Collecting New Guinea:
Transformations in the Lives of Four Ethnographic Collections, 1875-1988

by

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Abstract

In the late nineteenth century, when New Guinea became the subject of immense anthropological and scientific interest, travelers and naturalists from the West began to collect ethnographic objects for study and exhibition in museums. As anthropology developed into a formal discipline, it moved from its original setting of the museum to its permanent home in the university; in the process, these collections gradually became less relevant to the study of human culture. Four such ethnographic collections are housed at the University of Michigan Museum of Anthropological Archaeology (UMMAA); with these collections I illustrate how and why collectors' ideas about the value of assembling collections have changed over time. The first arrived in 1875 with tens of thousands of natural history specimens and no provenance information beyond "New Guinea." As part of the booming museum specimen exchange industry, the second arrived by way of the Field Museum in Chicago in 1945, having been assembled from five separate collections made between 1905 and 1913. The third was a by-product of a 1964 study of a regional trade system, eventually neglected by even its collectors. The most recent addition, which arrived in 1988, was intensively studied in a doctoral dissertation. I draw upon archival evidence and comparative museum collections to place these four ethnographic collections into their historical context. By tracing the paths that took these materials from New Guinea to the shelves of research museums in the United States, I reveal that the collections had richer live histories than their documentation would suggest.

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Introduction

Three lone men ventured into dense jungle foliage, embarking upon an expedition to "record a way of life that civilizing influences must inevitably end."[1] For four months in "Stone Age New Guinea," the three men traveled 450 miles on a journey along the banks of the Sepik River and through the highlands of New Guinea. Each of the travelers had his own purpose on the expedition: the guide led the others across difficult terrain, the botanist collected medicinal herbs, and the photographer captured images of the villagers on film. They searched for headhunters, attended lively ceremonial dances, and marvelled the villagers' superstitions. After four months, they returned to modern civilization.

The article "Journey into Stone Age New Guinea" reads like the travel journal of an early European explorer, but it was published centuries later, in the April 1969 edition of *National Geographic Magazine*. The twenty-five-page article, composed by travel writer and photographer Malcolm S. Kirk, fits neatly into the genre of a National Geographic adventure story, intended to thrill the magazine's average middle-class Midwestern reader. On one page, a man wearing a bird-of-paradise feather headdress and necklaces made of cowrie shells looks up in astonishment from a Polaroid photograph; on another page, a bare-chested woman carries a sleeping baby in a string bag. Through his camera lens, Kirk allows the audience to peer into the lives of the world's last "unspoiled"[2] people, marked as an exotic "other" by the things that they make, wear, and use.

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[1] Kirk, Malcolm. "Journey into Stone Age New Guinea." National Geographic Magazine. April 1969. 570.
[2] *Ibid., 578.*

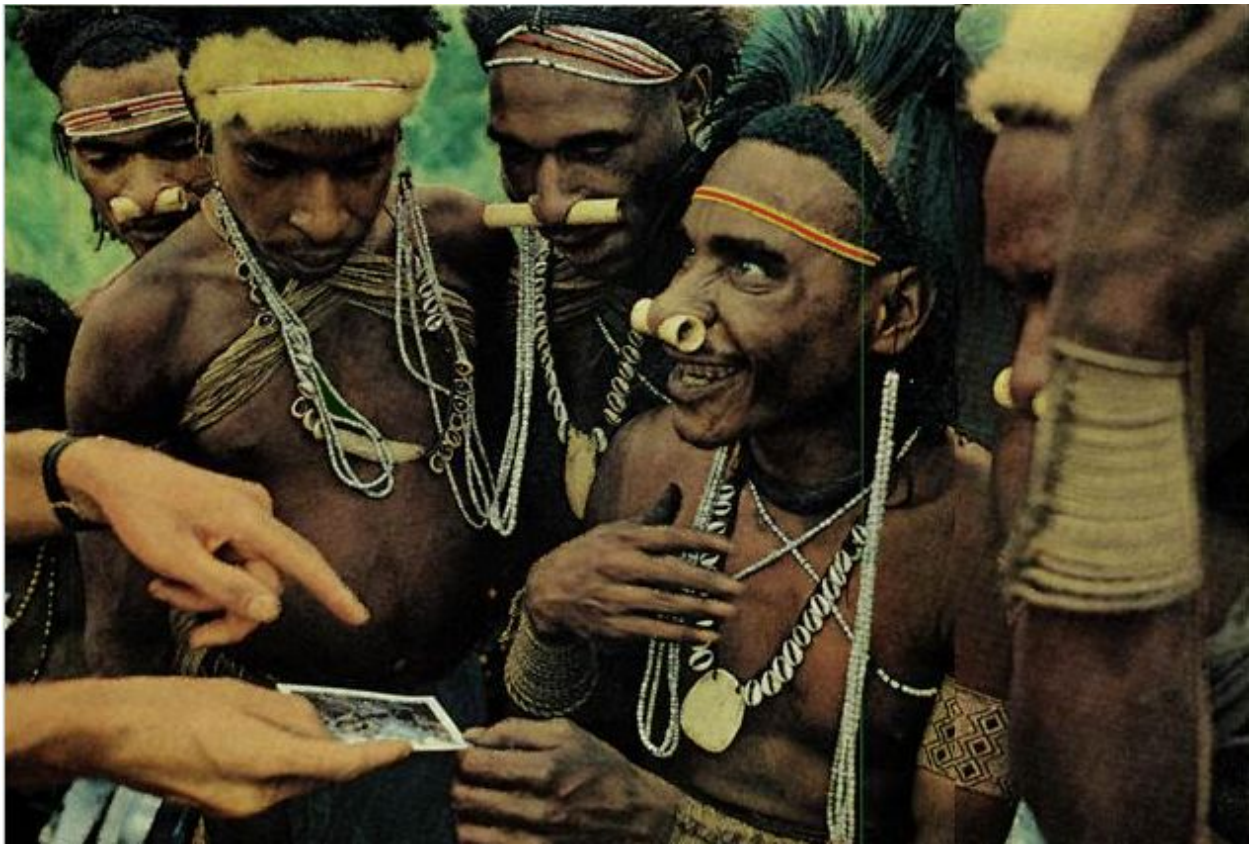

Figure 1. *National Geographic Magazine,* April 1969.

For nearly 150 years, the American public has learned about the last "unspoiled" peoples of Papua New Guinea from the pages of *National Geographic Magazine*[3] and from the exhibits about Melanesia in museums of anthropology. Both narrative formats distill reality into a visual narrative and display traditional material culture for the purpose of entertaining and educating an unfamiliar audience. Both locations are sites of contact in which Western authors have historically had the sole authority to tell stories about Papua New Guinea to people who have never been there. The genre of expedition-adventure story traces back to the literature produced by early voyagers and explorers who first encountered and collected objects from indigenous

[3] First published in 1888.

communities in the Pacific. Although collectors' motivations for assembling collections have changed over time, museum collections are a tangible legacy of the enduring narratives about cultural difference that fill popular culture.

The traditional material culture of indigenous communities in the Pacific has fascinated the West since the sixteenth century, when the first European voyagers returned home with cultural curiosities from afar. Acquired through purchase, trade, or theft, these objects became prized possessions in their new contexts. Wealthy Westerners displayed "curios" in cabinets of curiosity with taxidermied animals, gemstones, fossils, and family heirlooms. The market for these objects grew into a commercial enterprise as colonization progressed. Simultaneously, material culture became a tool with which to classify groups of people on a continuum from "savage" to "civilized." Beginning in the early nineteenth century, scholarly institutions and wealthy individuals founded museums to aggregate and display objects. Collecting became an scientific endeavor as naturalists and ethnologists organized impressive field expeditions to amass collections of zoological and cultural specimens. Through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the anthropology museum developed in tandem with the university, and anthropological research went on in both kinds of institutions. But by the mid-twentieth century, most cultural anthropologists had left museums. Collections of material culture, now called ethnographic objects, remain in storage in museums, although they do not receive the same attention that they once did.

This thesis uses four ethnographic collections from New Guinea housed at the University of Michigan Museum of Anthropological Archaeology (UMMAA) between 1875 and 1988 to

examine how ideas about the value of collecting ethnographic objects have changed over time, during this later period when anthropology moved from the museum to the university.

Historian of anthropology William C. Sturtevant has divided this time period into three stages which I will refer to throughout this thesis.[4] During the "Museum Period" (1840s to 1890s), museum anthropologists typically had no formal training in anthropology and their interests in ethnology arose from different disciplinary backgrounds.[5] The field entered the "Museum-University Period" (1890s to 1920s) as museums professionalized and anthropology developed into a formal discipline.[6] Before 1920, the "half dozen or so academic departments of anthropology all existed in some kind of relation to an anthropological or general museum," and only about half of professional anthropologists were employed in universities.[7] The "University Period," characterized by the dominant setting of academic anthropology, began in the 1920s and continues to the present.[8] The institutionalization of funding for field research through private foundations such as the Rockefeller Foundation fueled the growth of ethnographic studies and the expansion of university anthropology departments.[9] By the end of the 1930s, there were more than thirty departments of anthropology in American universities, including the University of Michigan.[10]

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[4] William Sturtevant, "Does Anthropology Need Museums?," in *Proceedings of the Biological Society of Washington.*, 2nd ed., vol. 82 (Washington: Biological Society of Washington, 1969), 619–50.
[5] *Ibid.* 622.
[6] *Ibid,* 623.
[7] George W. Stocking, "Ideas and Institutions in American Anthropology: Thoughts Toward a History of the Interwar Years," in *The Ethnographer's Magic and Other Essays in the History of Anthropology* (Univ of Wisconsin Press, 1992).
[8] Sturtevant, "Does Anthropology Need Museums?" 625.
[9] George W. Stocking, "Philanthropoids and Vanishing Cultures: Rockefeller Funding and the End of the Museum Era in Anglo-American Anthropology," in *Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture* (Univ of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 112–45.
[10] *Ibid.*

Ethnographic Objects

What makes something an ethnographic object? Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett offers a straightforward explanation:

> "Ethnographic artifacts are objects of ethnography. They are artifacts created by ethnographers. Such objects become ethnographic by virtue of being defined, segmented, detached, and carried away by ethnographers. They are ethnographic, not because they were found in a Hungarian peasant household, Kwakiutl village, or Rajasthani market rather than in Buckingham Palace or Michelangelo's studio, but by virtue of the manner in which they have been detached" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998, 17-18).

Ethnographic objects have been detached from a larger cultural whole. No object is inherently ethnographic: an object becomes ethnographic when someone decides that it should be so. The act of selection, then, qualifies an object to represent the whole of which it was once a part. Susan Pearce describes the relationship between an ethnographic object and the culture of which it was once a part as being simultaneously metonymic and metaphoric.[11] An ethnographic object selected by a collector "bears an intrinsic, direct, and organic relationship," – in other words a metonymic relationship — with the cultural practice of which it was once a part because it *was* once a part of it. But "the very act of selection adds to its nature." Detached from its social world, the object "now bears a representative or metaphorical relationship to its whole." It is the ethnographer who decides which objects should stand for this complex whole.

[11] Susan Pearce, *Museums, Objects, and Collections: A Cultural Study* (Smithsonian Institution, 2017).

Methods

The core case studies for this thesis are four collections at the University of Michigan Museum of Anthropological Archaeology (UMMAA) from New Guinea.[12] The first collection was made in 1875; the second was made around 1910 and accessioned by the UMMAA in 1945; the third was made in 1964; and the fourth was made in 1988. The time interval between these five moments in the four collections' lives ranges from twenty to thirty-five years. I chose these collections because they were distributed relatively evenly across this 113-year time period and because of the unique way that each relates to the major issues in its time period.

I first examined the accession records for the four collections before deciding which objects to access. The accession file for each collection contains correspondence between the collector and museum staff, lists of specimens, field notes, and photographs if the collector provided them. After learning about the collector and his goals for assembling the collection, I chose a selection of objects to access. With the assistance of the UMMAA's collections managers, I examined and photographed objects in each collection for reference.[13]

To supplement the first collection, made by Joseph Beal-Steere 1875, I used several additional archival sources. As an ornithologist, Beal-Steere primarily collected zoological specimens; as a result, his field catalog books and some archival materials are housed in the Bird Division of the University of Michigan Museum of Zoology. I accessed these records as well as

[12] A note on places and place names: Except for the first collection, whose exact provenance is unknown, the objects were collected on the eastern half of the island of New Guinea, what is now the nation of Papua New Guinea. Throughout this thesis, I refer to "New Guinea," "German New Guinea," or "Papua New Guinea" according to the name in use at the time the collection was made. The names of villages, cities, and geographic features have changed over time; wherever possible, I provide the modern place name as a reference.

[13] I photographed all 70 objects in the Beal-Steere Collection, 8 of 10 objects in the Field Museum Collection, 27 of 107 objects in the Harding-Sahlins Collection, and 2 of 124 objects in the Guddemi Collection.

the Joseph Beal-Steere Papers at the Bentley Historical Library, which include his field journals and correspondence.

The second UMMAA collection originally came from the Field Museum, where the objects had been grouped under five separate accessions. With financial assistance from the Honors Program, I traveled there for two days to access the archives, accession records, and related collections for all five accessions. In total, I examined thirty-four objects that were of the same types and from the same locations as objects in the UMMAA's collection.[14]The archives provided insights into the collectors' motivations; examining these objects helped me understand why the Field Museum might have chosen to send U-M the objects that it did.

I interviewed two living collectors. Marshall Sahlins assembled the third collection and answered questions by email, and Phillip Guddemi made the fourth collection and spoke with me through video call. They provided insights into the collections that are absent from the archives.

I traveled to New York City with the support of the Anthropology Department to research two comparative collections. At the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) I accessed the Otto Finsch Collection, which was assembled in the 1880s, to gain a better understanding of the material culture of New Guinea at the time Beal-Steere assembled his collection. I also visited the Metropolitan Museum of Art to view the Kwoma ceremonial house ceiling exhibit and access its archives. I compare this collection to the Guddemi Collection in Chapter 4 to illustrate differences in the ways that anthropology and art museums collect and display the material culture of Papua New Guinea.

[14] For example, A.B. Lewis collected a string bag from the village of Kirau that is now in the UMMAA's collection, so I photographed the three remaining string bags from Kirau at the Field Museum.

Overview

Using four ethnographic collections as case studies I ask, *How have ideas about the value of collecting ethnographic objects changed over time? How has the relationship between material culture and anthropology changed over time?*

In Chapter 1, I examine seventy weapons from New Guinea that the naturalist Joseph Beal-Steere acquired in 1875 at the end of a five-year collecting expedition for the University of Michigan. Beal-Steere provided no provenance information about the weapons beyond "New Guinea," an island on which he never set foot. I explore the ecosystem of Western naturalists, collectors, and traders working in the Pacific and adopt the framework of a "mystery story" (Thomas 1999) to speculate about how and why he collected these objects.

Chapter 2 traces the tangled life histories of ten objects that the Field Museum sent to the University of Michigan in 1945, at the height of the museum specimen exchange industry. Between 1905 and 1913, Alfred Buell Lewis (an anthropologist), Heinrich Voogdt (a ship's captain), and Heinrich Umlauff (a curio dealer) collected these ten items and thousands of others from German New Guinea and sold or donated them to the Field Museum in five separate accessions. By following the objects' journeys from their original contexts through a series of Western scientific institutions, I illustrate how museum staff construct the value of ethnographic collections.

