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**Paper title:**

Results from the first analysis of lipid residues in Lapita pottery

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1 **ABSTRACT**

2 Biomolecular and isotopic characterization of absorbed organic residues has been performed on eight dentate-  
3 stamped and two plain Lapita potsherds from the site of Teouma, in Vanuatu. Lipid profiles associated with  
4 decorated pots are homogenous suggesting that similar food types or mixtures of food types were placed in these  
5 vessels. This suggests a high degree of consistency in the use of Lapita decorated pots, irrespective of the  
6 morphological and stylistic variation of these vessels. Data obtained from single-compound isotope analysis are also  
7 not consistent with marine resources as potential food sources for Lapita vessels. Overall, the absence of marine  
8 resources in decorated vessels sharply contrasts with the current accepted model of subsistence strategy during the  
9 early stages of Lapita occupations at Teouma, characterised by broad-spectrum foraging of marine and terrestrial  
10 species. The absence of such commonly consumed, ubiquitous and easily accessible resources in Lapita vessels  
11 suggests that these pots were not manufactured to be used for ordinary occasions and day-to-day food consumption.  
12 This is the first time tangible data related to the use of these vessels is provided to support this claim in addition to  
13 contextual inferences.

14

15 **KEYWORDS**

16 Lapita, Vanuatu, Pottery, Lipid analysis, Oceania, Organic residue, Marine resources

17

18 **HIGHLIGHTS**

- 19
- Organic residue analysis of Lapita pottery from Teouma (2940-2710 cal BP), Vanuatu
  - 20 • Lipid profiles from decorated pots are homogenous
  - 21 • Data are not consistent with marine resources as potential food sources
  - 22 • Results suggest these pots were not manufactured to be used for ordinary occasions

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The first human settlers in Remote Oceania are recognised in the archaeological record by a set of cultural and material traits gathered together under the encompassing concept named the Lapita Cultural Complex (Earle and Spriggs 2015, Green 1991, 2000, Kirch 1997, Sand 2010a, Sand and Bedford 2010b, Sand et al. 2011, Sheppard 2011, Sheppard et al. 2015). The geographic extent of Lapita occupation is known to stretch from the Bismarck Archipelago and the south coast of New Guinea in the west to Tonga and Samoa in the east (Kirch 1997, McNiven et al. 2011, Skelly et al. 2014). Although it would be prejudicial to limit the complex entirely to its ceramic aspect (Green 1990: 33), the most distinctive element of the Lapita Cultural Complex remains its decorated pottery, characterized by fine dentate-stamped designs. The presence of Lapita vessels across such a wide geographical area suggests that these dentate-stamped vessels held a certain status within the social organisation of these colonising groups. The consensus is that the dentate-stamped Lapita vessels were probably used in special contexts (ceremonial, non-secular) rather than being a domestic cookware implement (Best 2002: 99-100, Spriggs 2003: 205, Chiu 2007: 257-260, Kirch 2000: 102-106, Terrell and Welsch 1997: 568). The main arguments supporting this idea are based on indirect contextual evidence from a number of Lapita sites, including the presence of decorated Lapita vessels in direct association with burials at the cemetery site of Teouma (c. 2940-2710 cal BP) in Vanuatu (Bedford et al. 2006, Bedford et al. 2010: 143). This article presents for the first time concrete data acquired directly from Lapita pottery from Teouma that clearly support this hypothesis.

The objectives of this paper are twofold:

**I. To propose an analytical method** able to **gain insights into the social role of dentate-stamped ceramics** by providing direct chemical evidence related to the original contents of these vessels. Previous attempts at analysing residues in Oceanic pottery have had limited success and/or targeted very specific aspects which hindered the widespread applicability of these techniques to archaeological assemblages (Hocart et al. 1993, Hill and Evans 1989, Fankhauser 1997, 1994, Hill et al. 1985). Until now, *direct* evidence of Lapita diets have been provided by i) bulk stable isotope analysis of human bone collagen (Kinaston, Buckley, et al. 2014, Kinaston, Bedford, et al. 2014, Valentin et al. 2010, Valentin et al. 2014), ii) the analysis of starch and phytolith microfossils in dental calculus (Horrocks et al. 2014), and iii) starch and phytolith analyses of pottery residues (Crowther 2009, 2005, Horrocks et al. 2009). Those studies have contributed significantly to scholarship but have important limitations when trying to reconstruct the use of Lapita pottery. Bulk stable isotope analysis of human bone collagen and the study of microfossils present in dental calculus of Lapita individuals provide direct evidence of the foods eaten by past people, but nothing indicates whether these foods were processed, cooked, stored, or displayed in Lapita vessels before being consumed. The analysis of starch and phytolith microfossils in soil adhering to sherds or preserved in carbonized deposits still adhering to the walls of ancient Lapita pottery have great potential for identifying precisely which plants have been processed or cooked in these vessels, but these techniques cannot be employed to document the use of animal resources. The biomolecular and isotopic analyses of lipids undertaken in the present study, on the other hand, shed light on a wider variety of food sources, including plant and aquatic oils, as well as animal fats.

37 This article details the results from the first organic residue analysis undertaken on Lapita pottery combining gas  
38 chromatography mass spectrometry (GCMS) and gas chromatography-combustion-isotope ratio mass spectrometry  
39 (GC-c-IRMS) analysis of lipids. When used in concert with stable isotope analysis of human bone collagen and  
40 faunal analysis, as we do here, these state-of-the art techniques in organic residue analysis have been shown to  
41 provide more accurate reconstructions of pottery use(s) than was traditionally possible (Craig et al. 2013, Craig et al.  
42 2011, Craig et al. 2007, Craig et al. 2005, Outram et al. 2009, Reber and Evershed 2006, Evershed et al. 1991, Taché  
43 and Craig 2015). Absorbed residues were targeted in the analyses reported here, since none of the Lapita pottery  
44 sherds recovered at the site of Teouma had visible foodcrusts, or carbonized deposits, adhering to their interior  
45 walls. Absorbed residues result from the contact and subsequent absorption of a ceramic container's original content  
46 into its porous and permeable wall during use (Heron and Evershed 1993). Such residues allow the identification of  
47 what has been placed in a vessel over its lifetime, as opposed to visible residues, which are usually formed from a  
48 single or a small number of cooking accidents that resulted in the carbonization of the vessel's content.

49

50 **II.** To test the hypothesis that the importance of Lapita dentate-stamped pottery had more to do with ideology  
51 (perhaps expressed in ceremony/ritual) than mundane use, with data directly acquired from the vessels via organic  
52 residue analysis. This idea that dentate-stamped vessels were not primarily used for cooking but rather for  
53 exceptional circumstances has been suggested originally by Groube (1971: 305) and the detailed analysis of the  
54 dentate-stamped assemblages of Lapita sites in the Arawe (Summerhayes 2000a) and Mussau Islands (Kirch 1997:  
55 120-122) in Papua New Guinea later suggested that “dentate-stamped vessels are one specialised component of a  
56 larger assemblage” (Summerhayes 2000b: 301). If this hypothesis is today largely accepted, it still relies on  
57 inferences and has yet never been demonstrated by tangible data directly related to the usage of these vessels.

