the next day. The crews of the boats were to spend almost two months in Big Bay expending huge energy in first establishing and then suddenly abandoning the ‘capital’ of Terra Australis del Espiritu Santo. The Spanish accounts written at the time which were later published in various forms (Kelly 1966; Markham 1904) are a valuable ethnographic record for the Big Bay area in particular both for the fact of being a record of first contacts and that they took place some 400 years ago. It is from these accounts that the first mention of pottery was made, ‘The natives make from the black clay some very well-worked pots, large and small, as well as pans and poringers in the shape of small boats. It was supposed that they made some beverage, because in the pots were found certain sour fruits’ (Kelly 1966:215). Had Quiros and company ventured further south to Efate and beyond they may well have commented on the changing cultural landscape including the absence of pottery on these other islands.

It was not until some 162 years later that other European visitors began to appear. It was firstly the French in 1768 under Bougainville who visited northern Vanuatu, and shortly later in
1774 Cook arrived visiting the islands in the north, centre and south. Cook named the island group, the New Hebrides (Beaglehole 1969), a name that remained in place until independence in 1980. Again valuable ethnographic information for the period can be gleaned from the early records but the contacts were marked by their brevity and were often less than amicable. Greatly increased European contact dates from the early nineteenth century, largely through the activities of whalers and traders (particularly sandalwood traders, see Shineberg 1967) and later on the ‘labour recruitment’ or ‘blackbirding’ voyages (Corris 1973). Again many of these contacts were often peripheral and rarely recorded, particularly those of the earlier nineteenth century. It was not until the arrival of the missionaries from the mid-nineteenth century that more detailed long-term ethnographic observations were recorded along with occasional mention of archaeological stratigraphy and the possibility that people had occupied the islands for some period of time.

Reverend Oscar Michelsen, the first missionary on the island of Tongoa, arrived in 1879. He was the earliest writer to mention the Kuwae eruption, recording oral traditions relating to the event (Michelsen 1893). Kuwae was said to be a large island which was blown apart during a violent volcanic eruption, leaving the present Shepherd Islands as testimony to its existence. Michelsen calculated that the volcanic eruption had occurred around A.D. 1540 (Michelsen 1893:13). In relation to the phenomenon he noted the presence of pottery sherds and bone in layers some depth below volcanic ash. The same site was later to be visited by Hébert (1965:91) and excavated by Garanger (1972). The volcanic event which has since been more precisely dated to AD 1452 (Eissen et al. 1994) was one of the world’s ten largest eruptions of the last 10,000 years (Robin et al. 1994).

In a similar stratigraphic situation the French traveller and sometime archaeologist Glaumont (1899) was to note pottery under volcanic ash on Ambae. The sherds were described as coarse without design or engraving and ascribed to a people living at an undetermined but clearly earlier period unrelated to the present inhabitants. Glaumont further speculated that the earlier ‘primitive’ inhabitants were probably absorbed by the current population on Ambae who were principally made up of Polynesians (Glaumont 1899:66). There are numerous other references throughout the early literature referring to presence of pottery on the ground surface, particularly in the north and centre of the country, along with the fact that it was no longer manufactured (Douceré 1922; Etheridge 1917; Lawrie 1892; Schurig 1930).

The Swiss ethnographer Speiser provides us with the first, published at least, accounts of excavations and the associated results from Vanuatu (Speiser 1996[1923]:83-6). He carried out a series of excavations on different islands in a search for evidence of an earlier ‘Palaeolithic culture’. These investigations included a series of ‘trenches’ on the islands of Santo (Port Olry), Aore, Ambrym, Malekula (Vao) and Lelepa. Very little was noted in any of the excavations and Speiser was to conclude that evidence of an earlier Palaeolithic population did not seem to exist. On several occasions he recorded the recovery of sherds from the test trenches, namely on Vao, Ambrym and Lelepa. Speiser described these sherds along with a number presented to him by locals on the islands of Iririki (Efate) and Vao (Malekula), commenting on their appearance and whether or not they appeared similar to the contemporary Santo material. In a more detailed discussion (along with photographs) of the contemporary ceramic traditions then extant on the west coast of Santo, Speiser was reluctant to accept that the numerous sherds found throughout the northern and central islands were made on those islands. Rather he ascribed the remains as ultimately having originated, through a series of exchange networks, from Santo (Speiser 1996:230).

Examples of the west coast Santo traditions were further reviewed by MacLachlan (1939) in his article on the Native Pottery of the New Hebrides. The studied materials, held by New Zealand museums, were illustrated and subjected to a series of seven measurements. Although understandably dominated by the recent whole pots from Santo his study also included an analysis of sherds collected by the missionary Milne from the islands of Emae, Nguna and Emai. A total of 21 sherds are illustrated and their colour and decoration are described in detail. This
article was to remain the primary source of information regarding ceramic remains from Vanuatu until further work was carried out in the 1960s. Some of the same sherds were to be used by Golson (1968, 1972) in his definition of the ‘Incised and Applied Relief’ tradition.

**Nascent planning**

When Golson published a wide ranging and detailed review of the archaeology of the South Pacific in 1959 he noted that although the practice of archaeology had arrived late in the Pacific, great progress had occurred in the previous ten years, dating from Gifford’s pioneering systematic archaeological work in Fiji in 1947 (Golson 1959). The New Hebrides was referred to in two sentences. One mentioned the similarities of incised ceramic material from New Caledonia to that of the New Hebrides, as noted by Gifford and Shutler (1956:93) who in turn had been forced to rely on the only source available, MacLachlan’s article of 1939. The second, appearing under ‘Perspectives’, noted that similar pottery traditions (soon after identified as evidence for a ‘community of culture’ [Golson 1961:176]) had been identified in New Caledonia, Fiji and Tonga and as far away as New Britain, but that there was a complete lack of archaeological knowledge for areas between these two geographic regions. Golson stressed the need for archaeological work to be carried out in the Solomons and the New Hebrides (Golson 1959:49). Clearly then, the archaeology of Vanuatu, up to the start of the 1960s, was a veritable *terra incognita*, a status (along with the term) further emphasised by two of the researchers who contributed to it being put on the archaeological map in the 1960s and 1970s (Garanger 1966:59; Ward 1979:1–11). It was a status that some islands continued to be noted for even thirty years after research began in Vanuatu (Allen and Gosden 1996; Gorecki 1992, 1996; Kirch and Hunt 1988; Spriggs 1990a, 1993, 1997).

At the 10th Pacific Science Congress in Hawaii in 1961 the need for coordinated Pacific archaeological research was further recognised. Pacific archaeologists attending the Congress presented a petition to that effect which was adopted by the Congress and led to the formulation of the Pacific Area Archaeological Programme (PAAP). Initially a number of aims were presented in the form of a resolution followed by several meetings which decided on a number of research areas which were top priority in Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia (Green 1961:478). The New Hebrides was seen as one of the five crucial areas of research in Melanesia, along with Fiji, New Caledonia, New Guinea and the New Guinea North Coast and off-shore islands (Solheim 1961:72). The PAAP prospectus for the New Hebrides, which qualified the islands as a crucial area of research, again emphasised the fact that no previous archaeological work had been carried out there, their favourable geographical position relative to Melanesia and Polynesia and that a wealth of ethnographic information was available (Solheim 1961:72). The push for archaeological research in the islands galvanised Richard Shutler and Jean Guiart who proposed a joint Franco-American expedition at the Congress (Garanger 1972:9). The archipelago was divided in two, the Americans were to carry out research in the south and the French the north, with overlapping interests on Efate (Shutler 1998 pers. comm.). Shutler who had intimate knowledge of the archaeology of New Caledonia saw the New Hebrides as a key region for the elucidation of the history of colonisation and settlement of the region and the ever present puzzle of the relationship of Melanesians and Polynesians (M.E. and R. Shutler 1968:157), a theme also emphasised by Garanger (1966:60). The French ethnologist Guiart had carried out many years of fieldwork throughout Vanuatu from 1948 onwards gaining intimate knowledge of the many and varied contemporary customs and social systems and collecting oral traditions, including those related to the arrival and influence of Polynesians in the central islands (Guiart 1956, 1963, 1973). Guiart was acknowledged by the Shutlers as inspiring their work in Southern Vanuatu (M. E. and R. Shutler 1968:158) and was regularly mentioned by Garanger as also having been instrumental in guiding his research. The
oral traditions collected by Guiart had great influence over Garanger’s chosen areas of research and his interpretation of the archaeology (Garanger 1972).