In Chapter 3, I analyze a collection of 107 ethnographic objects made by Thomas Harding and Marshall Sahlins in 1964 in a study of the Vitiaz Strait trade system. I sketch the development of anthropology in the twentieth century to explain why material culture held little interest to the two collectors. I examine the composition of the collection to show how it

attempts to illustrate the persistence of a traditional trade system in spite of external forces of cultural change.

Finally, in Chapter 4 I compare a collection of bark paintings from a ceremonial house ceiling that a U-M Ph.D. student named Phillip Guddemi collected in 1988 to a similar collection commissioned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the early 1970s. By comparing the ways in which a museum of art and a museum of anthropology collect and display the material culture of Papua New Guinea, I demonstrate how museums maintain the distinction between objects of art and objects of ethnography as well as the distinction between 'Primitive' Art and Western Art.

The 311 ethnographic objects in these four collections moved from their original contexts in New Guinea through a series of American museums over a period of 113 years. By exploring the social lives of ethnographic objects, I show how collectors' interests and motivations distort their meanings. Further, these four case studies illustrate how anthropology developed as a discipline and practice. Only by placing collections into their historical contexts may we fully understand the life histories of these ethnographic collections.

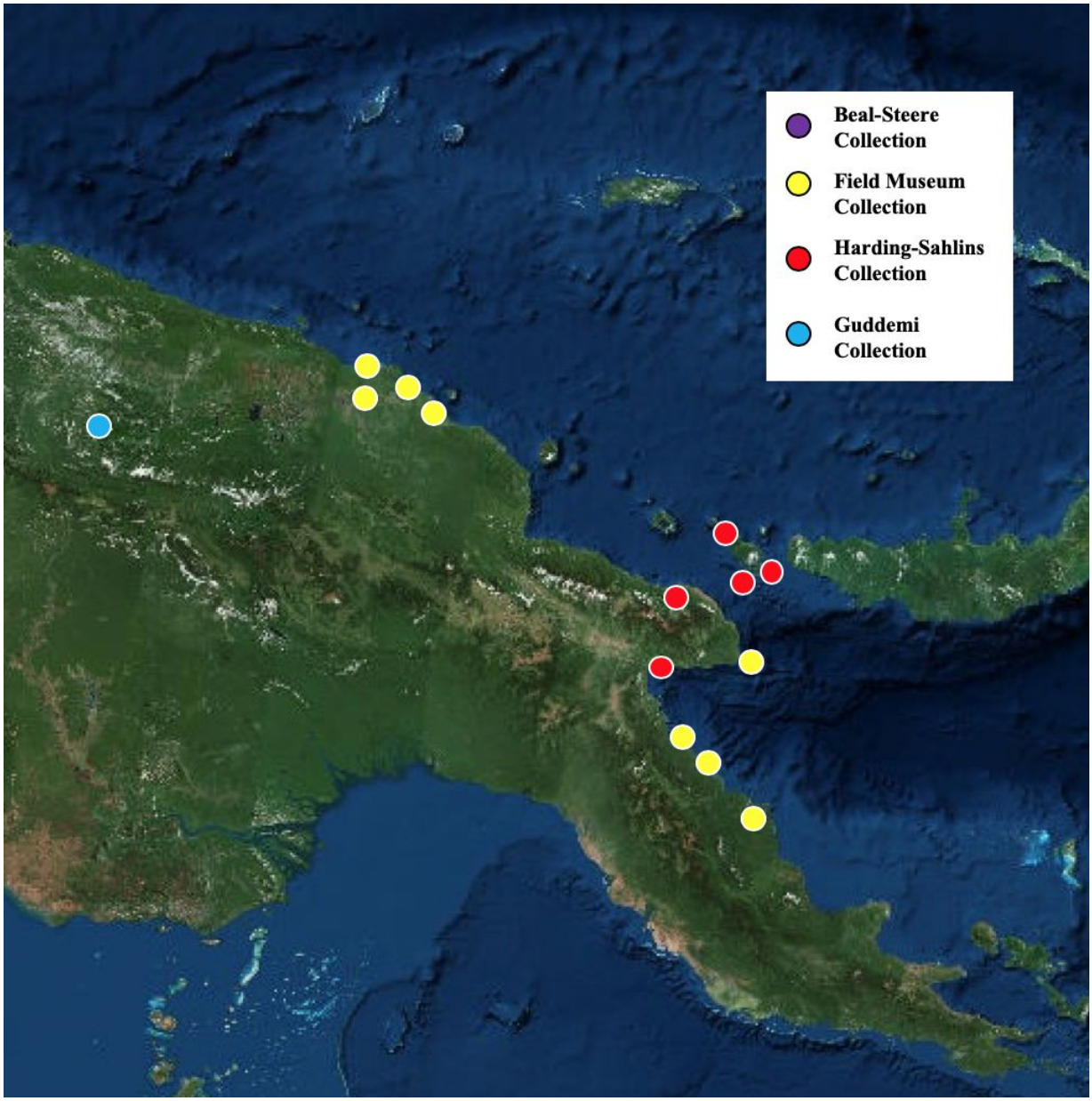

Figure 2. Map of object provenance, all collections.

Chapter 1
Imagining New Guinea: The Beal-Steere Collection

In September 1870, Joseph Beal-Steere, a naturalist and graduate of the University of Michigan Law School, embarked upon a five-year expedition to collect evidence of the natural world on behalf of his alma mater. When he returned to Ann Arbor in October 1875, he had assembled a collection of more than 60,000 zoological, geological, botanical, and ethnological specimens on his journey through South America, East Asia, and the islands of Southeast Asia. The University of Michigan awarded him its first ever honorary doctoral degree for his efforts to "further the cause of science"[15] and the Board of Regents built the University Museum to house his collection in 1880. In the last 144 years, the specimens have been cataloged, researched, exhibited, and relocated. Now divided between the Museum of Zoology, the Museum of Anthropological Archaeology, and the University Herbarium, what once was one collection has become multiple collections, distinguished by the types of specimens they contain, the locations from which they were collected, and the locations in which they now reside. The documentation he produced during his journey provides crucial information about the specimens' origins and significance. It too is divided among these museums and campus archives.

In 1922, the archaeological and ethnological artifacts from Beal-Steere's expedition became the first accession of the University of Michigan Museum of Anthropology, now called the U-M Museum of Anthropological Archaeology (UMMAA). Stored along with larger assemblages of pottery from Peru and musical instruments from Taiwan are twenty-six arrows, forty-two spears, and two bows from New Guinea. Beal-Steere failed to describe collecting these

[15] "Joseph Beal Steere, Master Naturalist," *The Ark*, March 1932.

objects in any of his diaries, letters, or field notes. Furthermore, he never traveled to New Guinea. Where did he acquire them? From whom? And for what purpose?

Inadequate documentation frequently separates modern researchers from the complete contextual "biographies" of ethnological collections. In such cases, Nicholas Thomas playfully argues that researchers might imagine themselves to be detectives in a "mystery story" in which objects are "the clues, the suspects, and the stars."[16] Studies that choose to embrace the framework of a mystery story will be "empowered by what we have – the artifact itself – rather than disempowered by what we lack – the contextual information."[17] 'Reading' objects as if they were texts can restore some contextual information from completely unprovenanced objects like Beal-Steere's weapons. Thomas elaborates: "We will always be led away from the artifact, and then perhaps back to it, in a succession of movements and speculations around implicit effects and meanings."[18] As we move from document to object in this speculative approach, we may reunite these objects with parts of their biographies that were lost on the journey.

The documents that Beal-Steere produced during the final six months of his expedition do not lead us to the seventy weapons from New Guinea but they may lead us to an understanding of the context in which he collected them. New Guinea appears in his letters as a symbol of the birds of paradise native to the island; New Guineans and Papuans appear as a mysterious and menacing presence that might lead him to these precious birds. These fleeting references, embedded in a larger narrative about his time in the Pacific, allow us to reconstruct

[16] Nicholas Thomas, "The Case of the Misplaced Ponchos: Speculations Concerning the History of Cloth in Polynesia," *Journal of Material Culture* 4, no. 1 (March 1, 1999): 6.
[17] *Ibid.,* 7.
[18] *Ibid.*

the environment in which Beal-Steere worked and provide insights into the narrative about New Guinea that he believed and perpetuated by collecting these weapons.

Figure 3. Twenty-six arrows, UMMAA 8293 a-z (bottom to top)

After graduating from the University, Joseph Beal-Steere hoped to leave the United States to pursue his interests in the natural world. He persuaded a wealthy cousin named Rice Beal to finance his expedition on the condition that Beal-Steere write regular letters for publication in the *Peninsular Courier and Family Visitant* (*Courier*), the Ann Arbor newspaper owned by the Beals. He vividly narrates his journey in 100 letters published between 1871 and 1875, providing eager readers in Ann Arbor with a connection to foreign lands that most would never see. Given this audience, his letters tell an abridged and sensationalized version of events. He recorded moments of frustration, boredom, and sickness in his travel diaries. An ardent

Methodist who believed in Darwin's theory of evolution, he reflected on the intersections between religion and science and, like the other naturalists of his age, tried to explain the variation he witnessed among animal species and human populations. The diaries he kept during the last several months of his journey are missing. The letters that he wrote to the *Courier* are the only remaining narrative record of his movements during the period in which he collected the weapons.

From the New York Harbor in September 1870, Beal-Steere found a ride aboard a "little fishing schooner engaged in the rubber trade,"[19] then traveled south to the mouth of the Amazon River in Brazil. Assisted by local guides, he collected specimens to add to the University of Michigan's collection and assigned each a number in a field catalog book. Beal-Steere and his assistants would package these specimens in crates that they would periodically give to American embassies, connected traders, and trusted missionaries to ship back to the United States. He followed the Amazon River and traveled across the Andes Mountains, reaching Peru in December 1871. In May 1873, he boarded another ship and crossed the Pacific, arriving in China in August. He spent two years collecting specimens in China, Taiwan, and the Philippines before arriving in the Malay Archipelago — modern-day Indonesia and Malaysia — where he traveled between islands in pursuit of specific animals and artifacts. In a letter that accounts for the shipments of his collection, Beal-Steere reported that he left Boxes 70 through 75 "in the care of Reverend B.P. Krasthury"[20] in August 1875 to be sent on the next vessel bound for the United States, one month before he left Southeast Asia. According to Beal-Steere's field catalog book, Box 70 contained seventy weapons from New Guinea.

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[19] "Joseph Beal Steere - Naturalist, Explorer, Educator, Methodist," *Michigan Christian Advocate*, May 5, 1932.
[20] Joseph Beal-Steere, Letter to "Friend," December 1875, Box 1, Folder "Correspondence: Letters from Joseph Beal Steere Expedition 1870-1877," Joseph Beal-Steere Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

Beal-Steere's primary objective in Southeast Asia was not to collect these weapons, but to collect birds of paradise, species of a bird family from New Guinea that is best known for its ornate plumage. Eight percent of the world's bird species inhabit New Guinea, including thirty-eight of forty-two species of birds of paradise.[21] Beal-Steere delayed his return to the United States by four months to pursue these rare bird skins. The letters that he wrote to the *Courier* provide clues that place Beal-Steere in a network of European and American naturalists, traders, and collectors who shared his goal to collect birds of paradise, an obsession more than three hundred years in the making.

Although bird of paradise plumes had been traded in the networks linking the islands of Southeast Asia to mainland Asia for thousands of years, Europeans were not aware of the birds until 1522, when the explorer Ferdinand Magellan presented the King of Spain with five bird of paradise skins collected in the Moluccas.[22] The skins, which arrived without feet, gave "rise to European speculation that the birds, unable to alight, must remain perpetually in flight, suspended between heaven and earth."[23] The beautiful, mythologized birds captured the imaginations of European artists and elites, creating a demand for voyagers to return with new, fantastic varieties. Bird feathers became a popular accessory for aristocratic women in 1775 when Marie Antoinette first placed feathers in her hair. As European colonization progressed, trade with Southeast Asia expanded and the plumes became less expensive to acquire. Fashion catalogs reveal that European milliners decorated ladies' hats with bird of paradise plumes as early as the 1830s, opening the fashion to middle-class women. At the height of the bird of

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[21] Pamela Swadling, Roy Wagner, and Billai Laba, *Plumes from Paradise: Trade Cycles in Outer Southeast Asia and Their Impact on New Guinea and Nearby Islands until 1920* (Coorparoo DC, Queensland Australia: Papua New Guinea National Museum in association with Robert Brown & Associates, 1996), 49.
[22] *Ibid.*
[23] Stuart Kirsch, "History and the Birds of Paradise," *Penn Museum, Expedition Magazine.* 48, no. 1 (2006), 17.

paradise trade in the early 20th century, an estimated 80,000 skins were exported from New Guinea in a single year.[24] Birds of paradise became symbols of New Guinea that the Western public encountered in daily life. Invisible to the public were the many relationships that made this connection possible.

Naturalists like Beal-Steere shared the Western public's obsession with birds of paradise and embarked upon scientific expeditions to describe and collect new species for museums of natural history. In July 1824, René Lesson became the first European naturalist to observe living birds of paradise in their natural habitats. While hiking through a forest near Dorey Bay in northwestern New Guinea, he remarked that a Lesser Bird of Paradise "suddenly flew in graceful curves over my head… like a meteor whose body, cutting through the air, leaves a long trail of light."[25] Lesson's discovery sparked ornithologists' interest in New Guinea. At this time, the popular plume trade was dominated by a few, easily-accessible species of birds of paradise. However, European museums of natural history wanted access to rarer species that were only available in the most remote regions of New Guinea and of the surrounding islands. The naturalists that they sent to the region tapped into local trade networks and hired guides to take them to the birds' habitats. In 1828, the Director of the Natural History Museum in Leiden sponsored one of the first expeditions directly targeting birds of paradise and dispatched two naturalists to collect birds in southwest New Guinea. By 1867, the museum held 158 specimens of eight species of birds of paradise, at that time the largest collection in the world.[26] Museums competed with one another to assemble collections with the rarest species, causing dozens of naturalists to descend upon the region.

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[24] Swadling et al., *Plumes from Paradise*, 91.
[25] René Lesson, quoted in Swadling, *Plumes from Paradise*, 73.
[26] *Ibid.,* 75.

Between 1854 and 1862, the British naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace conducted an extensive and influential collecting expedition through the islands of the Malay Archipelago which Beal-Steere would explore in 1875. While pursuing the birds, Wallace made observations about their behavior and mapped their distribution. After eight years, he returned to England, disappointed that he had only collected specimens of six species. Wallace's work inspired many other naturalists to embark on their own expeditions and created an infrastructure to support collectors' needs. After capturing birds in the field, naturalists needed assistants to prepare the specimens for transportation by skinning and stuffing them. When Beal-Steere followed in his footsteps, he hired many of Wallace's former assistants. Although Beal-Steere benefitted from the infrastructure that Wallace and other early naturalists created, the profession of scientific explorer had become less glamorous: when Beal-Steere left the island of Amboina for Ternate in July 1875, it was "with the impression that there had been so many naturalists there and of such varied manners and morals, that the name of naturalist had lost its repute, if it had ever had any there."[27]

In addition to seeking specimens in the field, collectors like Beal-Steere often searched local markets for specimens and curios. While in Singapore in April 1875, Beal-Steere "spent some time in making inquiries and in visiting the different shops, but only succeeded in finding a few [birds of paradise] without feet, and in no way valuable for a museum, this being the wrong season of the year."[28] After learning that "the native vessels" that brought them arrived only in the fall — during the birds' mating season when they had special plumage — he decided to delay his return to the United States. He traveled to Makassar, a Dutch trading center in the Moluccas.