58 The rationale for conducting this study is that determining *what* was placed in these vessels has great potential to  
59 further our understanding as to *why* they were used. This project aims to determine what food items were placed in  
60 Lapita pottery in order to gain insights on the ways these vessels were used. By comparing data obtained from  
61 organic residue analysis of Lapita pottery with past study of soil microfossils, the composition of faunal  
62 assemblages, and current information on Lapita subsistence patterns and availability of resources, we hope to reveal  
63 whether commonly eaten food or unusual food items were placed in Lapita vessel. Established criteria employed to  
64 define ‘special types’ of food, such as rarity, difficulty of preparation and acquisition (labour investment), will also  
65 be considered to assess further the significance of these pots and determine whether Lapita vessels were special  
66 containers reserved for special occasions (Appadurai 1986, Berry 1994, Curet and Pestle 2010, Dietler 2012,  
67 Hayden 1996)<sup>1</sup>, or if they were more likely used in mundane day-to-day food preparations. Overall, the concept of  
68 Lapita cuisine has been little explored in the archaeological literature (cf. Kirch 1997, Kirch and Green 2001,  
69 Pollock 1992) and this paper aims at beginning to fill this void.

70

71

72 **2. LAPITA POTTERY: THE CURRENT CONSENSUS**

73 The analysis of the decorative aspects of Lapita pottery revealed that specific decorative motifs and quite rigid  
74 organisational rules were shared across a region covering 4000 km (Ambrose 1997, Chiu 2007, Mead 1975, Sand  
75 2007, Siorat 1990, Spriggs 1990). Such a complex and organised decorative system implies that the iconography on  
76 the pots held an important cultural significance for the people who were manufacturing and using them. Current  
77 models assume that the cultural connection between Lapita communities, attested by the homogeneity of the  
78 dentate-stamped decorations across Lapita sites, was associated with ideology rather than materiality; ideas were  
79 transferred more than objects, and the ideological signification of these vessels was more important than their  
80 economic value (Earle and Spriggs 2015). Accordingly, Best (2002), Chiu (2007) and Summerhayes (2000a) have  
81 argued that dentate-stamped Lapita ceramics, especially the ones displaying face motifs, were used to promote,  
82 signal and convey information about the social status and power of Lapita communities, notably in the contexts of  
83 special events and/or ceremonies (e.g., funerals, feasts, etc.).

84  
85 Even if generally accepted, the idea that dentate-stamped ceramics were involved in special activities rather than  
86 prosaic domestic cooking relies on little information regarding how these vessels were used (see Kirch 1997,  
87 Osmond and Ross 1998). The general absence from Lapita pottery assemblages of soot or carbonised residues  
88 indicative of cooking (Kirch 1997: 120-121, 2000: 106), as well as the forms (notably the flat-bottomed dishes and  
89 the open bowls elevated on a pedestal) and technological characteristics of Lapita pottery have been used to suggest  
90 that these containers are not well suited to use directly over a fire (Ambrose 1997, Clough 1992). This was in turn  
91 interpreted to mean that dentate-stamped Lapita vessels were primarily used for food display/consumption rather  
92 than cooking. However, this does not exclude completely the possibility that Lapita pottery was also involved in  
93 certain forms of cooking, through indirect stone boiling for example, as suggested by the presence of foodcrusts on a  
94 very small number of Lapita vessels (Crowther 2009, 2005) and Proto Oceanic reconstructed words for food  
95 preparation involving pottery (Osmond and Ross 1998: 68, Lichtenberk 1994: 275). Besides these technological and  
96 use-wear inferences, most of the arguments used to support the assumption that dentate-stamped Lapita ceramics  
97 were involved in ceremonial and/or ritual activities, as convincing as they might seem, rely on indirect contextual  
98 information, as detailed below.

99  
100 **i)** The Talepakemalai (ECA) site (Mussau Islands, Papua New Guinea) represents one of the largest Lapita villages  
101 known and is noted for its well preserved spatial integrity amongst waterlogged deposits (Kirch 2001, Kirch 1997).  
102 Two distinct activity areas with contrasting assemblages have been identified on this 82,000m<sup>2</sup> site dating back to  
103 perhaps 1350 cal B.C at the earliest (Kirch 1997, Kirch 2001, Kirch et al. 2015: 50, Specht and Gosden 1997: 181-  
104 187). While one area yielded a ceramic assemblage dominantly composed of plain globular jars accompanied by  
105 obsidian flakes, fish bone and evidence of conus shell ring manufacturing (Kirch 1997: 172), the other yielded finely  
106 dentate-stamped sherds from vessels displaying various forms, a variety of tools (e.g., shell scrapers and peelers,  
107 fishhooks, oven stones), ornamental objects (shell ornaments, anthropomorphic figure carved of porpoise bone) and  
108 evidence of a stilt-house (Kirch 2000). Based on the concentration of decorated ceramics and uncommon objects in

109 the latter area, it was suggested that the structure could have hosted special activities related to food preparation and  
110 consumption in a non-domestic context, a feast for example. In contrast, a more conventional habitation is thought  
111 to have occupied the area where artefacts were found dedicated to the completion of quotidian activities.

112

113 **ii)** Amongst other findings, excavations at the eponymous Lapita site WKO013 (Foué, New Caledonia) revealed a  
114 double pit dated to 1020-820 cal B. C., where two Lapita complete pots had been buried and 15 other half-broken  
115 decorated pots had been purposefully placed (Sand et al. 1998, Sand 2013: 3). It is unquestionable that the burying  
116 was intentional, as suggested by the organised position of the pots and surrounding sherds and by the characteristics  
117 of the filling, more compatible with a rapid filling than a natural and slow packing (Sand et al. 1998: 37, Sand 2013:  
118 3). Such behaviour has been interpreted as an indication that the vessels were treated with special consideration,  
119 which in turn would imply that they had some cultural significance for the occupants of the site.

120

121 **iii)** The exceptional preservation conditions at the site of Vao, an offshore island in northeast Malekula, Vanuatu,  
122 allowed the recovery of paint remains on the surfaces of some dentate-stamped sherds (Bedford 2006a). It was  
123 determined that multiple paint coatings were applied on the decorated vessels, as white and red paint were  
124 sequentially applied, leading ultimately to obscuring the dentate-stamped decorations. The presence of paint over  
125 intricate decorations could have held some special social or cultural significance and has been seen as supporting the  
126 idea that Lapita dentate-stamped vessels “were associated with ceremonial activities rather than domestic cooking or  
127 storage” (Bedford 2006a: 553).

128

129 **iv)** The unequivocal association of dentate-stamped pottery with burials at the Lapita cemetery site of Teouma  
130 (Vanuatu) also attests to the special value of these vessels (Bedford et al. 2010: 145-147, Bedford and Spriggs 2007,  
131 Bedford et al. 2007, Bedford et al. 2006). It has been demonstrated recently that some of the vessels recovered at  
132 Teouma were probably deliberately smashed and deposited as part of a ritual (Ravn et al. 2016). The dentate-  
133 stamped ceramic collection of Teouma is remarkable for its variability both in forms and motifs (Bedford 2007: 190,  
134 Bedford and Spriggs 2007, Bedford et al. 2006: 819). The designs on a number of Teouma vessels show some  
135 similarities with the earliest Lapita ceramic assemblages from New Caledonia, Reefs-Santa Cruz and further west in  
136 the Bismarck Archipelago (Bedford et al. 2006, Bedford and Spriggs 2007). It also seems that there was a much  
137 greater proportion of dentate-stamped decorated pottery in the cemetery area, compared to the adjacent cooking area  
138 where incised and plain or notched rim pottery predominated over dentate-stamped vessels (Spriggs and Bedford  
139 2013). Petrographic and chemical analysis of the Lapita ceramic collection revealed that the majority of the vessels  
140 was produced on Efate, although 11% of the pots examined have been identified as exotics (i.e. not manufactured on  
141 Efate), with provenances from other islands in central Vanuatu and from New Caledonia (Dickinson et al. 2013,  
142 Leclerc 2016, Chiu et al. 2016).

