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WESTERN TORRES STRAIT CULTURAL HISTORY PROJECT: RESEARCH DESIGN AND INITIAL RESULTS

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The Western Torres Strait Cultural History Project was devised 1) in response to a perceived absence of archaeological research on mid-Holocene and earlier landforms, and 2) as an attempt to track the history of ethnographically documented cultural practices in Torres Strait. Together, this dual approach to the archaeology of cultural landscapes promises to reveal new information on the dynamics of Torres Strait Islander history over the short and long terms. This paper presents the logic behind the project, its methodology, and some initial field results from the islands of Pulu, Badu and Mua. While the Project's earliest confirmed cultural dates of c.2500 years ago are consistent with previous research in Torres Strait, older cultural materials may be forthcoming from rockshelter excavations. Red slipped ware pottery excavated from Pulu Islet is the first pre-European contact pottery recovered from Western Torres Strait and may indicate c.2000 year old trade contacts with the Papuan Gulf region of Papua New Guinea. □ *Island regionalisation, marine specialisation, land bridge, Dual Historical Method, cultural landscapes, Torres Strait.*

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Between New Guinea and Australia is the island chain of Torres Strait, which formed c.8000yrs BP but was a land bridge at various times in the late Pleistocene during periods of low sea level. While great advances have been made into understanding the origins and history of Aboriginal Australians, relatively little attention has been given to Torres Strait Islanders by archaeologists and cultural historians. Unlike its northern and southern neighbours, there is no current evidence for the occupation of Torres Strait until the late Holocene, a time coincident with a period of major seafaring across much of the Pacific (Kirch, 1997; Spriggs, 1997). The dearth of knowledge on Islander prehistory is perhaps surprising given that it is the formation of the Strait by rising seas that created Australia as a relative terrestrial isolate.

Given its geographical positioning between New Guinea and Australia, Torres Strait is strategically positioned as a key to any subsequent movement of indigenous people and cultural traits, and flora and fauna (possibly including the dingo – McNiven & Hitchcock, this volume), between the two landmasses. Yet questions remain as to whether or not the descendants of the world's earliest seafarers occupied Torres Strait only in the late Holocene, as current archaeological evidence suggests, and how in possibly less than 3000 years Torres Strait Islanders

developed what is generally taken to be the most complex maritime culture in Australasia. Today, Torres Strait 'is probably the most important dugong habitat in the world' and Islander hunting of turtles and dugongs signal the historical emergence of specialised, ocean faring sea-peoples within Australian waters (Marsh, 1996: 142). In these regards, understanding the long-term history of Torres Strait Islanders promises to shed light not only on the cultural history of Australia's northernmost peoples, but also on possible links between cultural changes on the northern mainland and Island Melanesia, and on the historical emergence of specialised marine adaptations — including turtle and dugong hunting — over hundreds to thousands of years.

Despite these general interests and some emerging trends, after 30 years of intermittent archaeological research in Western Torres Strait, a detailed picture of Islander history is yet to emerge, and few attempts have been made to systematically address the above questions. Excavations on Saibai, Mabuiag, Pulu, Badu, Mua, Naghi and Murulag indicate a wealth of cultural sites dating to the last thousand years, but relatively little evidence of earlier settlements or island use (Barham et al., this volume). While there are reliable indications of island use and island habitation dating back to around 2500 yrs BP, the present data's implications for the

antiquity of island occupation remains problematic: no previous archaeological research has targeted mid-Holocene or earlier landforms (e.g., sites on elevated island hinterlands). If insights into ancient use of the region are to be obtained, sites located on older landforms need to be examined. In particular, areas exposed during Torres Strait's 'land bridge' and 'peninsula' phases need to be targeted. Similarly, no previous research has systematically aimed at tracking back in time the origins of characteristically Torres Strait Islander cultural practices, as known from ethnography. These notions and historical interests are now the subject of intensive investigation with the newly-conceived Western Torres Strait Cultural History Project by focusing research on archaeological sites on both recent (<3000 yr) and older (>3000 yr) landforms located inland (including elevated rockshelters on Mua, Badu and Pulu). The Project aims to investigate the antiquity of earliest occupation and the emergence of ethnographically documented cultural practices in Western Torres Strait by asking five specific questions:

