SOCIAL ASPECTS OF POTTERY MANUFACTURE IN BOERA, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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INTRODUCTION

Among the various societies in Papua New Guinea with a potting tradition are the Motu of the Port Moresby area, Central Province. There are four other recent pottery making communities in Central Province: the Mailu who live on Mailu Island in Amazon Bay, the Roro of the Mekeo District, the Koita who live inland behind the Motu villages and the Maopa-speaking people of Dorama village in Cloudy Bay (May and Tuckson 1982:56). Amongst these potting groups the Motu were always well known because the size of their industry overshadowed that of the others (Groves 1960:3).

Studies that have been done in the Motu region indicate that the Motu pottery industry is heir to a long tradition and that its products were distributed as far as the Gulf of Papua for several hundred years prior to European contact (Bulmer 1978). These studies have mainly been concerned with changes in decorative styles and with origins and distributions. However, very little work has been done concerning traditional pottery production and its social aspects amongst the Motu themselves. Only Finsch (1903) and Groves (1960) have described pottery manufacturing techniques, although most of the early Europeans who visited Motu villages mentioned the pottery industry (Stone 1876:471, 1880:54; Turner 1878:489; Haddon 1900:431).

In this paper I wish to discuss the social aspects of recent and surviving pottery making at Boera, the only Motu village still producing pots today. Techniques of pottery manufacture are described in the hope that they will shed more light upon the study of prehistoric pottery in the same region, as well as upon Motu views on the quality of their products. The range of types of traditional Motu pottery as well as their functions and uses will be clarified. In conclusion, both the prehistoric and ethnographic pottery styles of the region will be discussed with special attention to the use of potters' trade marks.

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THE MOTU

The Motu today divide themselves into Western and Eastern groups with the Western Motu occupying the villages of Manumanu, Rearea, Porebada, Hanuabada, Pari, Boera, Tatana and Vabukori. The Eastern Motu live in Tubusereia, Barakau, Gaire and Gabagaba (Fig. 1). The villagers of Boera, Tatana and Vabukori have been regarded as different from each other as well as from the other Western or Eastern Motu villages (Allen 1976:424). From oral tradition it is known that they have a different history of ancestral migration (Oram 1977:78).

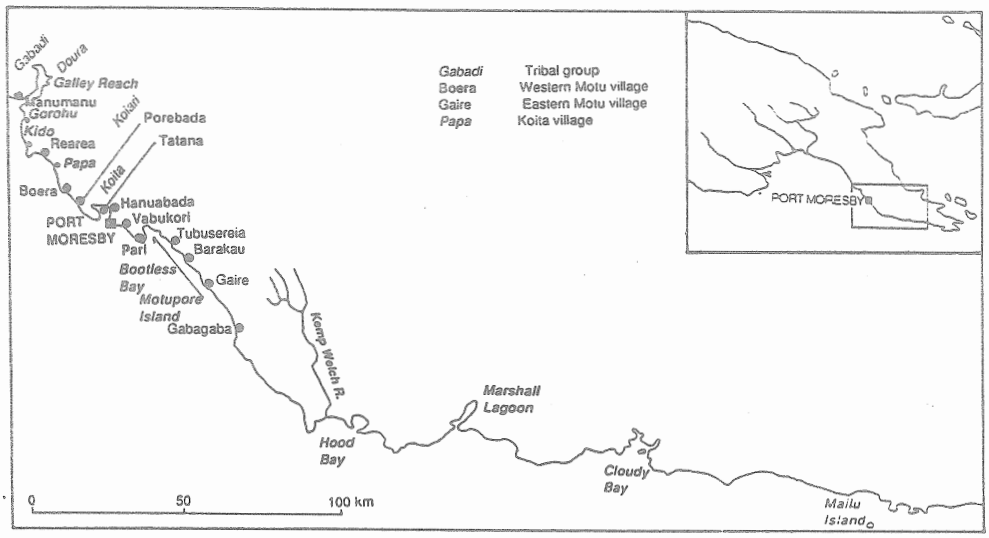

FIGURE 1: THE MOTU REGION (ADAPTED FROM ORAM 1982)

The Motu people occupy the 125 km coastline around Port Moresby, with the city itself situated approximately in the centre. They live in an area where there has never been enough food to feed the people (Groves 1960:5). The Western Motu live in a dry region, consisting mostly of open grassland and scrub of little potential for gardening (Oram 1977:80-3). The Eastern Motu occupy a more fertile area (Oram 1977:83), but also often suffer from lack of food due to droughts and unsuccessful gardening (Oram 1982:11).