143

144

145

146 **3. LAPITA SUBSISTENCE STRATEGY IN REMOTE OCEANIA**

147 In the early days of Lapita research, the significant presence of shellfish and fish remains in the earliest layers of  
148 Lapita sites in Fiji and Tonga triggered the hypothesis that the Lapita potters were ‘oceanic strandloopers’, a model  
149 suggesting ephemeral settlements and an emphasis on the exploitation of coastal resources before developing  
150 horticulture later on (Groube 1971, Davidson and Leach 2001 for a review). Multiple data sources have since  
151 discredited this model and revealed that a generalist subsistence strategy combining marine and terrestrial broad  
152 spectrum foraging, hunting and the cultivation of native and introduced plant species (so-called ‘transported  
153 landscapes’) characterises Lapita settlements. Among the data supporting this new consensus are stable isotope  
154 ratios of human bone collagen (Bentley et al. 2007, Kinaston, Buckley, et al. 2014, Kinaston, Bedford, et al. 2014,  
155 Valentin et al. 2010), Lapita faunal assemblages (e.g., Hawkins 2015, Worthy et al. 2015), microfossils from Lapita  
156 deposits and pottery (Crowther 2009, Lentfer and Green 2004, Matthews and Gosden 1997, Crowther 2005, Tromp  
157 2016, Horrocks et al. 2014, Horrocks et al. 2009, Horrocks and Nunn 2007, Horrocks and Bedford 2005) and  
158 linguistic reconstruction of Proto Oceanic including terms related to plant crops and horticulture (Kirch 1997, Ross  
159 1996). Moreover, it is generally accepted that Lapita subsistence strategy comprised a diversity of activities, with  
160 people adapting to a range of different environments through equally diverse subsistence strategies (Burley et al.  
161 2001, Kinaston, Buckley, et al. 2014, Sand and Bedford 2010a, Valentin et al. 2010).

162 **3.1 Terrestrial animal resources**

163 It is well documented that the consumption of indigenous animal populations by Lapita settlers in Remote Oceania  
164 resulted in an impoverishment of natural environments following human arrival, particularly in terms of avifaunal  
165 (Bedford 2006b, Steadman 2006, 1995, Worthy et al. 2015, Worthy and Clark 2009) and megafaunal species such as  
166 iguanids, crocodiles and tortoises<sup>ii</sup> (Burley 1999, Hawkins et al. 2016, Irwin et al. 2011, Mead et al. 2002, Pregill  
167 and Steadman 2004, White et al. 2010). Fruit bats also represent a terrestrial species known to have been heavily  
168 exploited by Lapita communities (Bedford 2006b, Kirch and Yen 1982, Worthy and Clark 2009, Hawkins 2015).  
169 Evidence also suggests that some domesticated animals and commensals (pigs, chicken, rats, but probably not dogs)  
170 were introduced into Remote Oceania by Lapita settlers (Storey et al. 2008, Anderson 2009, Matisoo-Smith et al.  
171 1998, Hawkins 2015) even if the intensity and the degree of reliance on these domesticates during the early phases  
172 of Lapita occupations remain a matter of discussion (Davidson and Leach 2001, Lentfer and Torrence 2007,  
173 Torrence 2011).

174

175 **3.2 Terrestrial plant resources**

176 Edible plants naturally available in Remote Oceania probably consisted of leafy greens, fruits and nuts although  
177 their exact distribution is unknown (Kinaston, Buckley, et al. 2014: 7, Lebot and Sam in press, Walter and Lebot  
178 2007). In addition to the species naturally distributed in Remote Oceania, it is generally agreed that Lapita  
179 populations practiced some form of horticulture/agriculture based on introduced crops (Green 1979, Kirch 1997,  
180 2000, Kirch and Green 2001, Spriggs 1997, Kennett et al. 2006). This is supported by the presence of microfossils  
181 (starch grains and/or phytoliths) of *Colocasia esculenta* (common taro) and *Dioscorea esculenta* (lesser yam) in  
182 sediments from putatively Lapita deposits in Fiji (Horrocks and Nunn 2007), banana (*Musa*) from Lapita and



183 immediately Post-Lapita deposits in Vanuatu (Horrocks et al. 2009), and by microfossil analysis of Lapita potsherds  
184 from various sites in the Reef /Santa Cruz Islands and Samoa that yielded starch grains associated with taro  
185 (*Colocasia esculenta*), lesser yam (*Dioscorea esculenta*) and banana (*Musa*) (Crowther 2009).

186

### 187 **3.3 Importance of marine resources**

188 The current model favours generalist and diverse subsistence strategies adapted to a variety of environments, but it  
189 should be emphasized that marine resources are systematically present in the vast majority of Lapita sites and their  
190 consumption is indisputable (Nagaoka 1988). Multiple lines of evidence confirm that Lapita occupants significantly  
191 integrated marine resources into their diet. Sites from all across the Lapita distribution have yielded fish and  
192 shellfish assemblages that are often in great abundance. Faunal assemblages dominated by marine resources have  
193 been documented in New Caledonia (Sand 2010a: 195-201, Davidson et al. 2002), Vanuatu (Bedford 2006b; Ono  
194 (pers. comm.)), Fiji (Jones 2009, Clark and Szabó 2009, Szabó 2009, Best 2002), Reef/Santa Cruz (Green 1986,  
195 Swadling 1986), Tikopia (Kirch and Yen 1982: 286-289), Mussau (Kirch 1987, Kirch et al. 1991), Niuaotuputapu  
196 (Kirch 1988), and Emirau (Summerhayes et al. 2010). Additionally, Lapita faunal assemblages are often  
197 characterised by abundant sea turtle remains (Allen 2007, Dye and Steadman 1990, Burley 1999: 196-197, Hawkins  
198 2015, Kirch 2000: 111). The large amount of sea turtles recovered from some Lapita sites suggest that they  
199 represented easy prey, particularly during their annual breeding period when they returned to beaches to lay egg  
200 clutches (Kirch 2010: 254-255).

201

202 The overwhelming majority of fish remains recovered from sites all across the Lapita distribution are species  
203 inhabiting inshore or reef environments (Sand 2010b, Davidson et al. 2002, Burley and Shutler 2007, Butler 1994,  
204 Kirch 2000: 111, Bedford 2006b: 231-236, Kirch and Green 2001: 133-134, Green 1986, Summerhayes et al. 2010).  
205 Amongst the fish families dominating Lapita contexts are *Scaridae*, *Lethrinidae*, *Acanthuridae*, and *Diodontidae*.  
206 Occasional specimens of pelagic and offshore carnivorous fish (mostly *Scombridae* and *Sphyraenidae*) are also  
207 present in Lapita faunal collections, but inshore and reef fishing was preferentially practiced at the overwhelming  
208 majority of Lapita sites (Butler 1994, Kirch 2000: 111, Green 1986). Remains from freshwater species are yet to be  
209 recovered from Lapita assemblages but this does not necessarily mean that they were not exploited by Lapita people  
210 (Ono pers. comm.). To this day, very few Lapita sites in close proximity to significant sources of freshwater have  
211 been excavated, as the vast majority of the sites are located on relatively small islands constituted of uplifted  
212 limestone with no rivers or streams. Due to the enormous size of the fish bone assemblage (more than 70 000  
213 fragments: Bouffandeau, pers. comm.) and the presence of the Teouma River and another stream near to the site, the  
214 collection of fish remains from the Lapita cemetery at Teouma represents a unique opportunity to investigate the  
215 extent to which freshwater resources were exploited by Lapita people.

