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Editor: Rosita Henry

Special points of interest:

- Progress reports
- Future Research Plans

Shield in the Material Culture Collection, JCU

Photo: Rosita Henry

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Research Project Newsletter 2

ARC Discovery Research in the Tropics

The research project *Objects of Possession: Artefact Transactions in the Wet Tropics of North Queensland, 1870-2013*. funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC Discovery Grant) is progressing well. Various team members have been conducting research in different museums in Australia and in Europe.

We report on our work below.

Presentation of Research Results

Three members of the research team—Michael Wood, Rosita Henry, and Ton Otto—presented a paper entitled *Ethnographic Artefacts and Value Transformations* at an international workshop on the question of value in anthropological theory and practice. The workshop took place in Cairns, 15-17 December, 2011.

The workshop was organised collaboratively by the Cairns Institute and the University of Aarhus and co-convened by Ton Otto and Rane Willerslev.

Professor Bob Foster (Rochester University, New York) was the discussant for our paper, which concerned the property claims made by collectors such as W.E. Roth, Eric Mjöberg and Ursula Mc Connel, over the artefacts they collected in the rainforest region.

The paper also considered the contemporary value of the artefacts for Aboriginal people and the kinds of property claims that Aboriginal people assert today in relation to these museum objects.

Henry, Otto and Wood are currently revising and reworking the paper in order to submit it for peer-review for publication in a special issue of the journal *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*. (http://www.haujournal.org/index.php/hau). This is an international peer-reviewed, open-access online journal.

Several other members of the research team are also in the process of preparing presentations for conferences during 2012 and writing papers on the research they have conducted to date.

For example, Maureen Fuary and Russell McGregor are working on a paper provisionally entitled, "Protectors and Collectors: Walter Roth and Archibald Meston".

Basket in the Material Culture Collection, JCU
Photo: Rosita Henry

Museum Research in Europe

Shelley Greer & Corinna Ercken-brecht, Cologne 2011

Photo: Rosita Henry

Rainforest Objects & Documentation in European Museums

In October 2011, Shelley Greer and Rosita Henry visited the British Museum in London, the Pitt Rivers Museum (Oxford), the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (University of Cambridge) and the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum in Cologne.

In this we were helped by Dr Ian Coates (National Museum of Australia) who had previously identified rainforest objects in the British Museum; and in Cologne we greatly benefited from long-term research by our ARC colleague, Dr Corinna Erckenbrecht, on the collector Hermann Klaatsch.

Our task was to examine rainforest objects and any documentation associated with their collection. As there are a significant number of objects, we focused particularly on the region from Cardwell to Cairns, and while we examined other objects, we were especially interested in bicornual baskets and rainforest shields. We have prepared a spreadsheet of all the objects that we examined.

We discovered both painted and unpainted bicornual baskets, some in remarkable condition given that many were collected over 100 years ago. We are now interested in exploring a number of issues in relation to these; notably, the significance of painted baskets versus unpainted, the range and nature of designs on painted baskets and the social context of basket production in the past and present.

An examination of shields revealed a number of designs featuring a range of motifs. Our interest here concerns the connection between these designs and collecting itself; that is, whether these different designs provided the basis for (at least some) collections.

Examination of the documentation allowed us to identify paths taken by objects from place of production to the museums. In some instances, objects passed through the hands of several collectors while in others there was a single collector who gave the objects to his family who in turn donated them to one of the museums. Following these pathways provides some insight into the 'value' of these objects for the collectors and others.

We have found that international exhibitions played an important role in firstly promoting the collection of artefacts but also in the subsequent establishment of museum collections.

Our research on documentation also included photographs of rainforest people and objects which have proven to be fruitful areas for further research.

We are grateful to James Hamill and Jill Hasell who helped us at the British Museum; to Elin Bornemann at the Pitt Rivers Museum; to Jocelyne Dudding for her help with the photographic collection at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge and to Corinna Erckenbrecht and Burkhard Fenner at the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum in Cologne.

Research is continuing and we hope to include other ARC colleagues in subsequent work.