Motu people are mainly fishermen and traders although they also make gardens. In order to fulfil their needs for food the Motu had to exchange products with other tribes; the Koita and Koiari who lived nearby, the Gabadi and Doura people further west in the Redscar area, as well as the people in the Gulf of Papua about 400 km westward. Exchange with the first four tribes could occur at any time during the year, while the long distance *hiri* trading activities with the Gulf people only occurred once a year.

Pottery was the main commodity in these exchange activities and was made in most of the Western Motu villages, except Vabukori. This village and Tatana specialised in making *ageva*, pierced discs made of *Spondylus* shell for trading purposes (Barton 1910:144). Most of the Eastern Motu villages, except Barakau, also specialized in pottery making (Seligman 1910:114). However, they never traded their pots to the Gulf and did not conduct *hiri*. Instead, they exchanged their pots for food with the inland Koiari (Oram 1977:86). Oram mentions that traditionally they obtained pots from the Western Motu and it seems they recently learned how to make them.

Today, Boera is the only Motu village which is still producing pots. Several factors have contributed to the disappearance of the pottery industry, the major one being European interference in Motu social and cultural activities. The introductions of wage labour, office work and shops have had great impacts on the Motu economy. Through participation in the cash economy people gained access to a range of introduced foods and goods. However, this has resulted in less attention to gardening, fishing and long distance trading as well as associated crafts such as pottery. Even in Boera pots are now made only very occasionally.

POTTERY MAKING AT BOERA

There are today about 26 potters in Boera. Most of them are old, the youngest being about 40. Only five or six are still making pots today, and of these only one makes pots regularly. The following description of pottery making is based on my observations in Boera village in 1989.

The raw material comes from a deposit near the village. According to the Boera potters two kinds of clay are normally required; *raro duba* (black clay) and *goroto* (white clay), which can be found together in the same deposit. The two clays are mixed together as they are dug out. While drying the clay in the sun on canvas sacking and strips of metal guttering the potter removes the roots and small stones. The dried clay is broken up into lumps with stone anvils or other hard objects until only small lumps (about 0.5 cm across) are left. The time needed to dry the clay varies according to the weather, from two to four days.

The next stage is the kneading of the clay, for which the potter uses only a quantity sufficient to produce 15 to 25 pots at a time. Salt water from the sea is poured on the clay until it is completely wet. After this some fine beach sand is sprinkled on it to serve as a temper. Only a small amount is used (about 5 to 10% of the pot mixture).

The clay is kneaded in a wooden trough or on a canvas mat. Each potter kneads a big lump of clay, sufficient for four or five pots. She starts by sprinkling some sand into the wooden trough and some more on top of the clay. She squeezes the clay hard, at the same time taking out any unwanted dirt. She kneads until the clay and sand are mixed evenly and she feels that the mixture is workable enough.

She then makes a spherical lump with a flat surface on top. With her index and middle fingers she makes a hole in the middle of the flat top. When the clay has been kneaded into several such lumps she starts to hand-mould a pot. For this she uses the upper part of

a broken pot which still has a perfect rim. This is placed upside down on the ground to serve as a cradle. The potters I studied at Boera also use other kinds of cradle including aluminium plates, plastic bowls and broken plastic jerrycans. Usually, a lining of cardboard is put inside the cradle so the clay does not stick.

The potter starts by putting her index and middle fingers in the previously-made hole and dragging the clay upwards to build the wall. Her other arm, which holds the outer part of the lump, also moves the clay upwards. She turns the cradle around and repeats the process until the lump is cylindrical. She then smoothes the outer wall of the pot by rubbing it with her fingers up and down. The potter then starts to build the rim. The edge of the clay which will become the lip of the pot is pinched between her thumb and index finger. Turning the cradle around with one hand, she moves her other hand around the lip to make the required shape and to smooth it. For the final shaping and smoothing estuarine bivalve shells of the species *Geloina coaxans* (which has a smooth edge) and *Anadara antiquata* (which has a serrated edge) are used.

The pot is then left to dry in the sun while another one is started. After the first pot has become leather hard the paddling process begins with a wooden paddle (*iatuatu*) and a stone anvil (*nadi*). Basically there are two different types of paddles. The first one to be used, called a *hahedikadika*, has a rough surface with which to hit the pot with strength to make the clay more compact and solid. The potter does not concentrate on shape at this stage. The second paddle has a smooth surface and, depending on its function, is called a *hahenamonamo* or a *hahemanada*. The *hahenamonamo* is used for the final shaping and the *hahemanada* is used at the end of the work to smooth the surface. It seems that the names *hahenamonamo* and *hahemanada* refer more to the stage of finishing rather than to any specific differences in paddle shape.