216 Despite the recurrence of some fish species dominating the ichthyological assemblages, the diversity of fish species  
217 represented in faunal collections suggests that Lapita people used a variety of fishing techniques (Butler 1994).  
218 However, the paucity of artifacts related to fishing activities recovered from Lapita sites hardly reflects the  
219 importance and diversity of this subsistence practice. Fishing gear recovered from Lapita contexts is limited to

220 several types of fish hooks (for bottom fishing, open-sea trolling, and hand line fishing) and trolling lures (Szabó  
221 2010, 2007, Burley and Shutler 2007, Sand 2010a, Kirch 1997, Szabó and Summerhayes 2002). This situation  
222 probably reflects the perishable nature of the equipment employed for other fishing techniques, such as poisoning,  
223 nettings or spearing (Kirch and Green 2001: 131-141, Ono 2003).

224 In addition to the zooarchaeological remains, isotope analysis of human bone collagen from individuals buried at  
225 Teouma confirms that marine resources were consumed regularly and represented a significant portion of the diet.  
226 Studies indicate that the Teouma population subsisted primarily on a mix of inshore/reef fish resources, marine  
227 animals, and terrestrial animal resources (both domesticated and wild) with low-level food production (Bentley et al.  
228 2007, Kinaston, Buckley, et al. 2014, Valentin et al. 2010).

229 Lastly, linguistic reconstructions also reveal the importance that the sea and its resources had for Lapita people.  
230 Reconstruction of the Proto-Oceanic language shows that it included a wide array of words describing a variety of  
231 coastal environments, as well as different kinds of fish and fishing techniques. Such linguistic data highlight the  
232 detailed and extensive knowledge that Lapita people had in regards to their conception of the ocean and its resources  
233 (Kirch 2010: 253, Walter 1989, Kirch and Green 2001: 99-119, Geraghty 1994, Ross et al. 1998).

#### 234 **3.4 Lapita subsistence at the Teouma site and in Vanuatu**

235 When the Teouma cemetery was in use (2940 to 2710 cal BP: Petchey et al. 2015, Petchey et al. 2014), the uplifted  
236 karstic reef terrace underlying the site would have been a low promontory extending into the bay, bordered by a  
237 river to the north. This environment would have represented an ideal location for the exploitation of pelagic and reef  
238 fish species (Bedford et al. 2006: 812-813, Bedford et al. 2010: 143, Hawkins 2015: 45). Neighbouring streams  
239 supplying fresh water and the terrestrial ecosystem around the site and inland would have completed the landscape  
240 and provided suitable environments for foraging both terrestrial and aquatic resources. The location would also have  
241 been adequate for swidden agriculture, even though this practice has still not been demonstrated convincingly for the  
242 early occupation stages.

243  
244 The terrestrial animal species most represented in the Teouma faunal assemblage are bats, pigs, tortoise, sea turtles  
245 and birds (Hawkins 2015). The significant amount of pig remains recovered at the site represents a convincing  
246 argument for its introduction, and contrast with the rather sparse zooarchaeological record of this species elsewhere  
247 in Remote Oceania (Anderson 2009). Small quantities of pig bones were also reported at the Lapita sites of Vao,  
248 Uripiv and Erueti (Bedford 2007, Garanger 1972). Chicken and rat bones (both *Rattus exulans* and *Rattus praetor*)  
249 are also abundant at Teouma (Hawkins 2015, Storey et al. 2010).

250  
251 While published archaeobotanical work in Vanuatu has been relatively limited (Hope and Spriggs 1982, Wirthman et al.  
252 al. 2011, Combettes et al. 2015, Hope et al. 1999), analysis of microfossils from archaeological deposits has yielded  
253 some evidence for the introduction of plant species, including banana and taro. Banana (*Musa*) phytoliths have been  
254 identified from Lapita deposits at the site of Uripiv (c. 3000-2700 BP ) (Horrocks et al. 2009) as well as in dental  
255 calculus from a Late-Lapita individual buried at the site of Vao (2300-2000 cal BP) (Horrocks et al. 2014). Both

256 sites are located on islets off the northeastern coast of Malekula about 225 km to the northwest of Teouma. Other  
257 studies have identified starch granules attributed to the Aroid family in Lapita deposits from Uripiv, and possibly  
258 from dental calculus of individuals buried at Vao and Uripiv. The species could not be identified but *Cyrtosperma*  
259 *merkusii* (giant swamp taro) is believed to be the most likely candidate (Horrocks et al. 2014, Horrocks and Bedford  
260 2005). Calculus of individuals buried at Teouma also yielded starch granules and phytoliths from a variety of nuts  
261 and both introduced and native tree crops species (*Dioscorea esculenta*, *Cocos nucifera*, *Barringtonia* spp. nuts,  
262 *Inocarpus fagifer* and *Musa sp.* amongst others) (Tromp 2016). Vegetation clearance during Lapita times has also  
263 been identified from the palaeoenvironmental records of New Caledonia (Stevenson 1999); Aneityum in Vanuatu  
264 (Hope and Spriggs 1982); and Fiji (Anderson et al. 2006).