Before embarking on overviews of the research of the major players of the 1960s, mention must be made of Bernard Hébert, the French Overseas Territories Administrator, who also had some influence on the work of the Shutlers and Garanger. Hébert spent six years in Vanuatu during which time he carried out a number of surveys visiting archaeological sites and surface collecting ceramics and other artifactual material on the main island of Efate and some of its smaller offshore islands and on the Shepherd Islands. He also visited a number of cave sites recording art, made note of various stone features, and identified archaeological deposits on Tongoa beneath the ash of the Kuwae volcanic eruption (Hébert 1965). The ceramics illustrated largely comprise of ‘incised and applied relief’ ware although at the site of Erueti he recovered four distinct and quite different sherds. By gleaning information from publications of New Caledonian work (Avias 1950; Lenormond 1948; Gifford and Shutler 1956) he was able to identify the sherds as Lapita, the first for Vanuatu, assigning them the pre-Lapita label of Vao-Lapita-Vuatom, ‘je me permets de désigner par le groupe Vao-Lapita-Vuatom’ (Hébert 1965:78). Garanger acknowledged the value of the Hébert’s article (Garanger 1972:16,18) which guided his initial archaeological program on Efate and the Shepherd Islands.

The Shutlers in the South, Centre and North

The New Hebrides portion of PAAP began in 1963 with Richard and Mary Shutler arriving on Aneityum in November. The Shutlers were to carry out a series of extensive surveys along with some excavation, principally in cave sites, on the islands in the south. The fieldwork which lasted almost a year has only ever been briefly outlined in a number of articles (M. E and R. Shutler 1965, 1968; R. and M.E. Shutler 1968; Shutler et al. 2002) and further used in general synthesises attempting to establish cultural chronologies for Vanuatu (M. E. Shutler and R. Shutler 1967; Shutler R. 1969; R. and M. E. Shutler 1975). It was soon recognised that pottery did not appear to be present (although see below) in the southern islands and the strategy of the research then concentrated on identifying other artefacts which could be used as chronological markers. The publications associated with this initial fieldwork generally comprise a listing of artefact types and associated radiocarbon dates (see Hoffman 2003 and Shutler et al. 2002 for a detailed summary).

The results of the Shutlers’ fieldwork in the southern islands are briefly outlined below. Working on Aneityum between November 1963 and January 1964, the Shutlers reported 20 sites, namely 11 caves/rockshelters, seven old village sites and two petroglyphs. The extensive remains of abandoned agricultural terraces were also noted. Five rockshelters were partially excavated from which a series of relatively late dates were recovered. From the lowest cultural layer in two rockshelters, namely AtRS1 and AtRS3, dates of 470±80 BP (UCLA-693) 646-315 BP and 850±120 BP (WSU-140) 971-560 BP respectively were recovered.

The Shutler’s work on Tanna from February to April of 1964 was restricted to the south of the island. They noted numerous small middens, a large village site and five rockshelters, two of which were excavated. The rockshelter TaRS1, measuring some 24 by 54 feet (7.3 by 16.4m) was completely excavated and returned a number of dates. One date of 2370±90 BP (UCLA-734) 2737–2154 BP came from the lowest cultural level of the site while all other dates, generally from the upper layers of the site were late 645±80 BP (UCLA-1295A) 725–517 BP, 1095±80 BP (UCLA-1295B) 1225–796 BP, 192±45 BP (P-1188) 308–0 BP, 767±47 BP (P-1190) 760–652 BP, 518±46 BP (P-1189) 629–503 BP and 567±46 BP (P-1191) 651–513 BP. A number of bone, stone and shell artefacts were recovered but the disturbed nature of the site with European material being found up to midway down through the stratigraphy must cast some doubt on the reliability of the conclusions including the claimed date (1095 BP or earlier) for the earliest appearance of pig (Shutler 1969:136).
Short visits were made to both Aniwa, a Polynesian ‘outlier’, and Erromango where a number of archaeological sites were recorded, but in both cases bad weather prevented a return to excavate. On Aniwa 15 village sites and one cave were recorded while on Erromango six caves with cultural remains were noted. A piece of shell money (navela) was also collected from Erromango (Shutler et al. 2002: Plate 7g).

During April and May 1964 the Shutlers concentrated on Futuna, another Polynesian ‘outlier’, recording 19 rockshelters and 19 open midden sites. Excavations were undertaken on one open site and seven rockshelters which were largely unproductive. One site that did prove worthwhile was the rockshelter FuRS12, measuring some 45 feet long by 12 feet wide (13.7 by 3.6m). The entire site was excavated to bedrock down to a maximum depth of 48 inches (88.8cm). A large earth oven dated to 905±190 BP (WSU-184) 1258–536 BP was recorded along with fifteen burials and associated grave goods which were dated (seven dates on human bone) to between 1650±100 BP (GaK-757) 1818–1314 BP and 510±90 BP (GaK-763) 658–323 BP. The time span in the dates for the burials apparently indicated that the site had been used for burial over a very long period (R. and M.E. Shutler 1968:16). However with recent questions surrounding the reliability of both the dating of human bone and dates in general from the Gakushuin Laboratory (Kirch 1975, 1984; Spriggs 1990a) these conclusions must now be regarded as somewhat unreliable.

Although it was initially stated that pottery was not found in the southern islands (R. and M.E. Shutler 1968:17), an accepted ‘fact’ repeated by a number of authors when discussing settlement by aceramic groups (Bellwood 1978; Green 1979), the statement is somewhat modified later when Richard Shutler mentions ‘the almost total lack of pottery in the southern New Hebrides’ (Shutler 1969). In the earliest reports (Shutler and Shutler 1965; M.E. and R. Shutler 1968[1966]) a few sherds are mentioned as being recovered from a midden site on Aneityum (At1) and a sherd from Tanna is also noted as being included in a collection analysed by Dickinson and Shutler (1979). In their 1975 publication the Shutlers mention that ‘very little pottery’ had been recovered from the south (R. and M.E. Shutler 1975:69). It should be noted that the French geologist Aubert de la Rüe (1945:174) mentioned finding pottery on a number of islands including Aneityum.