1. How long has Western Torres Strait been occupied?
2. Was Western Torres Strait frequented and used during its 'land bridge phase' and subsequent 'peninsula phase' prior to sea level rise and formation of the Strait in the last c.8000 years?
3. Do the earliest radiocarbon determinations (all c.2500 yrs BP) available for cultural presence in Torres Strait truly imply a lack of people in the region during island/reef formation between c.8000 and c.3000 years ago?
4. What is the antiquity and developmental history of key expressions of the historically-documented Western Torres Strait Islander maritime culture, such as village sites, use of marine resources (e.g., dugong and turtle hunting), rock-art (e.g., paintings of canoes, masks and marine creatures), ritual sites (e.g., shell arrangements, stone formations and bone mounds), ceremonial paraphernalia (e.g., turtle-shell masks), strategic lookout sites marked with trumpet shells (to warn neighbouring villagers) and associated small shell middens, and trade/exchange systems (e.g., movement of ochres and stone tools)?
5. To what extent are cultural changes in Torres Strait linked to cultural and environmental changes on adjacent New Guinea and Australia.

This paper introduces the project, and outlines initial fieldwork aimed at addressing these questions.

BACKGROUND

Torres Strait is a 150km-wide watery realm separating Australia from New Guinea (Fig. 1). It is home to 'Torres Strait Islanders', a maritime people who harvest the seas for fish, turtle and dugong. Globally, Torres Strait is most famous as the place where the Melanesian and Australian (Aboriginal) cultural and ecological domains meet and as a transition zone between the horticultural and hunter-gatherer worlds (Harris, 1977; Walker, 1972). Coring of reefs and islands reveals the Strait was first established around 8000 yrs BP and that island formation is ongoing (e.g., Barham 1999, 2000; Woodroffe et al., 2000). Thus, the maritime lifeway of Islanders must have developed within this period and functioned as a bridge and barrier for diffusion of cultural traits (and flora/fauna) between NE Australia and Melanesia (Walker, 1972).

Alfred Haddon and colleagues on the 1898 Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits put Torres Strait on the world anthropological map. Haddon documented in detail cultural features of each of the 3 distinctive Islander groups — Western, Central and Eastern — in 6 volumes published between 1901 and 1935. Linguistically, the Western (including Top Western) and Central Islanders speak Kala Lagaw Ya and a dialect Kala Kawaw Ya, and the Eastern Islanders speak Meriam Mir (Shnukal, 1998). While the Central Islanders interacted with their neighbours, Islanders from the Eastern and Western Groups rarely interacted directly. It is only with the Western Island Group that a direct island chain exists between New Guinea and Australia, and a well-developed and well-documented trade/exchange system existed along this Western Islands chain (Vanderwal, this volume). Direct interactions involved huge dugout canoes and oscillated between enmity (raiding/headhunting) and amity (trade/exchange) (Lawrence, 1994; McNiven, 1998). Islander settlement focused on 'home' islands with seasonal visits to smaller islands. Subsistence involved cropping (e.g., yams, sweet potatoes, bananas) supplemented by plant collection (particularly in the SW) and specialised fishing and hunting of marine animals (turtle and dugong). These essential features of the Torres Strait lifeway form part of what Barham (2000) called the Torres Strait Cultural Complex. Despite this ethnographic detail, however, few detailed analyses have been undertaken of archaeological sites in the region and little is known about the origin and development of Islander customs.

