

SHORT REPORTS

POST-EUROPEAN ABORIGINAL OCCUPATION OF THE SOUTHERN CURTIS COAST, CENTRAL QUEENSLAND

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During test excavation of the Ironbark Site Complex under the auspices of the Southern Curtis Coast Regional Archaeological Project (a sub-project of the Gooreng Gooreng Cultural Heritage Project), seven bottle glass fragments were recovered from surface deposits associated with extensive shell midden and quarried stone deposits (Reid 1998). In the absence of obvious signs of intentional modification of the glass, the assemblage was subject to systematic inspection for use-wear and residues.

The Ironbark Site Complex is located on the southern margin of Middle Creek, approximately 11.5 km northwest of Round Hill Head and 60 km southeast of Gladstone on the southern Curtis Coast in Central Queensland. The site has three components: an exposed concentration of flaked pyroclastic rhyolite covering an area of ca. 1000 m² along the beach separating the mangrove fringe from the frontal ridge; a discontinuous exposure of shell and stone artefacts across low transgressive dune ridges adjacent to the creek which covers at least 100,000 m²; and, small exposures of shell and flaked bottle glass associated with a stand of cycad plants on an elevated ridge immediately south of the quarry exposure. Initial radiocarbon determinations obtained from

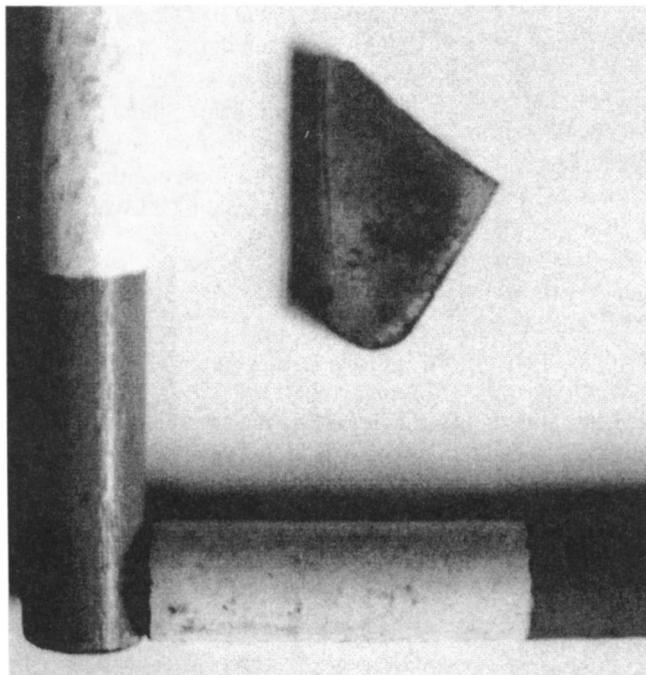


Figure 1 Ventral surface of glass bottle body sherd (FS187), scale = 5 cm intervals.

excavations on the frontal dune indicate that deposits began accumulating before 1640±150 BP (Wk-6361).

The glass assemblage consists of three bottle bases and four small body sherds, one of which conjoins to a base. Only one of the bases could be confidently dated to between AD 1900-15 on the basis of a manufacture's mark on the base (Boow 1991:180). The recovery of glass at an Aboriginal site some distance from known early European settlement supports the inference that it was discarded as the result of Aboriginal behavioural activity. This inference is strengthened by the fact that despite intensive examination, only incomplete bottles were recovered from the site. The presence of three bases in the assemblage suggests intentional selection and transport of the thicker bottle bases to the site (Allen and Jones 1980; Freeman 1993).

All seven glass objects were examined for use-wear and residues using an Olympus metallurgical incident-light microscope under low-level (<500x) magnification (see Loy 1994 for a discussion of techniques). Although starch grains were observed on the surface of all seven glass objects, only two sherds (FS181 and FS187) exhibit quantities of starch and use-wear features suggestive of systematic use in plant processing activities. Masses of large starch grains (>20 µm) occur on the surface of FS187 directly behind the working edge (Figs 1 and 2). The second sherd (FS181) has starchy soft plant tissue and fibres as well as deep scoring on the ventral surface. Both artefacts exhibit starch grains of greater average size and in much greater densities than occur in the surface and near-surface sediments of the site's deposits.

