

TALK

PRELIMINARY OF ETHNO-ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN THE STAR MOUNTAINS, INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

Regions where traditional preliterate societies have come into closer contact with the global world only a generation or two ago are rare. Some parts of the interior of the large island of New Guinea belong to this category. The process of acculturation, triggered by whole communities accepting Christianity, has been and still is quite dramatic, probably faster than anywhere else. For some communities it took just one generation, 25 years, for Bahasa Indonesia to be widely used as a vernacular language. Despite profound socio-cultural changes, much of the life in the formerly remote mountain valleys has remained little altered. This is an ideal situation for ethno-archaeological research because the local inhabitants still know and master the traditional techniques of survival and subsistence. For example, the knapping of stone into adze blades is still going on, probably the only place in the world. For archaeological science, this represents a unique opportunity to not only document the different steps of lithic production, its chaîne opératoire and social aspects like the different roles of helpers, apprentices and master knappers, but also the distribution/exchange of the blades as well as symbolic and ritual behaviours connected to this activity. Ethno-archaeological research in the Star Mountain region of New Guinea can be conducted in close temporal and socio-cultural proximity to autochthonous life styles. This and other examples may help shed light on technologies, life styles and behaviours of the more distant past for which only archaeological traces remain.