

**INDIGENOUS AGENCY AND ETHNOGRAPHIC COLLECTIONS
FROM CENTRAL PROVINCE,
PAPUA NEW GUINEA**

September-October 2008

**Submitted by
Dr. Robin Torrence
Dr. Jude Philp
Dr. Annie Clarke
Erna Lilje**



Cultural group, Maipa village

**This project is affiliated with The National Museum and Art Gallery, Port Moresby,
Papua New Guinea.**

PARTICIPANTS

Dr. Robin Torrence
Division of Anthropology
Australian Museum
6 College Street
Sydney N.S.W. 2010
Australia

Dr. Jude Philp
Macleay Museum,
University of Sydney, NSW 2006
Australia

Dr. Anne Clarke
Archaeology
School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry, A14
University of Sydney, NSW 2006
Australia

Erna Lilje
Archaeology
School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry, A14
University of Sydney, NSW 2006
Australia

ITINERARY

September 23 Travel to Port Moresby

September 24 Meet National Museum staff at the Modern History Museum; visit Hanuabada

September 25 Initiate study using National Museum database

September 27 Team visit to Ela Beach Craft Market

September 28-October 9 Study National Museum database; interviews with local craft specialists and knowledge holders

October 1 Torrence presents seminar at the University of Papua New Guinea

October 3-6 Team visit to Maipa village, Mekeo

October 9 Torrence gives interview for NBC 'Culture Talk' programme.

October 10 Clarke, Lilje, Philp return to Sydney; Torrence travels to Kimbe for meeting with Governor Peter Humphreys

October 13 Meetings with WNB Provincial Cultural Centre staff

October 14 Torrence travels to Rabaul

October 15 Meeting with staff at the Rabaul Volcano Observatory

October 16 Torrence travels to Port Moresby

October 17 Torrence travels to Alotau and joins *Oceanic Discoverer* as guest lecturer

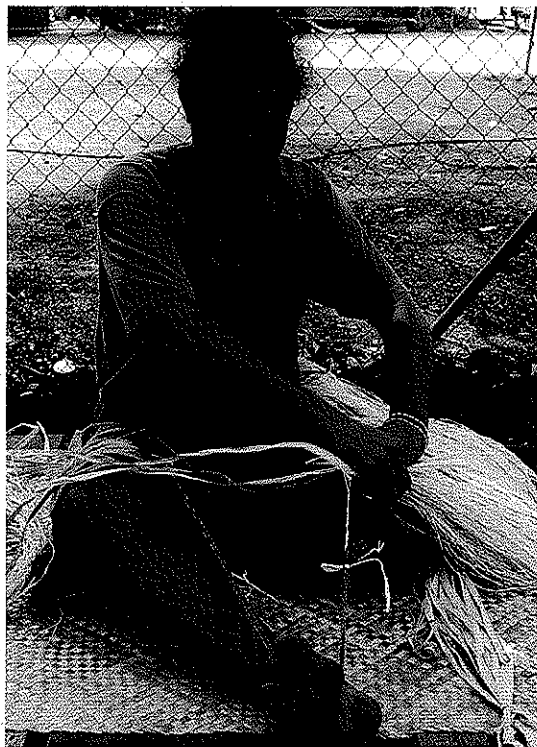
October 27 Torrence travels to Port Moresby

October 28 Torrence returns to Sydney

SUMMARY

The research visit achieved two main objectives. Firstly, as part of a project investigating changes through time in the ways that artefact producers in Central Province initiated and negotiated relationships with various 'outsiders,' the research team visited Port Moresby to analyse ethnographic collections from Central Province, PNG currently held in the National Museum and Art Gallery and initiated discussion with stakeholder communities about future collaborations and research. Due to the unanticipated closure of the National Museum, emphasis was placed on creating a comprehensive electronic database of the collections from Central Province. Interviews were held with various artifact producers and a visit was made to Maipa village, Mekeo.

In the second part of the research trip, Torrence met with government officials, New Britain Palm Oil, Ltd, and interested local citizens to discuss the results of her ongoing archaeological research and the potential for future research.



Demonstration of skirt making by Dairi Arua

INDIGENOUS AGENCY AND MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

The aim of the ongoing research is to understand the history of interaction between explorers, traders, missionaries, tourists, and British and Australian government officials and local communities in Central Province, PNG through the study of the items that were exchanged and have ended up in ethnographic collections in various museums. Previous collection-based research of PNG artefacts has largely ignored the active role of the Papua New Guineans who made the artefacts and offered them for exchange/sale. This new research is innovative because it re-focuses attention on how the artefacts were made, identifies changes in production through time, and provides a richer understanding of the producers themselves.

The main objective of the research trip was to study the ethnographic collections from Central Province now housed in the National Museum and Art Gallery, but this was not possible. Due to lack of electricity in the Museum during the 3 weeks of the visit, we could not study the collections. Instead, Torrence and Philp made a comprehensive electronic database of the collection from Central Province by cross-checking and adding information from the hard copy of the ethnographic registers to the existing database. This will provide the necessary information for comparison of assemblage composition through time and among various international museums. Meetings with Sebastian Haraha [PNG Museum] were also invaluable in providing additional historical and contextual information about the collections.