The apparent partitioning of the group between the French and Americans seemed a somewhat relaxed arrangement as demonstrated by the Shutlers final fieldwork of 1964. In June of 1964 they worked in the Vila harbour area recording four village sites and eight rockshelters. Excavations were carried out on three of the open area sites and two rockshelters. The two midden areas (Ef1 and Ef2) on the Efate mainland opposite Fila island proved to be relatively unproductive despite the large areas excavated (12 six by three foot squares (1.8 by .9m) and 17 six by three foot squares respectively) as were the two rockshelters (EfRS6 and 7) on the Efate mainland. On Fila island itself (Ef3) a grand total of 63, 6 by 3 foot (1.8 by .9m) test pits were dug at three different locations recovering a wide range of artefacts, including a ‘considerable collection’ of pottery decorated with relief, appliqué and incision (Shutler and Shutler 1965; M. E. and R. Shutler 1968). Three dates from different test pits and different levels were obtained, 815±180 BP (WSU-200) 1064–510 BP, 1020±130 BP (WSU-199) 1258–673 BP and 1090±140 BP (WSU-198) 1291–709 BP. It is however, difficult to determine the significance of these dates in relation to the excavated pottery without further details. The Shutlers also managed to survey east of Vila along the coast as far as Forari (R. Shutler 1998 pers. comm.). The Shutlers visited the site of Erueti with Garanger, the location of which had been outlined by Hébert, but were not initially successful in their search for Lapita sherds. On a second visit the Shutlers recovered ‘five small Lapita sherds’ (Garanger 1972:27).

In 1966 and 1967 the Shutlers embarked on a reconnaissance of the northern islands of Vanuatu (Shutler 1970). The fieldwork was largely concentrated on Santo (and adjacent small islands) with surveys of areas of the east coast noting a number of open sites with pottery. An excavation was carried out in a rockshelter near Hog Harbour recovering pottery from throughout
the 2 foot (44cm) deep stratigraphy. The nearby island of Aore was also visited and a number of mound features containing pottery were excavated. Araki, another small island off the south coast of Santo, was also visited and a number of sites with abundant pottery were recorded. Encouraged by Bill Camden, the missionary on the island of Tangoa, excavations were carried out there on two former village sites. Abundant pottery and shell implements along with some stone and bone artefacts were recovered from the 3 foot (90cm) deep stratigraphy. It was during this period of fieldwork that Mary Shutler made her initial visits to the west coast of Santo recording ethnographic data on the last remaining potters of Vanuatu, at the villages of Wusi and Olpoe (Shutler M.E. 1968, 1973).

All visits to other northern islands were very brief. On Malekula numerous sites with pottery were recorded on the north east coast and offshore islands. Surface collections of pottery were made but no excavations were carried out. Further brief visits were made to Ambae where pottery was noted, as it was on Pentecost. On Ambrym and Paama it was recognised that the regular volcanic eruptions and associated ash falls explained a lack of archaeological evidence. A number of former village sites were recorded on the Banks Islands but no pottery was in evidence.

In summing up the results of the various expeditions Richard Shutler noted that, ‘The nature of most of the New Hebridean archaeological sites i.e., shallow and often mixed with European material, makes it extremely difficult to attempt even a relative chronology, so that the application of the C-14 method of dating to the New Hebrides is of the greatest importance’ (Shutler 1969:135). Ironically, however, no account seems to have been taken made of the possibility that the samples submitted for radiocarbon dating might also come from mixed contexts. In the end they were left with an eclectic group of artefacts and dates which led the Shutlers to conclude that ‘no single artefact or artefact complex appears to be chronologically significant’ (Shutler 1969:136). This it seems, along with a lack of deeply stratified undisturbed sites, essentially inhibited the establishment of a cultural sequence for the islands, but the Shutlers were confident enough to suggest that ‘a tentative culture history of the New Hebrides indicated that people had been living in Vanuatu for 3000–4000 years with the pig, dog and chicken and practiced shifting cultivation supplemented with shellfish collection’ (Shutler 1969:137). Although it was felt that establishing a cultural sequence had greater prospects in the central and northern islands where pottery had been recorded it remained an unrealised goal. The intensive radiocarbon dating strategy that had been carried out in the southern islands was not repeated in the north, possibly due to the above notion regarding ceramics.

Despite the enormous amount of archaeological fieldwork carried out by the Shutlers, the contemporary lack of geomorphological and archaeological knowledge and other associated difficulties of primary research, frustrated the return of conclusive results. The heavy reliance on (the then recently developed) radiocarbon dating as being able to almost single-handedly establish cultural sequences also proved to be somewhat over emphasised. Although at least 56 dates, the largest number for any area of the western Pacific at the time (Shutler 1969, 1973; Shutler et al. 2002), were collected between the Shutlers and Garanger, their interpretation remained problematic. In a recent review of this earlier work (Shutler et al. 2002) recognition of the disturbed nature of these sites and the unreliability of a whole number of radiocarbon dates has been highlighted. What has emerged from this reassessment, decades after the initial fieldwork and conclusions is that the research and collections from southern Vanuatu in fact represent the most comprehensive data set on the last 500–1000 years of prehistory for that region (Shutler et al. 2002). Other profitable research was the ethnographic study carried out by M. E. Shutler on the potters of the west coast of Santo. In addition, the Shutlers also established type collections of Vanuatu pottery which were sent to a number of Museums in the Pacific. Other researchers to benefit from the Shutlers encouragement and supervision were Caroline Leaney who carried out investigations on Malekula and John Hedrick on Malo, the results of which are further discussed below.
Garanger on Efate and the Shepherds

The French component of the PAAP in the New Hebrides began in 1964 with the arrival of José Garanger. Garanger, at the time employed by the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), carried out a series of extensive surveys and excavations on Efate and the Shepherd Islands from April to October 1964 (Garanger 1966). A further twelve months fieldwork carried out between October 1966 and October 1967 was again concentrated on the Shepherds and Efate and also included the offshore island of Retoka. The large areas that were excavated, the spectacular finds and their detailed publication have resulted in Garanger’s seminal work remaining, even after some thirty years, synonymous with the ‘Archéologie des Nouvelles Hebrides’ and more specifically with both the Mangaasi ceramic tradition and the communal burials on the small island of Retoka (Garanger 1972, 1982). The influence and contribution of his research remain central to any discussion of archaeology in Vanuatu. Only a very general summary is outlined here and will be supplemented further in Chapters 3 and 6 where the more recent research at the Mangaasi site is outlined.

The initial research on Efate and the Shepherds in 1964 proved to be successful both in terms of the archaeology and in the attempts to relate the archaeology to oral traditions (Garanger 1966). On Efate, surveys around the island and on the smaller offshore islands of Nguna, Mau and Moso, returned large collections of ‘incised and applied relief’ ceramics (later named Mangaasi) along with shell and stone artefacts. Along with the identification of this distinctive widespread ‘incised and applied relief ware’ was the apparent recovery of a limited number of distinctive sherds from the surface surveys of the Mele plain. These cord-marked sherds were recognised as a separate ceramic tradition (Garanger 1966). They have since been identified as Japanese Jomon pottery dating to between 5500–3500 BP, the presence of which still remains somewhat of a mystery (Dickinson et al. 1999). A number of test pits were also excavated at different locations on Efate but generally proved to be of little interest (Garanger 1972). More detailed excavation and survey was carried out on the small offshore islands of Mele and Lelepa. The excavations on the tiny Mele Island uncovered a total of 18 burials that were dated to the seventeenth century. Also noted was a series of occupation floors constructed with coral gravel, along with the fact that no ceramics were recovered.

On Lelepa Garanger excavated a total of 28 test pits both in caves and open sites, the results of which proved to be somewhat disappointing (Garanger 1972:45). Again a number of burials were recorded along with the extensive painted and engraved art within the caves. A total of almost 10,000 sherds were recovered during surface collections, all of which belonged to the ‘incised and applied relief tradition’. None of the excavated test pits however revealed undisturbed stratigraphic layering and therefore proved unhelpful in the establishment of a ceramic chronology (Garanger 1972:45). Later research in 1966/67 on the west coast of Efate directly opposite Lelepa was to prove much more productive in that respect.