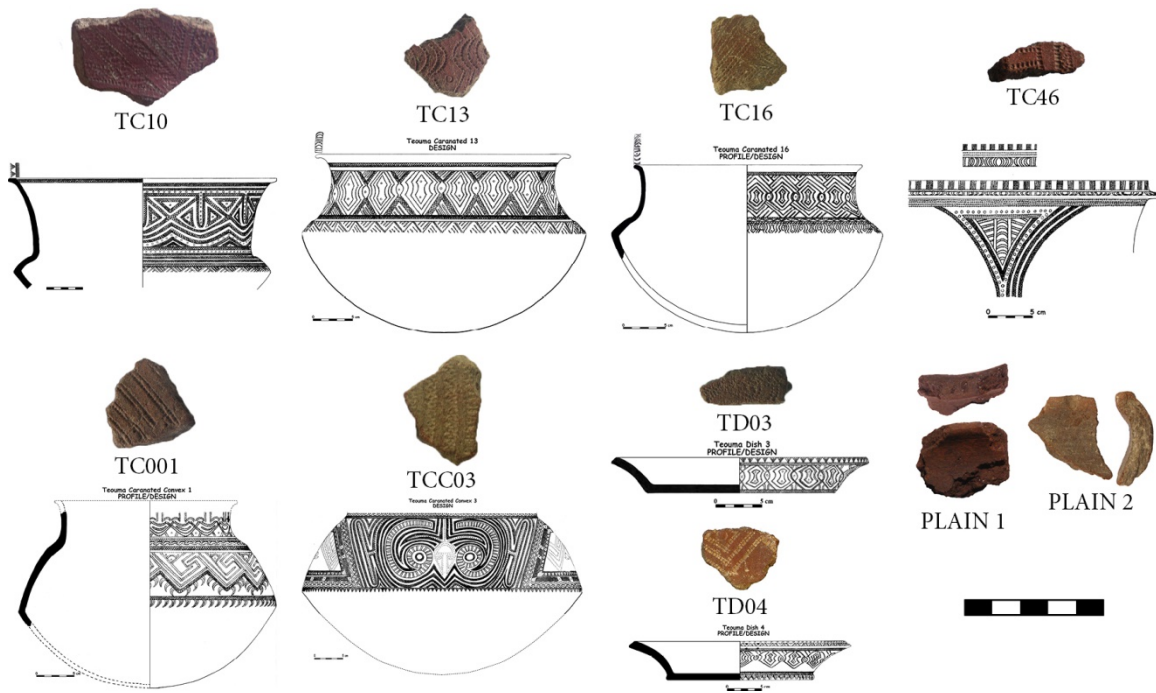
265

#### 266 **4. ORGANIC RESIDUE ANALYSIS**

##### 267 **4.1 Sampling**

268 Organic residue analysis was conducted on eight dentate-stamped decorated and two plain Lapita rim sherds (Figure  
269 1). Since Lapita decorated vessels always display decoration on their upper section near the rim (Sand and Bedford  
270 2010b), the absence of decorations in this section confirms that they originated from plain vessels. In terms of  
271 stratigraphic context, seven samples were recovered from the orange tephra layer associated with Lapita burials and  
272 the initial activity at the site (Table 1). Two samples (TC16 and PLAIN1), were recovered from the overlying  
273 midden and TCC01 was recovered from a disturbed section with limited stratigraphic control. Nevertheless, it was  
274 established based on the reconstruction of these vessels that the decorated sherds TC16 and TCC01 were originally  
275 deposited in association with the Lapita burials in Layer 3. It is probable that their presence in the midden was  
276 caused by post-depositional disturbance, as suggested by the presence of crab burrows and coconut roots across the  
277 site. As for the sample PLAIN1, it represents the only sample clearly associated with the midden. In terms of vessel  
278 forms and temper types, an effort was made to select samples with different forms. The only two samples displaying  
279 petrographic traits not corresponding to raw materials from Efate (TD03 and TCC03) were manufactured in New  
280 Caledonia<sup>iii</sup>.

281



282

283 **Figure 1** (double column fitting) | Ceramic pieces from Teouma that have been analysed for the biomolecular and  
 284 isotopic characterization of their absorbed organic residues. The shape of the vessels from which they originate is  
 285 also illustrated. TCC03 and TD03 were manufactured in New Caledonia, the others were local to the Teouma area.

286

Pot	# catalog	Area	Square	Layer	Temper type, provenance <sup>a</sup>
TC 10	8.2481	3A	3.2	Lapita orange tephra (3)	Unplacered, local
TC 13	5.3897	2	G1	Lapita orange tephra (3)	Opaque-rich, Efate
TC 16	5.3195	2	B1	Midden (2)	Unplacered, local
TC 46	6.1067A	3B	2.3	Lapita orange tephra (3)	Opaque-rich, Efate
TD 03	4.2477	3A	0.3	Lapita orange tephra (3)	Metamorphic hybrid, New Caledonia
TD 04		3	7.3	Lapita orange tephra (3)	Pyroxenic, Efate
TCC 01	4.2233	deep cut		Undetermined	Unplacered, local
TCC 03	6.670	3B	1.8	Lapita orange tephra (3)	Metamorphic hybrid, New Caledonia
PLAIN1	10.571	B ext	I17	Midden (2)	Undetermined (local)
PLAIN2	10.2841	B ext	F14	Lapita orange tephra (3)	Opaque-rich, Efate

<sup>a</sup> From Dickinson et al. (2013)

287

**Table 1** | Contextual details for the ceramic samples involved in this study.

288

#### 289 **4.2 Presentation of analytical techniques**

290 Ceramic samples ( $\approx 1\text{-}2$  g drilled from the potsherd interior surface) were weighed and lipids were extracted and  
291 methylated according to established protocol (e.g. Craig et al. 2013) by direct acid-catalysed transesterification to  
292 maximise recovery. Methanol (4 mL) was added and homogenised with the ceramic powder, the mixture was  
293 ultrasonicated for 15 min and then acidified with concentrated sulphuric acid (800  $\mu\text{L}$ ). The acidified suspension was  
294 heated in sealed tubes for four hours at 70°C and then cooled, and lipids were extracted with n-hexane (3 $\times$ 2 mL) and  
295 dried down under a gentle N<sub>2</sub> flow. The extracts were transferred to autosampler vials and 10  $\mu\text{g}$  of internal standard  
296 (hexatriacontane) was added.

297

298 Lipids extracted from ceramic matrices were first analysed by GCMS, a technique that allows the separation of  
299 complex mixtures and the identification of plant- and animal-derived lipids (e.g. sterols, *n*-alkanoic acids). Lipid  
300 extracts analysed by GCMS can be tentatively associated with food sources using two major techniques: the  
301 biomarker and the relative abundance approaches. Through the identification of chemical compounds that are unique  
302 to a certain resource or class of resources, the biomarker approach allows us to link directly and with confidence a  
303 residue with a specific resource, or at the very least with a group of resources. The relative abundance approach  
304 employs the ratios of various common compounds to propose, albeit with high degree of uncertainty<sup>iv</sup>, the general  
305 overall composition of a residue (e.g. plant vs animal). While we favor a methodology that combines both  
306 approaches, no biomarker has been identified in this study.

307

308 GCMS analysis was performed using an Agilent 7890A Series gas chromatograph connected to an Agilent 5975 C  
309 Inert XL mass-selective detector with a quadrupole mass analyzer (Agilent Technologies, Cheshire, UK).  
310 The splitless injector and interface were maintained at 300°C and 280°C respectively. Helium was the carrier gas at  
311 constant inlet pressure, and the GC column was inserted directly into the ion source of the mass spectrometer. The  
312 ionization energy was 70 eV and spectra were obtained by scanning between  $m/z$  50 and 800. All samples were  
313 analyzed using a DB5-*ms* (5%-phenyl)-methylpolysiloxane column (30 m  $\times$  0.32 mm  $\times$  0.25  $\mu\text{m}$ ; J&W Scientific,  
314 Folsom, CA, USA). The temperature program was 2 min at 50°C, 10°C  $\text{min}^{-1}$  to 325°C and 15 min at 325°C.

315

316 To better characterize the lipids extracted from Lapita pottery, the most abundant fatty acids preserved in ceramics,  
317 i.e., octadecanoic (C<sub>18:0</sub>) and hexadecanoic (C<sub>16:0</sub>), were then classified by their isotopic composition using GC-c-  
318 IRMS. By comparing such single isotope values with corresponding values from reference fats and oils, further  
319 information about lipid sources can be obtained. For example, it has been shown that fats from marine organisms are  
320 consistently enriched in <sup>13</sup>C compared to those of freshwater and terrestrial organisms. Additionally, C<sub>18:0</sub> acids in  
321 ruminant animals are generally depleted in <sup>13</sup>C by 1-7‰ compared to C<sub>16:0</sub> acids (Copley et al. 2003). The carbon  
322 isotopic composition of fats from non-ruminant animals and freshwater fish, however, exhibit a broad range of  
323 values and are more difficult to discriminate from one another without an exhaustive reference collection of modern

