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Uncovering Pacific Pasts: Histories of Archaeology in Oceania – An exhibition

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The displacement of objects into discourse may also re-enchant them (Starn 2005).

Objects have many stories to tell. The stories of their makers and their uses. Stories of exchange, acquisition, display and interpretation. This book is a collection of essays highlighting some of the collections, and their object biographies (see Gosden and Marshall 1999; Hoskins 2006), that were displayed in the *Uncovering Pacific Pasts: Histories of Archaeology in Oceania* (UPP) exhibition. The exhibition, which opened on 1 March 2020, sought to bring together both notable and relatively unknown Pacific material culture and archival collections from around the globe, displaying them simultaneously in their home institutions and linked online at www.uncoveringpacificpasts.org. Thirty-eight collecting institutions participated in UPP, including major collecting institutions in the United Kingdom, continental Europe and the Americas, as well as collecting institutions from across the Pacific (see Figure 1.1, and for a full list refer to the List of Participating Institutions). In most cases, the institutions displaying the objects in UPP are not reflective of these objects' natural homes. Their current locations are a clue to the deep life histories of the UPP collections – histories that illustrate an object's collection,

acquisition and sometimes transfer by their collecting institutions, and their display and study, often in Western academic contexts. The source locations of the objects in UPP span all areas of the modern-day Pacific (see shaded area in map of Figure 1.2). However, unlike contemporary understandings of the Pacific, collections in UPP also span the regions of Australia and Island Southeast Asia. The archaeology and material culture of these regions remain connected, both to each other and the Pacific region more generally, a fact that a revision of our discipline's intellectual history reinvigorates (Spriggs 2017). Combined together, the UPP collections reveal stories of how the material culture of Oceania (used interchangeably in this volume with 'the Pacific') has been interpreted and reinterpreted by its collectors and how objects and archival material collected in the past can illuminate the histories of our discipline.

The object biographies in this volume tend to focus on the history of the object collectors and their historic and ideological collecting contexts, with authors utilising externalist approaches (see Moro-Abadía 2006) rather than focusing on the histories of the object makers. This situation is not unique to histories of the Pacific or to material culture collections. It is related to the enigmatic nature of the archaeological record. The allure of material culture in understanding the past is to illuminate the people and cultures who made and used the objects. Instead, what is often left are the stories of the collectors, who were frequently 'outsiders' to the peoples and cultures subject to their inquiries. It is important for readers to examine the collectors' perspectives contained herein, even when informed from and with Indigenous knowledges (for examples see Spriggs, **Chapter 28**, and Dotte-Sarout et al., **Chapter 30**, both this volume), as reflecting their personal bias, their inherited Western positivist world views and the temporal constraints that informed them. While in many respects this limits our understanding, these personal biographies and lived experiences, a collector's interpretative frameworks and the historiography of an object's life history provide a lens through which to explore, reflect and critique the ideological roots of modern archaeology (Givens 2008; Murray 2002; Murray and Evans 2008; Schlanger 2002:128–129).

