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

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Conus armshells in British New Guinea: the effects of economic change on cross-cultural engagement

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In late nineteenth century British New Guinea armshells made from conus shells were an essential element of ceremonial exchange among communities resident along the southern coast and in the islands of the Massim region. A comparative analysis of the size and nature of decoration on conus armshells within the Official and Personal collections assembled by Sir William MacGregor, Administrator and Lieutenant Governor (1888–1898) illustrates the effects of economic change on the availability of objects used to broker cross-cultural exchanges. The abundance of trade goods available to local communities combined with high rates of inflation in the number of armshells required for marriage payments in the region around Port Moresby led to a severe shortage of these valuables. In the Trobriand Islands, which were experiencing an economic boom due to the high demand for pearls by western traders, large valuable objects used in the Kula ceremonial exchange system were also rarely given to outsiders. This study illustrates the impact of varying social and economic conditions on local decisions about social engagements involving cultural valuables.

□ British New Guinea, pearling, conus armshells, Kula, cross-cultural exchange, economic change, ethnographic museum collections

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CONTRASTING ECONOMIC HISTORIES

Armshell valuables made from conus shells have long been important cultural items among communities in the coastal regions of southeastern British New Guinea (Figure 1). In many areas these items are an essential requirement for brideprice and other cultural negotiations. On the Papuan South Coast armshells manufactured by Mailu Islanders, along with others acquired from Milne Bay, were traded west to the Motu in the Port Moresby region. From there, the Motu took them westwards on their *hiri* trade exchanges to villages in the Papuan Gulf (e.g. Turner 1878; Barton 1910; Malinowski 1988; Oram 1982). Armshells also circulated within the Kula ceremonial exchange system focused on the Trobriand, Dobu, Tubetube, and Woodlark Islands, but with connections to communities in a much larger area of Milne Bay (e.g. Malinowski 1988; Macintyre 1983a; 1983b; Leach and Leach 1983; Damon 1980; 1983; 1990).

Despite their ceremonial importance to local communities as brideprice and as signifiers of status, some conus shell armshells were exchanged with westerners and have subsequently ended up in ethnographic museum collections. Good examples are the conus armshells in the Official collection compiled by Sir William MacGregor, Administrator and later Lieutenant Governor of British New Guinea (BNG) between 1888 and 1898, as a legacy for the peoples in the colony and now mainly held in the Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery and the Queensland Museum, as well as those he reserved for his Personal collection curated at University Museums at the University of Aberdeen (see Torrence et al., Chapter 1 this volume and Torrence & Philp, Chapter 14 this volume; Quinnell 2000). To understand how the objects now in museum collections were procured because of their roles in brokering cross-cultural relationships, several interconnected variables must be considered. These include the natural occurrence of the *Conus* species used to make the armshells, changes in how the objects were exchanged in response to variations in the local



FIG. 1. Ahuia Ova, born 1877, lived in Hanuabada and worked for the colonial government. He is wearing two conus armshells and other valuables including boar's tusk and dog's teeth necklaces. Photo by Captain F.R. Barton, first published as Plate 3 in Seligman 1910 ©Royal Anthropological Institute.

socio-economic settings, and the evolving nature of cross-cultural relationships between local communities and foreign traders, missionaries and representatives of the British government.

After 1884 few armshells were traded to foreigners by people living along the southern coast of mainland British New Guinea (currently referred to as the Papuan South Coast) (Figure 2) because, as we show below, their cultural value had become greater than any of the western trade goods on offer. In the Massim region, which includes the eastern tip of New Guinea and offshore islands (Figure 3), the value of armshells and cross-cultural relations involving foreigners has a very different history. Trobriand and Woodlark Islanders continued to manufacture the largest armshells, but following the pearl boom of 1892, the Trobriands became a major focus for socio-economic activity. The resulting economic changes led to inequalities as only some coastal villages had the right to fish for pearls. When outsiders provided services to local communities, they were often gifted with armshells. Taken together, a complex constellation of social and economic factors helps explain why the sizes

of armshells and the decoration on them are so different in the Official and Personal collections.

CONUS ARMSHELLS: SIZE AND DISTRIBUTION

Over a very long time period, armshells circulating as valuable objects have been made from the wider upper body of *Conus leopardus* and *Conus litteratus* shells. *C. leopardus* normally grow to a maximum length of 220 mm. Although specimens as much as 250 mm long have been reported (Cernohorsky 1978:29), most are not greater than 170 mm (WoRMS Editorial Board 2022a). In contrast, *C. litteratus* have a maximum length of 170 mm, but are normally less than 130 mm (WoRMS Editorial Board 2022b). Only some reefs in southeast New Guinea yield sufficient conus shells to sustain long-term fishing. In the northern Massim area, the larger *C. leopardus* were acquired from the reefs off the west coast of Kiriwina Island in the Trobriand Islands and on the southeast coast of Woodlark Island (Figure 3). The smaller *C. litteratus* shells were obtained in the Louisiade Archipelago and from the barrier reef system that runs west along the Papuan South Coast,

