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Excavating MacGregor: reconnecting a nineteenth century collection from Papua New Guinea

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Collecting for the nation: Sir William MacGregor and the Official collection

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> Understanding the museum collection as a process rather than a product allows us to point out the complex intertwined relations between objects and the people who created, used and collected them, as well as the institutions, places and time periods to which they relate (Jacobs 2021: 323)

Between 1888 and 1898 William MacGregor, Administrator and later Lieutenant Governor of British New Guinea, brought together an unusually large assemblage of objects from local indigenous groups intended to serve as a record of local cultural practices he thought were disappearing rapidly due to the effects of colonization, of which, ironically, he was a principal agent. This Official collection is unique among nineteenth century ethnographic collections because it was not made for his own pleasure or enrichment (although he did put aside some material for that purpose) but was primarily intended as a record for the indigenous population and one that would remain in the control of the colony. The results of the '*Excavating MacGregor*' project reported in this volume make the Official collection more accessible to descendant communities as well as researchers through a thoroughly researched Master List of the contents along with additional resources. These also provide historical background on the multicultural, colonial social settings in which the collection was made. Finally, analyses of the objects in the collection enrich our understanding of the cross-cultural engagements in which the objects were acquired.

❑ British New Guinea, Papua New Guinea, William MacGregor, museum, ethnographic collections, colonialism

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ARTEFACTS OF COLONIAL ENTANGLEMENTS

A photo (Figure 1) taken in British New Guinea by A. C. English (1864–1919), a plantation owner and long-term Government Agent at Rigo Station, southeast of the capital Port Moresby (Figure 2) captures an elegantly arranged display of objects on the walls of a tongue and groove framed Queenslander style wooden building. Stone clubs, at that time a very popular item among collectors in the United Kingdom, dominate the centre of the display in the photo, bordered on the right, left and underneath by shields from several different cultural groups. Moving clockwise from the left are examples from the Northeast Division (modern Oro Province), the Trobriand Islands, and the Central Division. The left-hand side of the door is dominated by a closely packed row of stone adze-axe blades, with hafted adze-axes carefully positioned above and below so that the handles overlap to form a crisscross pattern. Flanking the doorway are two impressively large ceremonial axes with stone blades probably from Woodlark Island. On the left, creating an arc above the adze-axes are two weapons made from the long snouts of sawfishes that are complemented on the right by two crossed wooden clubs, often called 'swordclubs' because of their shape (cf. BOX 7.1 in Torrence & Davies, Chapter 7 this volume). Further to the right side of the doorway among a group of smaller objects are several items popular with contemporary European collectors because of their assumed association with cannibalism: bamboo knives and what is often termed a 'head carrier'. Who collected these objects, when, where, and, most importantly, why?

The location of this impressive collection is probably Government House at Konedobu in Port Moresby (Figure 2), the capital of British New Guinea which began as a Protectorate in 1884 and formally became a colony in 1888 with the unusual circumstances that the administration was shared between London and the colony of Queensland. The tartan patterned cloth covering the doorway perhaps gives a hint that the exhibitor might have been a proud Scot, but the definitive clue to the owner and therefore the location of the photo are labels written on some of the stone objects and clearly visible when the image is enlarged. The handwriting is identical to the idiosyncratic script of Sir William MacGregor, Administrator and later Lieutenant Governor, of British New Guinea 1888–1898 (see Davies et al., Chapter 5 this volume) so this seemingly archetypal colonial possession probably belonged to him. Our conjecture is supported by a newspaper article which describes Sir William's collection.

> Twenty minutes pull across the bay took me to Government House, that lies on a prominent spur overlooking the harbor inlet and Fairfax Harbor … The house itself is not a large one, and about the oldest building in Port Moresby, but it contains a very valuable collection of native weapons and implements. Sir William has brought them together from all parts of the South Sea, and every piece Is [sic] carefully numbered and catalogued, thus forming a most unique museum of curios. Some of the stone clubs especially, ground out of what seems to be white quartz, and others looking like marble are very rare, and it took the owners in many cases years to cut one single specimen out of the solid stone, and polish it up into its present shape. The importation of steel has done away with this patient Stone Age industry, and replica [sic] of Sir William's collection are extremely difficult to get, if indeed they are obtainable at all (*The North Queensland Register*, May 12, 1897).

On 31 May 1898, A. C. Haddon, then lecturer at the University of Cambridge and leader of the first formal anthropological expedition to the Torres Strait and British New Guinea, described a visit to Government House during MacGregor's absence.

> Later in the afternoon we all went in the Government whale-boat to the Residency to see Macgregor's [sic] collection. He has some beautiful specimens and a magnificent collection of stone clubs, axes and adzes (Herle & Philp: 2021: 189).

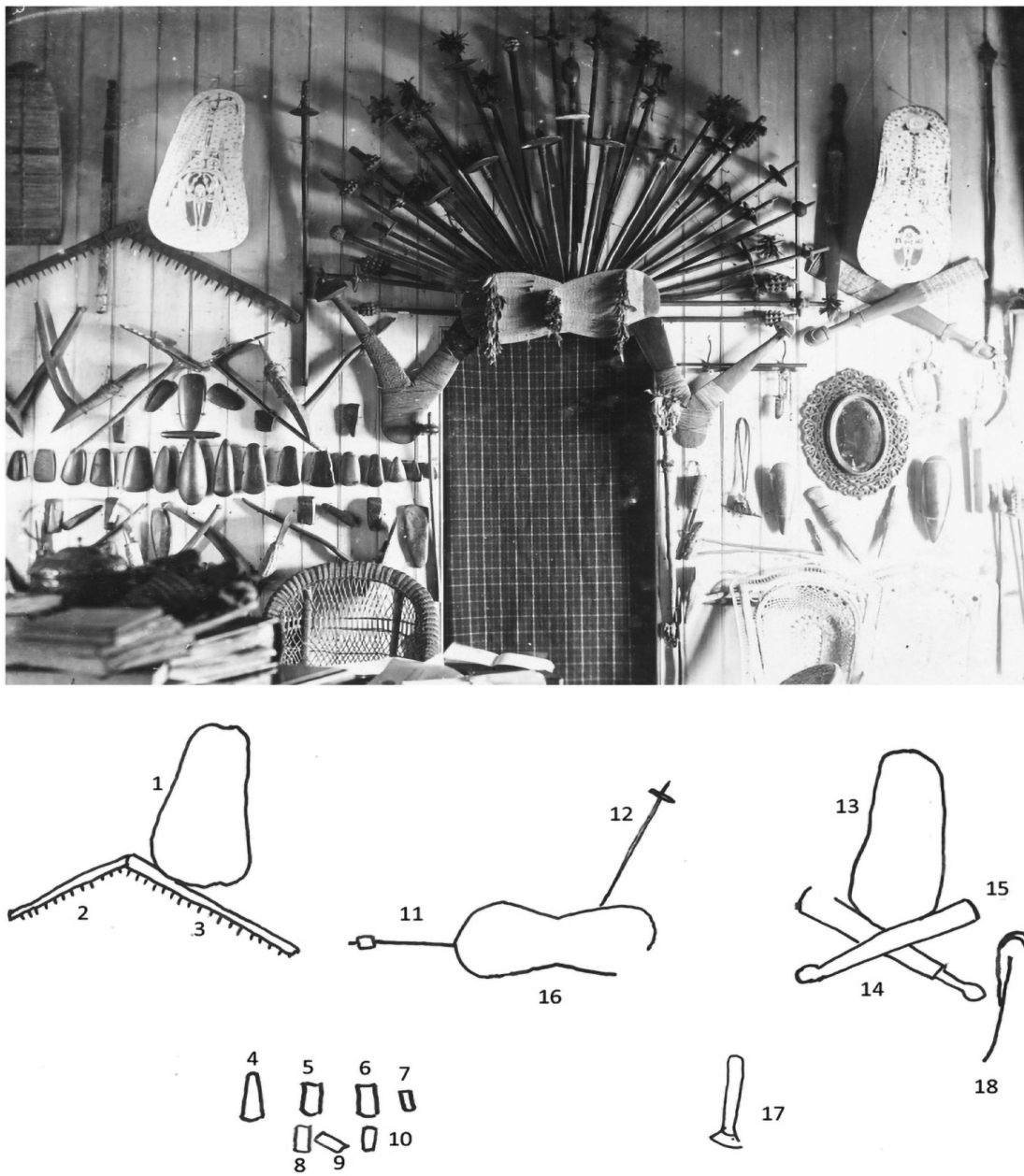

FIG. 1. UPPER. Objects acquired from communities across the colony of British New Guinea exhibited in an aesthetic arrangement on the wall of Government House in Port Moresby, echoing Sir Arthur Gordon's displays at Government House in Fiji and in elite houses in Great Britain during the late nineteenth century. Photograph by Albert Charles English (AMS332/251 Courtesy of Australian Museum Archives). LOWER. Location of artefacts that have been identified as extant in the University of Aberdeen Museums or have labels. See Table 1 for catalogue information.