1. UNCOVERING PACIFIC PASTS – AN EXHIBITION

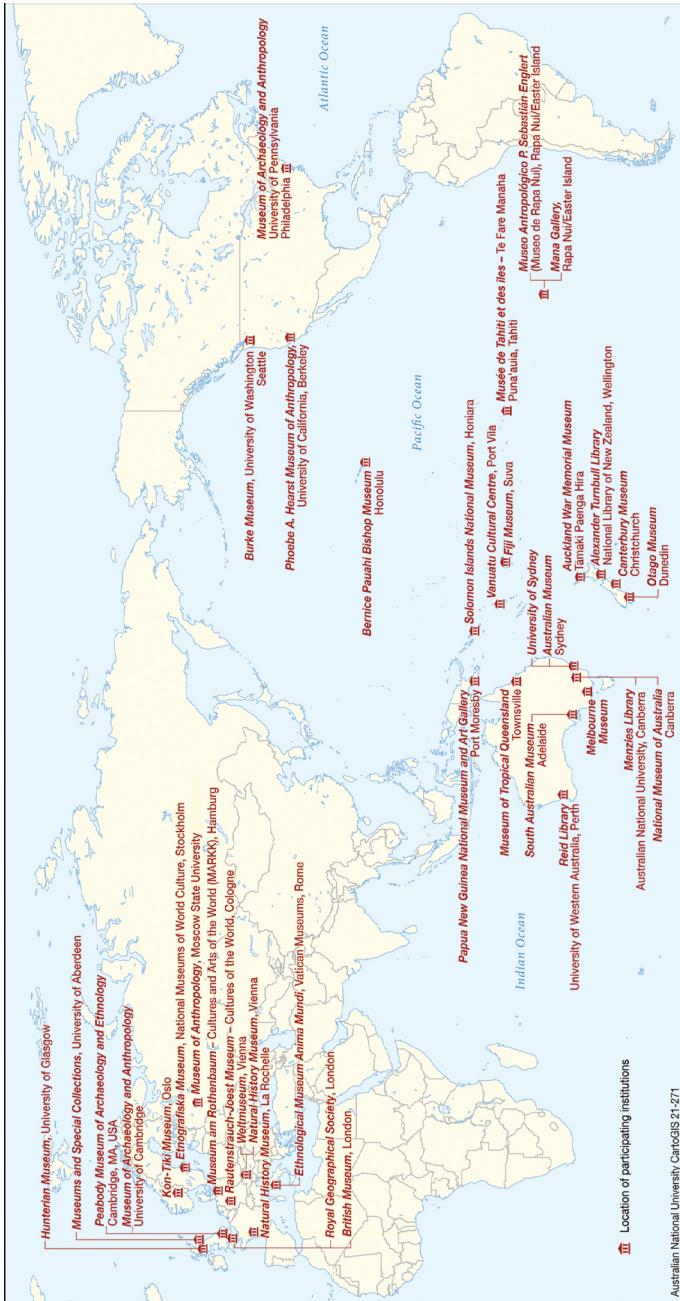


Figure 1.1. Locations of participating institutions in the *Uncovering Pacific Pasts* exhibition.

Source: Courtesy Jenny Sheehan, CartoGIS, Scholarly Information Services, The Australian National University.

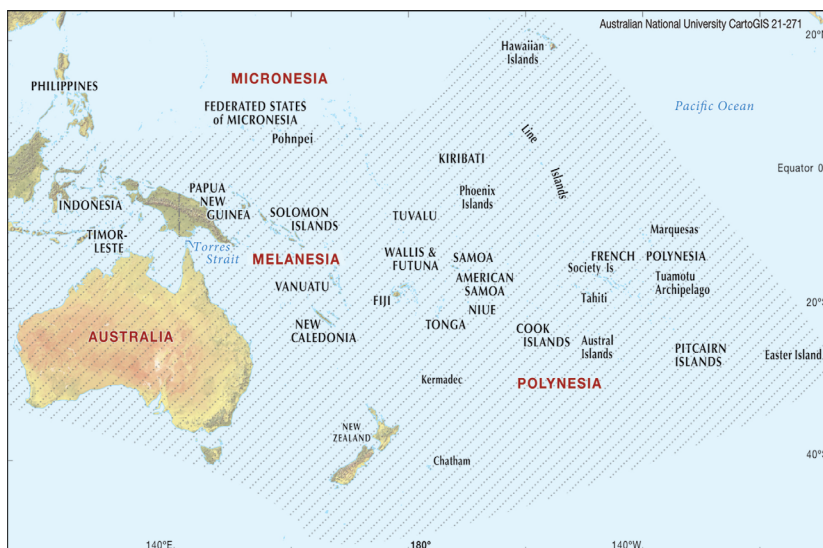


Figure 1.2. Distribution of source locations of *Uncovering Pacific Pasts* collections.