324 fats from the study area. Moreover, to this date, very few reference data exist for the composition of oils originating  
325 from plant resources, with the exception of acorns (Lucquin et al. 2016).  
326 GC-c-IRMS analysis of the samples was conducted in order to estimate the  $^{13}\text{C}/^{12}\text{C}$  ratio in the two most abundant  
327  $\text{C}_{18:0}$  and  $\text{C}_{16:0}$  fatty acids. This analysis provides further information for distinguishing different substances. The  
328 samples were analyzed using an Agilent 78908 GC (Agilent Technologies, Santa Clara, CA, USA) instrument  
329 coupled to an Agilent 5975C MSD and an Isoprime 100 IRMS (Isoprime, Cheadle, UK) with an Isoprime GC5  
330 interface (Isoprime, Cheadle, UK). All samples were diluted with hexane and subsequently 1  $\mu\text{l}$  of each sample was  
331 injected into a DB-5MS (30 m x 0.25 mm x 0.25  $\mu\text{m}$ ) fused-silica column. The temperature was set for 0.5 min at  
332 50°C, and raised by 10°C  $\text{min}^{-1}$  until 300°C was reached, and held for 10 min. The carrier gas was ultra-high purity  
333 grade helium with a flow rate of 3  $\text{mL min}^{-1}$ . The gases eluting from the chromatographic column were split into two  
334 streams. One of these was directed into an Agilent 5975C inert mass spectrometer detector (MSD), for sample  
335 identification and quantification, while the other was directed through the GC5 furnace held at 850°C to oxidize all  
336 carbon species to  $\text{CO}_2$ . A clear resolution and baseline separation of the analyzed peaks was achieved in both  
337 systems. Eluted products were ionized in the mass spectrometer by electron impact. Ion intensities of  $m/z$  44, 45,  
338 and 46 were monitored in order automatically to compute the  $^{13}\text{C}/^{12}\text{C}$  ratio of each peak in the extracts.  
339 Computations were made with IonVantage and IonOS Softwares (Isoprime, Cheadle, UK) and were based on  
340 comparisons with a standard reference gas ( $\text{CO}_2$ ) of known isotopic composition that was repeatedly measured. The  
341 results from the analysis are reported in parts per mille (‰) relative to an international standard (V-PDB). The  
342 accuracy and precision of the instrument was determined on n-alkanoic acid ester standards of known isotopic  
343 composition (Indiana standard F8-3). The mean  $\pm$  S.D. values of these were  $-29.82 \pm 0.16\text{‰}$  and  $-23.28 \pm 0.19\text{‰}$  for  
344 the methyl ester of  $\text{C}_{16:0}$  (reported mean value vs. VPDB  $-29.90 \pm 0.03\text{‰}$ ) and  $\text{C}_{18:0}$  (reported mean value vs. VPDB -  
345  $23.24 \pm 0.01\text{‰}$ ) respectively. Each sample was measured in replicate (mean of S.D. 0.11‰ for  $\text{C}_{16:0}$  and 0.10‰ for  
346  $\text{C}_{18:0}$ ). Values were also corrected subsequent to analysis to account for the methylation of the carboxyl group that  
347 occurs during extraction. Corrections were based on comparisons with a standard mixture of  $\text{C}_{16:0}$  and  $\text{C}_{18:0}$  fatty  
348 acids of known isotopic composition processed in each batch under identical conditions.

349

### 350 4.3 Results

351 The amount of lipid yielded from the two plain rim sherds are considered too low to interpret reliably (Evershed  
352 2008b). In contrast, the eight decorated samples yielded higher concentrations of lipids (Table 2) and are therefore  
353 most likely derived from the use of these vessels. Whilst long-term exposure to the burial environment leads to  
354 progressive loss of lipid molecules, it seems unlikely that this process has affected only the plain samples since they  
355 were deposited in the same conditions as the decorated sherds. Second, the lipid profiles, as discussed below, are  
356 typical of degraded oily foodstuffs rather than as might be expected from soils and sediments. Overall, the difference  
357 in the amount of lipids between decorated and plain vessels is difficult to interpret at this stage but it will be  
358 interesting to see if this pattern persists on a larger sample.

359

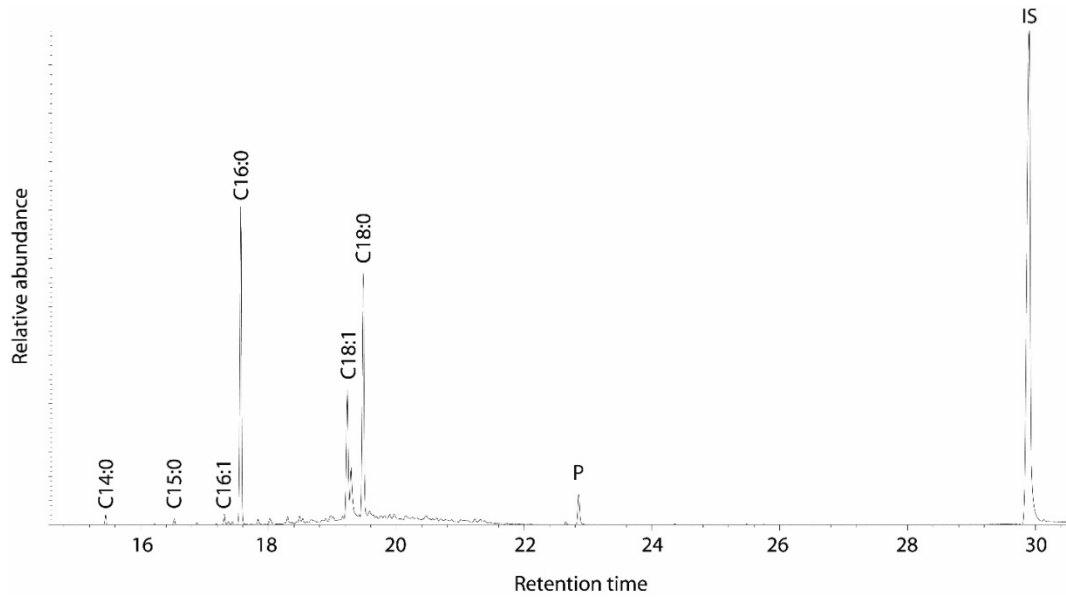
Sample ID	Lipid analysis		GC-c-IRMS	
	Lipid conc.(ug g <sup>-1</sup> )	Compounds detected	C <sub>16:0</sub> δ <sup>13</sup> C (‰)	C <sub>18:0</sub> δ <sup>13</sup> C (‰)
10.576	<5			
10.2841	<5			
TC-10	13.08	FA(C <sub>14:0-16:0,18:0</sub> C <sub>18:1</sub> ), AL(C <sub>17-21</sub> )	-28.64	-29.22
TC-11	17.25	FA(C <sub>14:0-16:0,18:0,20:0,24:0-26:0</sub> C <sub>18:1</sub> )	-27.36	-26.61
TC-13	10.12	FA(C <sub>14:0-16:0,18:0</sub> C <sub>16:1,18:1</sub> )	-29.22	-29.8
TC-16	6.89	FA(C <sub>14:0-16:0,18:0</sub> C <sub>18:1</sub> )	-28.67	-29.89
TCC-01	10.87	FA(C <sub>14:0-16:0,18:0</sub> C <sub>18:1</sub> )	-27.73	-28.9
TCC-03	6.66	FA(C <sub>14:0-18:0</sub> C <sub>16:1,18:1</sub> )	-28.41	-29.44
TD-03	10.2	FA(C <sub>14:0-18:0,20:0</sub> C <sub>18:1</sub> )	-29.48	-29.5
TD-04	17.83	FA(C <sub>14:0-18:0,20:0,23:0,24:0</sub> C <sub>16:1,18:1</sub> )	-27.25	-27.46

360 **Table 2** | Biomolecular and isotopic characterisation of absorbed residues from Teouma, Vanuatu  
361 FA (Cx:y)=fatty acids with carbon length x and number of unsaturations y, ALx=alkanes with carbon length x.  
362 Lipid concentrations are expressed in µg g<sup>-1</sup> (concentrations below 5 µg g<sup>-1</sup> cannot be reliably interpreted (Evershed  
363 2008a).