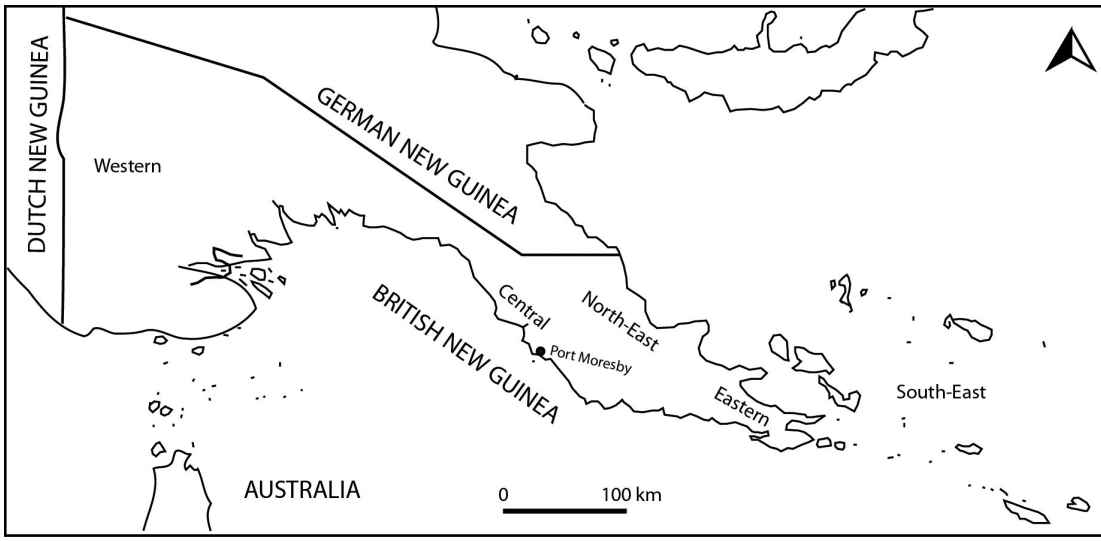

FIG. 2. Map showing the general location of British New Guinea, the capital Port Moresby and the administrative divisions in place in 1899. Drawing by Pamela Swadling.

TABLE. 1. List of numbered artefacts in the key to Figure 1 that can either be matched to objects in the University of Aberdeen Museums and/or that have been labelled in red paint or with paper labels.

Key	University of Aberdeen Museums Registration Number	Artefact	Label
1	ABDUA63449	Shield	Label on reverse: Woodlark I 19.7.90
2	ABDUA57939	Sawfish snout weapon	
3	ABDUA1663	Sawfish snout weapon	
4		Adze blade - stone	Red painted label: Fergusson I (date)
5	ABDUA530	Adze blade - stone	Red painted label: Louisiades
6	ABDUA4415	Adze blade - stone	Red painted label: Fiji Mountains
7	ABDUA4094	Adze blade - stone	Red painted label: New Zealand
8	ABDUA4121 or ABDUA59698	Adze blade - stone	Red painted label: Tonga
9		Adze blade - stone	Red painted label: Fiji
10	ABDUA4121 or ABDUA59698	Adze blade - stone	Red painted label: Tonga
11		Clubhead -- stone	Label present
12		Clubhead -- stone disc	Label present
13	ABDUA63450	Shield	
14	ABDUA990	Sword club	
15	ABDUA1015	Sword club	
16	ABDUA63453	Shield	
17	ABDUA57659	Head carrier	Paper label
18	ABDUA57656	Beheading knife	Red painted label: Bamu River Fly dist

MacGregor's elaborate arrangement of a collection of 'curios' was probably a deliberate imitation of the elaborate exhibitions of cultural artefacts in Government House (Nasova) in Levuka, Fiji (Thomas 1991:170–3) which copied displays common in upper class houses in England at that time (Torrence & Clarke 2011) and that he had observed during his previous post there. Many of the objects hung on the wall in the photo in Figure 1 are still extant in the University of Aberdeen Museums where MacGregor gifted the largest part of his personal collection (Table 1; see Swadling, Chapter 10 this volume; Torrence & Philp, Chapter 14 this volume).

The kinds of artefacts MacGregor had on display embody the tastes of a vigorous, active man whose aim was to create a united and peaceful colony stretching across a rugged and largely unexplored inland region, large waterways, and dispersed islands populated by small, largely egalitarian groups disrupted by the diseases, conflict and new opportunities resulting from recent contact with the western world. Is this collection purely a construct of MacGregor and the aims and methods of his associated British colonial administrators and the numerous foreign missionaries, miners, pearlers and plantation makers who were seeking converts, laborers and fortunes under the protection of the British government? To what extent do the objects also reflect the people who made them and the social 'entanglements' (Thomas 1991) that led to their acquisition? Most importantly, what information can be gleaned from this collection about the character of the cross-cultural interactions that led to the giving and the taking of the objects?

Focusing on the tools, weapons and objects of status and display depicted in English's photo, together with another c.14 000 similar items in the extant collections, the chapters in this volume, *Excavating MacGregor: reconnecting a colonial museum collection*, (Torrence 2022), address these questions. They explore the ways in which research on collections and the events that propelled objects from British New Guinea to several museums mainly in Australia, Papua New Guinea, and the United Kingdom can shed new light on the variety of cross-cultural engagements that characterize the evolving, shared culture typical of colonial settings (Gosden & Knowles 2001; Torrence & Clarke 2013; Edmundson 2021). The verb 'excavating' in the title of the book refers to the explicitly archaeological approach that we have adopted. Observations about the physical attributes of the material and the contexts in which they were obtained are brought into play to infer past human actions (see Torrence & Clarke 2016). As noted by Morphy and McKenzie (2021: 2), when doing research on museum collections, 'it needs to be recognized that the objects themselves are often a main source of evidence and that their materiality provides the most direct connection to their past.' Framed by historical and socio-cultural research, the papers in this volume generate insights into past cross-cultural interactions by studying the physical attributes and social biographies of the objects themselves and/or through exploring the composition and structure of assemblages.