The potter starts to paddle her pot while it is still in its cradle. The paddling first takes place around the wall under the rim to make it compact, leaving the bottom untouched. After about five minutes she turns her attention back to the lip of the pot. She smoothes it again and decorates the lip and body before she dries the pot in the shade. She sometimes ties Nipa palm leaves or a banana string around the belly of the pot in order to prevent it from collapsing under its own weight. After a period of drying the potter then puts the pot on her lap with its mouth facing her and starts to paddle its basal part, at the same time shaping it to become round.

After this, the pot is again left to dry for a period of time, from one hour to one night. Then it is paddled gently again until the required shape is achieved. Finally it is wiped with wet hands to make it smooth, then dried for one or two days before it is ready for firing.

The pots are fired in the afternoon when there is some breeze. Coconut midribs and leaves are used for fuel. Beforehand, while preparing the fuel, the potter places the pots in the sun for a short time. The outer wall of each pot is wetted with salt water to prevent it from cracking when firing, and also to clean it of dust and dirt. Usually, the pots are preheated before the main firing by burning coconut leaves placed on top of them. This

preheating only lasts for a very short time and does not happen at every firing. If the pots have been sun dried thoroughly they are not preheated.

Pots are removed from the preheating fire by inserting a pole into their mouths. They are then placed on the coconut midrib platform that has already been prepared. The number of pots fired each time varies. The potters I observed fire between 17 to 28 medium and small pots per fire. The pots are placed in several rows with their mouths to windward, except for those in the most leeward row which face the opposite direction. Coconut midribs are placed upright like a fence around the rows and other coconut stems, leaves and husks are put on top.

The fire is started from downwind by igniting a pile of coconut leaves against the fence of midribs. It burns rapidly and within two minutes the stems are burnt through. If the fuel falls away from the pots the potter puts it back. Often more fuel is added, using two poles to put it in place.

The fuel against the windward row of pots burns down to embers in about twenty minutes, by which time the leeward side sometimes has not even begun to burn. The windward pots are then removed from the embers, but sometimes if a pot is still partly black and unoxidized it is left for a while. Gradually, all the pots are removed.

I observed four firings in Boera, of which the first three began with preheating. The temperatures were monitored by using Chromel-Alumel thermocouples (TCs) (Fig. 2). After the ignition of the coconut fronds the windward TCs rose quickly from 85° to 196°C. Their highest temperatures (850° to 940°C) were reached in 9 to 18 minutes, by which time the central TCs had risen to between 272° and 801°C, while the leeward TCs were still below 60°C. The central TCs reached their highest temperatures (680° to 918°C) in 19 to 22 minutes after ignition.

The leeward TCs then started to rise quickly and reached their highest temperatures (680° to 970°C) in 26 to 37 minutes after ignition. The first pots were removed between 16 and 26 minutes after ignition, the last between 42 and 77 minutes.

The maximum firing temperatures achieved at Boera seem to be similar to other firing temperatures recorded in Papua New Guinea. The firing temperatures recorded on Goodenough Island ranged from 680° to 880°C (Lauer 1974:59), on Amphlett Island 680° to 918°C (Lauer 1974:156) and on Mailu 765° to 1018°C (Irwin 1977:253).

As soon as each pot is taken out of the fire its outer wall is splashed with an infusion of mangrove bark, using a brush of shredded coconut husk. This seals the small pores to prevent leakage and to strengthen the vessel wall. If there is a small crack in the pot after firing the potter will try to seal it by rubbing it with mangrove bark.

After the pots have cooled down they are cleaned by rubbing with various kind of leaves such as papaya, *kasipolo* (*Passiflora* sp.; Groves 1960:17) and *muramura*, a kind of mint. The *muramura* leaves also repel insects. The other leaves are only for cleaning and for sealing the small pores. Groves (1960:17) recorded that only water pots were rubbed with leaves, but the potters I observed in Boera rub not only their water pots but also their cooking pots and dishes. After finishing the pots are kept on the ground under the house, ready to be used or sold.