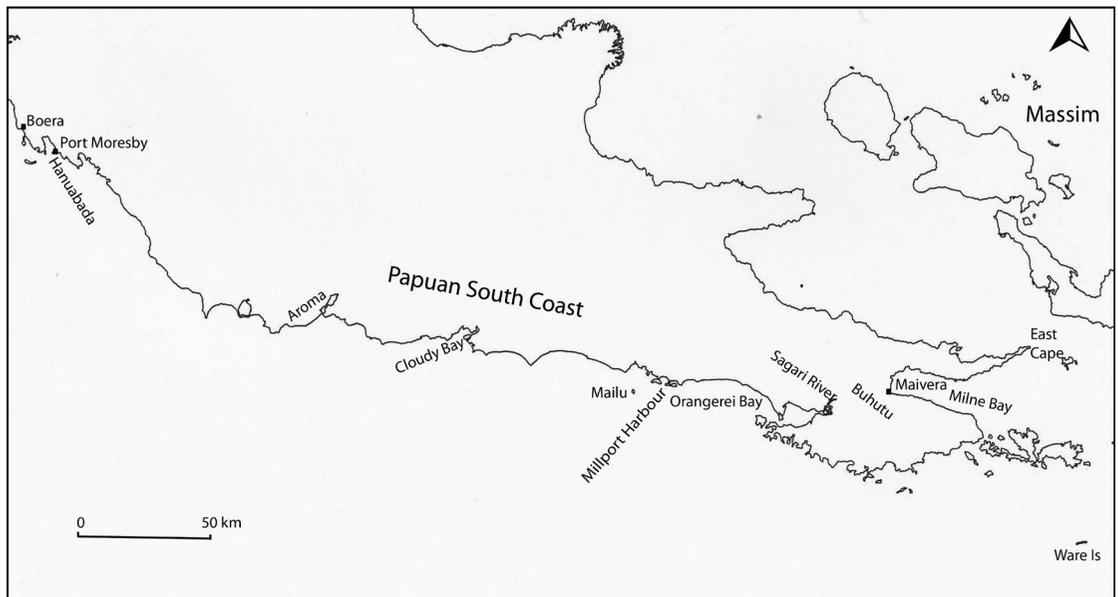


FIG. 2. The Papuan south coast. Drawing by Pamela Swadling.

from south of Sudest Island nearly continuously as far as Aroma (Figure 2).

In southeastern British New Guinea armshells have been produced in three main regions and one minor area.

1. In the Trobriand and Woodlark islands armshells have been made mostly from *C. leopardus* (Malinowski 1922: 502–504; Damon 1980: 284).
2. In the Southern Massim, Ware (Wari) islanders traded armshells mainly made using *C. litteratus* obtained from the region stretching from the Louisiade Archipelago to Tubetube and Misima (Belshaw 1955: 25; Lepowsky 1983: 476).
3. Mailu Islanders on the Papuan South Coast used *C. litteratus* to produce armshells (Malinowski 1988: 264–65; Saville 1926: 152–160). The Papuan South Coast supply was supplemented by armshells that originated from the Kula exchange network which connected many islands in the Massim region (Malinowski 1922). These were acquired by the Mailu islanders and then passed westwards by exchange. Due to ongoing local hostilities during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Mailu were unable to sail to the Massim to acquire armshells. Instead, they travelled to Maivera at the head of Milne Bay

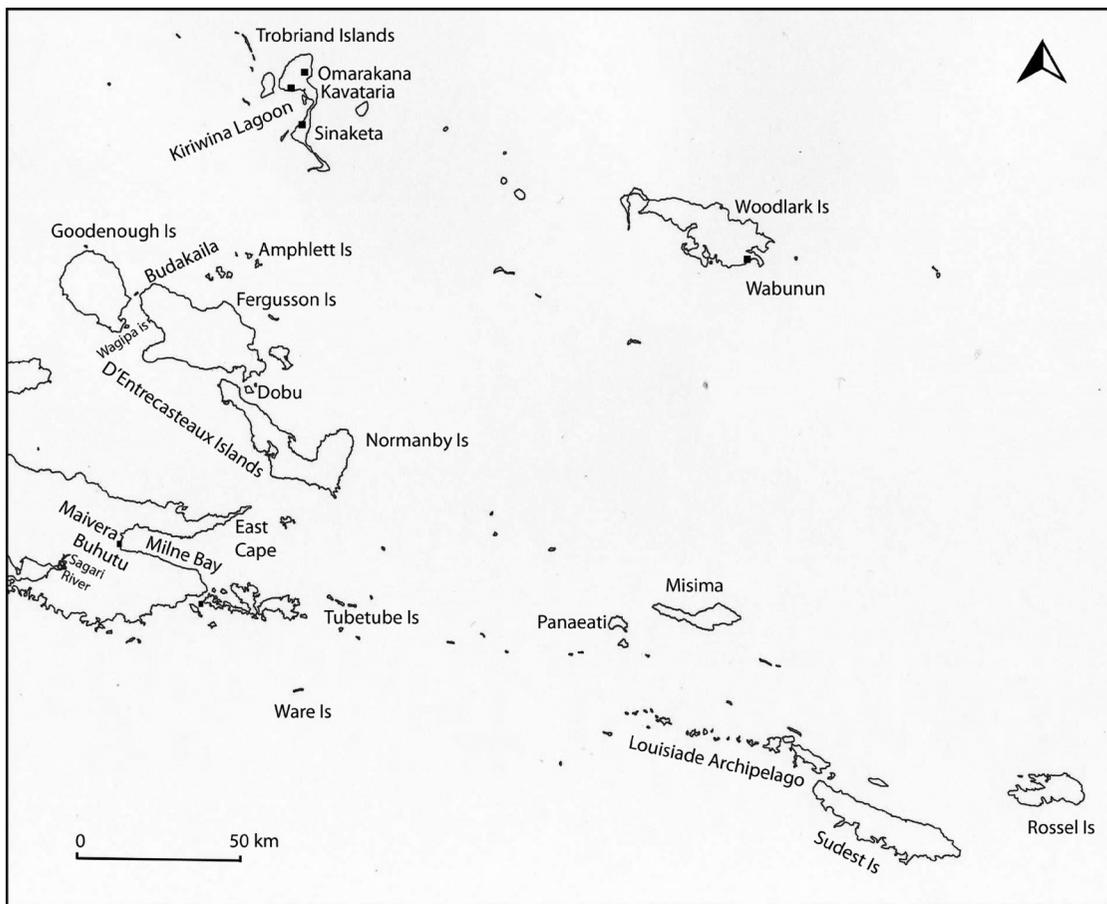


FIG. 3. The Massim region of southeastern British New Guinea. Drawing by Pamela Swadling.

by taking a canoe to the mouth of the Sagari River, walking up the Sagari valley to the hills occupied by the Buhutu and then down to Maivera (Belshaw 1955: Map 1; Saville 1926: 152–3) (Figure 3).