Shifting to the Shepherd Islands, Garanger was to have much greater success with deeply layered stratigraphy, and he was also able to confirm that the ‘incised and applied relief tradition’ found on Efate appeared there also. Armed with the earlier observations of both Michelsen and Hébert regarding archaeological deposits buried beneath volcanic ash, Garanger’s aim was to research further the pre- and post-volcanic remains (ceramic and aceramic) and attempt to verify the local traditions regarding the cataclysmic Kuwae eruption and the resettlement of the area by Ti Tongoa Liseiriki (Garanger 1972:84).

Nine excavations were undertaken on Tongoa, largely located on the east coast of the island. An extraordinary 360m² in total was excavated over two seasons, but many of the excavations (particularly those associated with pre-volcanic deposits), although providing detailed geomorphological information, proved to be largely sterile. Several however did prove to be worthwhile,
namely Aknau (TO-22), Euta (TO-11) and Lamalake (TO-23). All the sites contained varying numbers of ‘incised and applied relief’ sherds along with another quite distinct style. The recovered ceramics from TO-22 provided the largest sample of this distinctive tradition, later named Aknau ware which was characterised by internal incision on pots that had plain exteriors (Garanger 1972:87). It appeared to post-date the ‘incised and applied relief ware’, being dated on Tongoa and Makura to around 1000–900 BP. The earliest date for the ‘incised and applied relief ware’ recovered from Tongoa was 2460±80 BP (B 740) 2758–2347 BP at TO-23. A series of excavations were also carried out on a number of ceremonial structures and burial sites associated with detailed oral traditions relating to the re-settlement of Tongoa after the Kuwae eruption. Various oral traditions were able to be confirmed including that associated with the Kuwae eruption. A re-interpretation of these archaeological remains and the excavated burials on Retoka Island and how they relate to oral traditions can be found in Spriggs (1997:207–218).

The results from excavations further south on the island of Makura tended to corroborate those from Tongoa. A total of nine test pits were excavated, three of the more productive all located near the sea, were extended into trenches. One of the trenches reached a depth of 2m and the basal cultural level was dated to 2540±110 BP (GX-0223) 2852–2345 BP. The pottery from the lowest levels of the test pits was again characterised by ‘incised and applied relief ware’ (Garanger 1972:81). Aknau ware was recovered from the upper levels and appeared to have disappeared by 1000 BP.

Returning to Vanuatu in 1966 Garanger was again on the trail of oral traditions (now regarded as somewhat controversial), this time those associated with the ‘foreign chief’ Chief Roy Mata who was said to have transformed the political structure of Efate introducing a stabilising peace ceremony at a time of major conflict. When he died, he and a number of his supporters were buried on the island of Retoka. The excavations and the oral traditions appeared to coincide to some extent and were published in detail (Garanger 1972), although as mentioned above have been recently subjected to some re-assessment (Spriggs 1997). Initially the burials were rather uncertainly dated to the 12th century AD but more recent research indicates that the burials took place sometime during the 17th century (Bedford et al. 1998:187). Although no ceramics were associated with the burials, ‘incised and applied relief ware’ was recovered on the surface of the island and from a deep test pit adjacent to the burial area.

After being told that the location of Roy Mata’s village lay on the mainland of Efate Garanger shifted his research to the site of Mangaasi. Garanger excavated 118m² at Mangaasi where some 17000 sherds were recovered, approximately 3500 of which were diagnostic. They were of the same form and decoration as those that had been surface-collected and excavated on Efate and the Shepherds. Garanger then decided the term Mangaasi was a more appropriate and accurate term, than ‘incised and applied relief’, to describe the tradition in Vanuatu (Garanger 1971:54). The ceramics were characterised by globular incurving pots decorated with incised and or applied relief. Garanger argued that the ceramics represented a tradition that appeared around 2600 BP ([2445±80 BP (GX-0963) 2749–2334 BP], [2595±95 BP (GX-0964) 2915–2358 BP]) had survived for up to 2000 years, and although exhibiting aspects of conservatism in form and decoration could be divided into ‘Early’ and ‘Late’ Phases (Garanger 1971:54). Garanger noted some difficulty in interpreting the stratigraphy of the site and this is reflected in both his summing up of the ceramic chronology and the definitions of his Early and Late Phases.

Mangaasi was thought to represent a separate and distinct cultural tradition that was contemporaneous with or possibly pre-dated Lapita in Vanuatu (Bellwood 1979; Garanger 1972; Green 1979; M.E and R. Shutler 1967). Garanger (1972:124) speculated that its origins lay in mainland Papua New Guinea an argument taken up more recently by other authors (Galipaud 1996a, 1996b; Gorecki 1992, 1996).

Many of Garanger’s assertions regarding the Mangaasi tradition have been questioned, notably the validity of the Early to Late sequence and the proposed termination date for pottery
production and use. Graeme Ward (1979, 1989) highlighted these problems after his own excavations in the Banks Islands to the north. Ward argued that the stratigraphy at Mangaasi appeared somewhat disturbed, many of the sherds did not seem to be in primary deposition and the termination date for ceramic production and use was more likely to be around 2000 BP. In a recent article Garanger (1996b:70) stated that he now accepts Ward’s criticisms. The more recent excavations at the Mangaasi site from 1996 to 1999 (Bedford et al. 1998; Bedford 2000b; Bedford and Spriggs 2000), outlined in more detail below, were explicitly designed to clarify the stratigraphy of the site and the chronology of the ceramic material in the light of the criticisms by Ward and others.

The other important site excavated by Garanger on Efate was that of Erueti. The site is located on the south coast of Efate some 400m from the current beach at the rear of a bay fronted by a coral reef and lagoon. Fresh water springs are found at the rear of the site. As noted earlier the site had initially been recorded by Hébert, and later the Shutlers had collected further Lapita dentate stamped sherds from the surface of the site. As it was at the time the only place in Vanuatu where Lapita sherds had been recovered, Garanger needed little further encouragement to excavate. He excavated a single area measuring 35m² down to a depth of 80cms. Garanger noted that the stratigraphy seemed to be disturbed and the excavation was carried out in arbitrary 20cm spits (Garanger 1972:27). The recovered pottery from the site was dominated by plainware sherds. Some 5000 sherds were recovered from Erueti of which 96% were undecorated, a radical contrast to other sites where Mangaasi style decoration was in a ratio, decorated to plain of 50:50 (Garanger 1971:61). The vessels from Erueti were globular with outcurving rims. The distinctive lips were wide and flat and often notched on the outer edge, along with occasional decoration on the flat lip itself, including incision, punctuation and in one case dentate stamping. Several carinated sherds were also recovered as were six Lapita dentate-stamped sherds. A smaller component of the collection displayed linear incision and only six sherds of Mangaasi-like appliqué were noted (Garanger 1972:27). The classification system applied to the rim and lip forms from the site was used, with some modification, for the entire ceramic collections recovered by Garanger from Vanuatu (1972:fig. 22).

The pottery of Erueti was initially identified by Golson (1971), and accepted by Garanger (1972:29), as being part of the Lapitoid tradition. A single date of 2300±95 BP (GX-1145) 2710–2069 BP was obtained from the 60cm below surface level at the site. As mentioned a number of Mangaasi-style sherds were found throughout the excavation, including some in the lowest 20cm spit. Garanger argued (1971:61), based on a comparison of radiocarbon dates from Mangaasi and Erueti, that the Lapitoid ware appeared some time later than the Mangaasi material in Central Vanuatu, that it was unrelated to it, and had a restricted influence in Vanuatu. With the benefit of recent archaeological research both in Vanuatu and the wider Pacific, along with improved knowledge of site formation processes, a re-assessment of the sites excavated by Garanger and the related conclusions can be made and are discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

**Leaney on Malekula**

Having briefly broken away from the chronological review of research carried out in northern Vanuatu we return to the work of Caroline Leaney. Leaney had a BA in archaeology from Cambridge and was initially based on Tanna with her husband who was the British District Agent for the Southern New Hebrides. She worked with the Shutlers during their investigations on the island in 1964. Later that same year the Leaney’s shifted to Malekula taking ‘charge’ of the Northern New Hebrides. It was during this time that it was suggested by Richard Shutler that Leaney carry out a series of surveys on the island. The research objectives were of a general reconnaissance nature and the work was essentially consisted of a series of surveys recording
present and prehistoric village sites, caves and rockshelters and rock art sites. Collections of pottery and artefacts were also carried out along with preliminary test pitting. The work carried out between November 1964 and April 1965 was sponsored by the Bishop Museum and supervised from a distance by Richard Shutler. The only record of the work is an unpublished typescript (Leaney 1965).