A UNIQUE COLONIAL COLLECTION

The objects in Figure 1 represent a small sample of the total number of ethnographic objects that MacGregor acquired in British New Guinea. The complete assemblage has had a long and complex 'biography' (Foster 2012) that can be divided into the two streams shown in Figure 3 (also see Edmundson 2021; Torrence et al. 2020; Quinnell 2000). The primary focus of our research has been on the larger portion of MacGregor's collecting activities referred to as the 'Official' collection and comprised of an extraordinary agglomeration of material resulting from a multitude of social engagements between MacGregor and people from many areas of British New Guinea. Our study therefore focused on material in the Queensland Museum, Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery, Australian Museum, Museums Victoria and the British Museum. The second group, which was retained for MacGregor's own use, is termed the 'Personal' collection. Although it was largely obtained by him through the same social interactions as the Official collection, objects were also acquired as gifts

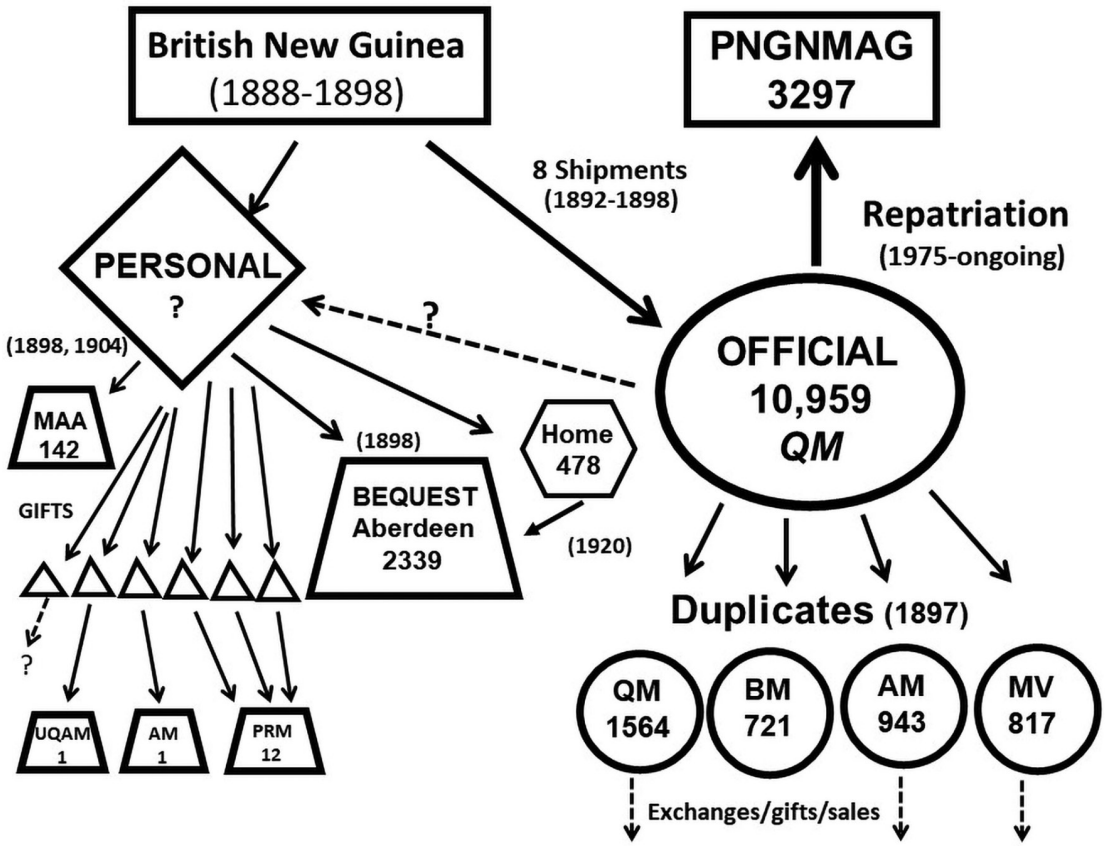

FIG. 3. The diagram depicts the major events in the long and complex biography of the Official collection including the major events in its dispersal. MacGregor apportioned the material into either the Official collection or his Personal collection, each of which has a history in which objects were transferred to various museums and individuals. Although museum registers record further exchanges, as indicated by the arrows with dashed lines, our project has not explored this portion of the collection history.

from colleagues and other acquaintances in the colony (Torrence & Philp, Chapter 14 this volume). Although limited by resources, we were able to make short visits to review the Personal collection at University Museums, University of Aberdeen, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge and the Pitt-Rivers Museum at Oxford University.

The choice of the Official collection from British New Guinea as the object of our research was deliberate because the incentive for putting it together is highly unusual in the history of ethnography.

As described in more detail by Quinnell (2000: 83), the Official collection is the consequence of MacGregor's attempt 'to secure collections of the arms, implements, and arts, etc., of the natives before it is too late' (MacGregor 1897a: 88). In his previous government posts in Fiji (1875–1888), he had observed rapid cultural change and was very conscious that indigenous practices and the material culture associated with them were being rapidly altered or replaced as part of the process of British colonisation. Not long after he took up his duties in British New Guinea, MacGregor noted that it was already difficult to obtain stone axes

FIG. 4. Undated portrait of Sir William MacGregor Courtesy of the State Library of Queensland.

(Joyce 1971:129). Heeding his own warning, he set out to collect all that was 'really representative of New Guinea' (Quinnell 2000: 83). MacGregor was certainly not unique in making a collection of 'native curios' in the British colonies (e.g. O'Hanlon & Welsch 2000; Thomas 1991), but at the time he was active, others collected items mostly as incidental extras to highly prized natural history specimens. Across the Pacific naturalists and adventurers were hoping to contribute to science by discovering new species for sale to large museums in Britain and Europe. In this light, it is significant that MacGregor also made collections of shells, rocks, and especially birds (Philp, Chapter 3 this volume).

Unlike other contemporary collectors, MacGregor's (Figure 4) primary goal in acquiring the objects in the Official collection was not for his personal pleasure, financial gain, or for the benefit of scholars or audiences in the northern hemisphere. In contrast, his aim was to bring together a 'type' collection of all kinds of material culture that would inform the descendants of the Papuan people about their history. Although he was happy for the collection to be curated at the Queensland Museum (QM) in Brisbane, he stressed that it was owned by British New Guinea.

> The colony was not in a position to erect and maintain an extensive and costly museum. But the Government of Queensland was equal to the occasion, and an arrangement was entered into .... When the new Queensland Museum is built, a wing of it is to contain the articles belonging to New Guinea. The Possession in this way already possesses an extensive and very valuable collection of things illustrating the present condition of the natives, its natural history, etc. This will be added to, and, I trust, may never be broken up and dispersed. It is the property of the Possession, and should never be alienated under any circumstances (MacGregor 1897a: 88–89).

As the years passed and the collection lay in the storerooms of QM out of public view, MacGregor's intention for an Official collection for the people of British New Guinea was nearly thwarted (Quinnell 2000). Eventually, a satisfactory outcome was negotiated and over a number of years the Director and staff of the Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery in Port Moresby have made a selection of the objects they regarded would best comprise the foundational collection for the newly built National Museum and Art Gallery (see Knowles & Quinnell BOX 1.2). When the carefully selected objects from the Official collection finally came home (1980–1992), many were displayed in a special hall in the new building (Torrence et al. 2020: Fig. 1; Knowles & Curtis, Chapter 15 this volume). The unique history of the Official collection, made specifically for and continually owned by the descendants of the owners of the objects, endows it with special status in the history of nineteenth century colonialism.

SCIENCE MEETS ETHNOGRAPHY

As the most senior representative of the British Government, MacGregor's primary objectives in British New Guinea were to pacify the many small, kin-based societies in the colony and to establish some form of consistent local leadership so that a unified country could be placed firmly on the path to what he considered as stability and economic success. Having recognized that an essential element of establishing the control needed for unification was detailed knowledge about the cultural diversity and natural resources of the colony, he set out vigorously on his mission (see Quinnell BOX 1.1). MacGregor's personal tastes, friendships and colonial purpose all influenced the shape of the collection. His extraordinary toughness and persistence ensured that he explored every corner of British New Guinea (Figure 5). He

FIG. 5. MacGregor spent many months exploring and traversing the rugged forested country of the Owen Stanley ranges captured here in a photograph taken by A. C. English possibly on one of those journeys (HP90.28.2315). Photo courtesy of the Chau Chak Wing Museum, University of Sydney.

was the first westerner to climb the summit of Mt. Victoria (4038 m.) (Joyce 1971: 138) and to ascend the headwaters of the Fly River (MacGregor 1890a; 1890b). He was assiduous in taking astronomical readings and his government produced detailed maps in each of the *Annual Reports on British New Guinea* (e.g. see Figures 3, 4 in Philp, Chapter 3 this volume). For his discoveries, outstanding maps and descriptions of the new colony, MacGregor was awarded the Founders Medal from the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) in London in 1896. A comment by Admiral W. J. L. Wharton[1] after MacGregor's address to the RGS on February 25, 1895 summarises MacGregor's impressive achievements.