364  
365 There is a high degree of homogeneity in the fatty acid profiles associated with the eight decorated Lapita sherds,  
366 suggesting that the residues were composed of similar resources (Figure 2). Notable in the absorbed residues from  
367 Teouma are the high abundance of unsaturated fatty acids, namely C<sub>16:1</sub> and C<sub>18:1</sub>, which are more common in plant  
368 and fish sources than in meat (Table 3). Palmitic acid (C<sub>16:0</sub>), which also tends to be more abundant in plant and fish  
369 than in mammalian fats is slightly more abundant in the lipid profiles in five of the eight analyzed residues.  
370 However, an absence of lipids associated with aquatic animals (e.g. isoprenoid or alkylphenyl fatty acids (Evershed  
371 et al. 2008)) in all the samples suggests that plant or meat, rather than aquatic resources, contributed to these  
372 residues, although this interpretation needs to be confirmed by increasing the sample size. Indeed, it has been shown  
373 elsewhere that an absence of aquatic biomarker does not necessarily mean that no aquatic resources were processed  
374 in the pots (Taché and Craig 2015). A ratio of C<sub>16:0</sub>/C<sub>18:0</sub> slightly below one characterises the three remaining  
375 samples (TC10, TC11 and TD03), which tend to indicate an animal source. However, without corroboration from  
376 other diagnostic compounds (e.g. cholesterol, triacylglycerides), and given the abundance of unsaturated fatty acids  
377 in these samples as well, meat cannot be definitively identified as the primary components of these residues. Similar  
378 chemical profile can be derived from plant resources containing relatively high abundance of stearic acid (C<sub>18:0</sub>), or  
379 with a mixture of terrestrial plant and animal resources. Fatty acid ratios may also change during exposure to the  
380 burial environment, particularly as shorter chain molecules are more soluble and therefore more easily lost through  
381 dissolution.

382 Results from single-compound analysis also show a high degree of consistency between samples and are not  
383 consistent with marine or ruminant animals in all the samples (Table 2 and Figure 3). While these data are in line

384 with the preliminary interpretations outlined above, they do not allow us to identify plants, non-ruminant animals  
 385 and/or freshwater resources as the main components of the residues.

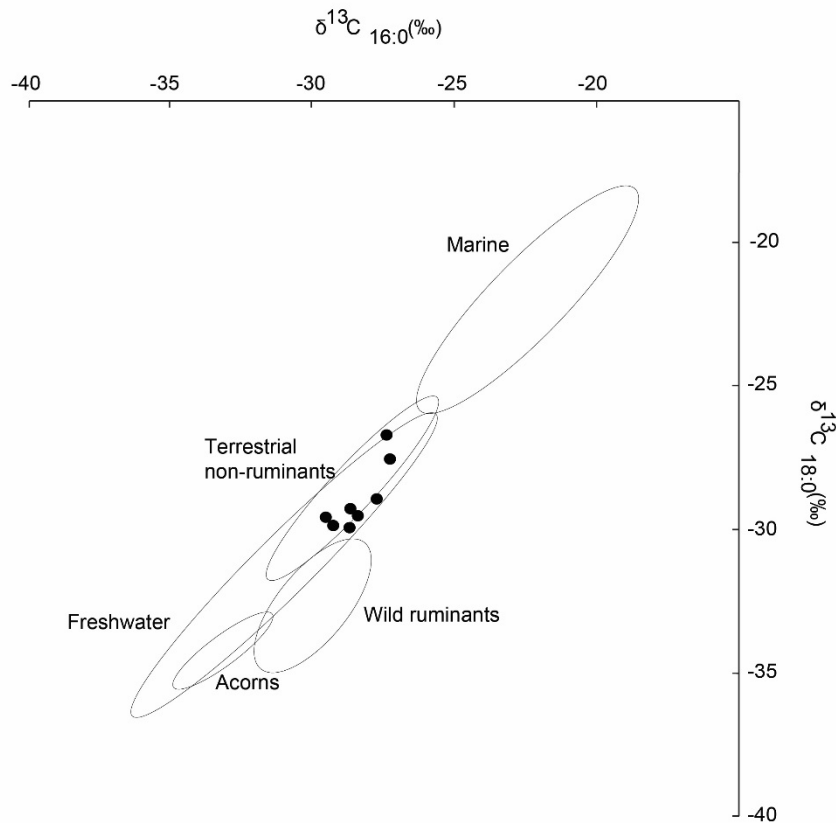


386  
 387 **Figure 2** (1.5 column fitting) | Typical partial gas chromatogram of lipid extract from a Lapita dentate-stamped  
 388 potsherd from Teouma (TC16), Vanuatu. Cn:x are fatty acids with carbon length n and number of unsaturations x; P  
 389 is a plasticizer contaminant; IS is the internal standard (*n*-hexatriacontane).

Compounds	TC10	TC11	TC13	TC16	TCC01	TCC03	TD03	TD04
C <sub>14:0</sub>	3.2	2.5	2	1.8	3.3	1.5	1.3	4
C <sub>15:0</sub>	5.1	2.6	2.9	1.1	2	1.8	1.4	1.1
C <sub>16:1</sub>	14.1	3.5	12.7	1.9		7.9		2.5
C <sub>16:0</sub>	31.1	23.6	30.2	37.5	40.3	36.5	39.4	38.9
C <sub>17:0</sub>		3.7					1.8	1.5
C <sub>18:1</sub>	9.6	22.5	23.1	27.5	18.7	20.9	12.4	13.2
C <sub>18:0</sub>	36.9	30.2	29	30.2	35.6	31.5	43.3	35.4
C <sub>20:0</sub>		4.8					0.3	2.1
C <sub>23:0</sub>								0.4
C <sub>24:0</sub>		3.7						0.8
C <sub>25:0</sub>		1.4						
C <sub>26:0</sub>		1.5						

390 **Table 3** | Relative amounts of fatty acids expressed as a percentage of total fatty acids for each compound in each  
 391 absorbed residue.





392  
 393 **Figure 3** (double column fitting) | Plot of the  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  values of  $\text{C}_{16:0}$  and  $\text{C}_{18:0}$  fatty acids extracted from Lapita dentate-  
 394 stamped decorated pottery vessels from the Teouma site. These are compared with reference fats from acorns, wild  
 395 ruminant, terrestrial non-ruminant, freshwater and marine organisms (Taché and Craig 2015, Lucquin et al. 2016)  
 396 plotted as confidence ellipses ( $1\sigma$ ; Stastica v.7).

397

### 398 5. DISCUSSION

399 Three main conclusions can be reached based on the data obtained from this preliminary organic residue analysis.

400 **i)** The biomolecular and isotopic characterisation of the decorated potsherds from Teouma yielded homogenous lipid  
 401 profiles and carbon isotopic values indicating that similar food types or mixtures of food types were placed in these  
 402 vessels, whether manufactured locally or from New Caledonia. This suggests a high degree of consistency in the use  
 403 of Lapita decorated pots, irrespective of the morphological and stylistic variation of these vessels. Indeed, results  
 404 show that the content of the vessels was not differentiated based on the various forms and/or decorative motifs of the  
 405 containers. The sampling included three types of vessel forms (carinated, carinated convex and flat dish) and every  
 406 one of the eight decorated samples analysed displayed distinctive decorative patterns. It is thus argued that the use of  
 407 Lapita pottery at Teouma was uniform, and possibly culturally regulated, rather than haphazard and opportunistic.  
 408 While this is aligned with previous interpretations of decorated Lapita vessels having special significance and being  
 409 employed in non-secular contexts, the context of use and social significance of Lapita pottery still eludes us and will  
 410 require additional analyses combining molecular and archaeological data.