4. Boera, a Motu village west of Port Moresby, supplemented the supply of armshells from Mailu and the Kula region (Oram 1982:13).

CULTURAL VALUES OF ARMSHELLS

When Otto Finsch (1887) was on the South Coast in 1882, he learned that armshells were called *toia* (*toea*) and reported that the most prized examples had maximum external diameters of 80–90 mm. For the Motu people who occupied a number of villages, mainly in the Port Moresby region, *toea* were very highly valued because they were an essential component of brideprice payments. In 1876 a payment of 10 armshells was required, but by the early 1900s the number had inflated to over 40 (Turner 1878; Seligman 1910:77). The Motu also used armshells to pay for sago when on their *hiri* expeditions to the Papuan Gulf (Barton 1910; Oram 1982). In 1876 Andrew Goldie reported that one conus armshell was traded for two hundredweight (224 pounds or 100 kg) of sago (Davies 2012: 202). In the early 1880s villagers near Port Moresby traded a large *toea* for an American axe (Finsch 1887: 154–55), but by 1884 their willingness to trade armshells to foreigners had ceased because, as we show below, the rapid inflation in the number required for brideprice meant their cultural value had become so high that they did not use any in trade to foreigners. At the same time, iron tools had become much more abundant and easier to acquire and so their value for Papuan communities had decreased.

The importance of the inflation of armshells in Port Moresby and its wider ramifications for the colonial economy are evident from the personal history of Ahuia Ova (Figure 1). He was born about 1877 and would have married about 1900. The brideprice for his wife Gali consisted of 43 *toea*, of various sizes and value, 3 pigs and 100 dog's teeth (enough to make a

neck ornament) (Seligman 1910:77). Ahuia Ova lived in the Motu village of Hanuabada, worked initially as a domestic servant and cook at Government House and then as a village constable and later interpreter at the Central Court (Oram 1979).

In the Massim region armshells are among the valuables used to pay for services such as peacemaking, as well as in marriage and mortuary payments (Macintyre 1983a; Weiner 1988). In the late nineteenth century armshells (*mwali*) replaced circular boar's tusks (*doga*) as the primary valuable exchanged for necklaces (*soulava*) in the Kula exchange network (Malinowski 1922; Swadling and Bence 2016). Although the status of a Kula armshell depended largely on the history of who had owned and traded it, as on the Papuan South Coast, one of the components of its value in the Massim was its size, measured in terms of how far above the elbow it could be worn. In the early twentieth century Seligman (1910:513–14) reports that in the Massim conus armshells with an opening diameter of 80 mm were highly valued. The size of armshells used in the Kula depended on the status and wealth of the participants. Chiefs would give famous, large *mwali* armshells in exchange for necklaces (*soulava*), whereas men starting in the Kula would usually begin to establish relationships using small *mwali* unless a senior relative provided them with a special high-value armshell (Malinowski 1922; Campbell 1983:239).

CONUS ARMSHELLS: SIZE AND DECORATION

Since the documentation associated with conus armshells in museum collections is generally very limited, it is necessary to find physical attributes that might be suitable approximations for their cultural value in the past. Two measurements of size are applicable. The most common dimension recorded in museum catalogues is the maximum external diameter taken across the opening from one external side of the conus armshell to the other. The less frequently reported dimension, but preferable because it relates to the way local communities measured value, is the diameter of the

opening. Figure 4 shows that since the two variables are highly correlated, the maximum external diameter, which is used here because it is readily available, is an adequate proxy measure.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, armshells in the Massim were usually decorated with a banana seed rosette in which shell beads were inserted (e.g. the elaborate example from Goodenough Island in Figure 5). *Mwali* used in the Kula exchange network were even more elaborately decorated. In addition to a rosette of black banana

seeds with inserted shell beads, strings of shell beads, shell pendants and pandanus streamers were also attached. Prior to the availability of glass trade beads, shell beads were made from *Chama* sp. shells (Liep 1981, 1983, 2009:191).

When Bronislaw Malinowski (1988: 265) was on Mailu Island between September 1914 and March 1915, he observed that, as in the Massim region, the islanders also used a rosette of black banana seeds with inserted shell beads to decorate their armshells. When the armshells were traded westwards, however,