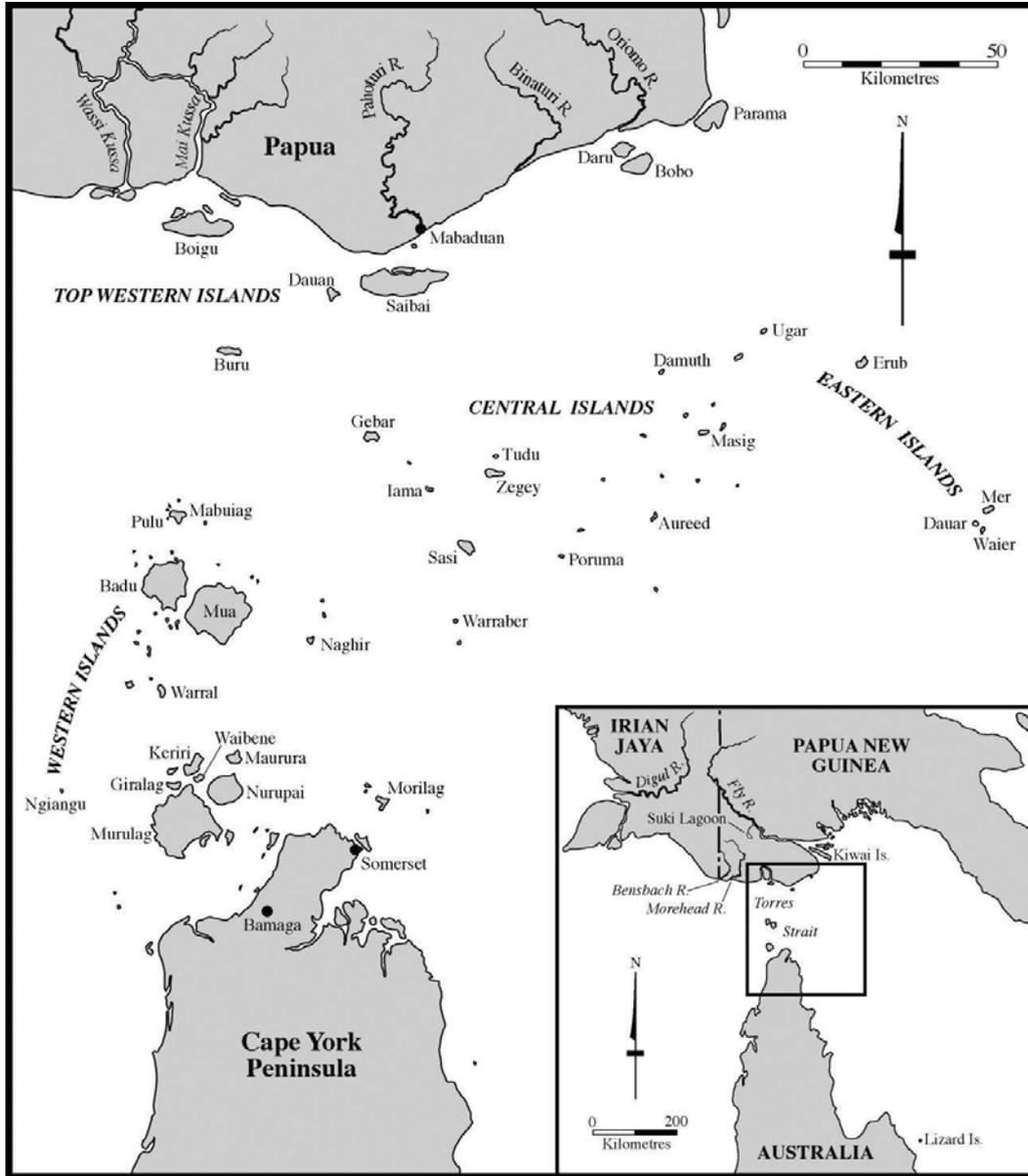


FIG. 1. Torres Strait region.