411 **ii)** The amount of lipids detected in the decorated samples strongly suggests that food has been placed in these  
412 vessels. It is difficult from the preliminary data obtained so far, however, to identify the content of the vessels at this  
413 stage and three broad categories of resources cannot be excluded: terrestrial animals (excluding ruminants), plants,  
414 and freshwater resources. Importantly,  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  values of fatty acids extracted from the vessels are not consistent with  
415 marine species as the dominant food source, as these would be expected to have more  $^{13}\text{C}$  enriched fatty acids.  
416 Although no comparable measurements of fatty acids from authentic marine organisms from this region are  
417 available, collagen and bulk tissue samples of modern Vanuatu marine plants, shellfish, reef fish and deep water  
418 fish are clearly enriched in  $^{13}\text{C}$  over terrestrial species (Kinaston, Buckley, et al. 2014) supporting our interpretation.  
419 The lack of marine foods in pottery is highly unexpected based on what is known of the faunal assemblage  
420 recovered from Teouma and Lapita sites in general. Indeed, and as previously mentioned, multiple lines of evidence  
421 suggest that marine resources composed a significant portion of the Lapita diet:

422

- 423 • Extensive assemblages of fish and shellfish (and sea turtle to a lesser extent) have been recovered from a  
424 majority of Lapita sites all across the Lapita distribution (including Teouma), confirming that marine  
425 resources were consumed in significant quantity by Lapita populations.
- 426 • Isotopic analysis of human bone collagen from individuals buried at Teouma revealed that their diet was  
427 composed of a mix of marine and terrestrial resources.
- 428 • Linguistic reconstruction of Proto-Oceanic indicates that Lapita seafarers had an extended vocabulary to  
429 describe marine related concepts, including words describing various kinds of fish and fishing techniques.  
430 This indicates that fishing and navigating was an important part of their life and thus that marine resources  
431 were likely ubiquitous.
- 432 • Elements of the Lapita material culture, such as fishhooks and trolling lures, confirm that fishing was  
433 practiced, most commonly in inshore or reef environments.

434 Not only were marine resources commonly exploited, but other characteristics of Lapita sites also suggest that  
435 marine resources were abundant and accessible:

- 436 • It is generally accepted that Lapita sites were preferentially located on beaches and in at least some cases  
437 composed of stilt houses. Given the proximity of the ocean from their habitations, one can assume that  
438 marine resources were relatively easy to exploit. Moreover, many Lapita sites are also situated in close  
439 proximity to reef passes where fish are found in extremely high density.
- 440 • The size of some of the fish and shellfish assemblages recovered from Lapita sites is impressive, to the  
441 point where they originally raised the question as to whether Lapita occupants were eating primarily marine  
442 resources. This reveals the importance of maritime subsistence activities amongst Lapita people (Bedford  
443 2006b, Davidson et al. 2002, Kirch 1997: 197-203, Szabo 2001) and indicates that such resources were  
444 ubiquitous at the time of occupation.

- 445 • The assemblages of fish remains from Lapita sites are composed primarily of fish species inhabiting  
446 inshore or reef environments. Offshore species are scarcely represented. This indicates that Lapita people  
447 preferred easily accessible marine resources that were located in close proximity to the shore.
- 448 • Considering that Teouma probably represents a colonising site (Bedford et al. 2010, Bentley et al. 2007), it  
449 is argued that pristine fish stocks existed during the earliest stages of occupation as they had never been  
450 exploited before by human communities. Consequently, the marine biomass available for exploitation was  
451 significant.

452 Overall, the absence of such commonly consumed, ubiquitous and easily accessible resources in Lapita vessels  
453 suggests that these pots were not manufactured to be used for ordinary occasions and day-to-day food consumption.  
454 This is consistent with the view that dentate-stamped pottery held a particular status in Lapita societies, and that its  
455 use was reserved for exceptional occasions, possibly ceremonial/ritual activities.

456 **iii)** Preliminary results presented in this article are extremely promising and have already provided valuable insights  
457 regarding dentate-stamped Lapita pottery. This represents the first step of an ongoing project involving additional  
458 organic residue analysis that will bring further clarification on the numerous questions raised here. To provide  
459 known food residues for isotopic and biomolecular comparisons, reference samples have been obtained from the  
460 study region and carbonised experimentally on unglazed ceramic matrices. Animal bones from the site of Teouma in  
461 Vanuatu have also been obtained. Lipids will be extracted from these reference samples and submitted to the same  
462 analytical techniques described in this article in order to refine our identification of the food resources that were  
463 preferentially placed in Lapita vessels. Additionally, a larger number of dentate-stamped and plain potsherds will be  
464 analysed to get a more representative portrait of what was placed in these vessels. To account for variability in usage  
465 patterns, potsherds will be selected from a variety of domestic and funerary contexts.

466

## 467 **6. CONCLUSION**

468 In summary, the biomolecular and isotopic characterisation of residues absorbed in Lapita pottery at the site of  
469 Teouma yielded very homogeneous results, suggesting that these vessels were used consistently to process or hold a  
470 specific type or mixture of food, rather than opportunistically to process or hold a variety of resources available in  
471 the environment. By providing direct chemical evidence, these results support the long-held idea based on  
472 contextual inferences, that Lapita dentate-stamped vessels were used for specialised functions rather than mundane  
473 cooking activities. Results also show that marine resources, even though they were consumed in large quantity by  
474 Lapita dwellers and despite their ubiquitous presence around Lapita sites, were unlikely to have been placed in the  
475 ceramic vessels that were analysed. At this point however, data do not allow us to discriminate between freshwater  
476 aquatic, terrestrial animal and/or plant resources as the main components of the residues analysed. Ongoing analyses  
477 conducted on archaeological ceramics and modern samples of fats and oils will help resolve this issue.

478 As this preliminary study clearly demonstrates, organic residue analysis of Lapita vessels has the potential to  
479 contribute a markedly improved methodology for reconstructing the actual use of ancient ceramics in the south  
480 Pacific, while laying the groundwork for more informed theories on the origin, dispersal, function, and eventual  
481 replacement of Lapita pottery across Remote Oceania. This can only be verified through the widespread application,  
482 across the Lapita distribution, of a combination of techniques in organic residue analysis of archaeological ceramics  
483 (e.g., lipid, bulk and single compound isotope, and microfossil analyses). The outcomes of this study not only  
484 represent a breakthrough in terms of future research avenues but also provide additional data on the context within  
485 which the Lapita vessels were used and on the ways foods were consumed by these colonising groups.

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493 Guinea.

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402 **FOOTNOTES**

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<sup>i</sup> Many similar albeit not equating terms figure in the literature to define the type of food often consumed on special occasions: 'high status', 'luxury', 'prestige' and 'elite' food (Curet and Pestle 2010, Szabo 2001, Hayden 2003, van der Veen 2003). Each of these denominations carries a specific meaning regarding the social context in which they are consumed and their implications in terms of social and political power structure (Twiss 2012). Because it is premature at this stage to address the significance of our results in terms of the social stratification of Lapita groups, we decided to use the encompassing term 'highly valued' foods, to qualify the content of the presumably prestigious dentate-stamped Lapita vessels.

<sup>ii</sup> It must be noted that factors other than human predation, such as climate change for example, could also have contributed to impacting ecological conditions (Nagaoka 2012, Wirthman et al. 2011, Seeto et al. 2011).

<sup>iii</sup> There is thus a possibility that any residues in these two vessels relate to their use in New Caledonia before transport to Vanuatu. As will be detailed in the discussion however, there is nothing different in the way they were used that might confirm this.

<sup>iv</sup> This uncertainty is due in large part to the fact that fatty acids and other compounds degrade (through, oxidation and/or microbial breakdown) or leach out of pots at different rates in different environments.