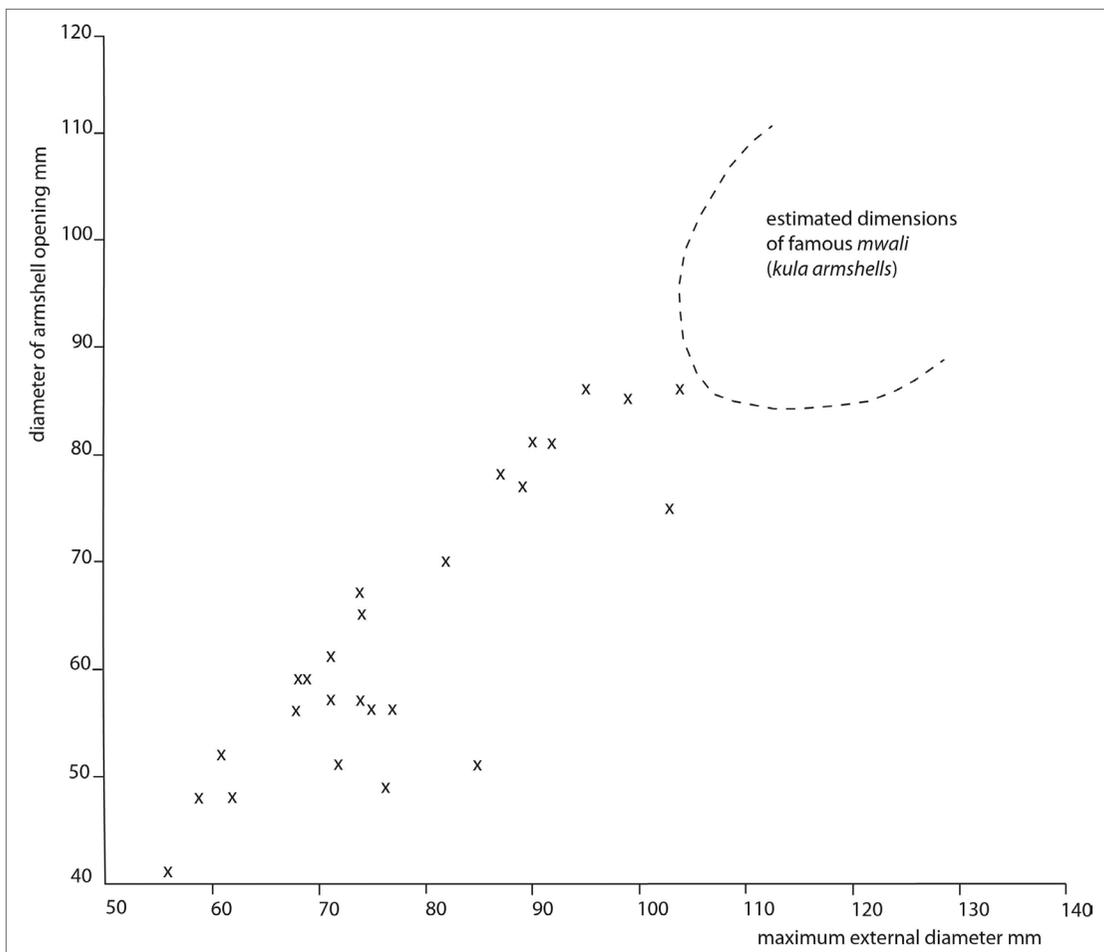


FIG. 4. The size range suitable for making armshells based on MacGregor’s Personal collection now held at University Museums, University of Aberdeen. The estimated dimensions for famous *mwali* are based on the maximum external diameters of two famous high-ranking *mwali* (Nimov and Nimoa) (Bickler 1998: 355; Macintyre 1983a: 77-8). The scattergram also shows a linear correlation between measurements based on the opening and the maximum external diameter. Drawing by Pamela Swadling.

it is likely that most of the shell beads were removed before they reached the Motu language speakers of the Port Moresby area. At that time, in both the northern Massim and along the Papuan South Coast, there was a shortage of shell beads because the Port Moresby shell bead industry that had been an important supplier to both Mailu and the Massim had ceased production (Swadling & Bence 2016).

THE OFFICIAL COLLECTION

Within the Official MacGregor collection at the Queensland Museum and the Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery there are 13 conus armshells (Table 1 and Figure 5). Among the provenanced examples, there are pairs from Cloudy Bay and from Millport Harbour, both located in present day Central Province. Another pair comes from Holnicote Bay, in what is now Oro Province, and four or possibly five armshells are provenanced to Goodenough Island in the D'Entrecasteaux Islands in Milne Bay Province (see Figure 3). The Cloudy Bay pair (ER8843 (MAC2503.1, MAC2503.2))¹ may have

been acquired by MacGregor when he was there in late May 1891 (cf. Quinnell, Appendix I, online this volume). The pair from Millport Harbour (ER10125 (MAC2506.1, MAC2506.2)), are composed of two segments, one of which has a decoration made with blue glass beads on one of the joins (Figure 5e; cf. Chan 2018: 85–85). MacGregor may have obtained this item on 5 June 1891, as he wrote that on that day the 'chief' from Dara village 'sold much of his finery for tobacco' (MacGregor 1892b: 60). The Holnicote pair (ER10539 (MAC2508.1, MAC2508.2)) are also made from conus segments (Figure 5f). MacGregor may have procured these when he met and traded with a large group of people from Kumusi on 4 August 1890 (MacGregor 1892a: 17–18). Segment armshells such as the pairs from Millport Harbour and Holnicote Bay are generally considered less valuable than those composed of complete shell rings. It is not known where the unpolished armshell (ER 19651 (MAC 2498)) was acquired (Figure 5d).

Two of the Goodenough Island armshells (ER18826 (MAC2136) and ER18825 (MAC2505)) (Figure 5b, c) have maximum external diameters of 55 and

TABLE. 1. Armshells in the Official Collection

| Max external diameter (mm.) | Opening diameter (mm.) | Decoration | Provenance | ER Number | MAC Number | Museum | Status |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|--|-------------------|-----------|-------------|-------------------|-----------|
| 93 | 89 | banana seeds with inserted shell beads | Goodenough Island | 18829 | MAC2502 | PNGNMAG | missing |
| 67 | | undecorated | Goodenough Island | 18825 | MAC2505 | Queensland | |
| 55 | | undecorated | Goodenough Island | 18826 | MAC2136 | Queensland | |
| | | <i>mwali</i> , 2 strings of beads and shell pendants | Goodenough Island | 18828 | MAC2137 | Queensland | not found |
| 80 | | unpolished armshell | Unknown | 19651 | MAC2498 | Queensland | |
| 50 & 55 | | pair, segmented armshells, one with blue glass beads | Millport Harbour | 10125 | MAC2506.1-2 | PNGNMAG 92.14.807 | |
| 50 & 65 | | pair, segmented armshells | Holnicote Bay | 10539 | MAC2508.1-2 | Queensland | |
| 54 | | pair | Cloudy Bay? | 8843 | MAC2503.1-2 | Queensland | not found |
| 75 | | armshell | not known | 9371 | None | Museum Victoria | not found |
| 77 | | armshell | not known | 10185 | MAC2507 | Queensland | not found |



FIG. 5. Conus armshells in the Official collection: a. Goodenough Is., (ER18829 (MAC2502 PNGNMAG)); b. Goodenough Is., (ER2136 (MAC2136)); c. Goodenough Is., (ER18825 (MAC2505)); d. Unknown provenance, (ER19651 (MAC2498)); e. Millport Harbour, (ER10125 (MAC2506.1, MAC2506.2); PNGMAG 92.14.807); f. Holnicote Bay, (ER10539 (MAC2508.1, MAC2058.2)) Scale bar: 1cm. For measurements see Table 2. Queensland Museum photography.