PAST ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH ON TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER ORIGINS. In the early 1970s, David Moore undertook the first archaeological excavations in Torres Strait (Moore, 1979). Following ideas developed by Haddon (1935) and Golson (1972), Moore recognised that within Torres Strait, the western

region has the greatest potential for early sites as it features large remnants of the old 'land bridge' that once existed between Australia and New Guinea (i.e., the large islands of Mua, Badu & Murulag). Furthermore, following rising sea levels at the end of the Pleistocene, flooding of the land bridge would have left SW Torres Strait

as a large peninsula tipped by what is now Mabuig Island for a short time c.8000-7000 yrs BP. However, Moore only excavated sites in recent coastal sediments and, not surprisingly, only obtained 'recent' (<1000 yrs BP) dates.

In the wake of Moore's research (see also Vanderwal, 1973), David Harris and Tony Barham set up a major project in the Western Strait in the early 1980s aimed at understanding both 'when and how human occupation of the region took place' and social processes that led to the emergence of agriculture (for details see Barham et al., this volume). A research focus on coastal areas and sea level changes resulted from recognition of the long-term importance of coastal resources in the human history of the region (Barham, 1999, 2000; Barham & Harris, 1983, 1985; Ghaleb, 1990, 1998). Middens excavated on Murulag, Mua, Mabuig and Saibai indicated specialised maritime subsistence dating to the last 2500 years. Rowland (1985) found similar results on Mua and Naghi. These late Holocene dates match reasonably well with recent results of reef coring which indicate that large intertidally exposed reef-flats (comparable with those of the present day) only formed during the last 3000 years (Barham, 2000; Woodroffe et al., 2000). Detailed coring and pollen-analyses of swamps around mound-and-ditch horticultural systems on Saibai suggest intensive agriculture developed in the last 1200 years (Barham, 1999). This confirms earlier archaeological data for the antiquity of horticulture (Barham & Harris, 1985), and suggests that the onset of (village) sedentism (underwritten by horticulture) in Torres Strait may be similarly restricted to the last 1200 years. Some scholars continue to argue that these later cultural changes may be linked to Austro-nesian influences along the southern Papuan coast in the last 2000 years (Harris, 1995; see also Golson, 1972; Moore, 1979; cf. Barham, 2000).

Archaeological fieldwork in Torres Strait by Moore, Harris, Barham and Rowland in the 1970s and 1980s provided the first broad chronological insights into the long-term history of the Strait. Three important implications of this research are: 1) Understanding the 'big picture' of Torres Strait cultural origins requires targeting sites on older landforms from the 'land bridge phase' and subsequent 'peninsula phase' prior to the peak of sea level rise around 7000-6000 yrs BP (Barham, 2000; Woodroffe et al., 2000). With the exception of once-mountain peaks, such landforms are only present on the larger islands of Western Torres Strait. 2) Understanding cultural developments

over the last 2500 years requires a series of focused and detailed studies on the cultural history of individual islands. 3) Torres Strait is a dynamic environment and Holocene sea level changes, reef development, coastal geomorphology and general land and seascape histories need to be adequately understood at local and regional scales before models of cultural change tracing human resource use and/or human-environment interactions can be formulated. Each of these core lessons is taken as a prologue to the Western Torres Strait Cultural History Project.

NEW WAVE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH. After a break of a decade, a new wave of researchers is taking a fresh look at the human and environmental history of Torres Strait. Building on previous work, archaeological researchers have begun examining human use of all the major island sub-groupings. The Murray Islands Archaeological Project (James Cook University) has found evidence for specialised marine use during the last 2500 years, along with the first evidence of prehistoric pottery in the Straits dating back to c.2000 yrs BP (Barham 2000; Carter 2001, 2002; Carter et al., this volume) and probably traded from the Papuan Gulf. While this research has produced fundamental new knowledge on the antiquity of occupation in Eastern Torres Strait, the full significance of this work cannot be assessed without detailed understanding of cultural developments across Western Torres Strait.