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[27] Joseph Beal-Steere, Letter to *Courier,* July 6, 1875, Joseph Beal-Steere Accession Records, Bird Division, University of Michigan Museum of Zoology (UMMZ)
[28] Beal-Steere, Letter to *Courier,* April 25, 1875, Joseph Beal-Steere Accession Records, Bird Division, UMMZ

In Makassar, he spent "hours wandering up and down the long street, examining the people and their commerce, for every house is a shop and nearly all the same simple articles are sold."[29] In a letter to the *Courier*, he told readers in Ann Arbor that he had purchased several skins of King, Magnificent, and Twelve-Wired Birds of Paradise at a moderate price from a market operated by local traders. Markets like this one provided Beal-Steere with plenty of opportunities to collect birds and cultural objects originally from locations throughout the Malay Archipelago, possibly including the weapons he acquired for the UMMAA.

While actively pursuing birds of paradise, Beal-Steere became embedded in a network of Western collectors who lived in the Pacific. In Surabaya, Beal-Steere met a German collector he called Mr. Sheepmaker whose house was "a real museum" full of live birds and animals as well as "old Chinese and Indian pottery and bronzes, with arms and implements of Eastern nations, and beside this quite a collection of Javan beetles and butterflies."[30] With admiration and envy, Beal-Steere described Sheepmaker's collection of Hindu bas reliefs gathered from the ruins of temples. In addition to collecting animals and relics to fill his own home, Sheepmaker regularly sent live animals to a zoological garden in Holland. European settlers in the Pacific often accumulated large collections that served as symbols of their personal wealth and worldliness. The exotic animals and artifacts of the Pacific fascinated the Western world, creating an environment in which collectors like Beal-Steere and Sheepmaker could acquire cultural curios that held personal interest for their scientific value.

Capitalizing on the growing demands of Western naturalists and settlers, entrepreneurs established outposts across the Pacific, connecting travelers to remote destinations and the rarer

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[29] Beal-Steere, Letter to *Courier,* May 28, 1875, Joseph Beal-Steere Accession Records, Bird Division, UMMZ
[30] *Ibid.*

biological specimens they could not collect themselves or acquire by trade. While collecting birds and butterflies in Makassar, Beal-Steere stayed with a trader named Captain Van Hartrop, who planned to make a collecting trip to New Guinea later that summer. When Beal-Steere left Makassar, he told the *Courier* that he hoped Van Hartrop would be able to provide him higher-quality bird of paradise skins at a lower price when he returned. Later that summer, in Manado, Beal-Steere met a Mr. van Duivenboden, the son of a trading magnate based on the island of Ternate. During his expedition through the Malay Archipelago, Alfred Russel Wallace had stayed with Duivenboden, whom he described as the "King of Ternate" because of his wealth and influence on the island.[31] The Duivenbodens specialized in the trade of birds of paradise and made massive profits by procuring rare specimens to sell to European merchants and museums. By exploiting rivalries between naturalists and providing buyers with misleading information about the source of the specimens, the Duivenboden trading firm became one of the largest in the region. Duivenboden planned to make a trip to New Guinea to collect birds of paradise and promised to sell Beal-Steere specimens when he returned. Duivenboden also introduced Beal-Steere to his son-in-law, Antonie Augustus Bruijn, who showed him a splendid collection of birds of paradise. Bruijn offered to sell him some, but unfortunately, Beal-Steere found that "his prices were as fine as his birds."[32] By building relationships with minor traders like Captain Van Hartrop and major traders like the Duivenboden family, Beal-Steere was able to extend his access to sources of specimens, although the fine specimens he sought remained out of his means.

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[31] Ulbe Bosma and Remco Raben, *Being "Dutch" in the Indies: A History of Creolisation and Empire, 1500-1920* (NUS Press, 2008), 164.

[32] Beal-Steere, Letter to *Courier,* June 8, 1875, Joseph Beal-Steere Accession Records, Bird Division, UMMZ

Beal-Steere retraced his path on the journey home. From Amboina, the furthest place he traveled to the southeast, he returned to Ternate in late July 1875. There, he found that "several small schooners [had] arrived from New Guinea; but they had been quite unsuccessful in getting birds of paradise, as the Papuans were unfriendly, and shot some of the hunters."[33] Next, he stopped in Manado to see Bruijn and purchased some of the expensive birds he had examined during his first visit, "bringing [his] collection up to over a dozen species of these birds, some of them being the rarest known."[34] In Makassar, he visited Captain Van Hartrop, who he discovered had become ill and had not made the journey to New Guinea at all. Realizing that he had "about all the species of birds of paradise [he] could hope to get,"[35] Beal-Steere decided to return to Singapore. While waiting for the steam ship to arrive, he packaged part of his collection and included arrows, spears, and bows from New Guinea in Box 70. He carried the twenty-seven precious bird of paradise skins that he had collected with him to Ann Arbor in Box 78.

In pursuit of birds of paradise, Beal-Steere met merchants in marketplaces and befriended traders and collectors, any of whom could have connected him to the seventy weapons that are allegedly from "New Guinea." Here, our textual trail of evidence has run cold: without additional documentation, it is not possible to trace the objects back to their precise locations of origin. In the absence of this information, the biographies of the weapons are — and will only ever be — partial. Beal-Steere's decision not to collect or record this information is consequential.

Lacking contextual information, we may turn to the objects themselves to try to solve the mystery of their provenance. Objects' materials and methods of manufacture are indices of their locations of origin. By comparing Beal-Steere's arrows and spears to those that are

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[33] Beal-Steere, Letter to *Courier,* August 5, 1875, Joseph Beal-Steere Accession Records, Bird Division, UMMZ
[34] *Ibid.*
[35] *Ibid.*

unquestionably from New Guinea, we could problematize or cautiously establish their provenance.

Consulting an expert can be the most efficient way to provenance an object. "At a quick look,"[36] Barry Craig, the former Curator of Foreign Ethnology at the South Australian Museum, suggested in email correspondence that the Beal-Steere arrows were created by the Marind-Anim, a group of people dispersed over a wide area that straddles what is now southeast West Papua, Indonesia and the Western Province of Papua New Guinea. In 1922, A.P. Lyons reported in the journal *Man* that several Marind-Anim groups who lived an area between the Fly River and the Morehead River produced 'Buji arrows' which spread toward the coasts through trade. Buji arrows were "made in three parts. The haft is of reed; the head of a hard, light, and white coloured wood; and the tip, of which the lower end is left to protrude as a barb, is of bone."[37] Villagers in Karagara and Tombukabora made these arrows throughout the year and ornamented them with a mixture of human blood and ash, each producing "a series of his own tribal designs, with intermediate broad red bands."[38] On appearance alone, UMMAA 8293A (Figure 4, bottom arrow) could fit Lyons' description: the shaft is made of reed, the arrows are ornamented with bands of a dark pigment, and the jagged edge of the tip could be described as protruding "as a barb." However, this is the extent of Lyons' description. He does not include images, nor does he describe spears or bows like those in the Beal-Steere Collection. This area in the Marind-Anim region is merely one possible provenance for the Beal-Steere Collection.

[36] Barry Craig, email correspondence with author, April 6, 2019
[37] A. P. Lyons, "The Arrows of the Upper Morehead River (Papua) Bush Tribes.," *Man* 22 (1922): 146.
[38] *Ibid.*

Figure 4. Six arrows, UMMAA 8293 a-f (bottom to top)

A more intensive effort could be made to provenance these weapons. It would include consulting comparative museum collections from the Marind-Anim region, searching for other descriptions of Buji arrows in the literature, and possibly testing the black substance on the weapons for human blood. Museum collections are filled with unprovenanced materials; the reality is that although an object could be traced to its location of origin, most never will be.

The weapons will not be fully provenanced but will remain in the UMMAA's collection — what broader implications might Beal-Steere's decision to collect these weapons have? In "'Mostly Harmless'? Missionaries, Administrators, and Material Culture on the Coast of British New Guinea," Michael O'Hanlon adopts Nicholas Thomas' "mystery story" framework to investigate a seemingly sinister device that filled many museum collections — the man-catcher. Supposedly, peoples along the coast of New Britain killed their enemies with man-catchers, a deadly "mixture of stringless tennis racket and garrotte."[39] O'Hanlon shows how the supposed cruelty of the man-catcher "propagated compelling understandings of New Guinea"[40] in both popular fiction and travel literature. Instead of taking these narratives for granted, he studied the

[39] Michael O'Hanlon, "'Mostly Harmless'? Missionaries, Administrators and Material Culture on the Coast of British New Guinea," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 5, no. 3 (1999): 379.
[40] *Ibid.*

features of the artifacts themselves and showed that most specimens would have been too fragile for their supposed use. Unprovenanced objects may play into false narratives because they have no documentation to correct them.

Birds of paradise were on Beal-Steere's mind as he navigated the islands of Southeast Asia. He had to rely on European traders who, in turn, had to rely on native hunters to procure rare specimens from the birds' inland habitats. Thus, the archetype of the New Guinean hunter loomed in his mind, as shown in his descriptions of the 'unfriendly' locals. The weapons from New Guinea may have been, in Beal-Steere's imagination, a natural complement to the birds of paradise he collected because of their association with hunting. Or they may have been souvenirs he found at a good price. In a marketplace in Makassar in May 1875, Beal-Steere remarked that, "The customs and state of civilization of a people could be judged off pretty closely if their articles of every-day consumption were known."[41] As a natural historian, collector, and eventual curator, he believed that through careful study objects could reveal truths about the natural world and people's place in it. He also knew that his collection would be studied long after he returned to Ann Arbor. Without provenance information, we may move closer to the weapons' true biographies by focusing on the artifacts themselves, yet their true life histories may always remain a mystery.

[41] Beal-Steere, Letter to *Courier,* May 28, 1875, Joseph Beal-Steere Accession Records, Bird Division, UMMZ

Chapter 2
"Beauty, Value and Completeness": The Field Museum Collection

> "The Melanesian specimens are duplicates and are of mediocre quality, but they are good enough for the University of Michigan to use for teaching purposes."[42]

With this statement, Paul Martin, the Curator of Anthropology at the Chicago Museum of Natural History (now called the Field Museum), convinced the Museum's director to approve an exchange of specimens with the University of Michigan Museum of Anthropology (now called the Museum of Anthropological Archaeology, or UMMAA). Ten ethnological objects from New Guinea arrived at the University of Michigan on October 19, 1945. Although small in scale, the collection was a welcome addition to the UMMAA's meager collection of Melanesian material culture. When James Griffin, then a Curator of Anthropology at the UMMAA, received the shipment, he remarked that his colleague Professor Leslie White "was highly pleased" and would "make excellent use"[43] of them as teaching specimens.[44] The specimens — which at the Field Museum had been "duplicates" "of mediocre quality"[45] — became singular examples of material culture, an ideal teaching tool, and an "object lesson" with which White could illustrate the cultural diversity of New Guinea.

In exchange, Griffin sent five ethnological specimens from the UMMAA's Aleutian Islands collection to the Field Museum. The collection, which included potsherds and two Aleutian *umiak* skin boats, was of primary interest to George Quimby, a junior Curator of

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[42] Paul Martin, Letter to Clifford Gregg, October 1, 1945, Folder Memo 1150, Field Museum Anthropology Department Archives, Chicago.
[43] James Griffin, Letter to Paul Martin, October 19, 1945, Folder Correspondence 1930 - 1975, Martin, Paul S, Box 16, James Griffin Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
[44] See Chapter 3 for a discussion of Leslie White's contributions to the theory of cultural evolution and his role in building the Department of Anthropology at the University of Michigan.
[45] Martin, Letter to Clifford Gregg, October 1, 1945, Folder Memo 1150, Field Museum Anthropology Department Archives Chicago.

Anthropology at the Field Museum as well as a colleague and close correspondent of Griffin's. Quimby studied the prehistoric production of art and pottery in the Aleutian Islands and, following the exchange of cultural materials from the UMMAA, published an article in the Museum's publication *Fieldiana.*[46]

Such mutually beneficial exchanges had been a popular way for museums to "grow" their collections since the late eighteenth century.[47] During what Robert Welsch has coined the "Expedition Period," roughly between the 1870s and 1920s, museums sent scientists on "extensive (rather than intensive)"[48] field expeditions to amass comprehensive collections of biological and ethnological specimens. Once museum staff opened the crates brought back from these expeditions, they would catalog and organize their contents. If a museum held more examples of a specimen than it needed for reference or display, then it would label the specimens "duplicates" reserved for exchange with other institutions that curated collections of interest. In a study of the development of five colonial museums of natural history prior to 1900, Susan Sheets-Pyenson explains that museum administrators grew to prefer exchanging specimens with other museums over purchasing or collecting new materials because it cost nothing and would make use of space that otherwise would have stored redundant specimens.[49] Jude Philp explains that for naturalists working in museums, "the exchange of 'duplicate' material was essential" because "the basic work of the institution was classification, cataloguing, and display of

[46] George I. Quimby, "Pottery from the Aleutian Islands," *Fieldiana. Anthropology* 36, no. 1 (1945): 1–13.
[47] Susan Sheets-Pyenson, "How to 'Grow' a Natural History Museum: The Building of Colonial Collections, 1850–1900," *Archives of Natural History* 15, no. 2 (June 1, 1988): 121–47.
[48] Robert L Welsch and A. B Lewis, *An American Anthropologist in Melanesia. A.B. Lewis and the Joseph N. Field South Pacific Expedition, 1909-1913 Vol. 1* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 5.
[49] Sheets-Pyenson, "How to 'Grow' a Natural History Museum"

collections along taxonomic lines."[50] The logic of taxonomy shaped early anthropology because naturalists conducted many of the first anthropological studies for museums and their goals for exchanging biological specimens transferred to their work with cultural objects. Anthropology museums joined what he calls the "exchange industry,"[51] as state-sponsored and privately-owned institutions exchanged thousands of items to establish collections that provided representative samples of a range of societies' material cultures. With these comprehensive collections, curators could illustrate taxonomic relationships between groups of people. These early exchanges built the collections museums hold today, creating social relationships between museum administrators and scientists in the process.

At the height of the specimen exchange industry in the early twentieth century, museums of all sizes used their collections as currency, engaging in negotiations that reveal how museum administrators and scientists constructed collections' value. In a study of the Smithsonian Institution's role in the specimen exchange industry, Catherine Nichols describes how museum objects acquire value and are assigned the label "duplicate."[52] She notes that "a particular specimen's selection for use in exchange is determined relative to other objects."[53] When duplicate specimens reach their new institutions, "they shed their status as duplicates as they became representative examples at each institution of a knowledge category constituted by …

[50] Jude Philp, "Hedley Takes a Holiday: Collections from Kanak People in the Australian Museum," in *Unpacking the Collection: Networks of Material and Social Agency in the Museum*, ed. Sarah Byrne et al., One World Archaeology (New York, NY: Springer New York, 2011), 270-271.
[51] *Ibid.*
[52] Catherine Nichols, "The Smithsonian Institution's 'Greatest Treasures': Valuing Museum Objects in the Specimen Exchange Industry," *Museum Anthropology* 41, no. 1 (2018): 13–29.
[53] *Ibid.,* 18.

object form, function, material, and cultural provenance."[54] In this way, a specimen's scientific value is not static but dynamic, shifting with its institutional context.