Leaney’s research was concentrated in a number of discrete coastal areas namely around Lakatoro, along the coast and the small offshore islands in the north east, north and north west coast and in the south and south west including, Port Sandwich/Lamap, the Maskelyne Islands and round to Toman Island. Many of these areas were visited only briefly, due to time constraints and inaccessibility. The test pit excavations carried out by Leaney are reported with the barest of details (Leaney 1965) and largely proved to be unproductive. They were all single test pits carried out within the vicinity of Lakatoro and included a rockshelter north of Lakatoro, another rockshelter north of Litzlitz (near Lakatoro) and a ceremonial structure on Uripiv Island.

When discussing the archaeological possibilities of the island the first point that Leaney made was ‘one of the most striking things about Malekula is the enormous quantity of potsherds to be found on the surface’ (Leaney 1965:7), a point regularly highlighted throughout the descriptions of the village and associated ceremonial sites. Leaney was the first archaeologist to record the large caves, Yalo A and B on the northwest coast, and their impressive collections of rock art which have recently been the focus of more detailed study (Bedford et al. 1998; Wilson 2002). The report is useful for its descriptions of population density and location in the 1960s and often emphasises the evidence for dramatic depopulation which in some areas of Malekula has only really been turned around in the 1990s.

Hedrick on Malo

Slightly further north and commencing in 1968 under the guidance of Mary Elizabeth Shutler, John Hedrick, a masters student at San Diego State College, carried out survey and excavation work on the island of Malo, just south of Santo (Hedrick and Shutler 1969:262-265) where he located evidence for a ‘Lapita-style’ site (Fig. 2.1). The site (NHMa-7) was situated near the village of Avunatari on the northwest coast some 10 metres above sea level. Hedrick initially commented that the site was stratified and undisturbed (Hedrick and Shutler 1969:262) and having received one radiocarbon date of 2020±60 BP (UCLA-1412) 2146–1826 BP from the lowest level of the excavation suggested Lapita settlement at the site dated from this period. A coral slab platform was also suggested to be related to the Lapita occupation.

In a later publication however Hedrick discussed the stratigraphy in more detail noting several inconsistencies largely indicated by two more radiocarbon dates (940±80 BP [LJ-1907] 1046–686 BP and 1200±200 BP [LJ-1906] 1520–694
BP) he had received (Hedrick 1971:13). In his re-analysis of the site Hedrick stated that the 1000 year occupation of the site, as suggested by the dates, seemed very unlikely particularly as the style of the pottery remained consistent throughout the layers. The late date for the arrival of Lapita at Malo was also difficult to explain (Hedrick 1971:18). Hedrick emphasised the preliminary nature of the results and stressed the need for more work which was in fact carried out by him between July 1972 and July 1973. The results of the work from this period have only ever been published in a popular article where the archaeology is barely noted (Hedrick and Hedrick 1975). Much more detail can be found in a partial PhD draft produced in the early 1980s (Hedrick nd). The PhD was never completed.

During the year of fieldwork Hedrick recorded 19 Lapita sites, 3 of which he excavated. Some of the sites were quite extensive and all were located in the north and east of the island up to several hundred metres inland on a former shoreline some 10-12 metres above the present sea level, which has prograded since initial settlement due to uplift. He first revisited Avunatari (NHMa-7) excavating a 3 by 3 metre area adjacent to his earlier test pit. The later excavation clarified the stratigraphy at the site and Hedrick recognised that the in situ Lapita material was restricted to the lowest levels of the site, below the coral slab platform and the Lapita recovered from the mound was not associated with the very late dates. This possibility had been earlier suggested to him by a number of people including Palmer, Green, Golson and Specht (Hedrick nd) and was hinted at by Ward (1979:1–17).

Some 200 metres north of NHMa-7 Hedrick excavated another Lapita site again located on the remains of a former beach ridge. At Naone (NHMa-8) he excavated a 5 by 5 metre area identifying four layers. Again the upper levels of the sites were disturbed. From the lowest levels he obtained radiocarbon dates on marine shell of 2980±70 BP (ANU-1134) 2880–2656 BP and 3150±70 BP (ANU-1135) 3138–2759 BP. Accepting these dates and the 2020±60 BP from NHMa-7 Hedrick concluded that ‘classic’ Lapita settlement in the area appeared at around 3000 BP and lasted to around 2000 BP.

The other Lapita site excavated by Hedrick was located on the north coast of Malo at Batuni’urunga. The site actually stretched some 3 kilometres east to west but Hedrick concentrated in the general area of a fresh-water spring, NHMa-101, excavating at three discrete locations. The sites were all somewhat disturbed and the two dates from the site of 620±85 BP (Gak-4567) 691–509 BP and 999±49 BP (P-2087) 1046–790 BP were, as Hedrick noted, not very enlightening. Hedrick also made extensive ‘highly selective’ surface collections in the area (including recovering the large pieces of a single pot from Paoancarai Lagoon) which he described as being very representative of the ‘entire (Lapita) pottery corpus’ found on Malo (Hedrick nd).

In the search for an undisturbed well stratified site which would contribute to the establishment of a cultural chronology Hedrick moved to a cave site, Avunamatala NHMa-9, located inland of the Lapita sites NHMa-7 and 8. A 1 by 3.6m trench was excavated in the cave and two levels were identified. The remains indicated sporadic short-term use of the cave and periods of abandonment. Pottery recovered from the cave included a variety of ‘incised and applied relief’ material. No dentate stamped Lapita was recovered from the cave. One date of 195±35 BP (P-2089) 304-0 BP from the upper level of the cave certainly indicated it had been used up to very recent times. Although this review has largely concentrated on a discussion of the Lapita ceramics on Malo, as did the research of Hedrick, ‘incised and applied relief’ ceramics were also recovered from both the excavations and surface collections, particularly at NHMa-9 and NHMa-101. Hedrick noted similarities between some of the material with that recovered by Garanger on Efate and the Shepherds, while other material seemed more similar to material from Malekula (Hedrick nd). However, being unable to locate sites that were less disturbed he was unable to establish the relationship of the different ceramic styles. Hedrick returned briefly to Malo in 1983 but as yet no report on his survey work of that year has appeared.
Despite the disturbed nature of the sites investigated and the lack of published data the research carried out by Hedrick on Malo has contributed significantly to the understanding of Lapita settlement pattern in general and more specifically in Vanuatu. It established that initial settlement on Malo was concentrated around lagoonal complexes and a preference for smaller islands was also suggested. On the evidence to date Malo might appear to be somewhat of an enigma in Vanuatu, a sort of ‘Lapita metropolis’ or an initial central place from where other islands may have been visited or colonised (Bedford et al. 1999:21). Recent research, however, in Malekula (Bedford 2003) and Aore (Galipaud pers. comm. 2002) where a series of Lapita sites have been identified, suggest that factors of site visibility are playing a significant role in the currently identified Lapita settlement pattern.