Shelley Greer

Research at the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum in Cologne, Germany, October 2011 From Left to Right: Dr Shelley Greer, A/Prof Rosita Henry, Dr Corinna Erckenbrecht Foreground: A 'toy sword for children' collected by Klaatsch in Cooktown, Nov. 1904. Photo: Dr Burkhard Fenner (Curator of the Oceanic Collection, Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum)

Continuing Research in Germany: Corinna Erckenbrecht

In 2011, I visited the Museums of Ethnology in Leipzig, Dresden and Herrnhut doing research into artefact collections from the Wet Tropics. In September and October 2011, I also did intensive research into the Klaatsch collection at the Museum of Ethnology in Cologne where the largest part of the Klaatsch collection from Australia is held.

The research in Cologne was partly done with Rosita Henry and Shelley Greer who were on study leave in Europe and had been doing research at other European museums as well. I have written two reports on my work where I describe in detail the composition of the collections today, the acquisition of the artefacts by collectors and museums (according to the available archival material), their way of property thinking and the materialisation of data storage in the museums.

In April, 2012 I plan to visit the Museum of Ethnology in Warsaw, Poland, where a considerable part of Klaatsch's Australian collection is kept today. Originally this was a selection that Klaatsch took with him to Breslau (now Wrocław) when he was Professor of Anthropology there from 1907 – 1916. After WWII these collections were centralised in Warsaw.

In 2012 I also plan to collaborate with Mike Wood on a writing project comparing Klaatsch's ownership claims regarding his collection with later collectors, eg. Ursula McConnel.

Corinna Erckenbrecht

Value of Artefacts & Property Claims by Collectors

Ursula McConnel: Anthropologist and Collector

Russell McGregor and Rebecca Fisher, Collections Officer in the Cultural Heritage Branch of the Australian Museum, examining a rainforest shield collected by Walter Roth.

Photo: Maureen Fuary

Hunting the Collectors

Hunting the Collectors: Roth and Meston

In December 2011 we spent a week researching in the Australian Museum, Sydney. Our focus was on the artefacts and papers of the notable late-nineteenth and early -twentieth century ethnographer and Aboriginal Protector, Walter Roth.

In January 2012 we spent a further two weeks researching in Brisbane, in the John Oxley Library, Queensland Museum and Queensland State Archives. Again, we searched out material relating to Roth, as well as to his contemporary and fellow collector/protector, Archibald Meston. We also looked more widely into the documentary record relating to the collection and exhibition of artefacts from the Wet Tropics of North Queensland.

At the Australian Museum we found lots of material on the artefacts Roth collected from the rainforest region in the 1890s and early 1900s. Unfortunately, much of the documentation relating to one of the most controversial episodes in Roth's career – his sale of 2000 ethnographic objects from North Queensland to the Australian Museum in 1904 – has been lost. The majority of the objects themselves, however, are still held by the museum, along with information about their provenance and origins. The staff at the Australian Museum were exceptionally helpful, and we look forward to strengthening our connections with this institution in the future.

Our researches in Brisbane were more dispersed, but still netted a good haul of information about collecting in the Wet Tropics. Among other things, we found some interesting information on the public display of Aboriginal artefacts and crafts at venues like the Brisbane Exhibition in the early twentieth century. We also found some particularly good photographs of rainforest Aboriginal people and their material culture, from the Cairns and Cardwell districts and from the Atherton Tablelands.

Over the next few months we'll write an article based on the material gathered on these research trips. We've provisionally entitled it 'Collectors and Protectors: Walter Roth and Archibald Meston'. Russell will write an additional article on the changing European representations of rainforest Aboriginal people over the century and a half from the mid-nineteenth century until now, and Maureen is working on a paper entitled "Objects of Desire" which looks at the emotional and aesthetic dimensions to the collection and acquisition of objects.

Maureen Fuary & Russell McGregor

Maureen Fuary working on the Roth papers with Kate Khan, Senior Fellow in the Anthropology Research Section of the Australian Museum

Photo: Russell McGregor

Art and Artefact: Trish Barnard

Trish Barnard, Senior Curator Cultures & Histories, based at the Museum of Tropical Queensland Museum, who is a research associate on the ARC project has proved invaluable in helping us to identify artefacts from the rainforest region held in museums nationally and internationally.