As collections crossed borders for scientific study, scholars created a peculiar system of exchange worthy of anthropological analysis. Nichols argues that specimen exchanges fail to conform to either idealized form of exchange.[55] In commodity exchange, actors exchange impersonal commodities because of the value they hold for use or exchange; in gift exchange, actors exchange objects tied to their identities to build social relationships. Specimen exchanges mimic commodity exchange in that "there are clear instances where objects are valued for their use in the institutional functions of knowledge production and education" but at the same time mimic gift exchange because specimens "are also valued for their ability to cement social relationships within a broad community of scientists and museum practitioners."[56] When arranging an exchange, administrators at each museum would evaluate the collections' monetary and scientific value to determine whether the collections were of equal use value to their institutions. However, administrators and scholars constructed relationships in the process, mediated by the collections they exchanged.

The Field Museum-UMMAA exchange bears the hallmarks of both gift and commodity exchange. Paul Martin's letter to Director Gregg justified the exchange in terms of the collections' equivalent use value: the Aleutian specimens would be "used for our forthcoming book" and the Melanesian objects sent to the University of Michigan would be used "for teaching purposes."[57] Nearly four decades of correspondence between George Quimby, curator at

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[54] *Ibid.,* 19.
[55] *Ibid.*
[56] *Ibid.,* 15.
[57] Paul Martin, Letter to Clifford Gregg, October 1, 1945, Folder Memo 1150, Field Museum Anthropology Department Archives, Field Museum, Chicago.

the Field Museum, and James Griffin, curator at the UMMAA, makes clear that the transaction functioned as a gift exchange too: it strengthened the curators' relationship.[58] In their letters, the two men discussed recent studies, commented on drafts of each other's work, and sent updates about new babies and family illnesses. In early 1946, just after they coordinated the exchange, Griffin offered Quimby a position as Assistant Curator of Archaeology at the UMMAA. While it was just one moment in the long history of their relationship, the exchange strengthened the links between the curators and their institutions.

The records associated with exchanged collections are notoriously poor, diminishing the collections' value. While the original institution may have kept a collector's detailed notes, exchanged portions of collections were typically sent with vague and incomplete provenance data. But, where detailed information exists at the parent institution, "the pathway [to retrieve it] is usually quite explicit… because the transactions were only possible through the maintenance of tight accounting systems, since exchanges could only work on a global scale through a coordinated network of trusted partners."[59] We can make sense of these partial collections by retracing their journeys to reconnect material objects with two-dimensional records.

Unsurprisingly, when the Field Museum sent the UMMAA the collection of objects from New Guinea, it provided only vague provenance information. Between the early and mid-twentieth century, the Field Museum maintained an "Exchange Room" from which staff could select duplicates to exchange or sell.[60] The Field Museum holds one of the largest collections of Melanesian material culture in the United States; the UMMAA's collection is a

[58] Folder Correspondence: Quimby, George I. 1938 - 1975, James Griffin Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
[59] Philp, "Hedley Takes a Holiday," 273.
[60] Nichols, "The Smithsonian Institution's Greatest Treasures," 18.

tiny fragment of a much larger whole. The documentation remaining at the Field Museum reveals that this collection was assembled from five separate accessions, sent by three different collectors who acquired them from villages in German New Guinea between 1905 and 1913. The collectors are Captain Heinrich Voogdt, a captain of a ship for the New Guinea Company whose access to remote villages led him to collect ethnographic objects; Heinrich Umlauff, a dealer who bought curios from collectors — including Captain Voogdt — to sell to ethnographic museums in Europe and the United States; and Alfred Buell Lewis, an anthropologist and curator at the Field Museum who spent four years assembling a systematic collection of Melanesian material culture. The three collectors' lives intersected through the collection and trade of ethnological objects in the Pacific. The men involved in this tangled web of relations gathered more than twenty thousand objects from many of the same villages within the same decade. By acquiring these collections between 1905 and 1913, the Field Museum reunited the objects once more.

In their study of museum exchanges at the Oberlin College Museum, Linda Grimm and Amy Margaris argue that thinking about exchanged collections in terms of their 'life histories' "helps us to think about collecting as an *ongoing process*, not just as a singular act of removing objects from their original cultural contexts."[61] Such an approach reveals layers of history that have been obscured in the absence of complete documentation, revealing how objects accrue and shed meaning as they move from their original contexts through a series of Western scientific institutions. Tracing the life histories of the objects in the UMMAA's collection illuminates the

[61] Amy V. Margaris and Linda T. Grimm, "Collecting for a College Museum: Exchange Practices and the Life History of a 19th-Century Arctic Collection," *Museum Anthropology* 34, no. 2 (2011): 109, emphasis added.

ways in which administrators and curators in addition to collectors have shaped the value of these collections.

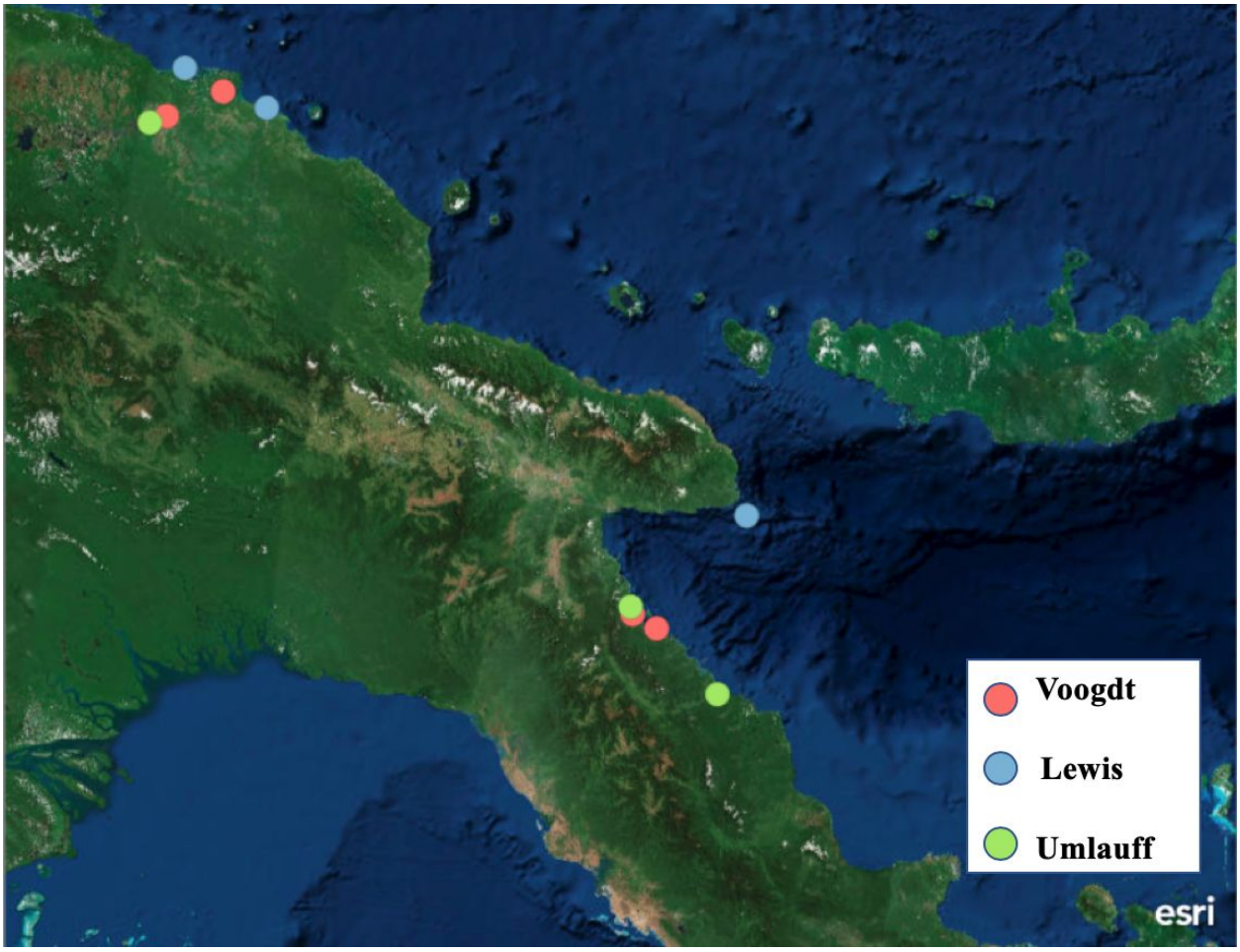

Figure 5. Map of Object Provenance, Field Museum Collection

Table 1. Objects from the Field Museum collection.

Object	UMMAA Catalog #	FM Accession #	Provenance	Collector
Small Wooden Figure	17718	1080	100 miles up, Kaiserin Augusta River, German New Guinea	Captain H. Voogdt
Shell Ring	17719	1088	Huon Gulf, German New Guinea*	
Wooden Headrest	17720	1088	Wigetu, Huon Gulf, German New Guinea	
Carved Skull	17721	1088	Singrin, 25 miles up, Kaiserin Augusta River, German New Guinea	
Tortoise Shell Arm Ring	17713	1113	Tami People, Huon Gulf, German New Guinea*	A.B. Lewis
Wooden Mask	17714	1113	Borbor, German New Guinea	
String Bag	17715	1113	Kirau, German New Guinea	
Club	17716	1140	Waria River, German New Guinea	J.F.G. Umlauff
Axe	17717	1140	Kaiserin Augusta River, German New Guinea*	
Lime Holder and Bone Spatula	17712a, b	967	Huon Gulf, German New Guinea (German New Guinea)*	

** Approximate locations shown on Map 3*

Accession 967: The J.F.G. Umlauff Museum, 1905
Lime holder and bone spatula, Huon Gulf

"You are aware, of course, of the existence of the great house of Umlauff of Hamburg, the greatest of all dealers in natural history and ethnological specimens."[62]

Established by Johann Friedrich Gustav (J.F.G.) Umlauff in the mid-19th century and managed by his sons after his death, the J.F.G Umlauff trading firm and museum grew to be one of the largest and most lucrative dealers in zoological and ethnological specimens in Germany. The Umlauffs framed their operation as a museum to give it scientific legitimacy but it functioned primarily as a storehouse for the collections it sold to private collectors and natural history museums in Europe and the United States.

The Umlauff Museum's letterhead reveals how nature and culture intertwined in its dealings. A scroll bearing the stylized name "J.F.G. Umlauff" swoops across the top of the page; the vertical axis bears the bust of a Native American man wearing a feathered headdress staring into the distance, surrounded by seashells. He is supported upright by the horns of a buffalo skull, under which three contorted masks stare outward with open mouths. The tips of an array of spears, clubs, and axes peek from behind these specimens. Above the scroll, a mounted taxidermied head of a deer is flanked by a monkey and a lizard crawling in opposite directions. A lion lays in the far right of the letterhead, surrounded by larger-than-life German coins. A tropical bird flies above, surveying the assemblage. One imagines that massive crates containing these specimens filled the Umlauff storehouse, joining creatures and curiosities from the far reaches of the earth.

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[62] George Dorsey, Letter to Frederick J. V. Skiff, July 22, 1905, Accession 967, Field Museum Anthropology Department Archives, Field Museum, Chicago.

In 1905, George Dorsey, Curator of Anthropology at the Field Museum, toured the great ethnological museums of Germany and met Heinrich Umlauff, who offered to sell the Museum a large collection of Pacific material culture. Despite its high price of 65,600 marks — equivalent to approximately half a million U.S. dollars today — Dorsey believed that purchasing the collection would elevate the Field Museum's status. He underscored the importance of this goal in a letter asking Director Skiff to purchase the collection: "If we are ever to extend the limits of this department beyond the confines of North America, this is certainly the most favorable opportunity we shall ever have for making a beginning in this direction."[63] He persuaded Skiff; the Museum purchased the collection in August 1905. The collection contained nearly 2,200 specimens, one-third of which were from German New Guinea.

> "This collection from German New Guinea is of exceptional beauty, value, and completeness. It is only, however, about one-tenth the size of the collection in the Berlin Museum, but thoroughly represents a certain type of culture in this island not hitherto represented in this institution."[64]

Scholars working in museums typically set the standards of "beauty, value, and completeness" for collections, while trading firms such as the Umlauff Museum catered to these criteria, turning collections into commodities. The monetary value that the firm assigned to any one object depended on the firm's evaluation of a set of factors, including the object's physical condition and relative rarity as well as the buyer's aesthetic tastes and personal wealth. In the early 20th century, museums sought to acquire complete, systematic collections that could illustrate the cultural variation of entire regions. Thus, as the German market for ethnographic curios grew, the Umlauffs learned to reserve the most "complete" collections for museums. Those collections for which museums would pay the highest prices were "not broken apart,

[63] *Ibid.*
[64] *Ibid.*

rather only [sold] as a unit, because well-documented pieces naturally increased [the entire collection's] value."[65] Although not complete or well-documented by modern standards, the geographic breadth of the Umlauff collection enticed Dorsey.

While the collection is broad, it is not systematic. The Umlauff firm provided the Field Museum with a list of the objects and vague provenance information for each. It offers no information about the date of collection or the identities of the collectors. Because of the volume of collections that passed through the firm, this is unsurprising.

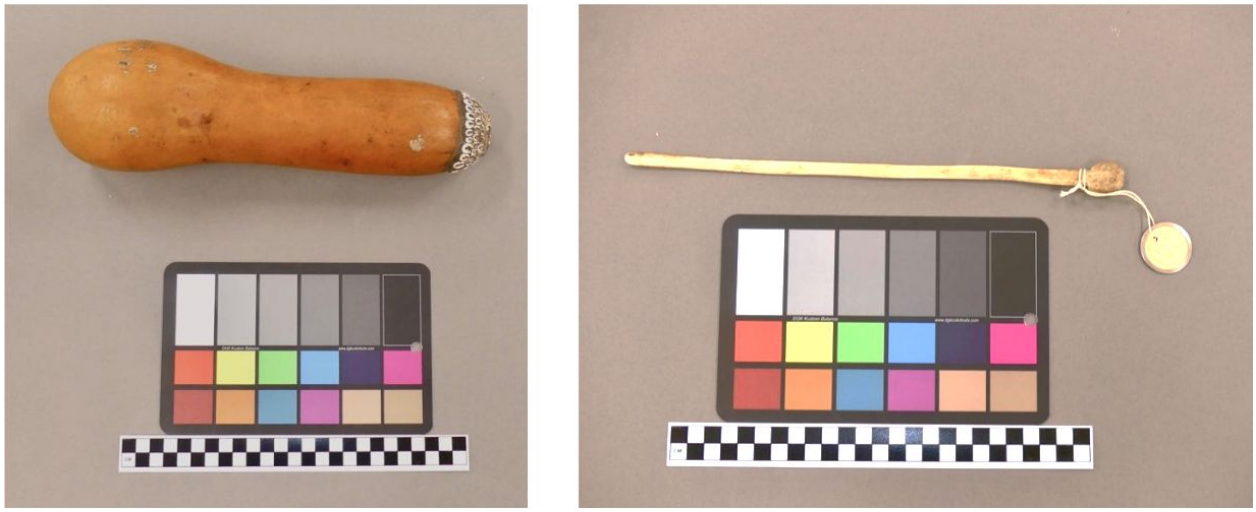

Figure 6. Lime holder and bone spatula, UMMAA 17712a, 17712b, Huon Gulf, German New Guinea

In 1945, the Field Museum broke off a small part of the Umlauff collection and sent this lime gourd and bone spatula to the UMMAA. Attributed to the Huon Gulf region, this hollowed-out gourd would have been used to hold and transport lime, a powder created by crushing burned coral, shells, or limestone. Small cowrie shells in rows adhere to the area around the gourd's circular opening, through which the spatula, made from the femur of a cassowary bird, would have been pushed to retrieve the lime. Lime activates the stimulant properties of the

[65] Hilke Thode-Arora, *Die Familie Umlauff und ihre Firmen: Ethnographica-Händler in Hamburg.*, 1992, 150.

betel nut (*Areca catechu*) and is an ingredient in betel chewing, an activity practiced throughout Melanesia.