The work of Hedrick remained the largest record by far of Lapita ceramics for Vanuatu for another thirty years. He was able to define a large number of different Lapita vessel forms along with a whole suite of designs. He incorporated this information into the Donovan (1973) classification system and this enabled later researchers to include Malo within both studies of Lapita design and decoration (Anson 1983; Mead et al. 1975; Spriggs 1990b) and more general syntheses of the Lapita cultural complex (Green 1979; Kirch 1997; Kirch and Hunt 1988). Evidence for Malo initially being part of an exchange network or at least in some form of interaction with other Lapita settlements further afield was found in the recovered exotic materials. These included obsidian that came from the Banks Islands, Talasea and Lou (Ambrose 1976) and at least one of the Lapita sherdswhich was sourced to New Caledonia (Dickinson and Shutler 1979:1696). Preliminary results from more recent work on Malo and Aore, carried out by Jean-Christophe Galipaud, are discussed below.

Groube on Aneityum and the Banks

Some ten years after the Shutler’s expedition, the southern islands of Vanuatu once again became a focus for investigation. In 1972 Les Groube from the Australian National University carried out a short survey on Erromango and spent a much longer period on Aneityum. There he surveyed various areas of the island concentrating on the extensive abandoned agricultural terracing systems (Groube 1972, 1975). Groube chose the Imkalau valley as a focus of investigations where the deep flood plains had been downcut by the Imkalau river exposing a four metre deep section with apparent evidence of agricultural activities throughout the stratigraphy. At the base of the deposits was a thick black soil rich in charcoal which returned a date of around 2000 BP (Groube 1975). Mapping of the surface features was completed with the help of Norma McArthur who further extended the research to other agricultural and historic sites (McArthur 1967, 1974). Groube also excavated a habitation site nearby named the ‘White Walls’ which was dated to within the last 200 years (Groube 1975:29). In a popular article of 1975 Groube summed up by describing the terraced agricultural remains on Aneityum as ‘the Easter Island of Melanesian agriculture’ (Groube 1975:30), an evocative phrase which was to inspire later researchers.

In October and November of 1972 Groube also spent six weeks in the Banks Islands visiting three islands in the northern part of the group, recording a variety of surface features and making surface collections. The recovered pottery was identified as relating to the ‘incised and applied relief tradition’ seen further south. On the small islet of Pakea off Vanua Lava, Groube test excavated a low mound feature to a depth of 1.5 metres defining four layers (Ward 1979: Appendix IV-2, 4–4). Abundant faunal material was recovered along with a limited number of sherds. Two dates from charcoal samples collected between 650 and 1250 mm below the surface returned ages of 1230±70 BP (ANU-1150) 1291-970 BP and 1380±140 BP (ANU-1151) 1544–973 BP.
Ward in the Banks

It was to the Banks Islands that Graeme Ward, who was carrying out fieldwork for a PhD, headed in 1973. Encouraged both by Groube’s results and the recently published research on other islands of Vanuatu, namely Efate and the Shepherds (Garanger 1972), and the Southeast Solomon Islands (Green 1973) (a project in which Ward participated) which pointed to considerable change in the prehistoric record in the region, Ward targeted the Banks Islands citing their strategic location in Island Melanesia, as potentially providing some solutions to developing archaeological questions (Ward 1979:2). The main focus of Ward’s research was the study of the development of subsistence activities, particularly marine-related strategies on small islands in the Pacific. The establishment of a chronological sequence and how that related to comparable sites in Vanuatu and nearby archipelagos was a further aim of the research. The initial fieldwork of 1973 (May to August) concentrated on environmental and archaeological surveys. Ward managed to carry out surveys on most of the islands/islets that make up the Banks Group including Mota Lava, Rah, Mota, Ureparapara, Rowa, Gaua, Vanua Lava, Pakea and Nawila. On all the islands except Ureparapara pottery was recorded. The sherds were generally small, somewhat worn, and when decorated exhibited characteristics of the incised and applied relief tradition (Ward 1979 Appendix III-1 3-12). A second field season from June 1974 to April 1975 focused on archaeological excavation and the collection of ethnographic data.

Although Ward excavated a number of sites on different islands in the Banks Group, the principal excavation and the only one described in any detail in his PhD was that of the open site on Pakea Islet earlier tested by Groube. The Pakea site comprised an area of low mounds covering some 160,000 square metres, about a tenth of the total area of the islet. The mounds seemed to have been formed by midden dumping over the previous 1500 years. Ward identified three major cultural layers at the site of which only the lowest (Layer 3) was seen as an in situ deposit while the upper layers of the excavation appeared to be somewhat mixed (Ward 1979:5–19). The lowest layer revealed evidence of short term occupation, possibly seasonal visits. Although pottery was found throughout the stratigraphy Ward believed it was intrusive in the upper layers. The earliest date from the site was 2600±130 BP (ANU-1711) 2955–2348 BP but the concentrated cultural material was associated with dates at the site of around 2000 BP (2300±80 BP [ANU-1874] 2706–2122 BP, 2000±120 BP [ANU-1822] 2310–1632 BP, 1890±70 BP [ANU-1813] 1991–1632 BP and 2240±70 BP [ANU-1710] 1994–1685 BP). The upper layers dating between 1300 and 650 BP were principally made up of shell midden and according to Ward could be seen as evidence of more permanent settlement. They also contained abundant evidence for the manufacture of shell tools and ornaments. Evidence for subsistence activities suggested that initially there was a predominance of fish over shellfish and that pig was also an important component in the diet. A change over time in shellfish collection strategies was also noted, from initially utilising a wide range of species to a more restricted range, possibly due to targeting and/or depletion.

The pottery excavated by Ward was highly fragmented and worn and his proposed sequence has been disputed (Kirch and Yen 1982:204, 206). Based on the relatively small sample of 168 diagnostic sherds including 4 with evidence of appliqué, 28 with incision and 31 with punctation, Ward slotted the material into the ‘incised and applied Mangaasi tradition’, although he noted some difficulty assigning it to Early or Late Mangaasi (Ward 1979:7–22). He believed pottery use and manufacture ceased some time after 2000 BP (Ward 1979:7–43). Ward dismissed the idea that the Pakea ceramics had any connection with Lapita or the Lapitoid plainware found at Erueti. As mentioned earlier Ward also suggested that the termination date for the Mangaasi ceramics of Central Vanuatu seemed more likely to correspond to a similar 2000 BP date.

Kirch and Yen (1982: 204, 206) were later to question Wards termination date for ceramic use in the Banks and his rejection of a connection to Lapitoid plainware. Ward’s termination date of c.
2000 BP clearly did not fit with Kirch and Yen’s proposed importation of Mangaasi-like pottery (Sinapupu ware) from Vanuatu into Tikopia from 2000 BP until 750 BP. Kirch and Yen (1982) argued that the Pakea site was mixed and therefore the dates could not be relied upon. With the benefit of hindsight and recent research results from other sites in Vanuatu a reassessment of the ceramics recovered by Ward can be made. They are characterised by plainware globular vessels along with occasional carinated vessels with a high percentage of outcurving rims and notching on the lip. A smaller component of incised and punctate material and very occasional appliqué was also present. The material would appear to show greater affinity with the ceramics from the Erueti site than those of Garanger’s Mangaasi tradition. The plainware pots with outcurving notched rims would fit with Ward’s date of c. 2600 BP and are likely to have been succeeded by the incised material also present and reminiscent of the early decorated material from Erueti. The applied relief and punctate material appears at the end of the sequence around 2000 BP or later. There is consistency here at least with Wards chronological interpretation although no doubt further excavations to refine the end of the sequence are required.