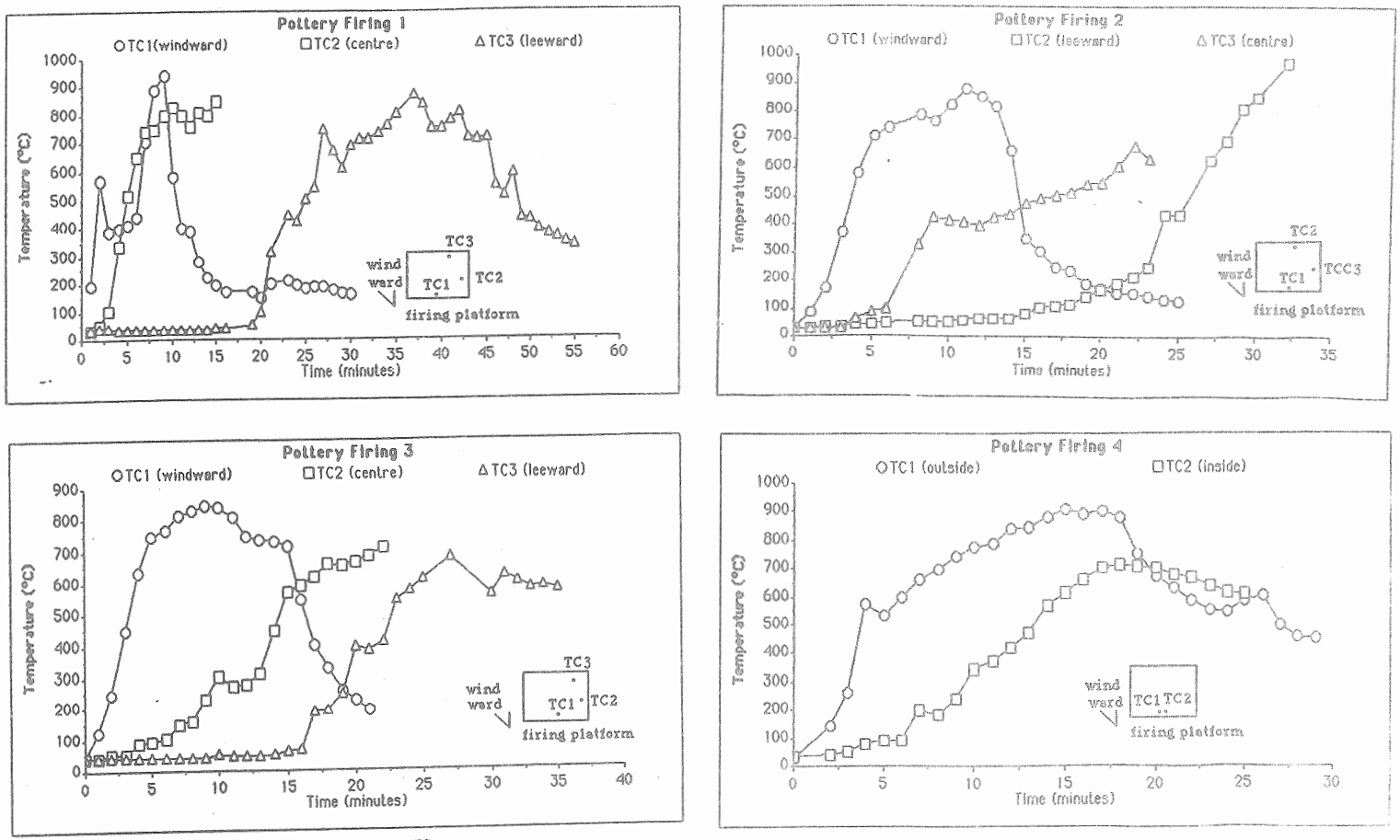

FIGURE 2: THERMOCOUPLE RECORDS OF FOUR BOERA POTTERY FIRINGS

Vessel Quality

According to the Boera potters the quality of a pot is mainly determined by its ability to survive firing and by its shape, thickness and decoration. Kaira Daro, one of the potters, described the ideal pot as having a smooth and rounded shape with an even thickness. Boio Udia and Momoru Gaiva, other potters, said the best pot is one with a thick wall which will last longer. The shape of the rim can be varied according to the potter's desire and the potters can tell who is the maker of a pot by looking at the overall shape of its rim. Every woman seems to have her own way of shaping pot rims and thus can be distinguished the work of sisters who all use the same trade marks inherited from their mothers.

The potters always say that they build their pots perfectly before firing them. Therefore, there should ideally be no differences between the pots of skilful potters and those of ordinary ones. Differences are only recognised in the speed of individual potters when at work. Skilful potters can produce more pots than ordinary potters in a given amount of time.

According to Boera potters, pot shapes differ slightly from one Motu village to another although the same names are used for them. People can recognize which village pots come from by looking at their body shapes.

The Shapes, Functions, and Uses of Motu Pots (Table 1 and Fig. 3)

The most common pot types made traditionally by the Motu are the *uro* (cooking pot), *hodu* (water pot) and *nau* (dish), as recorded by Turner (1878:489) and Stone (1880:54). Groves (1960:10) mentions that in the 1950s the women at Manumanu, one of the Motu villages, produced these three kinds plus another called a *tohe* (sago storage pot). However, Chalmers (1887:122) recorded no less than ten different types of pots made by the Motu, Barton (1910:114) recorded seven and Finsch (1914:270) listed eight, while Groves' Boera informant provided him with twelve different names (Groves 1960:14).