Source: Courtesy Jenny Sheehan, CartoGIS, Scholarly Information Services, The Australian National University.

Until recently, the history of archaeology in Oceania has received relatively little attention (Dotte-Sarout et al. 2021; Howes and Spriggs 2019; Spriggs 2017). This is surprising when we consider the vast extent of this region, which extends roughly from the eastern shores of the Asian and Australian continents to the western shores of North and South America, covering fully one-third of the earth's surface. Its ecological and cultural diversity is no less vast: the islands of the Pacific range from linear chains of volcanic islands to low atolls, uplifted coralline reefs and fragments of continental crust (Kirch 2017:37–54; Neall and Trewick 2008). Some, like New Guinea, are large, others tiny. Some show evidence of human settlement dating back to the late Pleistocene, c. 40,000 years ago; others were not discovered or settled until around 1,000 years ago (Kirch 2017:4–5). In total, land amounts to only 0.34 per cent of the area of the Pacific Basin, and Patrick Vinton Kirch has rightly described the human colonisation of Remote Oceania by small groups of seafarers wayfinding across 4,500 km of open ocean as 'one of the great sagas of world prehistory' (Kirch 2017:89; see also Nunn et al. 2016).

Some sites of archaeological significance in Oceania have entered the public consciousness, most notably the monumental *moai* of Rapa Nui/Easter Island (Van Tilburg, **Chapter 18**, this volume), ‘hotly debated [...] as a testament to “ecocide” or to adaptability and resistance’ (Kirch 2017:1; see also Bahn and Flenley 1992; Diamond 2005; Hunt 2007; Hunt and Lipo 2010). Others, less well known, nevertheless bear witness to human achievement on a global scale. The identification of Kuk Swamp in the New Guinea Highlands as a location of independent agricultural development and plant domestication during the early Holocene, 9,000 years ago, led to its inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List (Litster et al., **Chapter 32**, this volume; see also Golson et al. 2017). Small wonder, then, that European visitors to the Pacific from the 1500s onwards were not interested solely in the natural resources and strategic significance of the region, nor in its inhabitants as merely potential Christian converts or sources of cheap labour. Instead, they wondered who the people of the Pacific were, and when and how they had come to be there. Their studies of material culture, augmented by work in areas such as linguistics, oral history and physical anthropology, were attempts to find answers to these questions.

One of the primary themes of the volume, evident when surveying the UPP collections and their historical contexts, is the connectivity of people, places, objects and ideas from the very beginning of European exploration and material culture collecting practices (see Spriggs, **Chapter 2**, this volume). As early as the 1870s anthropological pursuits in the Pacific had come to be guided and supported by professional societies, in addition to the pre-existing support frameworks that facilitated previous colonial explorations (see Spriggs, **Chapter 8**, this volume). One of the early archaeological excavations in the Pacific, undertaken as early as 1904 at Wanigela in today’s Papua New Guinea (see Spriggs, **Chapter 8**; Bonshek, **Chapter 13**; and Howes, **Chapter 14**, all this volume), was informed both by international expert advice and attempted experimental conservation techniques. Finds from this excavation include the intricately engraved *Conus* shell valuables, which for the first time in the UPP exhibition are being displayed concurrently in their respective homes at the British Museum, London and the Weltmuseum, Vienna (Figure 1.3).



Figure 1.3. Carved *Conus* shells on display at the British Museum.

Source: Courtesy of the British Museum staff.

By the outbreak of World War I, the beginnings of the defined and increasingly professionalised branches of study of anthropology, archaeology, physical anthropology and linguistics had already taken root in both the British and American traditions. The period from 1918 to 1945 heralded a new beginning in Pacific research (see Spriggs, **Chapter 19**, this volume), where endeavours were predominately initiated

and supported by the growing number of university-trained faculty in university departments and museums, in both the USA and Europe, as well as in national collecting institutions. Pioneer academics during this time undertook field research underpinned by specific archaeological research questions. They also developed the university curricular and training standards for the field and recruited and taught the students who went on to become the first cohort of fully professionally trained archaeologists working in the Pacific from the end of World War II (see Spriggs and Howes, **Chapter 26**, this volume).