The lime gourd is one of three from the Huon Gulf; two remain at the Field Museum but neither has a matching bone spatula. Both are roughly the same size, about twenty-five centimeters in length. One has cowrie shells attached in rows around the opening, like the UMMAA's lime gourd. A fine crack spiders up the length of the other gourd, and a brown shell with white spots encircles its opening. The opening of the gourd is sealed with newspaper, and when shaken, powdered lime can be heard rustling inside. Of the three lime holders from the Huon Gulf in the Umlauff collection, why was the UMMAA's chosen for exchange? Someone at the Field Museum may have assigned it duplicate status because of its similarity to the lime holder with cowrie shells. Because it would become a teaching specimen, the Field Museum may have chosen to include the bone spatula with the lime holder. The Umlauff Museum provided no additional provenance information beyond "Huon Gulf"; detached from specific provenance and relationships to other objects in the collection, this pair of specimens became a general illustration of an activity with cultural significance throughout Melanesia.

Accessions 1080 and 1088: Captain Heinrich Voogdt, 1909
Small wooden figure Kaiserin Augusta River
Shell ring, Huon Gulf
Wooden headrest, Huon Gulf
Carved skull, Singrin

> "Voogdt is captain of the New Guinea Company's trading steamer, is hard working, shrewd, energetic, with a keen eye for business… Realizing his great ability as a discriminating collector and that he could collect more cheaply than any one else...it seemed to me that here was presented a remarkable opportunity for securing a large collection from the coast villages of German New Guinea, which I believe to be the richest of all the territory of this vast island."[66]

After he coordinated the Umlauff purchase in 1905, George Dorsey, Curator of Anthropology, set upon building the Field Museum's Pacific Collection into one that would become nationally renowned. He proposed to launch the effort himself: in late 1907, the Board of Trustees approved his plans, and he set off in January 1908 on a six-month expedition. Dorsey's itinerary was ambitious: at the behest of the board, he began his trip in Egypt, then traveled to India, Ceylon, Singapore, the Dutch East Indies, and Australia. He finally reached German New Guinea on July 9, 1908.[67] Over the course of one month, Dorsey collected 1,500 ethnographic specimens in German New Guinea. He had initially planned to end his journey there, but after receiving an invitation from Heinrich Voogdt, a steamship captain for the New Guinea Company, Dorsey accompanied Voogdt to inspect the Company's outposts on the northeast coast, west of Friedrich Wilhelmshafen (now Madang). For one month aboard the 200-ton *Siar*, Dorsey and Captain Voogdt collected from coastal villages simultaneously. Following the trip, Dorsey returned to Chicago and persuaded Director Frederick Skiff to

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[66] George Dorsey, Letter to Frederick J. V. Skiff, February 9, 1905, Accession 1088, Field Museum Anthropology Department Archives, Field Museum, Chicago.
[67] Robert Welsch, "One Time, One Place, Three Collections: Colonial Processes and the Shaping of Some Museum Collections from German New Guinea," in *Hunting the Gatherers: Ethnographic Collectors, Agents and Agency in Melanesia, 1870s-1930s* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 162.

purchase the Voogdt collection. These materials arrived in 1909 in two shipments, registered under two accessions — 1080 and 1088. In the Field Museum's exchange with the University of Michigan, four objects from the Voogdt collection — a small wooden figure, a shell ring, a wooden pillow, and a carved skull — were assigned new catalog numbers and assumed a new, collective identity.

Between 1895 and 1914, Heinrich Voogdt worked as the captain of a ship for the New Guinea Company, a private firm that ran German New Guinea as a "company colony"[68] and ultimately became a major force in the collection and sale of ethnographic objects. According to official colonial policy, German New Guinea's purpose was "to serve the needs of German commercial interests."[69] In 1884, in service of the New Guinea Company, Otto Finsch, a naturalist and ethnologist, led an expedition to establish the first German colonial outpost and assembled a large ethnographic collection in the process. Adolf von Hansemann, director of the New Guinea Company, sold Finsch's collection to the Berlin Museum; according to Ranier Buschmann, Hansemann "did not plan to sell this collection for profit; rather his aim was propaganda."[70] He hoped that an exhibit of the artifacts at the Berlin Museum under the name of the New Guinea Company would attract Germans in Berlin to settle in New Guinea. Because selling ethnographic objects could serve its commercial interests, the Company made collecting one of its primary ventures.

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[68] Stella Regis-Tove and Center for Pacific Islands Studies Staff University of Hawaii at Manoa, *Imagining the Other: The Representation of the Papua New Guinean Subject* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 7.
[69] John Moses, "Imperial German Priorities in New Guinea 1884-1914," in *Papua New Guinea: A Century of Colonial Impact, 1884-1984* (Boroko, Papua New Guinea: National Research Institute and the University of Papua New Guinea, in association with the PNG Centennial Committee, Port Moresby, 1989),163.
[70] Rainer E Buschmann, *Anthropology's Global Histories: The Ethnographic Frontier in German New Guinea, 1870-1935* (Hawaii: UHPRESS, 2009), 35.

The New Guinea Company took advantage of its employees' close contact with the indigenous creators of ethnographic materials and tried to make the dealing of such objects appear scientific. Buschmann notes that the Company's employment agreements included lengthy clauses which restricted the rights of its employees. One such stipulation was that the New Guinea Company had ownership of any object that was collected by a Company employee while acting on Company business. The Company strove to create an air of scientific legitimacy by publishing articles about its expeditions in the journal *Nachrichten aus Kaiser Wilhelmsland* ("News from Kaiser-Wilhelmsland"), in operation between 1885 and 1898. However, employees noted that the Company regarded the objects it collected as profitable commodities rather than scientific specimens.[71] In 1899, the New Guinea Company faced financial challenges, and the German government took administrative control of the colony. The Company's ethnographic ventures had not been as lucrative as it had hoped and, as a result, it lifted restrictions on its employees' collecting activities. Likely due to this lessening of restrictions, Captain Voogdt began collecting and selling ethnographic objects on trips in the early 1900s when he had completed his assigned duties for the New Guinea Company. By the time that he met George Dorsey in 1908, Voogdt had become an active collector with a "discriminating"[72] eye and had made several collections for German museums.

In August 1908, Dorsey accompanied Voogdt and his superior Georg Heine on the ship's usual route along the North Coast of German New Guinea and on an additional trip 120 kilometers up the Kaiserin Augusta River (now known as the Sepik River). Their trip was the

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[71] *Ibid.,* 36.
[72] George Dorsey, Letter to Frederick J. V. Skiff, February 9, 1905, Accession 1088, Field Museum Anthropology Department Archives, Field Museum, Chicago.

first made in the 20th century.[73] Dorsey told the *Chicago Daily Tribune,* which printed installments of his "Diary of a 47,000 Mile Journey," that this represented "a chance to see Papuans by the wholesale,"[74] and collect material culture from groups that had minimal exposure to Western influences. As captain of the *Siar,* Voogdt's mission was to deliver supplies to New Guinea Company outposts and recruit men from villages along the coast to work as laborers on plantations around Astrolabe Bay. With the captain's advice, Dorsey purchased a selection of trade goods to exchange for artifacts including fishhooks, fishing lines, tobacco, calico, knives, axes, matches, and beads. The *Siar* made brief but numerous stops, providing the two collectors with many opportunities to exchange trade goods for ethnological specimens.

Of course, Dorsey and Voogdt had to locate willing trading partners in the villages they visited. While Voogdt and Heine searched for recruits, Dorsey often drew a crowd of locals who wanted to make a trade. Dorsey told the *Chicago Daily Tribune*,"their greed for fishhooks, fish lines, mirrors, paint, and arm rings was really great."[75] The goods that he brought were of high demand because of their high value: fishhooks and axes were useful tools that could reduce the strain of arduous tasks. Dorsey described the brisk pace of trade: in just two hours, "I made just 238 distinct trades. It was hot, fast, and furious."[76] Because of the speed of such transactions, Dorsey collected little information, merely recording objects' names and locations of purchase. Once Voogdt completed his other duties, he typically joined Dorsey and "traded in earnest for his own collection,"[77] creating entries with equally meager information in small paperback ledgers.

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[73] Welsch, "One Time, One Place," 159.
[74] Dorsey, George, "Dorsey Studies Guinea Natives" *Chicago Daily Tribune,* September 28, 1909,
[75] Dorsey, George, "Guinea Natives Fear all Whites," *Chicago Daily Tribune,* October 2, 1909.
[76] *Ibid.*
[77] *Ibid.*

As they traveled together, Dorsey and Voogdt influenced each other's ideas about what was worthy of purchase. After studying the Voogdt collection, Robert Welsch observed that "Voogdt had considerable understanding of variations in artifact types along the coast, and he had a keen sense of which pieces were common and which were rare and unusual."[78] Voogdt guided Dorsey to the "rare and unusual" artifacts he sought, and Dorsey taught Voogdt what scholars looked for in museum collections. Despite Dorsey's academic credentials, both men's collections privilege the exceptional over the ordinary. Voogdt wanted fine artifacts for which museums and private collectors would be willing to pay large sums, and Dorsey wanted objects that would impress museum visitors.

While Dorsey and Voogdt initiated the exchanges and had the power to decide what belonged in the museum collections, it is also clear that these transactions were not one-sided: to some degree, their indigenous trading partners had agency and constructed these collections too. Although the collectors may have badgered villagers to get what they wanted, the villagers could ultimately decide if and what they were willing to trade. They could also decide not to trade and developed strategies to avoid the collectors. Dorsey remarked that when the *Siar* would dock at a village, women and children would flee.[79] As a result, Dorsey and Voogdt tended to trade with men more frequently than with women, and both collections are biased toward objects used and made by men. The range of objects that are both present in and absent from the Voogdt and Dorsey collections thus preserves the will of indigenous makers and traders, not just that of the objects' collectors.

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[78] Robert L Welsch and A. B Lewis, *An American Anthropologist in Melanesia. A.B. Lewis and the Joseph N. Field South Pacific Expedition, 1909-1913: Appendixes Vol. 2* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 162.
[79] Dorsey, George, "Guinea Natives Fear all Whites," *Chicago Daily Tribune,* October 2, 1909.

Figure 7. Sketch of etching on carved cranium, UMMAA 17721, Singrin, German New Guinea

In Singrin, a village twenty-five miles up the Sepik River, Captain Voogdt collected a carved human cranium. In life, it belonged to a female individual who died between the ages of twenty and thirty years old. Post-mortem, the cranium was modified: fine marks from removing the flesh cover its exterior surface, a half-centimeter wide hole is bored into the center of the head where the coronal sutures intersect, and a symmetrical geometric design (sketched above) is carved into the frontal bone, above the brow. The individual's orbital sockets and nasal cavity are filled with wood that is beginning to deteriorate. The skull is stained orangish-brown with red ochre. During the more than one hundred years it has been in museums' custody, the left

zygomatic arch has been broken and it has been inscribed with three numbers marking the custody of Voogdt, the Field Museum, and the UMMAA.

We do not know from whom Voogdt collected this young woman's skull, so it is difficult to determine why it had been prepared in this way. Some societies in New Guinea prepared and ornamented the skulls of their kin to worship or honor them; others ornamented the skulls of slain enemies. Dorsey also collected carved crania with Voogdt and described doing so in an article in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*. A passage under the heading "Carved Skull Prize Trophy" provides context that may also apply to the skull that Voogdt collected.

> "Among my prized possessions was an exceedingly interesting carved and painted skull. This was one of a number in front of the house altars. The owner, an old man about 60, refused to be tempted by any of my knives to part with a single one of his prized skulls. On a little urging, however, he picked one up and offered it to me. After I had completed the trade I asked, 'who belong this fellow skull?' to which he replied 'O, he belong papa, belong me.'"[80]

The man's initial reluctance to trade his father's skull shows that it held value to him, although Dorsey did not bother to learn about the cultural significance of the practice. That it had been placed on a house altar along with a number of others suggests that it was a common practice to prepare the skulls of kin in this way and that people maintained a relationship with the dead after death. By offering a knife in exchange, Dorsey persuaded the man to abandon his reservations and trade the skull. Upon doing so, Dorsey claimed the skull for himself, and it became one of his "prized possessions."

For museum scientists, carved skulls from the Pacific were highly desirable because they functioned as both cultural curiosities and scientific specimens.[81] Members of the public and

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[80] George Dorsey, "Carved Skull Prize Trophy," *Chicago Daily Tribune* 3 October 1909.

[81] Dirk Hr Spennemann, "Skulls as Curio, Crania as Science: Some Notes on the Collection of Skeletal Material during the German Colonial Period," *Micronesian Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences* 5, no. 1/2 (2006): 70–78; Damien Huffer and Duncan Chappell, "The Mainly Nameless and Faceless Dead: An Exploratory Study of

scientists alike associated them with the "savagery" of cannibalism and headhunting, whether or not the skulls were produced in these ways. The German colonial government and missionaries discouraged these practices, causing groups to cease preparing the skulls of even their kin in traditional ways. Thus, carved skulls were becoming less common when Voogdt and Dorsey collected them in the Sepik River region. A.B. Lewis, on his expedition to the same region one year later, also collected many crania, carved and modeled over with clay.[82] In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, museums assembled large collections of human skeletal remains, disproportionately of non-white individuals.[83] By comparing the anatomy of racially diverse populations, early museum scientists tried to determine the biological basis of race, a mission often driven by scientific racism. Salvage anthropology, the movement that sought to preserve the cultural and biological remains of "vanishing" groups, was a major force that drove the expansion of early museum collections.[84] The collection of the bodily remains and material culture of "vanishing" peoples intertwined, a dark legacy of colonial collecting that persists today.

After the end of his expedition, Dorsey maintained an amicable relationship with Voogdt. telling him "I shall never forget you" and "in my whole trip around the world I enjoyed none so much as the one with you and Mr. Heine on the little *Siar."*[85] But Dorsey was also pragmatic and used their friendship to the Field Museum's advantage, writing to Director Skiff, "considering

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the Illicit Traffic in Archaeological and Ethnographic Human Remains," *Crime, Law and Social Change* 62, no. 2 (September 1, 2014): 131–53,

[82] Lewis collected as many as 68 crania in location and likely collected more in other places. Welsch, *An American Anthropologist… Vol. 1,* 136.

[83] Samuel J Redman, *Bone Rooms: From Scientific Racism to Human Prehistory in Museums* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2016).

[84] *Ibid.*

[85] George Dorsey, Letter to Heinrich Voogdt, January 29, 1909, Voogdt, Capt H. 1908 - 1912, Departmental Correspondence 1893 - 1935, Field Museum Anthropology Department Archives, Field Museum, Chicago.

the value intrinsically and from the Museum point of view of the material which he gathers, the price which he is contented to accept same is almost absurd."[86] Voogdt offered one portion of his collection to the Field Museum and sent the remainder to Germany, where he planned to sell it to European museums. The Field Museum purchased the Voogdt collection, which included material he collected with Dorsey as well as material he collected on the Huon Gulf. Due to a series of miscommunications, the purchase was not finalized until mid-1910, during which time the relationship between Dorsey and Voogdt soured. Dorsey portrayed the New Guinea Company in an unflattering light in several *Chicago Daily Tribune* articles published in September and October 1909. A letter from Voogdt to Dorsey in 1911 shows just how much their relationship had changed: "I am very sorry to tell you that Mr. Heine is much alarmed about what you wrote in one of the Chicago leading papers. He has refused the little souvenir you so kindly sent him — and your man Mr. Lewis had a good deal of trouble about it."[87] Because of Dorsey's impoliteness, the New Guinea Company refused to help the Field Museum when Albert Buell Lewis, Assistant Curator of Anthropology, traveled to German New Guinea as part of a four-year collecting expedition in Melanesia.[88] Voogdt tried and failed to sell another of his collections in Germany and offered to sell it to the Field Museum. Anticipating Lewis' return, Dorsey declined the offer. However, Voogdt's collection would eventually make its way to the Field Museum. He finally found a buyer in Germany—the Umlauff trading firm. In 1913, Dorsey visited the Umlauff Museum in Hamburg and secured the rest of Voogdt's collection for the museum.