The team also visited Hanuabada to record the context of pioneer missionary Rev. Lawes' (1839-1907) house as an aid to studying historical photos and contemporary collections. Two visits to Kilakila village further illuminated the place of church history within the wider context of artifact dispersal. Here we met with Mr Iava Ureki, descendent of a 1920s informant to hear his family history detailing Koitabu peoples' occupation of Port Moresby. We were also shown items which were presented by Lawes to the first Koitabu convert, Benjamin, ancestor of Mr Ureki and are still in use by the community. A further visit to the new church with Mr Max Kuruku Madaha illuminated the place of the church as an instigator of object manufacture to raise money for local community projects.

Lilje and Clarke interviewed several informants to gather knowledge and practical experience about manufacturing techniques for various types of 'grass' skirts commonly found in museum collections from Central Province. The contemporary skirts collected from the informants will also provide an important modern sample for Lilje's doctoral study.

Although the research project is focused mainly on the period before PNG independence, future work may expand the time scale up to the present. Looking at modern craft production also provides useful models for understanding Indigenous agency in the past. The team therefore took the opportunity to visit Ela Beach craft market, Boroko market, and a range of artifact shops to get a sense of the nature of contemporary craft production. Torrence also obtained a number of modern items and commissioned a seamstress to make representative examples of contemporary PNG 'national dress' styles for the Australian Museum collections.

A long-term aim of the research is to include active participation by people from Central Province in order to increase knowledge about past and current techniques of production and exchange and to collect information about intangible heritage. As a first step in this direction, the team visited Maipa village, Mekeo district, over one weekend to discuss the project with people and collect information that would help interpret historic ethnographic collections, with particular emphasis on dance costumes and grass skirts. Display books with pictures of artifacts that date to the last century from the Mekeo region and now housed in the Australian Museum and British Museum were donated to the village.

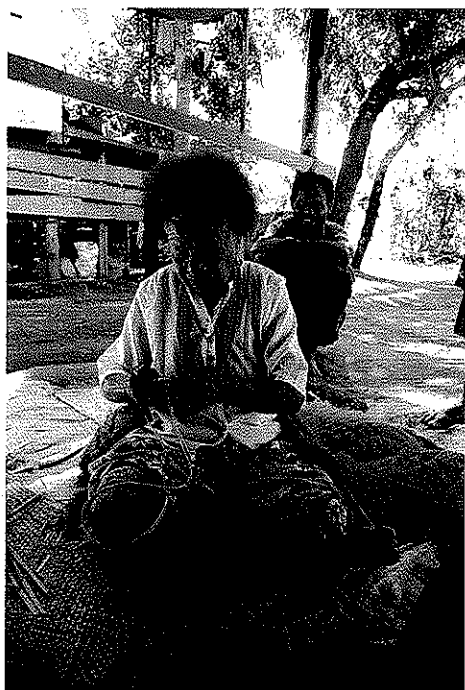


Maipa villagers sharing their knowledge and study of display books (far left).

REPORTING AND CONSULTATION

In Port Moresby the team met with the Director and various staff at the National Museum to inform them about the aims and methods of the research. Display books showing photographs of items from Central Province in the Australian Museum and British Museum were used to assist discussion about the research. Torrence presented a seminar about recent archeological research at the University of Papua New Guinea and was interviewed about the Indigenous agency and museum collections project on the NBC radio programme 'Culture Talk.'

Torrence travelled to Kimbe to return the results of her previous research in the form of a book, a PhD thesis by Sarah Byrne (University of London) and a number of article offprints. She met with the Governor, Peter Humphreys, and staff members from the WNB Provincial Cultural Centre, John Litom and Mary Kimbe, to report on research results and discuss future plans. She also presented publications to Jaimie Graham, managing director of NBPOL, and to Mahonia Na Dari Research Station library. Finally, she had a productive meeting with Riccard Reimann to discuss the future of the large collection of prehistoric material originally made by John Ray.



Avia Kivori demonstrates skirt making.



Maraga Kuruku with her dress designs and examples of 'national dress' made for the Australian Museum collections.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Funding was provided by an Australian Research Council Linkage Grant, a Grant-in-Aid from the Royston George Booker Scholarships at the University of Sydney, and the Australian Museum. The National Research Institute and especially Jim Robins are thanked for assistance with research permits. Herman Mandui and Matthew Leavesley helped with access to the National Museum. We thank Sebastian Haraha, our primary host at the National Museum, for his time, for sharing knowledge about the ethnographic collections and for providing excellent advice concerning research directions. Hugh Davies welcomed us to the University of Papua New Guinea and hosted a seminar. We are especially grateful for the gracious hospitality of a large number of people who assisted with accommodation, advice, specialist knowledge and provided a warm welcome to the NCD and Central Province: Max Kuruku Madaha, Moi Eli, Mure Eli Lilje, Stuart Fancy, Roger Kipo, Philip and Gorame Priestley, Bishop Gabutu, Dairi Arua, Kivori Dance Cultural Group, Avia Kivori, Joseph Oa Akauma, Grace Babona, Mary Batai, Andrew Kivori, Mary Kivori, Aunty Hoge Girigi, Maraga Kuruku, Iava Ureki, Chris McKee, Paul Kipo, Chief Ani Kineka, Chief Patrick Uae, Chief Aloysius, Chief of Agapu, Michael Aime and the residents of Maipa village.

In New Britain we thank Peter Humphreys, the WNB Provincial Cultural Centre, Mahonia Na Dari Research Station, Riccard Reimann, and especially Max and Cecilie Benjamin at Walindi Plantation for their support and hospitality.