Between 1996 and 1998, Ian McNiven documented 621 known and potential archaeological sites on 42 Torres Strait islands. The research entailed a thorough survey of anthropological and historical literature supplemented by field surveys and interviews with Elders (Fitzpatrick et al., 1998; McNiven, Fitzpatrick and Cordell, this volume). Five pilot archaeological projects evolved from this survey:

1. Pulu Culture Site Mapping Project – examining the ritual landscape of Pulu Islet off Mabuig Island (Western Torres Strait) with excavations undertaken at Tigershark Rockshelter in 1999 (McNiven, Fitzpatrick et al., 2002).
2. Tudu Culture Site Mapping Project – examining the cultural landscape of a sandy cay in Central Torres Strait, focusing on excavation of a ritual dugong bone mound in 2000 (McNiven & Feldman, 2003).
3. Torres Strait Rock-Art Project – focusing on rock-art (painting) sites across Western Torres

Strait, including detailed recording of Kabadul Kula rock-art site on Dauan Island, Top Western Group in 2000 (David et al., 2001, 2003; McNiven et al., 2000, 2001, 2002; McNiven & David, this volume; McNiven, David et al., this volume).

4. Torres Strait Stone Tool Trade & Exchange Project – a re-assessment of the sources of stone axes and club heads with a focus on quarries on Dauan (McNiven, 1998; McNiven & von Gnielinski, this volume; McNiven, von Gnielinski & Quinnell, this volume; see also Hitchcock, this volume).

5. Torres Strait Maritime Frontier Project – examining the development of frontier trade relationships between Islanders and European sailors, and how these impacted 19th Century Islander society (McNiven, 2001).

WESTERN TORRES STRAIT CULTURAL HISTORY PROJECT

Because of its large continental islands, and because of the chain of islands from Cape York to New Guinea, Western Torres Strait holds the key to understanding the long-term history of Torres Strait. In particular, the two large islands of Badu and Mua represent considerable remnants of the Pleistocene land bridge between New Guinea and Australia, and Mabuiag/Pulu represent the northern tip of the early Holocene ‘Cape York Peninsula’. As such, these islands have enormous potential to reveal evidence for ancient human use of the region. In contrast, most islands to the north and to the east have significantly less potential for early sites as they are either recent sandy cays or silt islands (Central and Top Western Island Groups) or the tops of old mountains (Eastern Islands). In 2001, we initiated the Western Torres Strait Cultural History Project and recorded oral histories and surveyed and test-excavated a series of sites on Mua, Badu, Mabuiag and Pulu. Three Monash University PhD candidates have also joined the Project: Cassandra Rowe (palynologist) is undertaking a detailed palaeobiogeographical study of Mua and Badu; Joe Crouch (archaeologist) is studying specialized use of satellite islands surrounding Mua and Badu; and Liam Brady (archaeologist) is researching the rock-art of Torres Strait, focusing on paintings across the Western Strait, including Murulag in Kaurareg territory in the SW.

We take our methodological lead from the view that knowledge of history is founded on a dialectic: history unfolds forward in time, while at the same time we trace the origins of what we know back in time. This dual movement guides

our own project. By tracking archaeological signatures of ethnographically documented cultural practices back from a recent to a more distant past, the antiquity of specific archaeological details — and, by implication, of cultural expressions — can be traced. At the same time, tracking the emergence of new archaeological expressions from a distant to a more recent past enables us to position cultural traits in historical perspective and to identify historical trajectories. Rather than jumping from one historical period of time to another, the method involves a tracing of continuity so as to identify and highlight discontinuities. Through this approach — which we may call the ‘Dual Historical Method’ — our ultimate objective is to undertake an archaeology of the cultural land- and seascapes that eventuated into the cultural practices of ethnographic (historical and contemporary) times in Western Torres Strait.