Basically, the pots made traditionally at Boera, and presumably at other Motu villages too, can be classified into five different major groups: cooking and storage pots, water pots, open dishes or plates, basins, and small basins with legs. Each of these groups can be divided into two to four size classes, except for the last one. This classification is based on the information given by Groves' informant from Boera (1960:14) and is detailed in Table 2. Two other pot types never mentioned by my informants are also recorded in the literature (Table 1). These are the *oburo* (Barton 1910:114; Finsch 1914:270; Oram 1982:17) or *ohuro* (Chalmers 1887:122) and the *kaiwa* (Finsch 1914:270) or *kaeva* (Chalmers 1887:122).

TABLE 1 (OVERLEAF): MOTU POTTERY TYPES ACCORDING TO ETHNOGRAPHIC RECORDS

F. R. Barton (1910)	J. Chalmers (1887)	O. C. Stone (1876 & 1880)	W. Y. Turner (1878)	K. Arifin (1990)	M. Groves (1960) Groves' informants	Groves' observation	O. Finsch (1903 & 1914)
TOHE	**TOHE**			TOHE	TOHE (sago storage)	TOHE (large open-mouthed spherical pot, shaped exactly like uro but several times their size. For storing compressed sago, diam. 75cm.)	TOHA (similar to uro, very large, used for food storage, such as sago)
URO	**URO** (large cooking vessel)	**URA** (cooking pot, diam. 35-60cm.)	URO (a hotu with a much wider mouth, cooking pot)	URO	URO (cooking pot)	URO (wide-mouthed spherical cooking pot, diam. 25-40cm.)	URO (cooking pot, spherical, h. 18-30cm., circ. 60-150cm., with wide opening, diam. 12-19cm.)
KEIKEI	**KEIKEI** (small pot)			KEIKEI	KEIKEI (cooking pot)		
	KAEVA (pot with rim)						KAIWA (similar to uro, but with flat, protruding rim of 2-3cm., which may have an inverted narrow rim, used for cooking meat and vegetables)
				VATAKWABU	VATAKWABU (water vessel)		
				HODUHODU MABADANA	HODUHODU MABADANA (water vessel)		
HODU	**HODU** (water vessel)	**HORDU** (water pitcher, diam. 35-60cm., contained 1.5 buckets of water, carried on the shoulder)	HOTU (a globular vessel with small mouth)	HODU	HODUHODU (water vessel)	HODU (narrow-necked spherical water vessel, diam. 30-45cm.)	HODU (waterpot, spherical, h. 21-32cm., circ. 63-130cm., narrow opening, 6-8cm.)
				NAU BARA	NAU BARA (open dish)		
NAU	**NAU** (dish for serving)	**NAO** (bowl)	NAO (lower half of hotu, dish or plate to hold cooked food)	NAU/ NAUPORE	NAUPORE (open dish)	NAU (shallow circular open dish, diam. 30-50cm.)	NAU/NAO (bowl, usually round, rarely oval, more or less flat, h. 6cm., circ. 20-30cm., mainly to hold food, smaller one also used as lid)
					NUDU HEGARA (open dish)		
				NAU KIBO	NAU KIBO (open dish)		
OBURO	**OHURO** (large cup)						OBURO (bowl, semi-spherical, h. 10-17cm., w. 8-13cm., used for meals and for scooping water)
KIBO	**KEBO** (basin)			KIBO	KIBO (basin)		
	KIBOKIBO (small basin)			KIBOKIBO			KIBOKIBO (small bowl, similar shape to oburo, h. 6cm.)
	ITURU (small cup)			ITURU	ITURU (small basin with legs for holding tattoo dye)		ITULU (ITURU) (footed bowl, usually used for black paint)

Type of pot	Size	Function
Cooking and storage pots:		
Tohe	large	sago or other food (e.g. banana) storage; cooking for feasts
Uro	medium	ordinary cooking: restricted to cooking by owner of a *lagatoi* and his wife during preparation of the *lagatoi* for a *hiri* expedition
Keikei	small	ordinary cooking; for boiling medicine and ceremonial flowers
Water pots:		
Vatakwabu	large	water storage at home
Hoduhodu mabadana (hodu)	medium	water carrier from well to house
Hoduhodu	small	water container carried when gardening or hunting; water container for little girl; medicine storage; lime storage
Open dishes or plates:		
Nau bara	large	ceremonial or communal serving plate
Nau pore	medium	eating plate
Nau	small-medium	eating plate; serving plate; lid of a cooking pot
Nau kibo	small	food or water container
Basins:		
Kibo	medium	cooking basin
Kibokibo	small	cooking basin
Small basin with legs:		
Ituru	small	tattoo dye container