These four main temporal phases of development form natural thematic breaks in this volume. Thus, **Chapters 3–7** cover the time period from the 1500s to the 1870s, with the exhibition object displays and the stories presented focusing on exploring expeditions and early settlers in the Pacific, in particular the collectors' ideas on the origins of local populations, and how similarities and differences in material culture could elucidate the relationships between them. The second section, **Chapters 9–18**, spans the period from the 1870s until the 1910s. This section introduces the reader to the objects and supporting archival materials from some of the first archaeological excavations in Oceania and their interpretations. Debates and theories on the origins of Pacific peoples, their migrations and settlement were now supported by increasing evidence – material culture from excavated contexts, stylistic analysis of objects and their distribution through space and time, oral histories of local populations and somatological studies – but analyses and interpretations of the data were strongly tied to the by then dominant theories associated with Darwinian evolution. Section three spans the interwar period (1918–45). The object histories presented here in **Chapters 20–25** highlight the growing establishment of archaeology as a subject in its own right and the supporting academic and professional institutions and societies that now framed the field. The final section, **Chapters 27–35**, focuses on the most recent past (1945 – present day). Armed with new scientific techniques and a workforce of university-educated and trained archaeology specialists, these object stories showcase the contributions of the individuals, places and ideas that continue to affect modern archaeological practice and debates. Disciplinary history fosters reflexive analysis and the object histories from the most recent past provide ample opportunity here for the curators and authors of the UPP exhibition to assess the ongoing legacy of those people, places and theoretical paradigms to which most if not all of us have direct connections. Interspersed between the object-focused chapters, each section is contextualised by an introductory chapter

(**Chapters 2, 8, 19 and 26**) that links the exhibition displays, setting the scene and filling in the gaps of any major finds, individuals, theories or collections that have not been included in the UPP exhibition content. The four section introductions thus also help locate Pacific archaeology in each period within important developments in the history of ideas on the one hand, and within the broader context of economic and sociopolitical activity in the Pacific on the other. As is to be expected in a subject of this magnitude and despite our best efforts, not all major themes and notable collections could be represented in a single exhibition.

The UPP exhibition was an initiative of the Collective Biography of Archaeology in the Pacific (CBAP) Project. The CBAP Project was an Australian Research Council (ARC)-funded Laureate research program, awarded to Professor Matthew Spriggs from 2015 to 2020, based in the School of Archaeology and Anthropology (SOAA), College of Arts and Social Sciences at The Australian National University (ANU) in Canberra, Australia. The CBAP Project aimed to create a subfield in the history of Pacific archaeology. In particular, it aimed to reassess dominant theoretical paradigms in Oceanic archaeological theory by undertaking a new historiography of Pacific archaeology across English, French and German scholarly texts. In doing so, the CBAP Project aimed to uncover a broader, more nuanced context in the history of Pacific archaeology: the forgotten networks of influence, early excavations, neglected contributors such as women and Indigenous scholars, and the linked disciplinary histories of both anthropology and archaeology (Spriggs 2017). The UPP exhibition is the culmination of five years of dedicated scholarship. The objects and the stories of their collection, exchange and interpretation displayed in the UPP exhibition do much to uncover this hidden history.