The organisation of this project follows this movement back and forward in time. We aim to investigate the earliest known legendary sites and also other promising archaeological sites on ancient landforms (such as Badu 15 Rockshelter and Mask Cave on Pulu) so as to be in a position to understand the nature and antiquity of the earliest sites from which we can unfold the cultural history of the central Western islands of Torres Strait. It is for this reason too that we plan to excavate legendary village sites on Badu, Mua and Mabuiag, enabling us to track through time the historical emergence of cultural practices. We have also begun radiocarbon dating ethnographically known sites and items of material culture that are characteristically Torres Strait Islander — in particular *kod* and other kinds of ceremonial sites and turtle-shell masks found archaeologically and held in museum collections — so as to track the history of these cultural practices back in time from the recent ethnographically known past to the temporally distant unknown past. Putting these two lines of evidence together, we aim to shed new light on the antiquity and history of Torres Strait cultural practices as we have come to know them from ethnography and oral history. With a major emphasis on historically known places already meaningful from oral tradition, the Western Torres Strait Cultural History Project also has considerable significance to present Torres Strait Islanders. It was a request by local communities to know the ancient history of these known cultural places that resulted in McNiven and David being taken by Islanders to such places to help set up this Project.

The five specific aims (above) of the Western Torres Strait Cultural History Project involve two research foci: 1) document empirically the history of use of three key island communities of central Western Torres Strait (Mua, Badu and Mabuia) and identify chronological and spatial changes in the establishment of new sites (e.g., occupation sites, rock-art sites, ceremonial sites), the relative use of marine and terrestrial foods (e.g., fish, turtle, dugong, birds, shellfish) and the relative use of local and imported material culture (e.g., ochre, stone/shell/bone artifacts, pottery); 2) examine the theoretical relationships between development of islands/marine resources, extent of island settlement, intensity of resource use, scale and nature of group interaction (e.g., trade), ritual inscription of land- and sea-scapes, emergence of social regionalism, and expression of group difference in material culture (see David & Chant, 1995 and McNiven, 1999 for similar theoretical approaches).

To achieve the Project aims, we have selected a broad range of sites from four islands for excavation. The selection reflects the results of 3 years of intensive field research in the region, which formed part of the formative years of the Western Torres Strait Cultural History Project. In particular, inland rockshelters on Mua, Badu and Pulu (rockshelters do not exist on Mabuia itself) are being targeted for long sequences. The emphasis on excavations is in line with the broad chronological aims of the Project and the need to obtain cultural sequences. Excavations employ standard archaeological techniques with fine-scale excavations (<5cm excavation units following stratigraphy in open sites; <3cm units in rockshelters). Rockshelter excavations are all planned to be small (<2m², in 50 × 50cm grid units) while open village site excavations are larger (up to 5 m², in 50 × 50cm or 1 × 1m grid units). Rock-art is being recorded by scale drawing and with digital photography (supplemented by computer enhancement) (David et al., 2001). Relative intensity of resource use (e.g., marine foods, raw materials) is determined by examining changes in species size/diversity, degree of artefact reduction/ curation and discard rates. Chronology is being determined using multiple ¹⁴C dates. Rock-art is being dated indirectly by the age of ochre fragments and painted panel spalls in associated deposits (e.g., David et al., 1999). Small pieces of individual shells are being dated from ritual trumpet shell (*Syrinx*) arrangements so as to obtain a series of radiocarbon determinations from individual sites to understand

the span of time involved in a site's creation. Individual trumpet shells with blow-holes located at lookout sites are also being directly AMS-dated. Excavations are being undertaken at sites with stone alignments with a view to dating the ages of the alignments themselves by stratigraphic associations (minimum and/or maximum dates). Excavations are also taking place at ritual dugong/turtle bone sites to obtain basal bone samples for ¹⁴C determination to understand the antiquity and development of hunting magic rituals (e.g., McNiven & Feldman, 2003). Geochemical/mineralogical sourcing is being carried out for stone artifacts, ochres and ceramics (e.g., McNiven & von Gnielinski, this volume; McNiven, von Gnielinski & Quinnell, this volume). Site taphonomy/landscape dynamics include sediment, pollen and phytolith analyses.

INITIAL RESULTS. Site surveys and excavations have taken place on Badu, Mua, Mabuia and Pulu. While analysis of excavated materials and survey data from the 'formative' years of our project are still in progress, initial results are presented below for Mua and Pulu. Results from Badu remain confidential and will be presented in due course once community permission is secured. At this stage, we can say that our radiocarbon dating results are consistent with a late Holocene colonisation of the Strait.