This evidence for post-European Aboriginal occupation of the Middle Creek area is significant as it demonstrates continuities in Aboriginal occupation absent from the documentary record and accords with Aboriginal oral historical data (Clarkson et al. in prep.). These data are consistent with McNiven's (1993, 1998; Courtney and McNiven 1998) findings on Fraser Island to the southeast, where clay pipes and flaked bottle glass artefacts have been recovered from the surface of 10 midden sites on the east

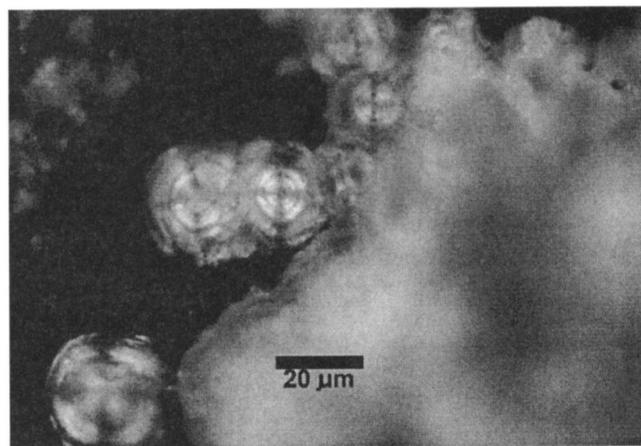


Figure 2 Starch grains on ventral surface of glass bottle body sherd seen under bright-field cross-polarised light (x500) (FS187).

coast of the island. The evidence from the Ironbark Site Complex also conforms with evidence from other sites in southeast Queensland suggesting continuing Aboriginal use of places and landscapes in the post-European period (e.g. Lilley and Hall 1988; Neal 1984). Identification of starch grains adhering to the surface of glass artefacts also illustrates the potential of residue techniques in the study of contact period materials.

Acknowledgements

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AUSTRALIAN EXCAVATIONS AT MARKI, CYPRUS

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From November 1998 to January 1999 the Australian Cyprus Expedition continued work at the Early to Middle Bronze Age settlement of Marki *Alonia* in central Cyprus. Dr Jenny Webb and I were once again fortunate in having an enthusiastic and talented team of students from five Australian universities – over 100 students from around the country have now participated in this project.

The Bronze Age settlement of Marki *Alonia* was occupied for some five to seven hundred years from about 2500 BCE. The archaeological site extends over some five ha, but it is very unlikely that more than a small part of this area was occupied at any one time. The architecture consists of multi-roomed rectilinear buildings with the lower courses of stone and upper sections of mud-brick. In some cases the stone walls are preserved to well over a metre in height. While the earthen floors are often very difficult to identify, other built-in features are found in many rooms. The most common are solidly built emplacements for storage jars and semi-circular or rectangular plaster hearth-surrounds often associated with low plaster benches along the walls. The most common artefacts are, of course, ceramic – an array of storage and cooking vessels, bowls, jugs and jars, of which very few were discarded when still complete or useable. Curated ground stone implements, such as querns and rubbers are well represented, as well as many expedient tools. The most common chipped stone tools are flint sickle blades, and there is a small number of copper pins and needles. The very large quantities of animal bones (primarily sheep and goat, cattle, fallow deer and pig) provide the largest sample of fauna available for the Cypriot Bronze Age.

In our latest (1998-1999) season our very large team (reaching 38 at its maximum) of students from La Trobe, Melbourne, University of New England, Queensland, The Australian National University and Monash enabled us to undertake work on a far more substantial scale than ever before. We opened up an additional 1000 square metres of the site, doubling the area previously examined. In most of this new area excavations were stopped when the uppermost courses of walls were exposed, but one building complex was more completely excavated. This proved to have a familiar but very complicated sequence of architectural development, with use, abandonment, demolition, rebuilding and renovation over several centuries. This area is especially important as it provides assemblages of material dating to the earlier part of the Bronze Age, filling in a period poorly represented in our previous excavations. Over the next two seasons (1999-2000 and 2000-2001) the remainder of the area begun this year will be fully excavated. The large area excavated should allow a substantial basis for investigating household architecture as well as other aspects of economy, technology and culture history at the site.