67 mm respectively. The third artefact (ER18829 (MAC2502)), with a 93 mm external diameter, is large enough to be worn above the elbow and therefore probably had a high value (Figure 5a). In addition, it is decorated with a rosette of banana seeds with many shell bead inserts. This would be in keeping with a high ranked Kula armshell, but it lacks the shell bead strings, pearl shell pendants and pandanus streamers of an active *mwali* exchange valuable. Another conus armshell from Goodenough Island (ER18828 (MAC2137)) (which has not been located at the Queensland Museum), may have been a *mwali* as it is recorded as having two strings of beads and shell pendants. The presence on Goodenough of former *mwali* is not surprising because armshells are recorded as having been taken out of the Kula network by Amphlett Islanders who bartered them with Goodenough Islanders for pigs and yams (Jenness and Ballantyne 1920; Young 1971:6). As discussed in BOX 10.1, it is possible that the Goodenough armshells were given to MacGregor by C.A.W. Monckton.

MACGREGOR'S PERSONAL COLLECTION

There are 26 conus armshells in MacGregor's Personal collection currently housed at the University of Aberdeen Museums (Table 2; cf. Anon. 1912; Torrence et al., Chapter 14 this volume). The assemblage was clearly brought together by someone very familiar with armshells on Kiriwina in the 1890s. Although armshells of a very high value are present, examples ranging from low to highly ranked objects are also included (Table 2 and Figure 6). This important assemblage also illustrates various stages of production from partially worked, complete but undecorated, and fully decorated *mwali*. The attention given to creating a comprehensive 'type' collection suggests that the person who put it together, possibly Rev. S.B. Fellows who had a mission on Kiriwina Island in the Trobriands and was a good friend of MacGregor (see BOX 10.2), was familiar with contemporary scientific principles and MacGregor's interest in collecting examples of unfinished objects (cf. Torrence, Chapter 6 this volume).

Representing the early stages of manufacture, nine armshells lack drill holes or decoration. One of these is unpolished (ABDUA:1593²) and another has a broken lateral lip (ABDUA:379). Although too small to even fit over a small wrist, they still would have had cultural value. Four armshells have holes drilled in their lateral lips (ABDUA:375, ABDUA:376, ABDUA:374, ABDUA:373) and have maximum external diameters of 59, 61, 82 and 92 mm respectively. The drilled armshells might have had decorations attached, as the two-lower grade *mwali* mentioned below only have external diameters of 68 and 69 mm respectively. Three armshells

are decorated with banana seeds and mainly shell beads (ABDUA:1591, ABDUA:1592 and ABDUA:445) with external diameters ranging from 89 to 95 mm respectively. The remainder of the collection consists of 10 *mwali* of varying rank as determined by their maximum external diameter (68 to 104 mm) and types of decoration.

Beginning with the lower ranked *mwali*, four are decorated with banana seeds, glass trade beads, shell pendants and pandanus streamers (ABDUA:388, ABDUA:393, ABDUA:389 and ABDUA:394). One also has shell pendants attached. These range from 68 to 74 mm in external diameter. Two of the lower

TABLE.2. Armshells in MacGregor’s Personal Collection held at the University Museums, University of Aberdeen.

| Max external diameter (mm.) | Decoration | Aberdeen Cat. No. |
|-----------------------------|---|-------------------|
| 56 | plain | ABDUA:377 |
| 59 | ? plain, no photo | ABDUA:375 |
| 61 | 2 drilled holes | ABDUA:376 |
| 62 | ? plain, no photo | ABDUA:378 |
| 68 | ? plain, no photo | ABDUA:380 |
| 68 | <i>mwali</i> , banana seeds, 2 glass bead strings, pandanus streamers | ABDUA:388 |
| 69 | <i>mwali</i> , rosette of banana seeds, 2 glass bead strings, 2 pandanus streamers | ABDUA:393 |
| 71 | ? plain, no photo | ABDUA:1594 |
| 72 | ? plain, no photo | ABDUA:381 |
| 74 | plain, broken lateral lip | ABDUA:379 |
| 74 | <i>mwali</i> , banana seeds, 4 glass bead strings, 2 banana seed pendants, pandanus streamers | ABDUA:389 |
| 74 | <i>mwali</i> , rosette of banana seeds, 4 glass bead strings with pandanus streamers | ABDUA:394 |
| 75 | ? plain, no photo | ABDUA:392 |
| 76 | unpolished armshell | ABDUA:1593 |
| 77 | ? plain, no photo | ABDUA:383 |
| 82 | 2 drilled holes | ABDUA:374 |
| 82 | <i>mwali</i> , segment form, 7 glass bead strings, pendants of shell, banana seed and shell beads, shell beads | ABDUA:391 |
| 85 | <i>mwali</i> , rosette of banana seeds with shell bead inserts, 7 glass bead strings, 2 shell pendants, pandanus streamers | ABDUA:387 |
| 87 | <i>mwali</i> , rosette of banana seeds with shell bead inserts, 2 remnant strings of shell and glass beads | ABDUA:392 |
| 89 | rosette of banana seeds with shell bead inserts | ABDUA:1591 |
| 90 | rosette of banana seeds with shell bead inserts | ABDUA:445 |
| 92 | 2 drilled holes | ABDUA:373 |
| 95 | rosette of banana seeds with shell bead inserts | ABDUA:1592 |
| 99 | <i>mwali</i> , rosette of banana seeds with shell bead inserts, 3 glass bead strings, 2 banana seed and shell pendants and is joined by binding as armshell had been broken into two pieces | ABDUA:390 |

grade *mwali*, with external diameters of 68 and 69 mm respectively, show that even small shells could be used in Kula exchanges. These smaller armshells may have been used by young men who were just starting out in the Kula (Campbell 1983:239). One armshell (ABDUA:391) is made from linked conus segments, glass bead strings with pendants of shells, shell beads and banana seeds (Figure 6e). Five armshells with external diameters that range from 85 to 104 mm are decorated with banana seeds that have shell bead inserts, mainly glass beads and shell pendants (ABDUA:387, ABDUA:392, ABDUA:390, ABDUA:386 and ABDUA:385). One has pandanus streamers attached. Based on these items, shell bead inserts were probably reserved for larger conus armshells and because they helped identify their status, were not removed from them.