On Mua, we have systematically recorded 46 sites with Elders and other Islander participants. Numerous rock painting sites have been systematically recorded using digital photography and computer enhancement (Brady et al., in press). One legendary Story site (Turao Kula, near Uma) was excavated (David et al., in press), revealing a radiocarbon date of 960 ± 145 yrs BP (Wk-9944) for the beginning of occupation. Two shell middens at Gerain, the homeland of the legendary hero Gelam, have also been excavated; radiocarbon determinations are forthcoming. Mua 28 (also known as Lady Hill rock-art site) in particular — situated at the foot of a mountain near a large permanent spring and promising great depth based on surrounding sedimentary clues — was recorded but not excavated, and holds considerable promise for deep, stratified deposits. A small piece of a trumpet shell with blowhole, strategically located at a lookout point on the opposite side of the valley to Mua 28, has been submitted for radiocarbon dating. Most of the sites we recorded on Mua concern Story places, legendary early and later villages, and inland rockshelters. On Mua, a series of seven

villages was recorded from Elders, documenting a chronological sequence of island (and village) occupation as recorded from oral tradition (see Fig. 2 for location of the villages and other sites). A multi-year excavation program targeting village sites will commence in late 2003.

On Pulu (a ceremonial islet for Mabuia Islanders), we undertook detailed recording, mapping and excavations of the *kod* ceremonial site complex in 2001 (McNiven, Fitzpatrick et al., 2002). Alfred Haddon visited the site with Mabuia Elders in 1898 and produced the most detailed 19th Century recording of an indigenous ceremonial site in Australia. These details, along with current oral traditions, have enabled us to trace back in time the history of this ceremonial site through archaeological research. In November 2001 we excavated four different parts of the site, revealing a clear and spatially consistent stratigraphy across the site, beginning with early occupation followed by the onset of ceremonial dimensions late in its history. ^{14}C samples for rock-art, along with bone and shell ceremonial structures at the *kod*, including the location where human heads were hung following headhunting raids, have been submitted; results will be reported as they become available. Our 2001 fieldwork also documented rock-art and surface stone tools and pottery sherds from Mask Cave on Pulu. These red slipped wares show superficial similarities to early Papuan Gulf pottery dated to c.2000 yrs BP (cf., Vanderwal, 1978) and are the first prehistoric pottery finds for Western Torres Strait. A test pit consisting of two contiguous $50 \times 50\text{cm}$ squares was excavated at Mask Cave in October 2002. It revealed an 80-90cm cultural sequence of bones, shells, stone artefacts, charcoal and pottery. Charcoal samples have been submitted for AMS age determination. Further excavations are planned for late 2003.