> This enormous coast-line 3000 to 4000 miles long, has been traversed from one end to the other; he has gone round every bay, ascended half the mountains, and spent a very great part of his time in exploration, and in making himself acquainted with the district, and he has added very largely indeed to our knowledge of the topography and geography of the island. (MacGregor 1897a: 95)

Professor A. C. Haddon from Cambridge University also commented at the time that

> Those who have not read Sir William MacGregor's reports will be surprised at the immense amount of geographical and ethnographical information which they contain; not only this, his despatches are written in a most interesting manner, and some of his pictures of savage life are extremely vivid and living. (MacGregor 1897a: 97)

MacGregor's scientific training in Medicine at Anderson's Medical College (Glasgow) and the Universities of Aberdeen and Edinburgh (Joyce 1974; 1971: 7–8) clearly had a large influence on his desire to contribute to scientific knowledge. He made observations and collected samples of the geological and botanical resources of the region, some of which are still being exploited in modern studies (e.g. Lindley & White 2021), and he sent biological specimens to various museums for identification. MacGregor's desire to contribute to modern science was a major driving factor that had a significant impact on his approach to ethnography and specifically to the Official collection, as illustrated, for example, by the extensive series of 'types' of string that he made (e.g. Figure 5 in Torrence & Davies, Chapter 7 this volume).

Ethnography was not part of MacGregor's training, but he gained invaluable experience in working in a cross-cultural environment through his posts as Chief Medical Officer (1875–1877) and Receiver-General (Treasurer) in Fiji (1877–1888) where he was sympathetic to the needs of the local population. Among his innovations was the training of Fijians to be medical assistants and the establishment of the Central Medical School at Suva (Joyce 1971: 31). His introduction to the prevailing European passion for collecting native curios came both from his close colleague the Governor Sir Arthur Gordon and other visitors to the colony. During his administration the Government House, called 'Nasova', was decorated with elaborate arrangements of artefacts (especially clubs) hung on walls covered with barkcloths bearing intricate designs (Herle 2018; Thomas 1991: 167–175). Also important were visiting collectors such as James Edge-Partington, who was compiling an encyclopedic guide to ethnographic collections (Neich 2009; Edge-Partington & Heape 1898).

MacGregor became especially close friends with Baron Anatole von Hügel, a very keen collector of ethnographic objects, who had been offered accommodation in Government House by Gordon. Later von Hügel became curator at the University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. Part of the basis for their friendship may have been that von Hügel took what Thomas (1991: 168) has called a 'self-consciously scientific' approach to ethnographic collecting, a methodology that MacGregor would have understood and appreciated and one he also adopted when putting together the Official collection in British New Guinea. Thomas' (1991: 168) characterisation of von Hügel as attempting 'to obtain a wide range of material: from mundane items to ornaments and weapons,

in standard forms as well as unusual or bizarre variants' is also an appropriate description of the Official collection that MacGregor later assembled in British New Guinea.

MacGregor accompanied von Hügel on some of his trips and made his own collection of Fijian objects which he carefully labelled, often with red paint (Davies et al., Chapter 5 this volume). Some of these were later donated to the University of Aberdeen (Anon. 1912). In his diary on 1 September 1877, von Hügel recorded one of their joint collecting trips.

> After lunch walked into town where I met MacGregor with whom I had a pleasant walk to Waitoru, where we grubbed about in every hut for bowls, etc., and got a few nice things. (Roth & Hooper 1990:137)

That his experiences in collecting objects in Fiji were highly valued by MacGregor is shown by the inclusion of several stone adze blades he took with him to Port Moresby, one of which is included in the exhibition depicted in Figure 1 (number 9).

While in Fiji, MacGregor was also exposed to the idea that ethnographic collections could be used to promote the skills and knowledge of the indigenous peoples of a colony. Although he did not actually attend the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London, he received a medal commemorating his official attendance (Curtis et al. 2016), suggesting that he was involved in putting together objects for display. Consequently, when he was finally given a senior post in British New Guinea in 1888, he had sufficient knowledge and experience in ethnographic collecting as a 'scientific' endeavour to encourage him to make his own museum collection. MacGregor's own, unique innovation was not the concept of a collection as a personal asset or one to be held by a foreign museum, but as a scientific record of the cultures in British New Guinea at that time. Most importantly, he envisaged a collection specifically intended for the descendants of the people whose material items comprised it.

CROSS-CULTURAL ENGAGEMENTS

The Official collection is the consequence of multiple cross-cultural engagements during the eleven years when MacGregor was traversing the new colony while attempting to achieve his vision for a single, unified government (Figure 6). Unlike his previous post in Fiji, there were very few 'chiefs,' or headmen in British New Guinea who could command authority over the many small unrelated cultural groups. In most of his encounters, MacGregor had to deal face to face with small, acephalous, roughly egalitarian communities, not all of whom wanted to become enmeshed in a social relationship with him (see Swadling et al., Chapter 10 this volume). In this situation the most effective way to enlarge channels of communication and forge the necessary social ties that might encourage further social interaction was through the exchange of goods. As illustrated by several case studies in this volume (Davies, Chapter 4; Torrence & Davies, Chapter 7; Bonshek, Chapter 11) many groups were desirous of the 'trade' that MacGregor and his agents had to offer (e.g. metal objects; cloth shirts; glass beads, tobacco, etc.) and willingly engaged in commerce (Quinnell 2000:86–87). The largest proportion of objects in the Official collection were probably acquired through face-

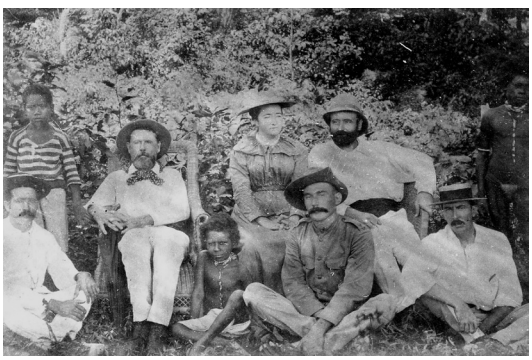

FIG. 6. On a 'visit of inspection,' Sir William MacGregor (seated in a chair, third from the left) called in to see his close friend Rev. Samuel B. Fellows (in the chair on the far right) and his wife Sarah on the island of Kiriwina. Captain Archibald Butterworth, Commandant of Police, is seated in front of Mrs. Fellows. The identity of the other people is unknown. Photo from the Fellows collection, Courtesy of the National Gallery of Australia.

to-face barter. A small number of additional goods came from gifts left in visible places like bush tracks or as special presentations to MacGregor (e.g. Torrence, Chapter 6 this volume, Haddow, BOX 14.1 in Chapter 14 this volume).

A key factor in MacGregor's social relations with local communities was the presence of members of his party who were carrying guns. MacGregor often fronted up to communities unarmed as proof that he was seeking peaceful interchange, but in situations where violence was potentially imminent, he was accompanied by an armed guard. During his first two years, MacGregor's armed support came from his personal staff, magisterial staff, the captain and crew of his boats the *Hygeia* and the SS *Merrie England*, temporary agents, usually South Sea Islanders, some volunteers, who were often miners or visitors such as Baden Powell (see Davies, Chapter 4 this volume). The ordinance establishing the Armed Native Constabulary was passed in May 1890 (Figure 7). Through his connections with the Fijian administration, two Fijian non-commissioned officers were seconded. He then employed 12 Solomon Islander labourers from Fijian sugar cane plantations as constables. Over time, MacGregor recruited additional local men primarily from the coastal area of the Western Division which had had long experience with Europeans through the pearling industry (Tok Pisin English Bilingual Dictionary 2015).