TABLE 2: POT SIZES AND FUNCTIONS RECORDED IN BOERA IN 1989

Each type of pot has certain functions. Most can be used for everyday purposes as well as for communal or ceremonial ones. For example, besides being used for sago or other food (e.g. banana) storage, a *tohe* can also be used as a cooking pot for special occasions such as a big feast or a dancing ceremony. However, there are certain ceremonial vessels which can only be used for one particular purpose, such as the *keikei* used for boiling flowers for body decoration during a dancing ceremony. Such pots cannot be used for cooking other things, although they are kept and stored together with ordinary pots

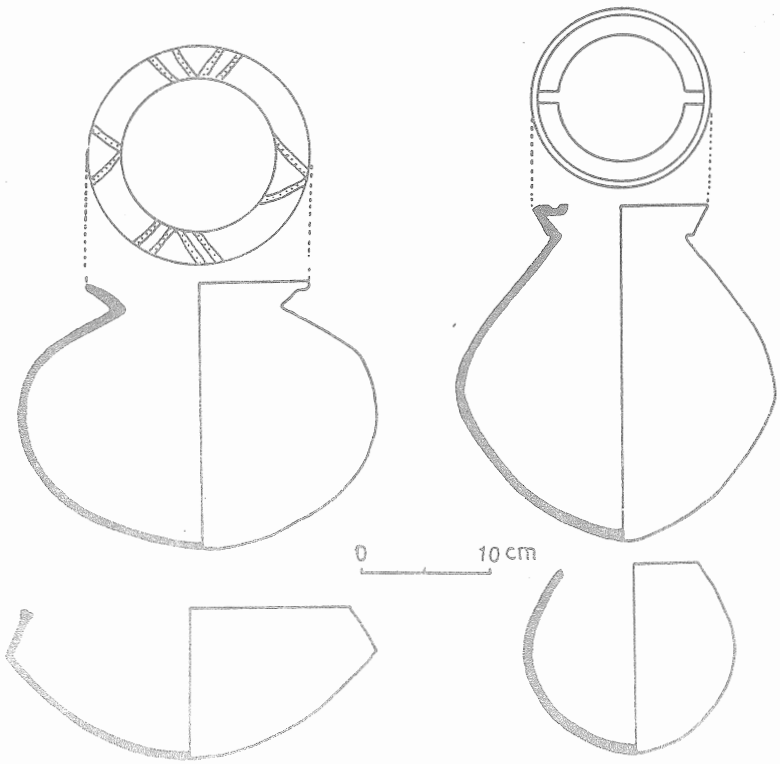

FIGURE 3: POTTERY TYPES PRODUCED IN BOERA IN 1989
Clockwise from top left: *uro*, *hodu* with *udu erenua* (two mouths), *kibokibo*, *nau*.

without any distinctive treatment. So too are large ceremonial plates (*nau bara*). However, a pot that is used by a magician to store medicine or other magical items is treated distinctively, being hung under the roof of the house and only allowed to be handled by its owner.

Broken pots are reused for various purposes. As we have seen, sherds comprising part of a rim and shoulder are used as cradles in pottery manufacture. An old worn cooking pot or a water pot which has lost its rim is called an *ikonotadi* and used specially to hold salt water for mixing with potting clay. Faulty pots, such as those with cracks after firing or those no longer useful for cooking but still with complete shapes, are used to make stove tripods, being placed upside down in a triangular arrangement.

There are differences in manufacture between pots for trade and pots for domestic use. Traditionally, almost all of the pots traded to the Gulf of Papua were decorated with potters' trade marks, these being certain patterns resembling the body tattoos of the potters. These trade marks are still handed down from generation to generation within the female line and no women from other families may copy them. During *hiri* expeditions the trade marks functioned to identify the owners of the pots for recording purposes.

It is probable that the pots made for local trade lacked such trade marks. They were traded by the potters themselves rather than by male traders so the possibilities of loss or wrongful attribution were small. Pots for household use were also left mainly undecorated. It seems also that pot thickness varied between pots for domestic use and those for trade, with pots for domestic use having thicker walls so they would last longer. Thinner pots are lighter and easier to carry and perhaps also easier to break, thus maintaining the demand for them. Trade pots also were not rubbed with leaves after firing.

