

UPPER SEPIK-CENTRAL NEW GUINEA PROJECT

PROGRESS REPORT April 2006

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This second visit to Port Moresby took place from 19th March to 1st April. I spent ten days working at the Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery finishing work for the project that had been started in the previous year.

Since the previous visit to Port Moresby, a revision of the work achieved resulted in a figure of 2185 objects recorded out of the 2878 identified from the register as relevant to the study. Many of these 2185 objects did not have geo-reference points for where they had been collected or from where they had been sourced by the vendors, if different from where they had been collected. Even more infrequent had been descriptions concerning the method of the objects' manufacture and use including the source of the materials used to make them. Accordingly, we had relied heavily on object descriptions and vernacular terms, and in the year since this first visit I had undertaken to glean whatever geographical or contextual information for the objects from collectors and other museums that held related material. The result was somewhat disappointing; only three collections could be given supplemental information. On this second visit, every avenue would be explored to maximize the information about the objects already recorded and to track down those objects that could not be found during the first visit. A year of research and looking at other collections had given me a better idea of what to look for in Port Moresby.

One problem that had been left unresolved since the last trip to Port Moresby was our inability to access a number of shields and bows in the sliding racks on the mezzanine of Store Two. Six racks were jammed and it had been assumed that the weight of the racks had pushed the runners down onto the brackets through which they were meant to run. When I arrived at the museum I took another look at the runners. I noticed that two systems were used and only one of them was failing. I obtained a sledgehammer and a cold chisel from the museum workshop and bent back the front floor bracket of each jammed rack and by the end of that morning all of the runners were free. This made it possible to access all of the previously inaccessible shields and bows housed in the store. Only five shields and three bows were unaccounted for after I had finished with these racks but I located two more Mountain-Ok house boards.

Early the next week I started working in Store Three. I decided to redo the first third of the drawers of small objects that I had completed on the last trip; a third of the way through that process I had realised that the registration numbers Barry had given to the assistants to enable them to find objects did not include material registered since the mid-1980s. Although I had remedied the situation, the first third of the boxes remained unreviewed due to the computer failure in March 2005. As it was a time-consuming job, I attempted to get help but that was not forthcoming, so I had to do it myself. I had considerable success: I located a Maria Wronska-Friend collection from Atbalmin; more Mackenzie material, including an impressive pig-tail string bag from the Duranmin; and several Gerrits and Juillerat upper Sepik skirts.

While I was in Store Three I also renewed my attempt to locate more of the unregistered David Hyndman Wopkeimin material. I had already located many of the arrows but a previous search through the Western Province section of the store had been disappointing. This time, knowing the idiosyncrasies of his field numbering system, I went through the 'overflow' drawers that held unregistered small objects that had been piling up in the store. After a tedious and suffocating process (the store has no ventilation and the air-conditioning was not working), I found only six objects that I could positively identify as belonging to the Hyndman collection.

While I did not uncover a significant number of objects on this trip, the high diagnostic value and distinctiveness of what I did find is valuable. However I was not able to locate one group of objects I had been determined to find. These were a series of ten rattan masks from Kwomtari collected by Bernard Juillerat that, according to the database, were housed in Store Four. Store Four is notorious amongst the staff because of its neglected, unstable and overburdened wooden racks. These racks had been pushed together with virtually no passageway between, thus preventing access. The major collections stored on these racks were Tony Crawford's Gogodala material, Dirk Smidt's middle Ramu material, and the repatriated William MacGregor collection; but there were other items as well. To make things worse, the lights didn't work. In the end I clambered over the racks with a torch but the further I went into the area the worse the situation was and I had to stop due to the likelihood that one of the racks would collapse under the combined weight of the objects and myself.

At this stage I was still working alone due to the reluctance of staff to show up. The only way effectively to search through Store 4 would be to pull everything out into the so-called mock-up area around which all the storerooms are located, and systematically check everything and then redo the shelving arrangements to provide access before placing the collections back on the shelves. This would be a major project and since this was not possible during my short visit, I had to be satisfied having found some of Juillerat's missing sago-spathe paintings buried under some of the layers of packaged objects, which I then recorded and placed with the others found during the first visit.

