

UPPER SEPIK-CENTRAL NEW GUINEA PROJECT

PROGRESS REPORT April 2007

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The process of data collection and photographing of 12,000 objects from the study region presently held in museums and private collections in South Australia, ACT, NSW, Queensland, Papua New Guinea, United States, Canada, England, Austria, Switzerland, Germany, France, Holland, Norway and Iceland has been completed. Reading on method and theory, and of ethnographic sources, is on-going. Andrew Fyfe now has a good grasp of the anthropological and archaeological literature relevant to the project. The website has been designed, and is being hosted by, Saitech Web Solutions. Progress reports have been posted to this website at regular intervals and in due course at least a sample of the database will be added to enable people to appreciate the range of material available from each location. Links to this website have been created on other websites.

A classification of the range of material culture has been formulated on the basis of functional contingency and all objects have been coded accordingly. Longitude-latitude co-ordinates and language have been determined for all collection locations and added to the data for each object. Agricultural systems data has been imported from the ANU Human Geography database for West Sepik and Western Provinces and all collection locations coded accordingly. Barry Craig has checked these variables by examining map printouts to search for anomalies and the entire database is being checked by him, object by object.

Andrew Fyfe has completed the identification of sixteen different types of binding on arrows and coded some 3000 arrows according to the presence of these characteristics; a similar process has identified ten different characteristics of string bag techniques and some 400 bags have been coded accordingly. Jill Bolton, a craft specialist in weaving and binding, has voluntarily assisted in identifying these characteristics and reproducing them for validation purposes. Currently, the coding of the structure of the designs carved on arrows is being done according to the system developed by Washburn & Crowe (1988, *Symmetries of Culture*, p.83).

The research assistant, Dandong Zheng, has contributed to these processes by setting up the computer database, doing data entry, printing out the maps and assisting with the coding of the arrow designs. In late May, discussions will commence with Dr Verbyla regarding procedures for carrying out statistical analysis of the distribution of the object classes for the entire dataset with valid collection points (c. 9000 objects), and of the distributions of the characteristics of arrows and string bags. Andrew Fyfe has chosen these two object classes because one relies on transmission of skills primarily from father to son and the other on transmission from mother to daughter. Men are typically more connected to the outside world than women, but social structure and marriage patterns also are relevant to what is transmitted and to whom. Intensive analysis will take place over the period from June to August but already some indication of outcomes is being suggested by simple filtering of the data.

Andrew Fyfe has written a paper on the background to the project, the history of the collections, and the processes and difficulties involved in collecting the data. This is being submitted to the journal *Oceania* in the second week of May. A second paper in advanced draft has also been written by Fyfe, dealing with method and theory, and outlining the analysis that is to be undertaken. This also could be submitted to *Oceania* for consideration. Much of this written material will provide the basis for chapters of his thesis, which will be completed in December.