FIG. 7. Captain Archibald Butterworth and members of the Armed Native Constabulary in full uniform c.1904. Photo by A. C. English, Courtesy of the University of Queensland Anthropology Museum.

Although the bulk of the Official collection is made up of material gained through peaceful exchange and gifting, a significant component is derived from material confiscated or stolen following violent confrontations by MacGregor or his agents in retribution for murder and/or theft of goods (Davies, Chapter 4 this volume; Torrence et al., Chapter 8 this volume; Torrence & Davies, Chapter 9 this volume). The most well publicised attack on indigenous people was directed toward a group of Marind-Anim known locally as the 'Tugeri', whose head-hunting raids into the coastal communities of the Western Division from their villages in Dutch New Guinea were forcing people to abandon their villages and move elsewhere, a problem that threatened confidence in the peace-keeping mission central to MacGregor's administration (MacGregor 1897b; 1897c; Torrence et al., Chapter 8 this volume). MacGregor's party of 20 encountered a Marind-Anim party of c.1000 men on 13 May 1896. After shots were fired killing the leader and several others, the Tugeri fled, leaving many of their belongings behind. MacGregor claimed the abandoned material as restitution, giving the canoes to both Torres Strait Islander assistants and local Papuan communities (MacGregor 1897b; 1897c). This single event resulted in the addition of around 1600 items to the Official collection. The Tugeri raid received international press attention, but it was not an isolated occasion (Torrence & Davies, Chapter 9 this volume).

In his comments following MacGregor's Royal Geographical Society lecture, Haddon had high praise for MacGregor's handling of conflicts with the local population:

> ...through his reports one sees that Sir William shows sympathy with and a knowledge of the natives, a firm hand and absolute justice (MacGregor 1897a: 97).

As he had been to British New Guinea previously and witnessed negotiations over the Government handling of inter-village conflicts, Haddon's remarks were not made lightly. For example, he notes that in 1890 Dr. Lamberto Loria, an Italian explorer, naturalist and ethnographer, had stolen a large group of cultural objects from a village in Holnicote Bay (modern Oro Province) after scaring away the inhabitants by gunfire (Quinnell 2000: 86). MacGregor impounded Loria's collection and later returned it to the village (MacGregor 1892: 15–16). We might therefore assume that Haddon's comment was about the ethical standards under which MacGregor was operating. On the other hand, it must be remembered that the potential use of force was always in the background of MacGregor's visits and negotiations with villagers since his party was armed and often accompanied by the Armed Native Constabulary.

A key issue for many Western museums today is the identification and return of objects that were taken by force or without permission, with the case of the Nigerian Benin bronzes having the most notoriety with respect to ethnographic museums (e.g. Phillips 2021; Hicks 2020). As the Official collection was made during a period when colonial authority was attempting to assert itself, we have devoted research to the identification of objects acquired under an unequal balance of power. In most cases the local population had as much, if not more, power and agency than MacGregor and his small party. For some government punitive events described in the official reports, it has not yet been possible to identify which objects were looted. Research on an incident in 1898 at Goromani (Torrence & Davies, Chapter 9 this volume) shows that careful analyses, particularly in conjunction with the new label database (Davies et al., Chapter 5 this volume; Appendix 5 this volume), can enrich knowledge about items acquired through violent interactions. The question of objects taken without permission is an important topic for investigation by descendent communities. Additional comparative research on the kinds of assemblages obtained from peaceful versus violent engagements is also important because it would help uncover subtle relationships between the nature of the interactions and the goods added to the Official and other collections in colonial contexts.

At the same time, it is important not to over emphasise the role of violence in the making of the Official collection because this diminishes the

agency of the local populations who were often in control of the situation or at the least were equal partners in exchange (cf. Morphy & McKenzie 2021). In considering the future of the Official collection, Edmundson concurs with our findings concerning the many ways that Papuans initiated and participated in the cross-cultural interactions that contributed to its formation (see also Torrence, Chapter 6 this volume; Philp, Chapter 12 this volume; Kingdon 2019; Torrence & Clarke 2016).

> There is no question that acts of dispossession, theft and violence occurred in the colonial past and these acts need to be addressed as part of ongoing reconciliation and restorative justice processes. But as well as bearing witness to violence and conflict, colonial collections may also reference agency, adaptation, opportunism, resilience, negotiation and long-term strategic responses to culture change (Edmundson 2021: 43).

In contrast to a view of the formation of the Official collection as largely about oppression by a dominant colonising force, we see the complex interactions between MacGregor and his party and local Papuan communities as a critical part in the formation of a new colonial culture in British New Guinea and, as described in other studies, also in other parts of the British empire (e.g. Thomas 1991; 1994; Gosden & Knowles 2001; Torrence & Clarke 2013; Kingdon 2019).

REINSTATING THE 'OFFICIAL' COLLECTION

Surprisingly, for most of its history, the Official collection has largely lain dormant and rarely accessed. Although it was exhibited in the Queensland Museum soon after it arrived in Brisbane, since the 1970's progressively fewer objects have been in the public eye in exhibitions (Knowles & Curtis, Chapter 15 this volume) and even less through published research. Even in Papua New Guinea, where the Official collection has been recognized since Independence as a priceless resource for the new nation (Chan 2018a), the use of the Official collection has been remarkably limited, despite the enormous breadth of its contents and the rarity and beauty of many of the objects. One of the key aims of our study has been to conduct the kinds of research that would make the Official collection more accessible.

Why has the Official collection been overlooked for so long? Rather than providing information about past social contexts or serving as an active agent in challenging stereotypes about the cultures of modern Papua New Guinea, this extensive assemblage of objects has largely been co-opted by western culture for its own uses. The conversion from a collection of ethnographic objects that once belonged to people in British New Guinea into the 'MacGregor' collection, a name that only recognises the agency of the white, male, European collector, is first noticeable in special labels printed by the British Museum. The words 'MacGregor Coll. 1897' (Torrence et al. 2020: Fig. 4) are used to identify the duplicates allocated to that museum (Torrence & Davies, Chapter 13 this volume). Twenty years later the Official collection was further converted into a western phenomenon through curatorial practices at QM. The transformation from 'Official' to 'MacGregor' was materialized through the creation of a new, but ultimately flawed, written record, the *Register of the 'Macgregor' Collection of New Guinea Ethnology* (Queensland Museum 1915–2001), which further erased the original intention of the collection as a record of the past for the descendants of those who had made and used the items. For example, in the *MacGregor Register* the original registration numbers were replaced by a new series prefaced by the letters 'Mac' (Davies, Chapter 2 this volume).

Quinnell's (2000) summary of the political history of the Official collection re-introduced the assemblage to a twenty-first century audience, but the uniqueness of this assemblage brought together for the people of what became an independent nation has continued to be overlooked. Although the Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery has reclaimed the collection and selected items that have since been repatriated

to their source country (Knowles & Quinnell BOX 1.2; Quinnell 2000), the material continues to be referred to in the home country and in Australia, as the 'MacGregor' collection (e.g. Moutu 2018), emphasizing its creation as a colonial project. A key goal of our project has been to lessen the focus on MacGregor as the creator of the Official collection by reconceptualizing the assemblage as an invaluable record of the lifeways, beliefs, and creativity of those who had made, used, and gifted the objects or had their property seized or stolen by British government representatives. By re-introducing the Official collection to a twenty-first century audience, we reinstate MacGregor's intended emphasis on the original owners so that their contributions can be more widely appreciated, and their descendants can choose to inject renewed life into this extraordinary assemblage (Chan 2018a).