One of the most important tasks for this trip was the locating of collector field notes, especially those for collections made during the 1960s and early 1970s, before the move into the new National Museum building in 1977. On the last trip I had exhausted all of the official and obvious locations for collection notes, such as the archives, library, store cabinets, office files as well as catalogue cards and registers themselves; one location, a safe in Store Two, could not be checked as the key had been elusive. On this second trip I finally procured the key but on opening it I was to find only old copies of the museum register and acquisition lists. The last possible location for field/collection notes in the museum was a large pile of boxes in the corridors and in the mock-up area. Many of the boxes and their contents had been damaged due to the pooling of water along the floor during the rainy seasons (the building had been damaged by an earthquake in 1980 and these leaks were never fixed). I spent two days checking through these boxes but I was able to locate only a few notes of collections received after the opening of the new building in 1977. The acting-Director, Simon Poriatuk, and one of the collection managers, Wilfred Oltomo, both stated that they had never seen any archive of collector notes from the early period of the museum. They suggested that such notes were once housed in the old House of Assembly building where the museum had been located for almost twenty years. Perhaps the notes had not been transferred to the new museum. I decided to make a quick visit to the old House of Assembly building, with

Wilfred Oltomo, but with squatting and aborted attempts to establish a worksite, there was nothing remaining. Finally I made enquiries at the National Library and the National Archives of Papua New Guinea. I was refused personal access to the archives so I visited these institutions every second day, following up requests for any information on files concerning the National Museum but the staff at these institutions reported they could find nothing more than official correspondence and files associated with financial matters. I rechecked the collector notes I had found during the first visit, to see if there was any information I had missed. After the completion of this task, I had added 121 objects to the number recorded last time, giving a total of 2306 recorded objects out of a potential of 2878, with 2018 now having reliable geo-references points. This means that 572 objects could not be found, suggesting the need for a thorough revision of the registration and storage situation at the National Museum.

Summary of all objects recorded in Port Moresby during both trips

Upper Sepik Basin

Collector	Nr of objects recorded	Year
A.D.C. Imonda	19	c. 1966
Catholic Mission Wewak	5	before 1970
B. Craig	679	1968, 1969, 1972
H. R. Dickinson	2	before 1964
A. Gell	5	1969
G. Gerrits	170	1972
G. J. Harvey	1	1964
P. Huber	47	1969
B. Juillerat	209	early 1970s
H. Kelm	64	1969
D. Niles	1	?
H. Peter	92	1969-1973
J. Wakeford	1	before 1961
Unknown	6	?
SUB-TOTAL	1301	

Central New Guinea

Collector	Nr of objects recorded	Year
R. Abbett	1	before 1958
B. Beaver	29	various before 1973
A. Bouchard	1	c.1980
H. Bell	3	1960s
E. Bercovitch	6	1984
L. Bragge	1	c. 1982
R. Brumbaugh	3	1978, 1983
D. Cook	8	early 1960s
B. Craig	210	1968, 1972, 1983
B. A. L. Cranstone	243	1964-65
W. Dutton	4	before 1965
H. Dutch	9	1977
D. Eastburn	1	?
T. Friend	15	c. 1985
T. Hoggard	1	before 1961
H. Haneveld	1	before 1966
W. Heathcote	12	c. 1971
J. Hicks	3	?
D. Hyndman	19	c.1970
J. Kelly	1	before 1962
B. Lawes	1	1972
O. McCaw	16	before 1970
M. Mackenzie	16	1983
A. Mann	11	c.1968
T. Michael	6	1983-84
T. Monahan	3	before 1971
G. Morren	94	1968, 1982
B. Morris	1	before 1966
D. Niles	1	?
J. Pasquarelli	4	c. 1966
A.Perey	142	1967/1970
J. F. Poole	72	early 1970s
M. Radcliffe-Taylor	1	before 1963
? Smith	17	before 1962
A. Stokes	20	c.1980
P. Swadling	2	1983
M. Wronska-Friend	17	1985
Unknown	10	?
SUB-TOTAL	1005	

TOTAL	2306	
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