Trish is currently conducting research for her Master of Creative Arts on a topic that is closely related to our ARC project. Trish is focusing on a particular collection that was donated to the Queensland Museum by leading Queensland Historian, Glenn Cooke, in 1999.

The collection consists of 2,200 tourist and domestic home ware objects with indigenised motifs. Trish is examining issues concerning the adoption and appropriation of Indigenous designs by non-indigenous artists and producers and the implications of this for the contemporary Indigenous arts industry.

Trish Barnard working with the Glenn Cooke collection, Queensland Museum

Progress Report on PhD Project: Bård Aaberge

My PhD project was approved by the James Cook University Human Ethics Committee on 30th November, 2011.

I was awarded a competitive travel grant from the Australian Anthropological Society to attend a masterclass by Rupert Stasch held at ANU in Canberra (29/9/2011). In the masterclass, entitled *Problems in the Theory and Ethnography of Intercultural Relations*, I presented a short paper on my PhD project which included a discussion about how Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives on Kuku Yalanji traditional knowledge are often based on divergent assumptions about how such knowledge has come into existence.

To date, I have conducted initial consultations with Yalanji people, have been reading up on theoretical and regional literature, and am at present writing up the project proposal and a substantive piece of writing on the early contact history in the northern Wet Tropics (mainly accounts about explorers) for my confirmation of candidature seminar which will take place late February or early March, 2012.

A part of my historical research has been the sometimes difficult task of mapping some of the explorers' travels (they were themselves at times quite confused about their whereabouts) to get a good understanding of which Indigenous groups they were actually encountering.

I have created a map using GIS technology, and I am adding on layers of information regarding the explorers' travels. As my work progresses I intend to map out collectors' travels in the northern tropics in the same way.

In 2012, I plan to produce a film in collaboration with two Yalanji elders (Roy Gibson and Harold Tayley) on the contemporary role of traditional knowledge. They will document traditional plant usage, medicine and the building of traditional shelters. The aim is to make a DVD that can be sold at the cultural centre in Mossman Gorge, as well as be used for educational purposes in the community.

In a complementary paper, we will examine how the utility of traditional knowledge has transformed: from ensuring subsistence economy in the past, to a means of entering the market economy in the present.

In a broad sense, the DVD itself can be seen as a hybrid artefact and a materialisation of traditional knowledge in a new form adapted to contemporary networks of exchange.

Bård Aaberge

Traditional Knowledge & Hybrid Artefacts

Photo: Rosita Henry

Research at the Musée du Quai Branly

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We will be on the Web soon!

Rosita Henry at the Musée du Quai Branly
November 2011
Photo: Jessica De Largy-Healy

French Connections: Jessica De Largy Healy and Arnaud Morvan

In November 2011, Rosita Henry visited the Musée du Quai Branly (MQB) to view objects held there that may have been collected from our NQ rainforest region. She was assisted in this research by Dr Jessica De Largy Healy. In Paris, Jessica has conducted archival research into the original collectors of the objects, and we are attempting to trace the trajectories of the objects on their journey to France and, within France, between various museums. We are especially grateful for the assistance of Magali Mélandri who is, with Philippe Peltier, in charge of the Pacific collections at the MQB.

Jessica De Largy Healy & Magali Mélandri
Musée du Quai Branly
November 2011
Photo: Rosita Henry

Another French scholar, who is collaborating with us on the project is Dr Arnaud Morvan. Arnaud has been investigating whether there are any rainforest objects among the Australian collection at the Musée des Confluences in Lyon, France. Arnaud has discovered two bicornual baskets in the Angoulême Museum, in south western France. Both baskets are noted to have come from "Herbert River". The name of the collector is Dr. Jean Henry Jules L'homme. He is a famous collector from that part of France who mostly made his acquisitions from the "secondary market" at the end of the 19th century, buying in the port cities of Bordeaux, Rochefort and La Rochelle, usually directly from ships returning from overseas.