When we began the *Excavating MacGregor* project to reconnect the Official collection with Papua New Guineans and scholars, its actual size and composition was poorly documented. Due to the large quantity of material that had arrived at QM in a relatively short time (10 959 objects in eight lots between 1892 and 1898), coupled with subsequent problems with registration and curation, a comprehensive inventory of the material had never been fully completed. Through a meticulous rereading of the original *Ethnology Register (New Guinea)* (Queensland Museum c.1889–1910) in conjunction with additional historical documents, a 'Master List' of the Official collection has been reconstructed (Davies, Chapter 2 this volume; Appendices 2, 3 this volume). Although this list does not replace MacGregor's original plan for a catalogue, 'the publication of which was close to MacGregor's heart' (Quinnell 2000: 93), the extensive tables in the Appendices make the collection contents widely accessible. A daily itinerary of MacGregor's movements through British New Guinea linked to historical source documents is another invaluable resource resulting from Quinnell's long term research (BOX 1.1; Appendix 1 this volume).

Further forensic analyses of labels still adhering to or written on objects has added substantially to the data relating to the collection localities recorded in the *Ethnology Register (New Guinea)*. In addition, an analysis of the handwriting on the labels has identified several individuals involved in collecting and documenting the objects in the field. Our study found that despite the requirements of his many other duties, MacGregor took an active, hands-on interest in the Official collection and curation of the objects (Davies et al., Chapter 5 this volume and see Appendix 5 this volume for a database listing of all identified extant field labels).

Alongside the forensic studies, background historical research has helped place MacGregor, together with his aims and methods, into the broader multi-cultural setting in which the Official collection originated. For example, Philp (Chapter 3 this volume) focuses in on five of MacGregor's 'visits of inspection' to highlight the multiple purposes of his travels (exploration, pacification, and collection of natural history specimens and cultural objects) and the complex settings in which he and his multi-cultural party of government officials, collectors and police interacted with communities across the new colony. Through following MacGregor's travels in the South-East and Central Divisions (Figure 2) during his first six months in the possession, Davies (Chapter 4) recreates the inter-cultural background at that time and highlights the multiplicity of different social interactions (e.g. gifting, barter, plunder) in which artefacts were obtained for the Official collection.

Following the scene-setting and discussion of methods, the subsequent Chapters 6–9 (this volume) use a range of analytical approaches to investigate the variety of cross-cultural interactions responsible for the formation of the Official collection. The kinds of exchange range from silent trade in which gifts were passed between local people and MacGregor in the absence of face-to-face meetings to straightforward exchange with no discussion through to active bartering. The interactions also include the acquisition of personal goods left behind after a punitive raid or theft from abandoned houses. These studies focus on the composition and structure of the assemblages

acquired by MacGregor and the physical properties of the objects to infer the perspectives of the largely silent indigenous actors who gifted, exchanged the items or had them confiscated as loot.

Subsequent chapters further examine the character of the social relations created in the making of the Official collection and the impact of rapid social change on these through studies of specific artefact types. Chapters 10–12 (this volume) bring together new research on Conus armshells, pottery, and arrows respectively. The history of exhibition of the Official collection (Knowles & Curtis, Chapter 15 this volume) is discussed in the final section which also documents the distribution of duplicates in 1897 (Torrence & Davies, Chapter 13 this volume) and the history of MacGregor's Personal collection (Torrence & Philp, Chapter 14 this volume).

A SHARED AND INVIGORATED ROLE

In the 1970's as the new nation of Papua New Guinea gained independence, the Official collection began a new role in creating entanglements between source communities and outsiders: in this case between Papua New Guinea and its close neighbour, the Australian state of Queensland. As summarized in Knowles and Quinnell (BOX 1.2; Quinnell 2000), the return of a sizeable portion of the Official collection to the newly founded Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery (PNGNMAG) was a world first in terms of the repatriation of cultural objects, since most of the returned material had originally been obtained through peaceful exchange and barter. More importantly, however, the repatriation process, which is still ongoing, has built close ties between the Queensland Museum (QM) and the PNGNMAG because the two institutions have agreed to share the responsibility for these objects acquired as part of their joint history.

What of the future of the Official collection at the two museums? Transfers from QM to the PNGNMAG have played a significant role in identity building for the independent nation of Papua New Guinea as well as providing historic depth to the museum's collections (see Knowles & Curtis, Chapter 15 this volume). Sebastian Haraha, former Assistant Curator, Anthropology at PNGNMAG, has eloquently explored changes in how communities from the Papua Gulf have reconceived the museum. A small part of the contemporary Gulf collection at the PNGNMAG includes Official collection objects transferred from QM. Haraha (2007:139) describes these as 'simultaneously both the oldest part and the newest part of our collection'. Through a series of examples drawn from over a forty-year period, he relates how the PNGNMAG has been transformed into a Haus Tumbuna (traditional house of spirits) in the minds of people from the Papuan Gulf. He describes how museum staff have placed objects within the walls of the museum to ensure their safety and security, but have also engaged with the collections and helped the institution to understand these artefacts in a cultural way which is different from the typological or art history approach used by museums elsewhere. He notes that Soroi Eoe's long tenure as Director from 1987 to 2005 was important in embedding this perspective as he was from the Gulf region. Haraha also describes how the Director becomes the embodiment of the museum through his custodial duties that straddle both museum and cultural realms and blur the boundaries between them.

At the same time as Papuan Gulf communities re-interpret the museum's role in daily and cultural life, the material from the Gulf region is contextually re-interpreted by the museum. Items from the shared Official collection are part of the 'founding collection' that is historically valuable and important in the identity making role that the museum holds. In addition, some of the Official collection has become part of a regional collection through its integration into the wider Gulf collection at the PNGNMAG. Haraha's example demonstrates how collections are continually transforming and as such can open new contexts for engagement, review and reinterpretation that enable different opportunities for knowledge sharing with descendent communities.

The shared Official collection embodies the ongoing ties that bind people together both at a local and

international level. Through the later twentieth century joint curation of the Gulf items in the Official collection and its placement in 'two homes' also connect two regions – the Papuan Gulf and Queensland – that have been culturally connected for millennia.

More recently, in interviews published in the book *Kambek* (Chan 2018a), Papua New Guinea staff and stakeholders in Port Moresby and in Queensland reflected on the impact of the return of the Official collection forty years on. Contributors highlighted the symbolic significance of the return of the collection and of access to the objects in Papua New Guinea for educating future generations about the past, but descendant communities in Queensland also stressed the importance of items remaining in Queensland where many Papua New Guinea nationals and descendent families now reside. Kiri Chan summarises the significance of the Official collection for recalling the past but also considers its role in the future.

> What MacGregor did – collecting the tangible as he traversed the provinces and ensuring its safe return – enabled us as Papua New Guineans to know and reflect on our past. It is fascinating to note the similarities and the changes, the breadth of knowledge we have lost, but also to consider what we can still maintain and produce. It also makes it possible for us to trace the knowledge and science, the unique ability to live within the means offered by one's own environment and to take advantage of it … (Chan 2018b: 35).

Opportunities for local communities to interact with either PNGNMAG or QM are very much appreciated by both institutions and can add significantly to knowledge and understanding of the Official collection. What is also important is that the act of sharing between the two museums, located in different countries, greatly enhances the the value of the collection through strengthening connections and relationships.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

Results from the *Excavating MacGregor* project show that the Official collection from British New Guinea compiled by Sir William MacGregor is a unique resource for tracing inter-cultural social relations in a past colonial setting, but one that also supports continuing cross-cultural relationships in the modern world. The material was deliberately brought together for the future use of the indigenous people dealing with the challenges of colonialization at the time the material was acquired and their descendants. Since our work makes the collection more widely accessible, we hope additional researchers, community members and knowledge holders will be stimulated to further explore the large array of objects as well as to debate our findings and add their unique perspectives to our discussions about intercultural negotiations and interactions.

Excavating MacGregor has set out to explore the ways that the Official collection embodies both the donors' and the collectors' perspectives about the social entanglements created through the process of exchange, with these further highlighted by the materials that were not offered but taken following violent confrontation. The size, depth, and richness of the collection as well as the existence of very rare and unusual objects, many that are exquisite representations of the skill and artistry of the makers, are well documented in this volume. However, there is still potential for much further research. We hope our findings will help reinvigorate and enliven this precious resource now largely shared by the Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery and the Queensland Museum, but with significant additional components in the Australian Museum, British Museum and Museums Victoria (see Figure 3) and, to a lesser extent, has helped introduce MacGregor's Personal collection held at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge and the University of Aberdeen Museums to a broader audience. Through unravelling the complex history of registration at QM to prepare a meticulously researched Master

List (Appendix 2 this volume) and by exploring the cross-cultural relationships embodied in the collection, our research makes this invaluable resource more accessible to descendants, specialists, and the public at large. It also showcases the immense potential of object-based, archaeological research on historic ethnographic assemblages for viewing the past from innovative and challenging perspectives.

