

UPPER SEPIK-CENTRAL NEW GUINEA PROJECT

PROGRESS REPORT June 2008

Barry Craig

As noted in the February 2008 report, 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, also has been completed. The APAI student Andrew Fyfe has a good grasp of the anthropological, archaeological and statistical literature relevant to the project.

Andrew Fyfe has been writing up the socio-cultural data to support his analysis of the data on arrows and string bags. This analysis is testing the hypothesis that there should be less variation in technical characteristics of arrows when analysed by distance than in the case of string bags. The hypothesis relates the more parochial and conservative characteristics of string bags, compared to arrows, to the fact that marriage is mainly endogamous in the study area and women are more local in their social interactions than are men, who did all the fighting and trading.

Andrew Fyfe has identified September 30 as the date for completion of his PhD thesis. Barry Craig is planning for him and Fyfe to spend two months in the upper Sepik and central New Guinea areas to familiarise Fyfe with the people and places from where the objects have come and to enable them to seek answers to questions raised by the data collection and analysis to date. This field trip is planned to occur immediately after thesis completion. Craig and Fyfe will seek a meeting with Managing Director Alan Breen at Tabubil, the headquarters of Ok Tedi Mining Ltd which has supported the project as an Industry Partner, to personally thank him for his continued commitment to the project and to inform him of progress to date. Copies of the database will be distributed to high schools in the region to provide access to students for the purpose of cultural heritage studies. A copy also will be provided to the PNG National Museum in Port Moresby. Funding for the trip is from museum fees-for-service work earned by Craig during the past year, not from the ARC-Linkage grant.

By the end of 2009, it is intended that the entire database, appropriately edited to remove taxonomic coding data specific to ongoing analyses, but retaining the photographic images of the objects, will be made available on the project website. This is in line with a commitment to make the database available for viewing by the participating museums, interested persons in Papua New Guinea, and students and scholars worldwide. The database will be set up for interrogation by specific location and by language group.

The application for an ARC-Linkage grant to develop and test a theory of the processes that shape material culture diversity using the USCNGP database has been successful and the two-year term of that grant, which will commence on completion by Fyfe of his thesis, will enable an intensive program of analysis to take place using sophisticated statistical methods and examining the several characteristics of many other kinds of objects.

In view of Dr Ari Verbyla's withdrawal from the project (because of his changed work commitments) we have been seeking an alternative statistician to assist us. Professor Charles Pearce (University of Adelaide, School of Mathematical Sciences) is considering involvement and the possibility of interesting a PhD student in the mathematical aspects of the second stage of the project over the next two years.

Andrew Fyfe's paper on the background to the project, the history of the collections, and the processes and difficulties involved in collecting the data requires revision before a formal acceptance is advised by the journal *Oceania*. A second paper by Fyfe, dealing with method and theory, and outlining the analyses that can be undertaken during the second stage of this project, will be sent to *Oceania* after the first has been formally accepted for publication. These materials form a substantial part of Andrew Fyfe's thesis, but the latter has first priority for completion.

A paper on the war shields of the Torricelli Mountains, a region adjacent to the north-eastern boundary of the Upper Sepik study area, has been resubmitted for publication by the journal *Oceania* after suggested revisions were made. This paper is co-authored by B. Craig, G. Lewis (UK) and W. Mitchell (USA) and addresses the question of changes in material culture across language boundaries.