ECONOMIC CHANGE AND KULA VALUABLES

When Sir William MacGregor was appointed as Administrator of British New Guinea in 1888, the central and northern regions of the Massim were making little contribution to British New Guinea's income. He observed that Trobriand Islanders were hard working, but in 1891 he was not able to identify an industry that could be established there to generate income for British New Guinea (MacGregor 1892–93:7). The situation changed radically in 1892 when pearls were found in Kiriwina Lagoon. The trader William Whitten had come to Kiriwina in the late 1880s to establish a *bêche-de-mer* fishery (Austen 1945: 24; Connelly 2014: 166, 177; 2020). He discovered that oysters (*Pinctada radiata*) or *lapi* as locally known (Anon. 2007:14; Malinowski 1935:18–19) in Kiriwina Lagoon produced pearls, thereby initiating an economic boom through sales to European traders (Monckton 1921:4).

In the financial year 1892–93, pearls worth £450 were exported (MacGregor 1894a:xxxii) but the profits grew exponentially. Rev. Fellows (2001 (2): 16–18; 24), who had a mission on Kiriwina, observed that when conditions were suitable, entire villages were emptied of their inhabitants as they searched for pearls in the lagoon.

In the financial year July 1893 to June 1894 pearls were the most valuable export from British New Guinea with an estimated value of £8000 to £10000 (MacGregor 1896: xxiv). This activity would have brought a flush of foreign trade goods to the villages with fishing rights in Kiriwina Lagoon.

By law, European traders could buy the pearls from the locals, but were not allowed to organize their procurement. The large demand by the traders for western trade goods to be used as payment to the locals for procuring the pearls led Burns Philp to establish a store at Kavataria (MacGregor 1894b). Once the villagers were satiated with foreign trade goods, the European traders used various alternative strategies to encourage locals to continue fishing for pearls. One method was to acquire traditional valuables from other islands in the Kula network and trade these for pearls (Swadling and Bence 2016: 57; Young 1998: 268). One resident trader who operated within the Trobriands, known as German Harry, used his vessel to sail to islands where demand for steel tools was still very high. Using the steel tools as trade goods, he acquired sago, coconuts, and pigs which he exchanged back at Kiriwina for pearls. He also used tobacco to purchase surplus foreign trade goods, especially axes, adzes, and tomahawks, from villages on Kiriwina. German Harry sold these to miners bound for the Mambare goldfields in what is now Oro Province, as well as to other European traders enroute to places where these tools were still keenly sought (Monckton 1921: 92).

The increased wealth that pearling brought to Kiriwina probably played a part in the decline of circular boar's tusk pendants (*doga*) that had been important valuables. This had enabled more men to participate in the Kula, as *doga* could only be worn by people of rank, whereas armshells could be worn by commoners, although very large *mwali* remained the preserve of high-status individuals (Swadling and Bence 2016). The arrival of the pearl traders and the trade goods they supplied also meant that large numbers of glass beads were available to decorate armshells (Figure 6) at a time when the traditional *Chama* shell beads were in short supply (Liep 1981: 300–301).

Pearling had an impact on the political economy of Kiriwina. Certainly by 1918 it had made villagers living along the Kiriwina Lagoon very rich, especially the headman of Sinaketa. This was not the case with To'uluwa, the paramount chief of Kiriwina 1899–1933, who lived at Omarakana, a village inland of the east coast (Connelly 2016:173–74). Malinowski (1922:468) describes him as a pauper who had gained no wealth from pearling. The pearl boom was

underway when the Rev. Fellows arrived on Kiriwina in 1894. He played a role in pacifying fighting and settling disputes and was given large valuable armshells as payment for this service.

Large valuable armshells were normally restricted only to transactions among high status individuals in local groups, but occasionally these could be given to outsiders in recompense for a special service such as negotiating with the British



FIG. 6 Conus armshells in MacGregor's Personal collection. a. ABDUA:376; b. ABDUA:1591; c. ABDUA:393; d. ABDUA:387; e. ABDUA:391; f. ABDUA:385. Scale bar: 1 cm. For measurements see Table 2. Photographs by Robin Torrence ©University of Aberdeen.

New Guinea government on their behalf. Both MacGregor and Moreton recognized that Fellows was the authority on Trobriand affairs and accepted his role in interceding between the islanders and the government (Connelly 2014: 87). For example, Fellows was asked by To'uluwa, the new chief of the Kiriwina district, to accompany him to a *Kabilula* ceremony. This was to make peace with the Tilataula district led by Moliasi, who was their supreme chief. In previous fighting Omarakana village had been razed by Tilataula warriors and its occupants had been dispersed elsewhere. During the ceremony on 10 January 1900, it was agreed that the Omarakana villagers could return and rebuild their village and that To'uluwa would be recognized as the new paramount chief on Kiriwina. Equivalent presents, including armshells, stone axes and necklaces, were exchanged between the chiefs of the two districts. Fellows also gave a speech pleading for law and order (Fellows 2001 (3):15–16; Connelly 2014:65). On a previous occasion on 9 November 1899, a deputation of chiefs from the Kabwaku and Okaikoda villages in the Tilataula district on Kiriwina sought

out Fellow's assistance. They came with a present of an armshell and food. They wanted Fellows to plead with Matthew Moreton, the Resident Magistrate, so that he would cease punitive measures against their villages (Fellows 2001 (3):10).