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❑ ENDNOTES

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BOX 1.1

SIR WILLIAM MACGREGOR'S ITINERARY IN BRITISH NEW GUINEA 1888-1898

Michael QUINNELL

Sir William MacGregor spent nine years between 1888 and 1898 traversing the length and breadth of British New Guinea. He mapped coasts and boundaries to the north and west, rowing up great rivers like the Fly in whaleboats, navigating the sago swamps of the Papuan Gulf in a steam launch, and walking across the mountainous Owen Stanley Range. He also travelled to remote island groups in the Coral Sea in the government vessel the SS *Merrie England* (see Figure 19 in Davies, Chapter 5 this volume). All these activities took place during his administrative 'visits of inspection' whose prime aims were the dissemination of government influence and, ultimately, the extension of control through exploration. A secondary purpose was the creation of official ethnological and natural history collections 'really representative of New Guinea' (MacGregor 1889). Because these duties were undertaken together, ethnographic collecting became integrated into the process of extending political control (Quinnell 2000: 84-7).

MacGregor's visits of inspection thus became the primary vehicle for collection events, initially at points of first contact, but also during subsequent visits to the same localities. The multiplicity of localities and visits over the decade of his administration prompted the need for an itinerary to track his whereabouts at any given time. This has become an aid for better monitoring and understanding the nature of the relationship between MacGregor and the Papuan communities he encountered.

MacGregor's itinerary was compiled over a number of years following the formal completion of the repatriation of a large part of the Official collection to the Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery in October 1993. Initially, the itinerary was developed for each separate year of the Annual Reports on British New Guinea, the primary source utilised, with additional data added from Queensland State Archives, diaries and publications. These separate notes were then complied into one MS Word document in mid-2016 at the commencement of the *Excavating MacGregor* project. The document was subsequently converted to an MS Excel spreadsheet in 2019. The final version is available electronically as Appendix 1 (this volume).

The itinerary is simply constructed, but it contains a wealth of data presented in an accessible format. It enables a researcher to track relationships between specific localities, dates, references to the official reports and dispatches, and collecting events over time and space quickly and easily. The Excel database consists of searchable columns for Date, Place/Locality, Comments/Events and Source. Dated labels or register localities are associated with documented collecting events. Indeed, events noted may indicate why no collecting took place on a particular date. The database has been an invaluable resource for the *Excavating MacGregor* project, but it also has great potential for further research focused on British New Guinea history.

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BOX 1.2

REFLECTIONS ON REPATRIATION: A GIFT TO QUEENSLAND MUSEUM

Chantal KNOWLES and Michael QUINNELL

The return of cultural heritage to 'Country' or community of origin is a significant act. Through repatriation the museum, which is maintained on the premise of care or custodianship of collections in perpetuity, seemingly acts in a way that undermines its core principles, but the return of artefacts is driven by other important considerations. These include the rights of Indigenous peoples, restorative justice, reparation, and politics. The transfer of a portion of what is now known as the 'Official collection' from the Queensland Museum (QM) to the Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery (PNGNMAG) between 1979 and 1992 was a milestone in museum practice and international returns. As more than forty years have passed since the first items were returned from QM to PNGNMAG, thirty years since the most recent transfer in 1992, and twenty years since Michael Quinnell (2000) described the history of the Official collection and the process of the return, it is useful to reflect on the undertaking of this significant act.

The return of objects which Sir William MacGregor assembled is unusual because most of the material had been acquired through peaceful exchange with local communities rather than through theft (see Chapters 3, 4, 6, 11, 12 this volume). Secondly, the collection was made especially as a record of culture for the descendants of the people whose items were assembled, rather than as an asset for a foreign museum. The third and most important point about the repatriation is that it was conceived as a way of cementing social relationships between the Queensland Government and the newly independent nation of Papua New Guinea. The act of returning cultural items to the national museum of the source communities was a deliberate positive step into the future rather than a recognition of a difficult past. In this case the transfer of cultural material, which is still ongoing, should be envisaged as a process in which both the donor and receiver benefit.

TIME TO RETURN

The transfer of a significant proportion of the Official collection to the newly opened PNGNMAG is well documented by Michael Quinnell (2000). Quinnell, Curator of Anthropology at Queensland Museum (1968-2009) was constantly active in the documentation, assessment, relocation and interpretation of the Official collection during his time at QM and he supported PNGNMAG staff as they selected items from the collection for transfer to Port Moresby. Here we cast the net wider than Quinnell's (2000) account to examine additional circumstances that led to the return, the intent of those involved, and the legacy of the repatriation. Despite the ground-breaking and successful transfer of the Official collection, forty years on there have been no further large-scale returns to PNG despite seemingly strong cases. For example, the Papuan Official Collection, made by the longest serving Lieutenant Governor (1908-1940) of the colony, Sir Hubert Murray, and currently held by the National Museum of Australia, remains in Canberra (Schaffarczyk 2006).

During the second half of the twentieth century, the Pacific was transformed politically, setting the stage for enormous change. In 1970 Tonga and Fiji became the first British colonies to secure independence and by 1975 Australian administered Papua New Guinea had followed suit. As an Independence gift to Papua New Guinea, Australia financed the development of the first purpose-built National Museum and Art Gallery which opened in 1977 (Moutu 2011: 6). In the years leading up to independence,

Papua New Guinea nationals were appointed to the museum's Board of Trustees and there was a gradual replacement of expatriate staff (Moutu 2011: 5).

In the 1970s debates around museum custodianship and ownership were shifting. At the 1970 Conference of Australasian Museum Directors a request was made for items in Australian museums to be repatriated to Papua New Guinea. The attendees passed a resolution 'that a fully representative selection of the MacGregor Collection be returned to the Papua New Guinea Museum' (Craig 1996: 203). Queensland Museum followed the recommendation with a request to the Queensland Government to seek legal opinion and the Solicitor-General concluded that Papua New Guinea would have a legitimate claim.

Also in the 1970s, academic and professional groups were established to further discussion and foster strong relationships between museums across the Pacific region. The founding of the Pacific Arts Association (PAA) in 1974 was significant for its engagement with Pacific Islanders. Driven by the activities of Māori academic Hirini Moko Mead, it drew global museum curators, anthropologists and Pacific art specialists to the southern hemisphere and provided opportunities for Pacific voices that countered the established voices in these fields to be heard. From Papua New Guinea, Michael Somare (President of the Board of Trustees of the PNGNMAG), Geoffrey Mosuwadoga (Director, PNGNMAG; President of PAA from 1978) and Soroi Eoe (Associate Curator, Anthropology and later Director PNGNMAG, President of PAA from 1993) emerged as leaders through questioning the status quo and generating discussions on repatriation.

At the 1974 Arts of Oceania symposium, Mosuwadoga delivered a speech on behalf of Somare and provided a PNG perspective on museums and the rights of communities to house their own heritage.

> We now have a National Museum and Art Gallery. These house our heritage. Some of our most valuable pieces of artwork are outside our country. I would ask you all to cooperate with us in returning our ancestral spirits and souls to their homes in Papua New Guinea. We view our masks and our art as living spirits with fixed abodes. (Somare 1979: xv)

In the same year as Somare's speech, the Queensland Premier, Joh Bjelke-Petersen's announcement that the MacGregor collection would be returned (Quinnell 2000: 96) was reported in the *Papua New Guinea Post-Courier* newspaper (*Papua New Guinea Post-Courier*, 18 September 1974, p. 3.). The following week the Post Courier reported the return in more detail under the headline 'PNG artifacts will return to us as gifts' (*Papua New Guinea Post-Courier* 4 October 4 1974, p. 15.). Outlining the uniqueness of the collection, the article advised that 'an open selection' would be returned as a 'good will gesture'.