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[86] Dorsey, Letter to Frederick J. V. Skiff, February 9, 1905, Accession 1088, Field Museum Anthropology Department Archives, Field Museum, Chicago.
[87] Heinrich Voogdt, Letter to George Dorsey, March 26, 1911, Accession 1088, Field Museum Anthropology Department Archives, Field Museum, Chicago.
[88] Welsch, *An American Anthropologist… Vol. 1,* 226-228.

Accession 1113: Alfred Buell Lewis, 1913
Tortoise shell arm ring, Huon Gulf
Wooden mask, Borbor
String Bag, Kirau

> "Of all the countries recently visited by me New Guinea impressed me as most deserving immediate attention… In Dr. Lewis we have a man eminently fitted to undertake this work. He knows, as few, if any, men know, the literature of this vast territory. Better than this he has spent months in overhauling, examining, classifying and cataloguing all our material from that region… I am confident in the belief that, as a result of such an expedition, our Institution would secure material for publication and for exhibition purposes of enormous value and extent."[89]

Between 1909 and 1913, Alfred Buell (A.B.) Lewis assembled one of the world's largest collections of Melanesian material culture for the Field Museum. During his excursions into villages in Fiji, German New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, the New Hebrides, New Caledonia, Papua, the Moluccas, and Dutch New Guinea, Lewis collected more than 14,000 objects.[90] The trip was part of Dorsey's quest to build the Field Museum's reputation and provided an opportunity to compile a more systematic collection from the villages Dorsey had passed through in 1908. As evidenced by his own collection, Dorsey personally preferred fine specimens that would make an impression on museum visitors; but, as a trained anthropologist, he valued well-documented specimens that would serve as resources for future ethnological studies. Two years before Lewis left for the South Seas, George Dorsey hired him as Assistant Curator of Anthropology. Lewis had recently earned a doctoral degree in anthropology from Columbia University but had virtually no field experience. A student of Franz Boas, Lewis proved to be most "concerned with documenting a traditional way of life" and built a collection "that

[89] George Dorsey, Letter to Frederick Skiff, December 22, 1908, cited in Welsch, *An American Anthropologist… Vol. 1,* 23.
[90] The A.B. Lewis collection represents one-third of the Field Museum's Melanesian holdings today.

self-consciously depicted" what Robert Welsch referred to as "the 'ethnographic past'"[91] By collecting traditional examples of material culture, Lewis hoped to document historical relationships between indigenous groups in the areas he studied and extrapolate what the groups had been like before Europeans arrived.

Lewis arrived in German New Guinea in late August 1909, three months into his expedition, with instructions from Dorsey. The chief curator felt that the museum's "collections from the coast region are sufficiently complete, except two or three areas."[92] In these areas Dorsey advised him to "only do such work as seems necessary to make our collections adequate," but, along the coast, Dorsey specifically urged him to "secure as many of the large carvings from the ceremonial houses as possible."[93] Like Dorsey, Lewis began by visiting Albert Hahl, the governor of German New Guinea, who encouraged scientific activity because it might foster commercial interest in the colony. Lewis accompanied Governor Hahl and his party on a tour of inspection of colonial outposts along the coast. Hahl's party left Lewis on the North Coast in Eitape (now Aitape), and from there he traveled east. Lewis forged connections with European collectors, missionaries, and administrators while spending more and more time in villages. In the beginning, Lewis collected in the interior of German New Guinea as Dorsey had instructed, but as the trip continued, he developed his own research agenda. He thought that the information Dorsey had collected was insufficient and returned to collect intensively in the same coastal villages, seeking to construct "a connected view of the whole coast."[94] Only a

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[91] Welsch, *An American Anthropologist… Vol. 1,* 7.
[92] George Dorsey to A. B. Lewis, May 5, 1909, cited in Welsch, *An American Anthropologist… Vol. 1,* 25.
[93] *ibid.*
[94] Robert L. Welsch, "Historical Ethnology. The Context and Meaning of the A. B. Lewis Collection," *Anthropos* 94, no. 4/6 (1999): 457.

representative sample of everyday objects from as many villages as possible would provide enough data to accomplish this ambitious goal.

Although he was assisted by local guides, Lewis was alone in the field — he had nearly complete control over the pace of the expedition and the composition of the collection. Initially a novice, he quickly became comfortable with the work. His field diaries, expertly analyzed by Robert Welsch, transition from simple summaries of his journey to careful observations about the societies he visited, data that would be useful after he returned to Chicago to analyze the collection. Charged by the museum only to "gather such data as will be needful for the proper labeling thereof,"[95] Lewis decided to collect more than just objects' names and locations of origin: he asked their makers for the objects' local names, materials, and uses. Interested in conducting a comparative ethnological study, he noted the presence and absence of certain types of objects and styles of decoration in many communities. Unfortunately, he did not speak the local languages and found it difficult to learn about local symbolism and groups' social and political organization. This language barrier prevented him from obtaining in-depth ethnographic information from the communities he visited. Still, his survey probably remains the most complete ever conducted in this region of New Guinea.

Lewis surveyed the North Coast of German New Guinea more systematically than any other region during his expedition.[96] It was along the North Coast that he collected a wooden mask and a string bag which are now in the UMMAA's collection. In his field notes, he makes no direct reference to either object but describes his activities in the villages in which they were collected.

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[95] George Dorsey to A. B. Lewis, May 5, 1909, cited in Welsch, *An American Anthropologist… Vol. 1,* 25.
[96] Robert L. Welsch, "Historical Ethnology. The Context and Meaning of the A. B. Lewis Collection," *Anthropos* 94, no. 4/6 (1999): 455.

Figure X. Wooden mask, UMMAA 17714, Botbot, German New Guinea

On May 25, 1910, Lewis arrived in Borbor (now Botbot), a village to the east of the Kaiserin Augusta River, where he collected the mask. There, he "spent part of the fortnoon" and "got a few things"[97] before returning to Kayan, where he had arranged to stay with a Chinese trader who owned a house on the shore. In the next few days, he visited several nearby villages and made a trip up the Kwā River. On May 29, he returned to Borbor because the Chinese trader "reported that there was to be a sing-sing,"[98] a gathering at which there would be a feast and

[97] Lewis, cited in Welsch, *An American Anthropologist… Vol. 1,* 251.
[98] *Ibid.,* 252.

dancing — an ideal opportunity to see and acquire ceremonial objects. Preparations were underway when they arrived: "One of the men's houses was especially decorated with leaves and red and yellow fruits of some tree, and in one end was a large pile of taro, yams, bananas, and sugar cane."[99] Men smoked *tamburan* pipes, and women divided the pile of produce among the people who had assembled and prepared sago. Lewis had hoped to photograph the men dancing but suspected "that the real performance did not come off till the moon arose, around midnight."[100] Tired from the day's events, he and the trader returned to Kayan before the performance. The next morning, in Borbor, "tamburan pipes and feasting were in full force, but no dancing."[101] Before leaving, Lewis collected three *tamburan* pipes, used at ceremonial occasions. Lewis makes no mention of masks in Borbor, but because his visit coincided with the sing-sing, he may have obtained the UMMAA's mask there before heading west.

On June 8, Lewis arrived in Kirau, a village fifteen miles west of the Kaiserin Augusta River, where he collected the string bag. In Kirau, he found two *tamburan* houses, which he compared to those he saw in Borbor. He persuaded village elders to show him the interior of the men's ceremonial house and found a cache of masks and wooden figures hidden behind a fringed leaf curtain. Because of the houses' and objects' sacred status, Lewis was not allowed to buy any of the artifacts he was shown. Once more, this language barrier prevented him from learning the meanings of the masks; however, he speculated that the masks "had some connection with the initiation and circumcision ceremonies."[102]

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[99] *Ibid.*
[100] *Ibid.*
[101] *Ibid.*
[102] *Ibid.,* 268

After making these observations, Lewis provided an overview of Kirau's material culture, noting which goods were made in the village and which came to the village through trade.

> "In Kirau the chief industry was the making of baskets and sleeping bags. These are made of kiran, a sedge about 6-8 ft high growing in shallow water… Wooden bowls did not seem to be made here … Pots were partly from the Mum region, partly from Wusumum, and partly from the 'bush.'
>
> "A few netted sacs were seen, either Kaup type or the 'bush' type, same as at Awar and Kaian, with seeds."[103]

Figures 8 - 9. Bilum bags of the "Kaup Type," UMMAA 17715, FM 140775

[103] *Ibid*.

Figures 10 - 11. Bilum bags of the "Bush Type," Field Museum 140772, 140773

Lewis collected examples of the two types of string bag produced in Kirau for the Field Museum. The bags are sturdy and expertly woven from the same type of finely spun fiber. Both are ornamented with local materials: the "Kaup type" bags with cowrie shells found on the coasts of New Guinea or traded in from the archipelago; the "bush type" bags with the outer casings of coix seeds (*Coix lacryma-jobi*) or "Job's tears," a grain native to Southeast Asia.

The UMMAA's string bag is of the "Kaup type." It is nearly identical to a bag that remains at the Field Museum. Nassa shells less than a centimeter across are woven evenly into the front of the bag. The mouth of the Field Museum's bag is dark brown, whether dyed intentionally or discolored from use is unclear. Their counterparts, two "bush" bags that remain at the Field Museum, were woven with a similar technique but are of different sizes and shapes. One side of each bag is decorated. Rows of dark red and faded blue alternate with the natural fibers' natural brown hue. Hollow *Coix* seed hulls are woven into the bag's exterior surface in rows and columns. The larger of the two bags has a red, plastic bead woven into the bag alongside the coix seeds, a detail that may be a maker's mark. Because the UMMAA's bag is

nearly identical to the one remaining at the Field Museum, it makes sense that it was designated a duplicate and included in the exchange with the University of Michigan.

The notes Lewis made about the movement of material culture in and out of Kirau provide researchers with valuable data; among other things, it shows evidence of links between communities. Welsch provides an example: 77 string bags from the Sepik Coast region were collected in one region but had been created in another.[104] These bags, and Lewis' notes about them, reveal that the bags link 56 pairs of communities. A previous study on trade in the Sepik Coast region found only seven references to the exchange of bags in more than 200 published references.[105] The collection demonstrates that string bags played a significant role in exchange, although Lewis' inability to communicate with villagers prevented him from learning what that role might have been. Eighty years later, in a field survey of the villages Lewis had visited, interviews with residents showed that string bags were not regularly traded as commodities in the same way that sago, pots, and dried fish had been. The bags may thus show their use "as supplemental gifts given 'on top of or in addition to' the main exchange as expressions of generosity and friendship."[106] The collection, supplemented by Lewis' careful notes, provides data that researchers can use as a baseline to understand change over time.

Despite the breadth of the Lewis Collection, it has largely been neglected as a resource for research. As later chapters of this thesis will show, anthropologists' interests and methods shifted in the decades following the first World War. Although it may take time to parse information it contains, the Lewis collection — and the UMMAA's small part of it — contains a

[104] Welsch, "Historical Ethnology," 461.
[105] Tiesler 1969-70, cited in Welsch, "Historical Ethnology," 460.
[106] Welsch, "Historical Ethnology," 461.

wealth of cultural and historical data that researchers and interested source community members could mine to answer the questions these groups ask today.

Accession 1140: The J.F.G. Umlauff Museum, 1913

Club, Waria River
Axe, Kaiserin Augusta River

"I need not remind you that the dealings this Department has heretofore had with Umlauff have been entirely satisfactory."[107]

In 1913, not long before A.B. Lewis returned from his Melanesian expedition, the Field Museum purchased Accession 1140, an ethnological collection from the J.F.G. Umlauff trading firm that contained materials collected in German New Guinea by Captain Heinrich Voogdt, among others. After the Field Museum purchased Accessions 1080 and 1088, Voogdt offered a second collection to the Field Museum. Dorsey declined to accept the collection, and Voogdt instead offered it to museums and curio dealers in Germany. The Umlauff firm purchased it sometime in 1910 or 1911 and prepared it for sale in 1912.[108] Umlauff combined Voogdt's materials with those from unknown collectors, then sent catalogs and photographs to high-profile German and American museums. The collection, offered for sale for $12,500, included 73 specimens from New Britain and 2,000 from German New Guinea. While in Hamburg in January 1913, Dorsey saw the collection and urged the Board of Directors to purchase it. As he had seen during his own expedition, the pace of collecting ethnological specimens had accelerated, emptying entire villages in German New Guinea of their indigenous crafts and technology: this made procuring specimens more difficult for European naturalists and thus these cultural materials became rarer. Stanley Field, President of the Field Museum, encouraged the

[107] George Dorsey to Frederick Skiff, April 24, 1913, Accession 1140, Field Museum Anthropology Department Archives, Field Museum, Chicago.
[108] Welsch, "One Time," 161.

Field Museum's recorder to make a counteroffer of $10,000.[109] Dorsey insisted that the museum offer $12,750, a higher sum than Umlauff had requested; several European museums had already offered its asking price, and he feared that the museum would lose the collection if it tried to negotiate a lower price.[110] Umlauff accepted the offer and shipped the collection aboard the *S.S. Pretoria* in fifteen cases. The cases arrived in April 1913, and Dorsey decided to charge Lewis with unpacking and cataloging the collection, as it would be integrated with the material that he brought back from Melanesia. An axe and a club included in this shipment eventually made their way to the University of Michigan.

