

UPPER SEPIK-CENTRAL NEW GUINEA PROJECT

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In March 2009, the degree of Doctor of Philosophy was awarded to Andrew Fyfe by the University of Adelaide for his thesis, *Gender, mobility and population history: exploring material culture distributions in the Upper Sepik and Central New Guinea*. In July, the first paper providing results of analysis of the data from the Upper Sepik-Central New Guinea Project was published ('Exploring Spatial Relationships between Material Culture and Language in the Upper Sepik and Central New Guinea', *Oceania* 79, 2009: 121-161). This paper provided a summary of Fyfe's thesis and an overview of the preliminary results.

During the next two months, more material was added to the website (www.uscngp.com), including a paper co-authored by Fyfe and Jill Bolton (*Knots, Loops & Braids: an examination of fibre craft techniques in the Upper Sepik and Central New Guinea*). This paper comprehensively describes many of the techniques used in the manufacture of arrows and string bags throughout the study area, including those that have been used, and will be further used, in analyses undertaken by the Project. Andrew Fyfe visited the Australian Museum in October to re-photograph those objects in the database for which photographs taken in 2004 proved unsatisfactory.

In August, the Archaeology department at Flinders University invited Barry Craig and Andrew Fyfe to give a seminar on the nature and results of the USCNG Project. This was well-received and, since then, new analyses, involving the use of similarity and distance measures, have been undertaken for two small fine-grained samples of arrows and string bags covering a significant cross-section of the study area. The most important of these were a series of Mantel tests quantifying correlations between material culture, language and geographic distance. The results are consistent with the findings for the analyses of attribute frequencies described in Fyfe's thesis, in that they show a significant effect for geographical distance with little or no measureable effect for language. The analyses' figures are comparable to those from analyses of the Field Museum's North Coast data, although the USCNGP data show greater sensitivity to distance. These findings will be presented at the Australian Archaeological Association's Annual Conference, *Old Guard New Guard*, on December 13th, 2009 and are being prepared for publication.

The next major analysis will be on the carved and painted designs on arrow heads and arrow foreshafts utilizing the taxonomy of Washburn & Crowe's 1988 *Symmetries of Culture* (p.83). This will be the first time such a system has been used for plane pattern analysis of decorated forms in Papua New Guinea and is expected to deliver more sophisticated results than those obtained by Craig in previous analyses (eg. Craig 1990, 1995, 2005). Preliminary coding of some 2000 designs has been done and this requires a second run before analysis can commence.

We have been editing the dataset in preparation for loading onto the website in February 2010. The design will enable a website visitor to select a location or an ethno-linguistic group on a Google-Earth terrain map and request to see all the objects, or objects of a particular class (eg, arrows, stone tools, string bags), that were collected from that location. There will be a photograph and basic data about each object. This will enable visitors to interactively explore the region's material culture and, should they wish, carry out their own research.

Material added to the website during September-October includes a selection of around 250 field photographs, taken mainly by Barry Craig between 1962 and 2002, organized in the 'Gallery' according to subject and ethno-linguistic group. In November, three papers were added. The first paper is *Introduction to the Legends of the Abau of Idam Valley and of the Amto of Simaiya Valley, West Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea*; the second is *Legends of the Abau of Idam Valley, West Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea*; the third is *Legends of the Amto of Simaiya Valley, West Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea*. These papers had been published in 1980 in a now-defunct Papua New Guinea journal, *Oral History* (8,4:1-113; 8,5:1-92). The original publication had extremely limited circulation and very poor reproduction of photographs. For this website publication, the original text of the *Introduction* has been revised and some additions made. The map was redone using a Google Earth terrain image and fifty photographs were scanned and inserted into the text. The *Legends* have been illustrated with an additional thirty six field photographs, most previously unpublished. Fifty four painted drawings by Abau and Amto men also have been included as an appendix to the *Introduction* and several have been inserted selectively in the *Legends*.

It is intended that the primary audience for the on-line project database, the field photographs in the Gallery, and the Legends papers, will be Papua New Guineans interested in their cultural heritage.

Further material will be added to the Website in the coming year, in particular Craig's 1964 field notes on Oksapmin male initiation, not recorded by subsequent anthropological researchers in that area, along with a selection of field photographs.

As a result of the project's focus on string bags as an iconic object in women's culture, Maureen McKenzie has donated to the South Australian Museum a large and exceptionally significant archive of field photographs. In the 1980s, McKenzie carried out field research in the upper Sepik and central New Guinea, as well as in other regions of Papua New Guinea, focusing on string bags made by women. She presented an analysis of her work as a Master's thesis at the Australian National University and published the thesis as *Androgynous Objects: String bags and gender in central New Guinea* (1991, Chur: Harwood Academic Publishers). Her photographs are of excellent quality, cover a wide range of material culture, and are therefore an invaluable resource for the project and an important research resource for the South Australian Museum.

Notice of the USCNGP, its objectives and the website, was published by Barry Craig in *Una Voce* 2009, No 4:19-20 (Journal of the Papua New Guinea Association of Australia Inc). This has resulted in several responses, from former government officers who worked in the region, that have yielded additional data of relevance to the project and greater awareness of the project.

References

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