RETURN, RECIPROCITY AND RELATIONSHIPS

Quinnell (2000: 81) notes that the Official collection has always been political in the circumstances of its creation, transfer to Queensland and its return. Politics provided the context for the request for return as did relationships at both macro (between the two regions of Queensland and Papua New Guinea) and micro (between museum staff) levels. Professional relationships between curators across Pacific museums were built and strengthened through discussions at symposia and training workshops, with Papua New Guinea often leading, initiating and hosting events (see Eoe & Swadling 1991 for an example of workshop outcomes). Within Australia, the Australian Museum (AM) in Sydney emerged as a leader in the pro-active repatriation of cultural material to the museum in their country of origin. Their approach to deaccessioning set important precedents. As each nation emerged and its museum was reimagined through a Pacific lens, significant items from the AM collections were gifted to Pacific museums (Specht 1991: 258). These actions acknowledged the imbalances created when cultural heritage was taken overseas, added historic depth to their collections, and established the basis for ongoing connections and potential collaborations. These transfers were never predicated on a deficit model of 'loss' to the AM, but instead were considered as a net gain in relationships. The AM's gift of 17 items to the PNGNMAG at its opening in 1977 prompted QM to follow soon after with the presentation of a rare early Gogodala drum (E4525) unique within its collection and not part of the Official collection.

These early gifts were not based on questionable acquisition histories, but instead were chosen for their value to the receiving institution's collections and communities. As gifts, they moved between institutions without conditions or controls, in stark contrast to the more typical discussions around repatriation, restitution and return that persist today, particularly amongst European institutions. In Europe the question of whether to return is frequently predicated on legal or moral ownership and the recipient's ability to 'appropriately care' for the objects (e.g. Phillips 2021; Knight 2017). This has sometimes resulted in the legal but not the physical transfer of some collections to another institution (Ween 2021). In addition, for many returns, but not all, the recipient institution is expected to finance the return. These practices are drastically different from the history of repatriation in the Pacific region and notably the Official (MacGregor) collection.

The very limited associated historical documentation for the Official collection shows that most items were acquired by trade or exchange and were part of relationship building or Pax Britannica (Chapters 3, 4, 6-7, 10-12 this volume; Quinnell 2000:85-87). Legal opinion and museum research focused on MacGregor's intention in forming the collection: that it was to be made to preserve cultural heritage for the nation and that MacGregor collected on New Guineans' behalf 'before it is too late' (MacGregor 1897a: 88). Instead, in a political decision Bjelke-Petersen and the Queensland Museum framed the return as a gift. In February 1980 the Boards of Trustees from QM and PNGNMAG met in Brisbane and reached an agreement for the partial return of the collection to PNG. The decision allowed QM, the caretaker of the collection for nearly a century, to retain approximately 40 per cent of the objects. Although the arrangement was a precedent-setting outcome and one of the largest returns of cultural heritage to place of origin from any museum, there was little fanfare. Quinnell supplied a short statement for inclusion in a PAA Newsletter of 1981 (Yaldwyn 1981: 6) (Figure 8).

FIG. 8. Shield ER10749 (MAC5096 PNGNMAG 80.66.13) from Kerepuna in the Central Division was included in one of the first returns to the Papua New Guinea National Museum as part of the ongoing process of repatriation from the Queensland Museum. A Queensland Museum label is marked up with 'PNG National Museum' identifying the object as selected for transfer. Queensland Museum photography, Gary Cranitch.

From 1980 until 1992, nine selections and returns were made. All Official collection items were photographed and catalogued, a process that added a further 2508 objects to the total number because over time some items had become disassociated from the Official collection. The selection process enshrined a commitment to an ongoing relationship characterised by the declaration made by the Trustees of the PNGNMAG that the collection would have a future with 'two homes' (Queensland Museum 1980). Quinnell (2000: 96-7) characterized the generosity shown by the PNGNMAG and Papua New Guinea national government as 'a typically Melanesian consensus', undertaken through the culture of reciprocity.

The return demanded a significant investment from both institutions. PNGNMAG was responsible for staff travel to QM and the transport of object consignments, whereas QM looked after photography and cataloguing. Quinnell worked with volunteers to develop the documentation and prepare a complete set of catalogue cards for each museum, thus reaffirming the link between the two portions of the collection. At the completion of the first seven transfers, more than three thousand objects had been returned (Figure 9).

FIG. 9. This 'battle charm' from Collingwood Bay in the North-East Division illustrates the complexities of museum documentation: QM Ethnography Register (ER) number (10959); MAC number (1334) applied c.1915; and the PNGNMAG accession number (96.26.57). The intertwining of the numbers materialises the ongoing and inalienable links between the two institutions. Scale bar: 5 cm. Queensland Museum Photography, Gary Cranitch.

TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY CONTEXTS AND COMPLEXITIES

There is no doubt that the Australian Museum had trailblazed the practice of providing historical artefacts to nascent institutions in independent Pacific states, but the transfer of the larger proportion of the Official collection to the new museum in Port Moresby set a new standard. The return was agreed as a gift; the scale was unique (3297 objects transferred to date); it was partly funded by the foreign institution with support from the Papua New Guinea government; and no conditions were placed on the future of the objects in their new home. Following the initial political announcements, it was the relationship between the two museums that flourished through the process of managing the transfers.

The early history of the Official collection at QM left complexities in the documentation and as a result almost 600 items had become erroneously incorporated into the Official collection (see Davies, Chapter 2 this volume). Consequently, early transfers to PNGNMAG included some items acquired from other collectors. The error was identified but no attempt has been made to recover these items. As time has passed, the 'loss' of these items has not had a negative impact, just as the gift of the Gogodola drum meant that QM no longer had in museum terms, 'a representative example'. Although the inclusion of non-MacGregor items in the Official collection transfer complicates the documentation, the relational aspects of the transfer continue to take precedence. The most recent transfer was completed in 1992, but more than two thousand spears, bows and arrows still await selection. In 2000 Quinnell noted 'The completion of the repatriation from Queensland to Papua New Guinea early in the new millennium will merely close one chapter in the MacGregor collection's narrative' (Quinnell 2000: 98). Twenty-two years later a different story has emerged. Although from time to time the remainder of the collection at QM has been reviewed by the staff from the national museum, the need for further storage is an impediment for PNGNMAG (Moutu 2011: 3).

Looking back, the legal basis for return of the Official collection was less important in ensuring the return of carefully chosen items from the Official collection to PNG than the social relationships established between actors in the two countries. The visibility of PNGNMAG staff on the world stage contributing to and leading discussions and debates in the 1970s allowed informal relationships to flourish at the same time as formal agreements were being explored. The value of reviewing a return decades later is that it has provided an opportunity to reassess the significance of the few items 'wrongly' returned and the legacy of unfinished transfers. By documenting the entire collection in the first phase of transfers, both institutions have a complete collection overview. In addition, shared knowledge between staff at the PNGNMAG and QM have resulted in re-imagined exhibitions and understandings (see Chan 2018; Knowles, Chapter 15 this volume).

Reflections also enable reinterpretations. With hindsight, the language of 'repatriation' and 'return' seems less appropriate as a way of summing up the unique collaboration between QM and the PNGNMAG. Instead of focusing on Joh Bjelke-Petersen's announcement of an unconditional 'gift' in 1974, the division of the collection was agreed through the generosity of the PNGNMAG Board of Trustees, signifying twentieth century indigenous agency in a newly independent nation. Perhaps it is time to recognize this agency and generosity by updating the collections documentation at QM again, maintaining 'MacGregor' as collector, but reframing the acquisition source as 'Trustees of the Board of the PNGNMAG', acquisition method as 'gift', and date of acquisition as '1980'.