

EXCAVATIONS ON MOTUPORE ISLAND,
CENTRAL DISTRICT, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

By Jim Allen with contributions by

Pamela Swadling and Owen Rye. 2017.

University of Otago, Working Papers in Anthropology

No. 4. Otago. Public Domain PDF, 640 pp.

ISBN 978-0-9922626-3-1.

Reviewed by

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This is a lengthy, painstaking and comprehensive treatment of the archaeological finds excavated from Motupore Island during 1970-1976. Notably, this work positions Jim Allen's long involvement in Papuan archaeological research both in terms of its historical development and theoretical foundations. Many might think they have heard most of it before, on seeing the monograph 'at long last'. However, this is not correct and much of importance would be squandered if scholars do not actively engage with this work.

Almost half of the text concerns pottery analysis:

- placing the study within the historic and prevailing disciplinary framework,
- sampling the collection
- testing and reformulating the analysis
- classifying the form and decorative aspects of the assemblage
- discerning manufacturing technologies and sources for raw materials (with Owen Rye)
- comparing the results with the findings from other coastal Papuan pottery studies.

This material is developed over six chapters and, I admit, it is not easy going. Nevertheless, Allen's clean writing style and methodical presentation makes this comprehensive pottery analysis very intelligible. The application of x-ray examination of sherds in order to identify the presence of different pot-making techniques is of particular interest. A compelling argument can be mounted for incorporating such analyses in future Papuan pottery investigations.

Stone, shell and bone artefacts are also described at length. Drill points and beads are analysed in detail and a convincing story for village craft specialisation emerges. Allen goes on to expand his discussion to incorporate ethnographic records for the Western Motu area, demonstrating how intertwined and mutually informative these data can be in fleshing out the late prehistory of the region.

The analysis of marine and terrestrial faunal remains, shellfish (by Pam Swadling) and feature (graves and post hole) information round out the monograph's archaeological data sections. Issues relating to food acquisition techniques and on-going resource availability, as well as local trade/exchange of food, are raised.

Allen ends the work with a summary and a review of how Motupore contributes to our understanding of the ethnohistory and late prehistory of the Port Moresby region. Here he brings into play an impressive body of anthropological, archaeological, historic and linguistic evidence. He aligns these with his archaeological findings and produces a most plausible hypothesis for the last 500 years of prehistory in the region and the evolution of the Motu *hiri*. Then, based on his more recent investigations in the Hall Sound area, Allen speculates about earlier times. Here Jim begins setting an agenda for future coastal Papuan research. Given the breadth of his knowledge on display in this monograph, he is well able to do so.

As is obvious in my review, there are many aspects of *Excavations on Motupore* I find commendable. One, I believe, is most notable. This is the meticulous nature of Jim's commentary describing how he goes about analysing each class of archaeological remains. The monograph is, in fact, a best practice model of a thorough archaeological investigation.

The *Excavations on Motupore* is well worth the wait.