Spriggs on Aneityum and Erromango

After Ward had completed his fieldwork in Vanuatu, Matthew Spriggs, another student from the Australian National University, arrived in 1978 to begin fieldwork for his PhD. As a student at Cambridge he had been inspired by some of Les Groube’s lectures on the ‘Easter Island of Melanesian agriculture’ terracing remains that covered much of the small island of Aneityum. Spriggs’ fieldwork, carried out between 1978 and 1980, was concentrated on Aneityum, the southernmost inhabited island of the archipelago, investigating agricultural intensification and human impact on the environment. Spriggs’ fieldwork also included an ethnoarchaeological study of irrigation systems on the northern island of Maewo (Spriggs 1981). Spriggs took the view that in certain respects prehistoric human-accelerated erosion was beneficial, creating the large coastal plains on which much of the population of Pacific Islands live (see Spriggs 1984, 1986). As part of that project, the first pollen analysis for Vanuatu was carried out by Geoff Hope. The results revealed vegetation clearance on Aneityum on a massive scale at about 3000 BP (Hope and Spriggs 1982). Hope and Spriggs argued that these changes were human induced and the results certainly suggest that people first arrived in the area around the time Lapita colonists might be expected to have appeared.

Rapid large scale erosion over an extended period led to extensive valley in-filling and coastal progradation creating whole new areas of coastal plain for settlement and agriculture. The newly created landscapes were occupied by 950 BP with people initially practicing dry land agriculture. By 400 BP there is evidence for more intensive agricultural activity with irrigated agriculture becoming increasingly prevalent. By AD 1830 these agricultural systems were at their peak, the valley floors were covered with irrigated gardens as were many hillsides with extensive irrigated agricultural terracing. Spriggs argued that the human-accelerated erosion which created the rich alluvial coastal plains provided the potential for greatly expanded agricultural intensification and associated social stratification (Spriggs 1986).

Despite and because of the fact that evidence for large-scale human induced erosion and subsequent valley infilling dating from c. 3000 BP was able to be identified, artefactual material that could have contributed to the establishment of cultural sequences was not recovered. There were no archaeological remains or land surfaces in the alluvial sections older than 2000 years, meaning that at least 1000 years of the island’s history was missing. Despite the fact that valuable information had been gleaned regarding the history of landscape change and sociopolitical machinations dating from likely first human arrival of around 3000 BP, information on the cultural
sequences for at least the first 1000 years of Southern Vanuatu were still non-existent and at best very sparse for the remaining 2000 years.

In 1983 Spriggs returned to Aneityum for further archaeological and palaeoenvironmental research. He then shifted his research focus further north when he commenced a project on Erromango, assisted by Vanuatu National Museum fieldworker Jerry Taki who had earlier worked with Les Groube. The explicit aim was to search for history of Southern Vanuatu that was earlier than 2000 years old. The uplifted coral reef terraces on the east coast of the island were not covered by alluvial deposition and it was hypothesised that Lapita and other early pottery sites would be found there. Locations near reef passages and freshwater sources at rivermouths were targeted, following the model of Lapita site location developed by Frimigacci (1980) for New Caledonia. The series of surveys and several excavations located the first in situ pottery recovered from southern Vanuatu. Pottery was recovered from a total of seven sites, two of which were excavated, namely Ifo and Naen. The recovered pottery was described as largely comprising of a regional variant of the Mangaasi tradition with a smaller Lapita component, dating to around 2300 BP (Spriggs and Wickler 1989). The excavated ceramics and other materials from the excavations on Erromango were analysed in detail by Wickler (1985). Further discussion of the 1983 fieldwork and ceramics is included in Chapters 3 and 5. The site of Ifo, which was described as being ‘transitional’ between Lapita and Mangaasi, provided Spriggs with further data to challenge the idea that Lapita and Mangaasi were two separate pottery traditions (Spriggs 1984). Further survey was carried out by Spriggs on Erromango in 1988 in preparation for the establishment of the Erromango Kauri Reserve (Spriggs 1988). Later, this work and all the earlier surveys and excavations which had been carried out on Erromango were synthesised in a cultural resources study of the island (Spriggs and Roe 1989).

The moratorium which was placed on archaeological research from 1984 clearly restricted research potential but with the establishment in 1990 of the Vanuatu Cultural and Historic Sites Survey (VCHSS), headed by David Roe and Jean-Christophe Galipaud, extensive survey and limited research re-commenced. The work of the VCHSS involved extensive surveys on many of the islands of Vanuatu along with the training of local personnel. To date over 40 development impact reports have been produced. These reports are designed to record archaeological, cultural and historic sites which may be threatened by development projects. However until 1994, when the research ban was lifted, no significant excavation was part of the VCHSS program.

Galipaud on Malo, Torres and Santo

In 1995 Galipaud was freed from his duties with the VCHSS and he became the resident ORSTOM archaeologist in Vanuatu. The ban on archaeological research had been lifted and over a four year period (Galipaud left Vanuatu in 1998) he carried out a series of surveys and excavations, principally on the islands of Santo, Malo, and the Torres.

Earlier surveys of Malo by Galipaud were followed up in July and August of 1997 with limited excavations at two sites on the island (see Fig. 2.1). The earlier surveys on the island, showed that Lapita deposits could now be identified as being located along much of the east and north coasts. Two sites were targeted for excavation in 1997, Avunatari and Atanoasao. Two sites at Avunatari (located in the same area where Hedrick had excavated earlier) proved to be disappointing as the deposits were very disturbed. Atanoasao was somewhat different, the Lapita deposit there being sealed by up to a metre of sediment. Several test pits uncovered a cooking and dumping area where the remains of ovens and oven rakeout were recorded along with an array of dentate stamped ceramics along with frequent shellfish and turtle bone. Several shell arm ring fragments were also recovered. The site appeared to represent the remains of a short term colonising occupation with dates of 2830±100 BP (Beta-110143) 3244–2752 BP, 2900±50 BP (Beta-110144) 3209–2872 BP and
2830±60 BP (Beta-110146) 3158–2781 BP, all being recovered from charcoal samples from the lowest level of the site associated with Lapita dentate stamped ceramics. Further details of the excavations are outlined in Galipaud (1998a), Noury (1998) and Pineda and Galipaud (1998).

Galipaud’s work in the Torres Group was concentrated on the islands of Tegua and Toga (Galipaud 1998b) where in some areas pottery was described as being relatively frequent on the surface. Excavations were carried out at an open site and a cave site (Woga) on Tegua and an open site at the village of Kurvot on Toga where mound features were noted. At the open site of Litetona three test pits were excavated to a depth of over one metre but returned few artefacts. Numerous surface collected materials were however recovered in the vicinity of the test pits, including shell adzes, arm rings, volcanic glass and worn pottery. Galipaud (1998b:163) indicated that the pottery was Mangaasi-style from the form and colour, although only one recovered sherd was decorated. At the cave site of Woga a test pit was dug to a depth of 2.5m. Artefactual material was very sparse with shellfish and several pieces of worked stone making up the total. No pottery was recovered. A date from charcoal collected from the very base of the test pit returned a date of 2100±60 BP (Beta-100138) 2305–1902 BP, perhaps indicating that pottery by that date was no longer a component of the material culture on the island.

The excavations on the island of Toga were concentrated at the village of Kurvot. Seven test pits were excavated along an east-west axis beginning behind the village and continuing at intervals of 30m. Artifactual material was again relatively sparse. Two phases of occupation were noted. In situ pottery was only found in the earlier levels and appeared to be largely a plainware which Galipaud compared to Kiki ware from Tikopia and early material from Pakea (Galipaud 1998b:166). Two dates from charcoal were recovered from the lower levels of TP 3, one AMS date of 2470±40 BP (Beta-118605) 2736–2354 BP and one standard C14 date of 2420±70 BP (Beta-118606) 2739–2333 BP, indicated the earliest occupation of the area.