In contrast to Dorsey's personal and emotionally charged correspondence with Voogdt, his correspondence with Umlauff was strictly impersonal and transactional. While it took more than one-and-a-half years to settle the Field Museum's sale with Voogdt, the second Umlauff sale took less than three months to complete, from initial offer to final payment. Dorsey's personal relationship with Voogdt clearly complicated the sale. The collectors took pride in their work and felt a sense of fellowship around their mutual interests in ethnology. But when Dorsey's trip ended, he became an intermediary between Voogdt and the Field Museum, Voogdt's artifacts became commodities, and — further complicated by Dorsey's insensitive remarks in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* — the men's relationship permanently shifted. Dorsey probably wanted to get Voogdt's second collection because it would complete the first and complement his own. But he also likely wanted to avoid the friction that their complicated relationship had introduced. Umlauff's offer came as a welcome opportunity to purchase the Voogdt collection via a neutral third party. Although Dorsey and Umlauff corresponded as early

[109] Stanley Field, Letter to D.C. Davies, March 10, 1913, Accession 1140, Field Museum Anthropology Department Archives, Field Museum, Chicago.
[110] D.C. Davies to Stanley Field, March 11, 1913, Accession 1140, Anthropology Archives, Field Museum

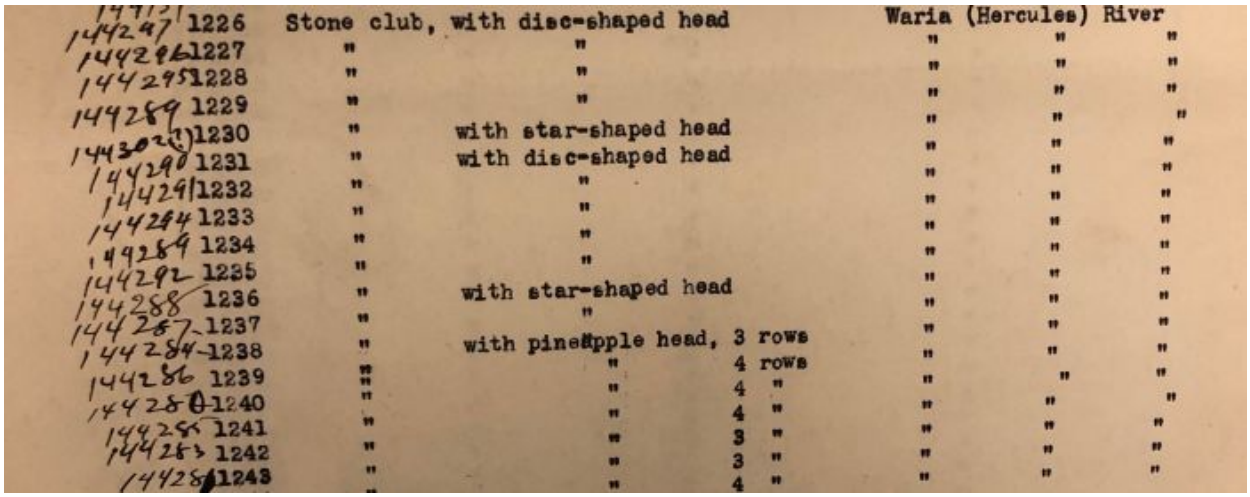
as 1899, they discussed business exclusively. At the same time that Dorsey was coordinating this purchase, he also inquired whether Umlauff could find "ten to twenty gorilla skeletons"[111] — Umlauff was a means to an end and a point of access to both biological and ethnological specimens. To the Umlauff firm, the Field Museum was just one of many potential buyers; without a close personal relationship to mediate the exchange, the artifacts could remain commodities and the sale could remain impersonal.

Although transactions with dealers were more straightforward than those with collectors, objects acquired from dealers were one step further removed from the moment of collection, a distance that lowers their scientific value. Museums desired comprehensive, systematic collections, rather than partial, undocumented collections. Because dealers moved their collections frequently and sometimes sold them in multiple parts, they often were separated from collectors' notes and diaries. Umlauff sent the Field Museum a catalog book that lists the objects and their locations of origin. Umlauff stated that the collectors had been "Voogdt and others," but did not indicate which objects were collected at what times by Voogdt and which were collected by the others. It is likely that no other information about the objects exists: in 1943, during World War II, an air raid destroyed the storehouse along with all of its records.[112]

[111] George Dorsey to J.F.G. Umlauff, March 6, 1913, Umlauff, J.F.G. 1898-1930; Departmental Correspondence 1893 - 1935, Field Museum Anthropology Archives
[112] Buschmann, *Anthropology's Global Histories,* 32.

Figure 12. Club, UMMAA 17716, Waria River, German New Guinea

From the Umlauff Collection, a club and an axe joined the University of Michigan's collection in 1945. Three documents trace the club's journey during three stages of its life history in which it was known by the numbers 1226, 144297, and 17716.



144247 1226	Stone club, with disc-shaped head			Waria (Hercules) River
144296 1227	"	"		" " "
144295 1228	"	"		" " "
144289 1229	"	"		" " "
144302 1230	"	with star-shaped head		" " "
144290 1231	"	with disc-shaped head		" " "
144291 1232	"	"		" " "
144284 1233	"	"		" " "
144289 1234	"	"		" " "
144292 1235	"	"		" " "
144288 1236	"	with star-shaped head		" " "
144287 1237	"	"		" " "
144284 1238	"	with pineapple head,	3 rows	" " "
144286 1239	"	"	4 rows	" " "
144280 1240	"	"	4 "	" " "
144285 1241	"	"	4 "	" " "
144283 1242	"	"	3 "	" " "
144281 1243	"	"	3 "	" " "
	"	"	4 "	" " "

Figure 13. Specimen inventory list, Accession 1140 Records, Field Museum Anthropology Archives

1226 is the number by which the club was known to the Umlauff Museum. In the above list of the 2,073 objects that the Field Museum acquired in Accession 1140, the stone club is grouped with eighteen other stone clubs from "Waria (Hercules) River." Of these, eight have similar disc-shaped heads, three have star-shaped heads, and seven have "pineapple-shaped" heads. These artifacts were probably collected by the same person, given that they are grouped together and have similar features. Within the list, objects of the same type from the same locations are grouped together, but if these groupings have a relationship with each other, it is not clear what it might be.

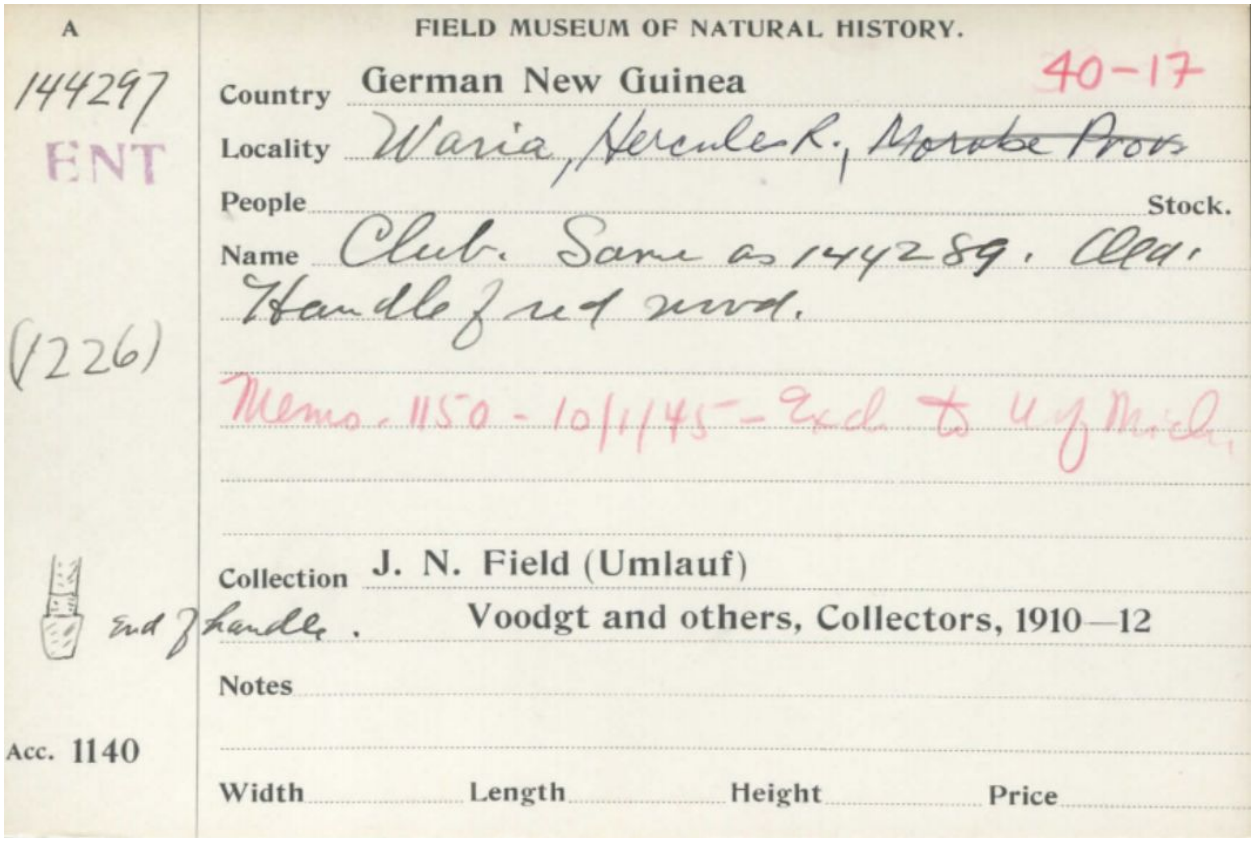

A
144297
ENT
(1226)
FIELD MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY.
40-17
Country German New Guinea
Locality Waria, Hercules R., Morobe Prov.
People Stock.
Name Club. Same as 144289. Also.
Handle & end mod.
Memo. 1150 - 10/1/45 - Exch. to U of Mich.
end of handle.
Collection J. N. Field (Umlauf)
Voodgt and others, Collectors, 1910—12
Notes
Acc. 1140
Width Length Height Price

Figure 14. Catalog card 114297, Field Museum Anthropology Archives

The Field Museum cataloged 1226 as 144297. Its catalog card lists the same locality, with the addition of "Morobe Province." Purchased through the Joseph N. Field fund, the club was collected by or acquired from "Voogdt and others" between 1910 and 1912. It is described as the "same as 144289." 144297 and 144289 may indeed have looked similar at one point, but 144289 is now in poor condition: its stone disc has detached from the handle, the wood is weathered, and a crack runs up the length of the shaft. It is unclear whether the club was in this state at the time of the exchange, but, of the set, the UMMAA's club is in better condition today.

Figure 15. Clubs, top to bottom: FM 144289, 144291, 144295, Waria, German New Guinea

144297 17716 Club - head disc shaped with hole in center through which wooden handle is passed. Waria, German New Guinea

Figure 16. Excerpt from Memo 1150, Accession 1623 records, UMMAA

When it arrived at the University of Michigan, the club from "Waria, German New Guinea" was re-cataloged as 17716. The exchange documentation describes the club's physical appearance but not say that it was part of the Umlauff collection, that it was collected by "Voogdt and others," or that it was originally acquired between 1910 and 1912. No mention is

made of the eighteen similar clubs at the Field Museum or what other materials from the Waria River region might be in the collection.

It may not have seemed important to send this information because the exchanged collection was intended to serve as a teaching collection. Since then, anthropologists' interests have changed, and the museum's needs have changed. Today, the collection is rarely, if ever, used for teaching. Without the associated contextual information, the collection is not well-suited for other uses. Following this trail of documents reveals that the further an object travels from its original context and the greater number of hands a collection passes through, the less information will be preserved. This is a loss: the life of a museum object is long, and there is no way to foresee what information will be deemed relevant by later researchers.

The Exchange

On October 10, 1945, a crate — containing a lime holder and bone spatula, a small wooden figure, a shell ring, a wooden headrest, a carved skull, a tortoiseshell arm ring, a wooden mask, a string bag, a club, and an axe — arrived in Ann Arbor. Each object has a richer life history than could be told in its documentation. Their creators fashioned these objects from wood, shell, and bone and exchanged them for tobacco and knives; collectors inscribed them with field numbers and packaged them in crates; curators deemed them inessential and assigned them the label 'duplicate'; finally, administrators reduced them to their names and locations of origin and sent them to museums across the United States. As the objects became specimens and moved further from their original contexts, the information that accompanied them dwindled.

In the early twentieth century, determined curators and administrators built these collections as resources that would elevate their institutions' status. During the twenty years George Dorsey led the Department of Anthropology (1895-1915), he 'grew' its holdings from 30,000 to 160,000 objects that belonged to more than 1,000 accessions."[113] Dorsey orchestrated the Field Museum's ascent by coordinating purchases with dealers and sending his staff on field expeditions. He forged relationships with collectors, dealers, and wealthy patrons in order to assemble collections that met the museum's standards for "beauty, value, and completeness."[114] Dorsey and these individuals treated the objects as commodities while using them to sustain relationships.

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[113] Robert L. Welsch, "Albert Buell Lewis: Realizing George Amos Dorsey's Vision," *Fieldiana. Anthropology*, no. 36 (2003): 102-103.

[114] George Dorsey, Letter to Frederick J. V. Skiff, July 22, 1905, Accession 967, Field Museum Anthropology Department Archives, Field Museum, Chicago.

The exchange shows how institutional context shapes the identities and content of collections. To observers and custodians of collections, each assemblage has a distinct identity tied to — and shaped by — its collector. Voogdt, Umlauff, Dorsey, and Lewis were very different individuals with different reasons for assembling their respective collections: studying the range of objects that each procured can reveal these differences. The paper trail reinforces these apparent divisions between the collections. In the case of the Voogdt, Umlauff, and Dorsey collections, Robert Welsch has taken a perspective that privileges the objects over their collectors, commenting that because the collections were assembled at approximately the same time from the same villages by collectors who had similar tastes and strategies, they comprise one, continuous collection.[115] Although he collected in many of the same villages, Lewis had very different goals and strategies: Welsch argues that his collection remains distinct. Because of its documentation, Lewis' collection is better suited for ethnological studies than the others. The archives associated with the collections could not travel when objects from the collections traveled to the University of Michigan. The collection became associated only with the Chicago Museum of Natural History, treated as a teaching collection rather than a resource for ethnological research.

The specimen exchange industry connected institutions and individuals through a unique form of exchange in which objects served as both commodities and gifts. When the exchange occurred in 1945, the study of material culture was already declining in importance in anthropology departments across the United States. Anthropologists found fault with studies that used material culture to infer relationships and turned away from broad ethnological surveys in

[115] Welsch, "One Time."

favor of focused ethnographic studies. As a result, many ethnological collections never fulfilled their potential as imagined by their collectors and curators. The UMMAA and Field Museum continue to care for these objects and their associated records, in trust as resources for future researchers.

When the Field Museum prepared the collection for exchange, staff selected objects from its New Guinea holdings without regard to their collectors or creators, combining them to constitute a new collection. The University of Michigan was not alone in receiving exchange material from Accessions 967, 1080, 1088, 1113, and 1140 in this way. Specimens from the Umlauff, Voogdt, and Lewis collections were sent in exchanges with the Bishop Museum in Hawaii; the Buffalo Museum of Science in New York; the Reading Public Museum in Pennsylvania; the Harvard Peabody Museum; the U.S. National Museum; the Museo Nacional México, and many others.[116] The Field Museum sent some collections with nearly complete provenance information and others with virtually none; these objects and their documentation are like loose threads that connect the museums across time and space. At various stages in their life histories, the objects served as exchangeable commodities, rare artifacts, and unnecessary duplicates, in the process facilitating relationships between villagers and voyagers, scholars and museum administrators, and students and teachers as they traveled between New Guinea, Germany, Chicago, and Ann Arbor.

[116] Accession 967, Field Museum Anthropology Department Archives, Field Museum, Chicago.

Chapter 3
Tradition & Cultural Change: The Harding-Sahlins Collection

In great two-masted canoes measuring up to sixty feet in length, the Siassi Islanders crossed the Vitiaz Strait. The Siassi people, intrepid sailors "who collectively could not have numbered more than twelve hundred,"[117] served a vital role as intermediaries in a trade system connecting hundreds of communities on the northeast coast of New Guinea to communities on the southwest coast of New Britain and to dozens of island communities in between. From these coastal villages, the craft goods, valuables, and food products stored in the hulls of Siassi canoes entered other inland trading spheres, reaching communities in the hinterlands of New Guinea, comprising a system whose goods collectively reached as many as a quarter of a million people.