The pot types that the Boerans used traditionally most often were the *uro* and the *hodu*. These were also the most common types traded, especially the *uro*. Big vessels such as the *tohe*, *vatakwabu* and *nau bara* were never traded, partly because they were too big for convenient long distance transport and also because the demand was mainly for the smaller types used for everyday cooking. Therefore, it is not surprising that most of the Europeans who visited Motu villages only found a limited variety of pot types being made (Turner 1878:489; Stone 1880:54; Groves 1960:10).

The Role and Status of the Potter in Society.

Pottery was the main trading commodity in Boera so most of the women knew traditionally how to make pots, even though not all did so. The latter could be girls whose mothers had died when they were young, or who had never shown any interest in making pots, or who had come into the community from outside in marriage. The potters used to look down on these non-potters, who often had to ask for food from their female relatives, although the society never seems to have placed much direct pressure on girls to make them learn potting.

Potters were not regarded as a special class in Motu society since most women could make pots. No hierarchy existed amongst them because they regarded themselves as equals. They recognized that some women were more skilful than others but usually a skilled potter would never say that she was better. Probably the main difference between skilled and ordinary potters was that the former might have many young women learning from them. A skilful potter also had the ability to make many kinds of pots in a short time. Her pots were always of perfect shape and most of them survived firing. The best potters specialized in making *tohe*, which only a few women could manage because of their large size.

At Boera, as well as in other Motu villages, pottery making has been kept within the group so that out-marrying women were prohibited from continuing potting. Sometimes, however, the knowledge did spread, as indicated by a legend about the Koro people who succeeded in learning the art from the Motu even though the latter tried to keep it a secret (May and Tuckson 1982:69).

PREHISTORIC AND EHNOGRAPHIHC MOTU POTTERY; SHAPE AND DECORATION

The prehistoric pottery found in the Port Moresby area may be divided into two categories; pots with everted rims and globular shapes similar to recent Motu cooking and

storage pots, and shallower bowls and dishes lacking everted rims (Bulmer 1971, 1978:76). The pots lack shape variation and are mostly undecorated, while the bowls and dishes have more shape variation and are often elaborately decorated. Similar types of pots and bowls have also been found in Gulf Province (Thompson 1982). Archaeological evidence indicates that by the protohistoric period the amount of variation in pottery shape and decoration had declined considerably (Bulmer 1978).

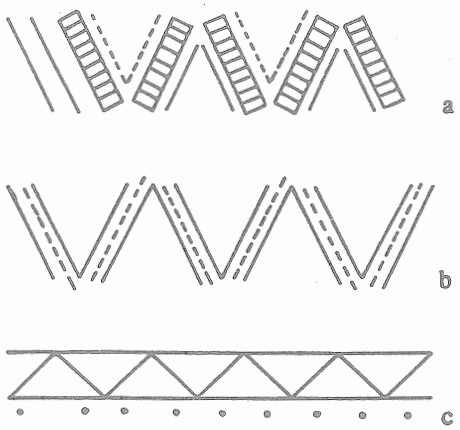

FIGURE 4: BODY TATTOOS AND INCISED TRADE MARKS OF BOIO UDIA, A BOERA POTTER
a, *toutou*, applied on *uro*; b, *toutou*, applied on *hodu*; c, *taratara*, applied on *nau*.

Based on archaeological findings, Allen (1976:445) stated that over time there was a reduction in the complexity of decoration found on prehistoric Motu pottery. The absence or simplicity of decoration on the ethnographically recorded Motu pottery seems to fit this idea quite well. Allen realised that not enough evidence was available for proof, but suggested that when a pottery industry grew in size the simplification of decoration would increase as a response to mass production. Allen used Groves' observations at Manumanu in the 1950s as an example. Traditionally, the Manumanu potters applied simple geometric designs as trade marks to their pots, but in the late 1950s only potters' initials were applied (Groves 1960:13). At that time the potters were trying to finish their pots rapidly to avoid delay to the *hiri*. Allen (1976:445) suggested that this may have forced the potters to reduce decoration to save time. In contrast, the sherds in surface collections from protohistoric Motu sites are almost always decorated (Bulmer 1978:57).

The Boera potters whom I interviewed said that they mainly applied their trade marks to the pots that were traded to the Gulf, not to those for local use and local trade. It may be that with the decline of the *hiri* there was no urgency to apply trade marks anymore. Therefore, Allen's theory that the reduction of decoration in Manumanu indicated a growing pottery industry is refuted since at the time of his example the Motu pottery industry was already in decline. Thompson (1982:117) has also rejected Allen's theory on other grounds. It seems more likely that the incidence of decoration on Motu pottery

decreased markedly after European contact owing to the general decline of pottery manufacture, as Bulmer (1978:61) has suggested. Early this century trade marks were still very important since the wares of skilful potters who often enjoyed widespread reputations could be authenticated by potential buyers (Finsch 1903:333).