During his tenure with the VCHSS Galipaud had also carried out a series of surveys and limited excavation on the island of Santo (Galipaud 1996c:27). Further survey and excavation was completed in 1996 from Wusi on the south west coast of Santo right up to the northern point of the island. A total of 66 sites were recorded and a series of test pits were excavated in both open sites and cave sites. The objectives of the research were to establish basic chronologies related to the human settlement of Santo and compare the results with those already known from the Banks and Malo. The test pit results proved to be rather disappointing with little artifactual material being recovered from what were largely relatively recent deposits. Collections of surface pottery were made and a basic typology of decorative styles was illustrated along with three distinct traditions being identified.

Two cave sites excavated at the northern tip of Santo, Malsosoba 1 and 2, are reported in some detail, but again were not particularly rich in artifactual material. Two radiocarbon dates were reported from charcoal recovered from the lowest levels of the caves, 1150±80 BP (Beta-98570) 1264-927 BP (Malsosoba 1) and 350±60 BP (Beta-97558) 498-310 BP (Malsosoba 2) (Galipaud 1996c). As noted by Galipaud (1996c:27) the west coast has proved to be a difficult area to find archaeological sites with any depth of stratigraphy and consequently the results are somewhat tentative. The complex and varied ceramic remains relating to human colonisation and settlement, which seem likely to have a 3000 year history on Santo, as yet require a great deal of further research.

Commencement of the ANU-VNM Archaeological Project

Also following the lifting of the ban on research in 1994 The Australian National University-Vanuatu National Museum archaeological project was commenced. Spriggs again targeted Erromango, this time testing for evidence of pre-Lapita settlement. A series of rockshelters/caves were selected for excavation along the west coast at a range of altitudes from 5 to 125 metres where
early Holocene and Pleistocene shorelines were preserved. Four sites were excavated in 1994, namely Velemendi, Velilo, Raowalai and Ilpin (Fig. 2.2). The earliest cultural deposit from any of the cave sites occurred at 5-10 metres above sea level at Velilo shelter. It consisted of a shallow trench and several postholes, associated with a charcoal date of 1220±130 BP (ANU-9709) 1350–916 BP. A date on marine shell taken from the former foreshore below the cultural layer returned a date of 4290±50 BP (ANU-9710) 4521–4257 BP. The only other excavation which provided dates earlier than the last few hundred years was at Raowalai Cave where charcoal and shell associated with burials was dated to 810±80 BP (ANU-9703) 923–571 BP and 910±70 BP (ANU-9705) 631–427 BP respectively. The next use of the site was domestic in the form of a large stone oven which gave a carbon 14 determination of 200±60 BP (ANU-9702) 425–0 BP. The other cave sites returned radiocarbon determinations no earlier than the last few hundred years (Bedford et al. 1998). The lack of evidence for early use of these sites would be surprising if there was widespread occupation of the island before the Lapita expansion. The only pottery found on Erromango, with the exception of a single sherd in secondary, surface deposition in a cave, comes from village sites situated at prime settlement locations at river mouths and associated reef passages. Two of these, namely Ponamla and Ifo which were excavated in 1995 and 1996 respectively, are discussed in detail in Chapters 3 and 5. Spriggs also returned to Aneityum in 1996 with Geoff Hope and Brad Pillans to undertake further palaeoenvironmental research.

Summary

This review clearly highlights the somewhat piecemeal nature of archaeological research in Vanuatu to 1995 and the pressing need for further work. Up to 1994 Vanuatu could still be described as largely an archaeological terra incognita or certainly a somewhat confused archaeological terrain. The large scale pioneering projects of the 1960s and 1970s which produced spectacular results provided a basic platform from which to proceed but for a number of reasons further progress was unrealised.

In many respects the archaeology of Vanuatu had been stuck in a pioneering phase. Many of the results from the earlier research remained unpublished or unconfirmed and had become increasingly enigmatic over time when compared to results from more recent archaeological programs throughout the Pacific. The Australian National University-Vanuatu National Museum Archaeological Project was commenced in 1994 to move specifically beyond the lingering pioneering phase.

Fieldwork post 2000

Although not outlined in any great detail here it is necessary to briefly mention a number of other, largely as yet, unpublished research projects which will be referred to in the text that have been undertaken since 2000. A number of them have particular relevance to subsequent discussions particularly in relation to Lapita settlement across the archipelago.
Small Islands of Malekula

In 2001 a three year archaeological research and training program was commenced on the small offshore islands of northeast Malekula (Bedford 2003). The program was specifically designed to rectify the dearth of information on Lapita sites in Vanuatu. The focus of the project was a search for Lapita on smaller islands and more specifically those on small islands not too distant from Lapita-rich Malo. Those islands chosen for study were a group located on the northeast coast of Malekula, namely Vao, Atchin, Wala and Uripiv. Lapita sites were found on the uplifted former beach terraces, on the sheltered western side of all these islands. The sites are generally very well sealed and preserved through a combination of tephra deposits, cyclonic sand deposits and accumulated debris from later habitation in the same area.

Aore and Tutuba

Since 2000 Jean-Christophe Galipaud has been carrying out survey and limited excavation on Aore Island (60km²). He reports the presence of at least two Lapita sites, Makue in the north and Port Latour in the south (Fig. 2.1), with some ephemeral evidence in the west. He also suspects that it is highly likely that Lapita will be found on the small offshore islet of Ratoua in the south (Bedford 2003; Galipaud pers. comm.). Only limited information regarding the sites is available to date but one of the significant features of the northern site of Makue is the relatively large number of obsidian flakes sourced to the west (Galipaud pers. comm.). Galipaud has also more recently confirmed the presence of two Lapita sites on the smaller adjacent island of Tutuba (14km²). The Lapita sites on Malo and Aore which have obsidian from the west are likely to provide some of the earliest dates for Lapita arrival in Vanuatu. This more recent research has also demonstrated the widespread nature of Lapita settlement across Vanuatu.

Arapus and Teouma, Efate

In 1999 the Arapus site, located directly southwest of Mangaasi was identified and some of the results from the research of that year are included in this publication. Further research at the site was carried out over separate field seasons in 2001-2003. This subsequent research has defined in detail the pattern of settlement at the site and extent of the archaeological deposits. Further fine dating of the site and detailed analysis and publication is forthcoming but the accumulated evidence now indicates that the Arapus site is associated with first settlement on the west coast of Efate but that it post-dates initial settlement of the island by at least some decades if not longer. The recent discovery of the Teouma site on the south coast of Efate further strengthens this argument (Bedford et al. 2004). Teouma is a Lapita site that was very recently uncovered during construction work for a prawn farm. The dentate-stamped motifs and vessel forms identified amongst the scattered ceramics indicate that the site dates to the earliest part of Vanuatu’s settlement with a number of sherds showing clear affiliation to sherds from Mussau and Reef Santa Cruz Lapita sites. Excavations at the site were undertaken in mid-2004 and 2005.

Rock-art

Another area of research that has seen major advances over the last five years is that of rock-art in Vanuatu which is now in many respects is one of the better known collections of the Pacific. In 2002 Meredith Wilson completed her doctoral research on the rock art of Vanuatu (Wilson 2002) and then subsequently in collaboration with Bruno David carried out one of the most intensive rock art dating programs in the world concentrating on the rock-art of northwest Malekula (Wilson and David in prep.).

Over the last ten years archaeological research in Vanuatu has shifted significantly from the pioneering phase in which it had for so long remained. An outline and some detail of the various advances in research and knowledge will be demonstrated in the following pages.