Many of the conus armshells and especially the *mwali* in MacGregor's Personal collection had probably been acquired by Rev. Fellows from high-ranking villagers on Kiriwina in recompense for these and other special services. It is also likely that some of the armshells he received had been gifted to him because the owner could gain status through opening up a new Kula path. Fellows greatly respected MacGregor. He noted in his diary that during MacGregor's last visit to Kiriwina he gave him an artefact collection that was much appreciated by MacGregor (Fellows 2001 (2):37). In view of the large size and decorations on the *mwali* in MacGregor's Personal collection, Fellows should be attributed as the collector (see BOX 10.2).

By comparison with some highly ranked and well known armshells, the largest *mwali* in MacGregor's Personal collection must have been considered as

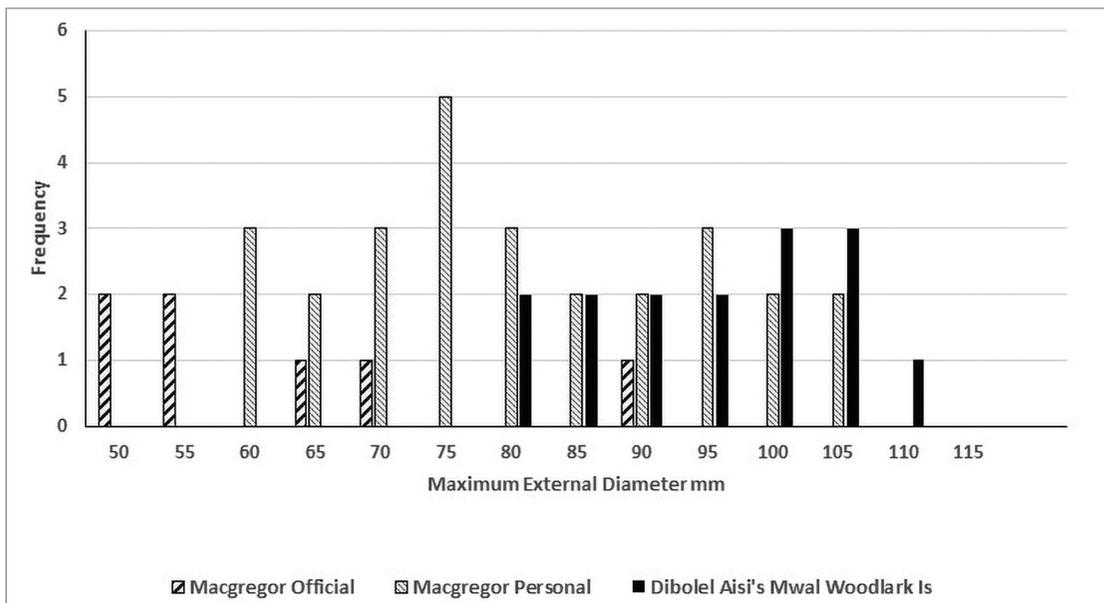


FIG. 7. Comparison of the maximum external diameters of the conus armshells in the Official collection and MacGregor's Personal collection with those held in 1995 by Dibolel Aisi, a relatively successful Kula participant at Wabunun village, southeast Woodlark Island.

highly ranked (Figure 7). For example, in 1995 Simon Bickler recorded the maximum external diameters of 15 *mwal* (the Woodlark name for a valuable conus armshell) held by Dibolel Aisi, a relatively successful Kula participant at Wabunun village in southeast Woodlark Island (Damon 1983:326; Figure 2). The largest of his armshells was the famous *mwal* known as 'Nimov', which has a maximum external diameter of 113 mm (Bickler 1998:355; pers. comm. 2019). An even larger *mwali* called 'Nimoo', recorded by Martha Macintyre (1983a: 112; pers. comm. 2019) at Tubetube Island in the Engineer Group of Islands had an external diameter of 140 mm.

ECONOMIC CHANGE AND MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

The armshells in MacGregor's Official and Personal collections contribute to a richer appreciation of indigenous agency within the context of economic and historic changes in 1890s British New Guinea. The absence of valuable armshells from the South Coast region, together with the sizes and decorations on the armshell objects in these ethnographic museum collections, provide striking examples of the effects of economic and social change in the early colonial period on the kinds of objects that local people were prepared to give away or trade with outsiders. The socio-economic changes in southeast British New Guinea at this time had a major impact on the traditional exchange of conus armshells and this had a further flow-on effect by restricting their availability for trade with westerners like MacGregor. By 1884 the rapid inflation in the number of armshells required for brideprice in the Port Moresby region meant that villagers no longer had surplus items to offer outsiders, despite the allure of western trade goods. Consequently, fewer objects were passed on to their trading partners on the South Coast, who therefore also had no surplus objects for trade to westerners. It is relevant to note that museum collections hold few armshells provenanced to Mailu, the main production centre on the South Coast. Due to their scarcity at this particular time,

MacGregor only acquired a few small armshells of low value from this region for the Official collection, although these items do occur among earlier material now housed in the Australian Museum (Swadling et al. in press).

The contrast between the number and size of the armshells acquired from the South Coast in the Official collection and the *mwali* from the Massim region that MacGregor was gifted by Fellows and later donated to the University of Aberdeen is quite striking, but the latter were obtained in the very different socioeconomic setting of the pearl boom in the Trobriand Islands. The flood of trade goods that villagers received in return for pearls generated many socio-economic and political changes. Possibly in recognition of his assistance in calming some of the resulting disruptions, the first missionary in the Trobriand Islands, the Rev. Fellows, was gifted armshells. It is also likely that some Islanders made strategic political decisions when they gave Fellows these valuable objects. Creating a new Kula path by giving a personally owned valuable to a high-status individual could have been a clever political move that would have bestowed prestige on the giver. Appropriately, these gifts were valuable items, but they were just short of being the size of the most famous and important *mwali* which were retained and are still in circulation today.