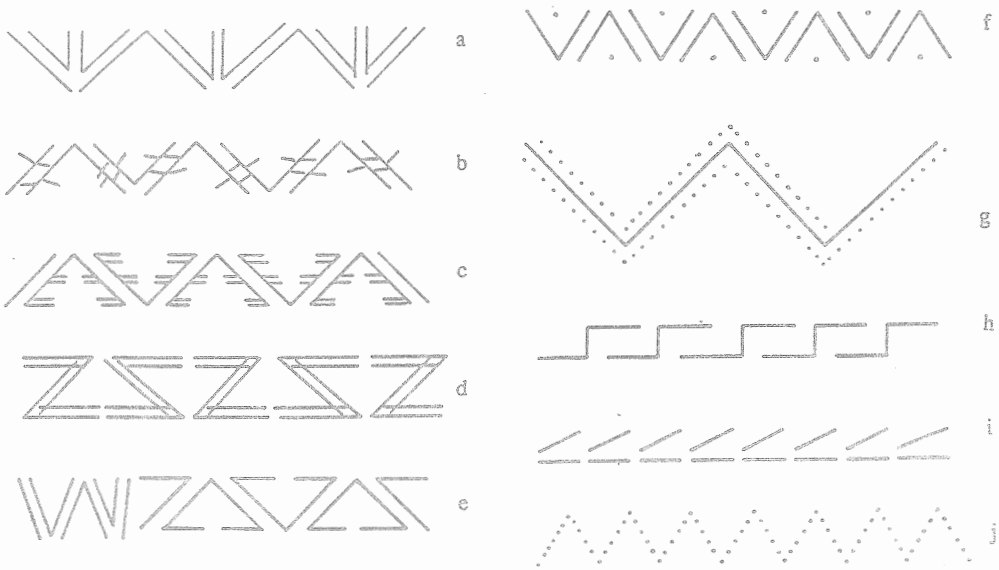

FIGURE 5: DECORATION APPLIED BY BOERA POTTERS IN 1989

a, *verimaoro*, applied to inside of everted *keikei* rim; b,c,e, unnamed, applied to inside of everted *uro* rim; d, *revareva*, applied to inside of everted *keikei* rim; f, *mairimairi*, and g, unnamed, applied to upper body of *kibokibo*; h, *revareva*, applied to lip of a *kibokibo*; i, *taratara*, applied to inside of everted *keikei* rim; j, *kodokodo*, applied to inside of everted *kibokibo* rim.

Although the archaeological record indicates that contemporary Motu trade marks and decoration are generally simpler than those of the past, they are not always as simple as has been claimed. Surviving Western Motu trade marks consist not only of simple geometric incisions but also include quite complicated designs, as illustrated by the examples given in Fig. 4. The reason why earlier observers have differentiated decoration as a separate category from trade marks is probably based on Groves' statement that the simple geometric incisions were only trade marks and not true decoration. The trade marks, however, also served as decoration and the two categories are hard to distinguish. The use of trade marks on pots may indeed go back several centuries. Many potsherds found in the Western Motu area and Gulf Province have simple incisions on their rims. Allen and Rye (1982:104-5) have interpreted the small distinctive designs on the Motupore fine sherds as trade marks. Similar designs from the Gulf Province sites have

also been interpreted as trade marks (Thompson 1982: Fig. 5.1, OAP 55, 119, 93; Fig. 5.3, OEB 118, 36). Modern Motu potters, however, regard their incised motifs as both trade marks and decoration. In this sense, the separation of trade marks from pure decoration may be meaningless (Fig. 5).

In 1989 the Boera potters applied decoration mainly around the insides (tops) of the everted rims of their pots. Almost all of the decoration consisted of simple motifs repeated in continuous bands. Less often the potters applied simple motifs separated by gaps of a few centimetres, thus forming an interrupted band. Some potters also applied variant motifs in the patterning, different from the rest of the decoration, as in Fig. 5e. The occurrence of such distinctive motifs on small sherds could lead archaeologists to interpret them erroneously as separate trade marks.

CONCLUSIONS

Further study of contemporary Western Motu pottery decoration is still needed in order to identify trade marks and their integration into decoration systems. This might assist archaeologists who study prehistoric pottery in the same region to interpret their data more accurately. Such a study should integrate with the wider artistic system of the Motu, especially tattoo designs. As the potting tradition is disappearing rapidly, together with the old people who are now the only ones who still understand it, there is some urgency for such a study to be carried out.

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