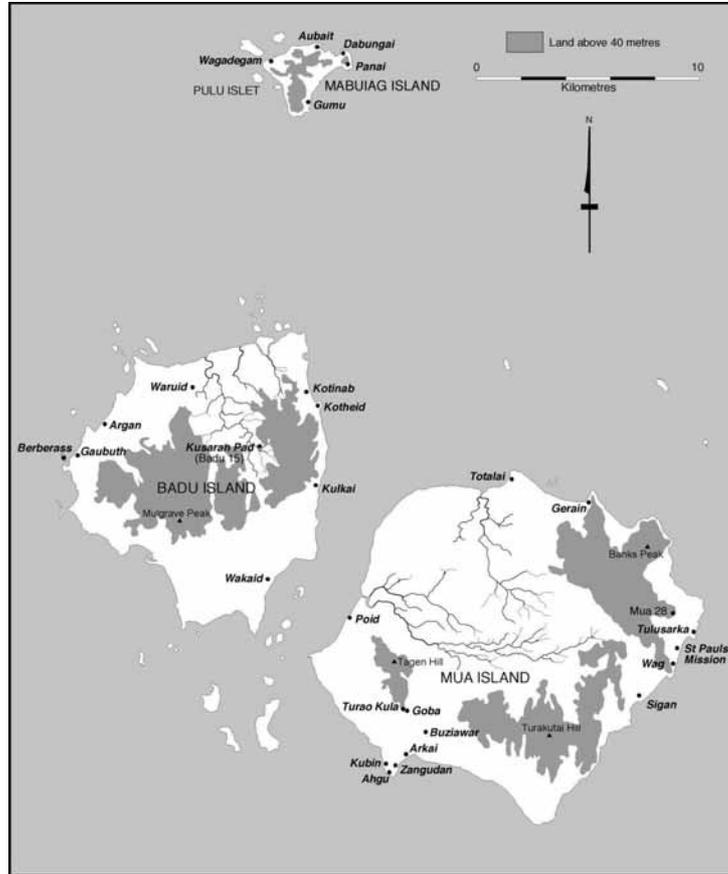


FIG. 2. Central Western Torres Strait.

On Mabuia, we recorded a series of village sites around the island. Oral history notes that occupation started at Wagadegam located around the corner from Pulu Islet. Harris and Ghaleb's excavations at the Gumu old village site produced a basal date of c.1000yrs BP. It is likely that prior occupation will be found at Wagadegam given the oral history and the >1500 year non-basal dates from nearby Pulu.

The above results are beginning to reveal key data on the distribution, nature and antiquity of ethnographically documented ceremonial, village and rock-art sites. Included amongst the emerging historical patterns are contemporaneous dates of approximately 2500yrs BP for Saibai in the north, Dauar in the east, and the Western Islands in which we are undertaking research. If these radiocarbon dates approximate earliest occupation by marine specialists, they

would signal an archaeologically instantaneous peopling of the Eastern and Western Strait late in the Holocene, indicating that seafaring by the earliest Islander ancestors likely involved more than a single boatload of people searching for a new homeland to colonise. These data and close community relations established during these studies signal the Western Torres Strait Cultural History Project's great potential for answering the Project's five major questions, listed above.

CONCLUSION

The Western Torres Strait Cultural History Project is the first broad-based project aimed at understanding the origin and development of the large continental islands of Torres Strait. In contrast to previous archaeological research, the Project targets old landforms to find sites with pre-3000 year-old sedimentary sequences. Secondly, the Western Torres Strait Cultural History Project is the first to focus explicitly on the developmental history of specific Islander communities by investigating legendary villages and ritual sites through the 'Dual Historical Method'. Thirdly, with a focus on the western island chain, the Project promises to shed new insights into the nature of cultural contacts between Australia and New Guinea during the ancient past. And last but not least, a focus on ethnographically documented ritual sites represents an approach to the archaeology of cultural land- and seascapes that focuses on performative dimensions of cultural action and cultural reproduction, an investigative process we have advocated elsewhere (David, 2002; McNiven, in press; McNiven & Feldman, 2003; McNiven & Russell, 2002).

Methodologically, the archaeology of oral tradition — including a focus on the earliest legendary sites and on ethnographically documented cultural practices — represents an attempt to systematically track back in time aspects of the Western Islander past (David, 2002; Kirch & Sahlins, 1992). In particular, we target ethnographically documented ritual sites as a way of investigating the antiquity of ethnographically known cultural land- and seascapes (and in doing so, indigenous ontologies as expressed in codified social behaviour and their material correlates). An archaeology of oral traditions allows for an historical agenda most meaningful to Islander communities (Louise Manas, Mua, pers. comm., 2002).

Initial results have revealed 1) initial island occupation and/or the commencement of major

regional demographic increases and an intensification of island occupation around 2500 yrs BP; followed by 2) noticeable and sustained increases in social activity during the last 1500 years; and 3) a later emergence or consolidation of ethnographically known ritual places and practices, perhaps as recently as c.500yrs BP. The broader applicability and reliability of these emerging trends will be explored in the course of the Western Torres Strait Cultural History Project, and as individual site reports are published.

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