The planning, curation and installation of a large international devolved exhibition such as UPP was only made possible by the immense support given by the participating institutions. The CBAP team, particularly Matthew Spriggs, Tristen Jones, Hilary Howes, Emilie Dotte-Sarout, Mirani Litster, Eve Haddow, Michelle Richards, Victor Melander, Andrea Ballesteros Danel, Bronwen Douglas and Elena Govor, wish to thank (in alphabetical order by institution, then by surname):

- Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, Wellington, New Zealand: Sascha Nolden
- Auckland War Memorial Museum Tāmaki Paenga Hira, Auckland, New Zealand: Louise Furey

- Australian Museum, Sydney, Australia: Patricia Egan, Vanessa Finney, Jim Specht
- ANU, Canberra, Australia: Anna Edmundson, Simon Haberle, Guillaume Molle, Duncan Wright
- Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum, Honolulu, USA: Marques Marzan, Jillian Swift
- British Museum, London, UK: Lissant Bolton, Liz Bonshek, Gaye Sculthorpe
- Burke Museum, University of Washington, Seattle, USA: Peter Lape, Laura Phillips
- Canterbury Museum, Christchurch, New Zealand: Emma Brooks
- Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, University of California, Los Angeles, USA: Jo Anne Van Tilburg
- Ethnological Museum Anima Mundi, Vatican Museums, Vatican City State: Katherine Aigner, Father Nicola Mapelli
- Etnografiska Museet/Museum of Ethnography, National Museums of World Culture, Stockholm, Sweden: Aoife O'Brien
- Fiji Museum, Suva, Fiji: Elia Nakoro, Sipiriano Nemani
- Hunterian Museum, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, UK: Malcolm Chapman, Andrew Mills
- Kon-Tiki Museum, Oslo, Norway: Reidar Solsvik
- Menzies Library, ANU, Canberra, Australia: Patrick Byrnes, Sarah Lethbridge
- Musée de Nouvelle-Calédonie, Noumea, New Caledonia: Julia-Jessica Wamytan
- Musée de Tahiti et des Îles – Te Fare Manaha, Puna'auia, Tahiti, French Polynesia: Miriama Bono, Tamara Maric
- Museo Antropológico P. Sebastián Englert (Museo de Rapa Nui), Rapa Nui/Easter Island, Chile: Francisco Torres Hochstetter
- Museum am Rothenbaum – Cultures and Arts of the World (MARKK), Hamburg, Germany: Jeanette Kokott
- Museum of Anthropology, Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia: Ekaterina Balakhonova
- Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK: Anita Herle, Nicholas Thomas
- Museum of Tropical Queensland, Townsville, Australia: Alison Mann

- Museums and Special Collections, University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen, UK: Neil Curtis, Jennifer Downes, Christina Mackenzie
- Museums Victoria, Melbourne, Australia: Nancy Ladas
- National Museum of Australia, Canberra, Australia: Laura Cook
- Natural History Museum, La Rochelle, France: Elise Patole-Edoumba
- Natural History Museum, Vienna, Austria: Margit Berner
- Otago Museum, Dunedin, New Zealand: Moira White
- Pacific Legacy Inc., USA: Mara Mulrooney
- Pacific Research Archives, ANU, Canberra, Australia: Catherine Ziegler
- Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery, Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea: Kenneth Miamba
- Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, Cambridge, USA: Ingrid Ahlgren, Pamela Gerardi, Jane Pickering, Katherine Satriano, Kara Schneiderman
- Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley, USA: Leslie Freund, Adam Nilsen
- Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum – Cultures of the World, Cologne, Germany: Oliver Lueb
- Reid Library, University of Western Australia, Perth, Australia: Deanne Barrett
- Royal Geographical Society, London, UK: Eugene Rae
- Solomon Islands National Museum, Honiara, Solomon Islands: Tony Heorake, Lawrence Kiko, Shirley Mwanasalua, Rita Sahu
- South Australian Museum, Adelaide, Australia: Stephen Zagala
- University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa: Alexander Mawyer
- University of Otago, Otago, New Zealand: Glenn Summerhayes
- University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (Penn Museum), Philadelphia, USA: Marie-Claude Boileau, Adria Katz, Jim Mathieu, Alex Pezzati, Kate Quinn
- University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia: James Flexner
- Vanuatu Cultural Centre/Vanuatu Kaljoral Senta, Port Vila, Vanuatu: Iarawai Philip, Richard Shing, Edson Willie
- Weltmuseum, Vienna, Austria: Reinhard Blumauer

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