

**Archaeological Studies of the Middle and Late Holocene,
Papua New Guinea
Part IX**

**A Stone Tablet from Buka Island,
Bougainville Autonomous Region**

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ABSTRACT. A stone tablet, photographed in 1971 by Graeme Pretty of the South Australian Museum at the village of Tohatsi in northeast Buka, has been incised with designs reminiscent of those to be found on some Lapita ceramics and contemporary Polynesian bark cloth. Photographs of the stone tablet are reproduced along with the information gathered by Pretty. Possible analogues are noted and reference is made to other engraved stone objects in the region.

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During the first half of 1971, Graeme Pretty, then Curator of Anthropology at the South Australian Museum, conducted field research in the Melanesian islands pursuing his interest in the mortar and pestle complex of the region. Pretty's field notebooks and photographs from this research are held in the archives of the South Australian Museum. So far as I am aware, a full, formal report of the expedition was never completed.

By chance, I came across some of Pretty's 1971 photographs in 2003 and those showing a stone tablet arrested my attention, as I had seen nothing quite like it before. Further, the designs engraved on one side of the tablet recall Lapita-type pottery designs. It seemed appropriate,

therefore, to try to find out exactly where the stone tablet was found and any other information concerning it.

Pretty kept field notebooks that he called "Daily Jottings" (Pretty, 1971). Volume VII covers the period 30 April to 7 May 1971, during which time he was in Buka (Fig. 1), taking off by plane for Rabaul on 2 May. After breakfast on that last day in Buka, his host in Tohatsi village, Herman Halihu, showed him "an elaborately carved stone which he found while clearing the ground for a house on his new settlement last year" (Pretty, 1971, VII: 38). [Tohatsi is Beatrice Blackwood's Tohatchi, on the northeast corner of Buka, whose people speak Halia, an Austronesian language.]