It is notable that the valuable armshells in both the Official and the Personal collections were only obtained because of personal relationships between individuals who were long term residents in British New Guinea and the local communities where they resided. We conjecture that the armshells from Goodenough Island that MacGregor contributed to the Official collection were only available because of Monckton's personal ties with the community. On Kiriwina high ranking armshells were also gifted to Fellows probably because it was assumed that he had high status and would be able to broker political relationships with the British government. The scarcity of these objects in the collections illustrates their important and ongoing role among social groups in south-eastern Papua New Guinea.

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□ ENDNOTES

1. These are museum registration numbers for the objects. See Davies (Chapter 2 this volume) for details on the history of registration systems and numbers at the Queensland Museum. Both the original (ER) and later (MAC) registration numbers are provided. If no museum is listed, then the object is currently housed in the Queensland Museum. If it is elsewhere, the museum will be named as follows: PNGNMAG is the Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery; AM is the Australian Museum; BM is the British Museum.
2. Registration numbers for objects in the University Museums, University of Aberdeen use the ABDUA prefix.

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BOX 10.1

GOODENOUGH ISLAND ARMSHELLS IN THE OFFICIAL COLLECTION

Pamela SWADLING

Cultural setting

In 1911–12 when Diamond Jenness was on Goodenough Island, he found that conus armshells and boar's tusk pendants (*doga*) were inalienable property amongst the Bwaidoga in the southern part of the island. They were regarded as family heirlooms that were inherited successively by each male member. If a family member gave an armshell to a trader or curio seeker, this gave rise to much resentment. These high value artefacts were used amongst the Bwaidoga as surety for a future payment and had to be returned once payment was made. Bwaidogans purchased pots in this way from Amphlett Islanders at Budakaila on North Fergusson Island. The only non-return armshell payments were in the case of brideprice or in compensation for some wrong-doing or healing service (Jenness and Ballantyne 1920)

Acquisition by C.A.W. Monckton

C.A.W. Monckton came to British New Guinea as a young man in 1895 and spent two years pearling, prospecting and trading in the Massim region (Figure 3). One of his first ventures was to go pearling in Moresby Strait, located between Fergusson and Goodenough Islands. On the southeast coast near

Wagipa Island, just off Goodenough Island, Monckton had his first contact with a man called Satadeai. After some initial confrontation, the two men became friends and Monckton gave Satadeai a tomahawk and some beads. In return, Satadeai gave Monckton yams, taro and curios including a circular boar's tusk, an artefact usually possessed by leaders (Monckton 1921: 36–37). It is likely that Satadeai was also the source of the conus armshells from Goodenough in the Official collection that arrived at the Queensland Museum from Port Moresby on 29 December 1897. Monckton had acquired the circular boar's tusk by 1897 (Monckton 1897).

Transfer to MacGregor

Monckton may have given the Goodenough Island conus armshells to MacGregor as a means of self-promotion. In 1895 he had been told by MacGregor that government employment was only possible if there were vacancies and he was well acquainted with British New Guinea. By 1897 when Monckton had the required experience, he was appointed an Acting Resident Magistrate (Monckton 1897, 1921: 12; Butterworth 1899: 108). When Monckton became a Resident Magistrate in the Eastern Division, he appointed Satadeai as a village constable and he also served Monckton as an interpreter (Monckton 1921: 36–7).

BOX 10.2

REVEREND FELLOWS AND MACGREGOR'S PERSONAL COLLECTION

Pamela SWADLING

MacGregor first met Rev. S. B. Fellows at the first Wesleyan Methodist Mission in the region established by Rev. George Brown on Dobu Island in the D'Entrecasteaux Islands in what is currently Milne Bay Province. From Dobu, Fellows was sent to establish a mission on Panaeati Island in the Deboyne Group of Islands just to the southwest of Misima Island in the Louisiade Archipelago and was there between 21 July 1891 and 14 October 1893. When MacGregor visited Panaeati Island on 27 January 1892, the two men found they had common interests and Fellows was invited to accompany MacGregor on a tour around the Louisiade Archipelago. Their close relationship continued when MacGregor returned to Panaeati on 24 July 1892. During this trip, Fellows provided a local language translation of MacGregor's speech at Panaeati and sailed again with MacGregor on the government steamer to visit other mission stations. On this voyage, Fellows bought a beautiful steering paddle which he presented to MacGregor. Fellows' interest in local artefacts may have been activated by MacGregor's efforts to record and acquire examples before they ceased to be found in villages (Fellows 2001 (2):1, 17, 3).

When Fellows returned to British New Guinea with his wife on 14 August 1894, they set about establishing a mission on Kiriwina in the Trobriand Islands. MacGregor came to tea on 8 November 1895 and spent the evening with Fellows and his wife (Fellows 2001 (2):19). Another visit took place on 4-6 July 1897 (Fellows 2011 (2):32) (see also Torrence et al., Chapter 1 this volume: Figure 5). MacGregor's final visit

was on June 13, 1898, when he expressed his pleasure with the artefact collection Fellows had assembled for him (Fellows 2001 (2):37). This group of items did not enter the Official collection, as only four items from the Trobriands are recorded in the transfers to the Queensland Museum that were made after 13 June 1898. These included one shield, two house models and one skirt. However, the fishing kites collected on MacGregor's last trip to what is now Milne Bay Province did enter the Official collection. On 30 June 1898 Fellows received a farewell letter from MacGregor expressing his gratitude for the assistance he had provided in both public and private matters. With the letter MacGregor also sent a gift for Fellow's daughter Margerie (Fellows 2001 (2):37): a bottle which held the equivalent of four sovereign's worth of gold from the Mambare goldfields, in what is now Oro Province.

From MacGregor Fellows probably gained an appreciation of the importance of making a collection of village artefacts in view of the impact that the activities of pearl traders and their trade goods were having on village life. Unlike many missionaries, Fellows did not make his collection with the aim of subsequently selling it to a museum or artefact dealer for financial gain. He may have presented the best of his armshell collection to MacGregor thinking that these items would go into the Official collection. Instead, MacGregor took Fellows' gift home where it was gifted to the University of Aberdeen in 1899.