Between September 1963 and August 1964, University of Michigan graduate student Thomas G. Harding conducted fieldwork for his dissertation in many of these communities linked by the trade system of the Vitiaz Strait. His goal was to produce a descriptive study of traditional patterns of trade by tracking the movements of goods and analyzing the relationships that sustained the system. In June 1964, Marshall Sahlins, the chairman of Harding's doctoral committee, joined him for one month in the field. Sahlins developed the idea for the field study and was there to assist and pursue his own research. By conducting this study, Harding earned a Ph.D. in Anthropology, secured a position at the University of California Santa Barbara, and published a monograph entitled *Voyagers of the Vitiaz Strait.*

The University of Michigan Museum of Anthropology (now called the U-M Museum of Anthropological Archaeology, or UMMAA) received another product of Harding's study — a

[117] Thomas G. Harding, *Voyagers of the Vitiaz Strait; a Study of a New Guinea Trade System, by Thomas G. Harding.* (University of Washington Press, 1967), 14.

collection of 107 ethnographic objects. Harding and Sahlins purchased these objects from villagers in the Siassi Islands, Umboi Island, and Sio village "for scientific purposes" under the conditions of a National Science Foundation (NSF) grant. They collected many but not all of the main craft goods and valuables involved in the trading system, including earthenware pots from Sio, wooden bowls from the Tami Islands, and boars' tusks from Umboi Island. The collection also includes objects from the Sepik River region that Sahlins purchased in 1965 from a curio dealer in Lae, New Guinea. The UMMAA reimbursed Sahlins for this portion of the collection because it had not been covered under the initial terms of the NSF grant. Because the Sepik materials were a collection of convenience rather than connected to Harding's project, they will not be examined in this chapter.

While the University Museum once oversaw all of the university's research collections, the UMMAA was formally established as a division of the museum in 1922 to curate its ethnological and archaeological collections. The Department of Anthropology was established seven years later, in 1929, by Carl E. Guthe, director of the UMMAA, and Julian Steward, a young professor who would later become a major theorist of cultural evolution. The UMMAA oversaw the administration of the Department and shared office space with its faculty in Ruthven Museums Building; as a result, the two institutions worked closely together. As the Department of Anthropology grew under the leadership of its chair Leslie White, so too did the distance between the Department and the Museum. In the mid-1960s when Harding and Sahlins made the collection, archaeological anthropologists maintained close ties to the museum while few cultural anthropologists considered it relevant to their work. The museum continued to care for its

ethnological and ethnographic collections but did not grow them at the same pace as its archaeological collections.

In light of the distance between the museum and cultural anthropologists on campus, it is clear that assembling the museum collection for the UMMAA was not the goal of Harding's study. Rather, it was simply another product: in fact, Harding neglected to even mention the objects in his ethnography. Neither he nor Sahlins were particularly interested in what the UMMAA did with the materials once they entered the museum's custody. Fifty years later, Sahlins only vaguely recalled creating the hundred-piece collection.[118] Furthermore, neither man worked in museums nor made subsequent collections for them. Their lack of interest in the collection is to be expected because, by the mid-twentieth century, cultural anthropology as a discipline had shifted away from museum-based research and anthropologists rarely relied on material culture to support their studies. To understand the Harding-Sahlins Collection, it is first necessary to understand its context.

The Reorientation of Anthropology

While anthropology had developed in tandem with the museum field, by the mid-1960s when Harding and Sahlins assembled this collection, the field was well into its "University Period."[119] Soon after the first World War, anthropological methods and research interests underwent a major shift, and as a result, museums and their ethnological collections diminished in importance to the field of anthropology, which found a permanent home in the university.

The shift to the university came from within the museum. At the turn of the twentieth century, Franz Boas, a curator at the American Museum of Natural History and professor at

[118] Marshall Sahlins, email correspondence with author, February 11, 2019.
[119] William Sturtevant, "Does Anthropology Need Museums?," in *Proceedings of the Biological Society of Washington.*, 2nd ed., vol. 82 (Washington: Biological Society of Washington, 1969), 619–50.

Columbia University, articulated what he considered "the limitations of the museum method of anthropology."[120] Rejecting Darwinian explanations of the development of human societies, Boas organized the AMNH's anthropology halls into geographically distinct culture areas, creating "life groups" that provided museum-goers with contextual evidence of the importance that the objects held within their respective social worlds.[121] He believed that immersive fieldwork and an emic perspective had to accompany any anthropological exhibit because the meaning of an object "can be understood only when viewed from the standpoint of the social and religious life of the people."[122] The museum director resisted Boas' firm stance and urged him to create exhibits that told a cultural evolutionary narrative in a less didactic manner, leading Boas to resign from the AMNH. Following the "Boasian reorientation of anthropology,"[123] anthropologists began to focus on the social dimensions of life, which, as Boas argued, "can not be expressed by any arrangement based on so small a portion of the manifestation of ethnic life as is presented by specimens."[124] While many of Boas' early students became members of the last generation of curators in the "Museum-University Period," his later students led the field into the "University Period" of American anthropology.[125] This institutional transition prompted changes in the funding structure, methodology, and theoretical orientation of anthropology as a discipline and practice.

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[120] Ira Jacknis, "Franz Boas and Exhibits: On the Limitations of the Museum Method of Anthropology," in *Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture* (Univ of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 75–111.; Franz Boas, "Some Principles of Museum Administration," *Science* 25, no. 650 (1907): 921–33.
[121] Jacknis, "Franz Boas and Exhibits."
[122] Boas, "Some Principles of Museum Administration," 928.
[123] Jacknis, "Franz Boas and Exhibits," 77.
[124] Boas, "Some Principles of Museum Administration," 928.
[125] Sturtevant, "Does Anthropology Need Museums?"

A shift in the funding structure of academic anthropological research facilitated the growth of university-based anthropology. Before 1920, the "half dozen or so academic departments of anthropology all existed in some kind of relation to an anthropological or general museum," and only about half of professional anthropologists worked in universities.[126] It was neither the government nor universities but wealthy philanthropists who funded the majority of anthropological field research, which primarily supported the construction of collections.[127] Donors were more likely to fund impressive expeditions that brought back exotic artifacts than slow-paced fieldwork that resulted in merely textual studies. The institutionalization of funding for field research in private foundations such as the Rockefeller Foundation and through initiatives of the New Deal era fueled the growth of ethnographic studies and the expansion of university anthropology departments.[128] By the end of the 1930s, there were more than thirty departments of anthropology in American universities, within which cultural anthropologists often had strong ties to their colleagues in sociology.[129] This shift from philanthropic to foundation-directed funding led most anthropologists away from museums and toward universities where the field matured with other empirical social sciences.

Following the era of armchair anthropology and the era of the ethnological expedition, anthropology adopted the ethnographic method as the field standard. Bronisław Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*[130] is regarded as the most influential early ethnography, in

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[126] George W. Stocking, "Ideas and Institutions in American Anthropology: Thoughts Toward a History of the Interwar Years," in *The Ethnographer's Magic and Other Essays in the History of Anthropology* (Univ of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 127.
[127] George W. Stocking, "Philanthropoids and Vanishing Cultures: Rockefeller Funding and the End of the Museum Era in Anglo-American Anthropology," in *Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture* (Univ of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 112–45.
[128] Stocking, "Ideas and Institutions in American Anthropology."
[129] Stocking, "Philanthropoids."
[130] Bronislaw Malinowski et al., *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (London: G. Routledge & Sons, Ltd., 1922).

which he developed the concept of the "ethnographic method." Through long-term participant observation, Malinowski studied the kula system in the Trobriand Islands to understand how it functioned in the present, in contrast to early anthropological studies that by and large used information about living groups to speculate about their distant pasts. Malinowski focused on several villages within a larger region, analyzing local manifestations of regional problems. By learning the language of his informants, gathering genealogical data, and recording local stories, Malinowski attempted "to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, and to realize his vision of his world."[131] Because a wealthy benefactor funded his expedition, Malinowski collected museum specimens for the Melbourne Museum, although he rarely mentioned them and did not study them.[132] While *Argonauts* encapsulates the new ethnographic method of fieldwork, Malinowski was not its sole inventor, for anthropologists before him such as Boas, E.B. Tylor, and Henry Louis Morgan approached their work in a similar way, and others who followed him including A.R. Radcliffe-Brown and Margaret Mead refined the method. Ethnographies using Malinowski's method proliferated the discipline and anthropologists descended upon societies like those in Melanesia that occupy the "savage slot."[133] These anthropologists wrote in the timeless "ethnographic present," a tense which portrayed "'primitive' cultures as atemporal steady-state systems" set apart from history.[134] As recent

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[131] *Ibid.*, 25.
[132] Robert L Welsch and A. B Lewis, *An American Anthropologist in Melanesia. A.B. Lewis and the Joseph N. Field South Pacific Expedition, 1909-1913 Vol. 1* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 568.
[133] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "Anthropology and the Savage Slot: The Poetics and Politics of Otherness," in *Global Transformations: Anthropology and the Modern World*, ed. Michel-Rolph Trouillot (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2003), 7–28.
[134] John W. Burton, "Shadows at Twilight: A Note on History and the Ethnographic Present," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 132, no. 4 (1988): 424.

scholars have critiqued, "The goal of this research was often comparative so as to document the range of human variability, especially 'them' in contrast to 'us.'"[135]

Debates about the nature of anthropology accompanied the development of the ethnographic method and account for the perspectives that shaped Harding's study. Anthropology traces its origins to the junction of history and science, a boundary (falsely) seen as a dichotomy.[136] Early amateur anthropologists used Darwin's theory of evolution to account for racial and cultural diversity and used evolutionary arguments to justify existing imperial hierarchies. Boas developed the four-field approach to anthropology and critiqued these speculative reconstructions, advocating for culture-specific studies that would better show the diffusion of cultural elements over geographic areas in patterns that could be more plainly observed and described. In 1923, British anthropologist A.R. Radcliffe-Brown urged the field to distinguish between ethnology and social anthropology, which had been used interchangeably. The former he redefined as "the attempt to reconstruct the history of culture," and the latter he described as "the purely inductive study of the phenomena of culture."[137] Following this redefinition, Malinowski joined A.R. Radcliffe-Brown in "an attack on speculative historical, diffusionist, and evolutionist studies," and "encouraged his students to conduct synchronic studies of social institutions within bounded, functioning societies."[138] British functionalism, led

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[135] Deborah Gewertz and Frederick Errington, "Retelling Chambri Lives: Ontological Bricolage," *The Contemporary Pacific* 28, no. 2 (July 27, 2016): 348.
[136] George W. Stocking, "Franz Boas and the Culture Concept in Historical Perspective," *American Anthropologist* 68, no. 4 (1966): 867–82.
[137] A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, "The Methods of Ethnology and Social Anthropology," *South African Journal of Science* 20, no. 1 (October 1, 1923): 138.
[138] Robert L Welsch and A. B Lewis, *An American Anthropologist in Melanesia. A.B. Lewis and the Joseph N. Field South Pacific Expedition, 1909-1913 Vol. 1* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 568.

by Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski, viewed the components of societies as interrelated, so that a change in one dimension would accompany a change in another.

George Stocking has described three dominant theoretical tendencies in the interwar years of American anthropology.[139] Students of Boas including Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead led the "culture-personality" or integrationalist movement, which was closely tied to psychology and viewed cultures as integrated and patterned. Influenced by British functionalism and Durkheimian sociology, structural functionalism became the second dominant tendency of interwar anthropology. The third pattern Stocking described as the "economic" or "techno-environmental" line of anthropology "conceived of the the integration of culture as an adaptive utilitarian response to external forces, rather than in subjective emotional or ideational terms."[140] Julian Steward and Leslie White, two anthropologists who helped establish anthropology at U-M, were proponents of this third line of thinking. Both argued that Boas' critique of cultural evolution had been too dismissive. They saw cultural and technological diversity as evidence of adaptation to different environmental challenges and sought to retrieve cultural evolution from the margins of anthropological theory. By tracing an academic lineage, we can see how the theories that Steward and White developed influenced Harding's study of the Vitiaz Strait.

Julian Steward, a key figure in the development of cultural evolution, established the Department of Anthropology during his brief tenure at the University of Michigan. He left in 1930 and later worked at the Smithsonian Institution where he founded the Institute for Social

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[139] George W. Stocking, "Ideas and Institutions in American Anthropology: Thoughts Toward a History of the Interwar Years," in *The Ethnographer's Magic and Other Essays in the History of Anthropology* (Univ of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 137-42.
[140] *Ibid.,* 141.

Anthropology before leaving to teach at Columbia University. Between the 1930s and 1950s, he published a series of articles that framed cultural change in evolutionary terms, brought together in the volume *Theory of Culture Change.*[141] He developed a theory of *multilinear* evolution as opposed to the *unilinear* evolution of the late nineteenth century, which charted the development of human societies in several universal stages. He criticized the "modern revamping of unilinear evolution," also known as *universal* evolution, a perspective that was "concerned with culture rather than cultures."[142] *Multilinear* evolution, in contrast, searched for rules to explain "the interrelationships of particular phenomena which may recur cross-culturally but are not necessarily universal."[143] While they worked to revive the same cluster of ideas, cultural evolutionists divided into factions over minute disagreements.

Leslie White came to teach at U-M in 1930, the same year that Steward left. White became acting chair of the Department of Anthropology in 1941 before becoming full chair in 1944. White built the department's reputation while working counter to the mainstream. In books such as *The Evolution of Culture,*[144] he argued that the evolutionary theories of Henry Lewis Morgan and E.B. Tylor should be reevaluated in light of new knowledge and that culture should be studied as a pure science, which he termed *culturology*. White, a universal evolutionist, disagreed with Steward on a number of fronts. Importantly, "in White's view there was no inherent conflict between what Steward identified as unilinear and multilinear evolution; they were simply complementary aspects of the same phenomena — that is, two points of view from

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[141] Julian Haynes Steward, *Theory of Culture Change. The Methodology of Multilinear Evolution.* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1955).
[142] *Ibid.,* 14.
[143] *Ibid.,* 29.
[144] Leslie A White, *The Evolution of Culture: The Development of Civilization to the Fall of Rome.* (New York, 1959).

which processes can be observed."[145] Despite their disagreements, White and Steward influenced a generation of students and revived the theory of cultural evolution.

When Marshall Sahlins began his undergraduate studies at the University of Michigan, he became White's protégé. Sahlins earned his BA and MA from U-M under White's supervision and earned his Ph.D. in Anthropology from Columbia University in 1952. There, faculty members who had been Steward's students and colleagues mentored Sahlins, including Eric Wolf, Sidney Mintz, and Morton Fried. Sahlins returned to become a professor at the University of Michigan, where a cadre of evolutionary, Marxist, and ecological anthropologists became his colleagues.[146] White influenced Sahlins' early work, as seen in *Evolution and Culture*, the 1961 volume that Sahlins edited with his student Thomas Harding and his colleagues Elman Service and David Kaplan.[147] In the volume they sought "to make explicit that for culture, as well as for life, evolution involves 'advance' as well as 'divergence,' overall progress as well as variation," a distinction they marked with the concepts of general evolution and specific evolution, respectively.[148] Sahlins later moved away from White's evolutionary perspective as he ventured into substantivist economics, which held that an understanding of a group's economic behavior had to begin with an understanding of its cultural system.[149] But in the 1960s when he made the collection with Harding, the two men were steeped in the cultural evolutionary perspective.

In the preface to *Voyagers of the Vitiaz Strait*, Harding wrote that the study "was prompted by a perspective recently espoused by several students of cultural evolution" including

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[145] William J Peace, *Leslie A. White: evolution and revolution in anthropology* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 169.
[146] *Ibid.*
[147] Marshall Sahlins et al., *Evolution and Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961).
[148] Thomas Harding, "Introduction," in *Evolution and Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961), 11.
[149] See Marshall Sahlins, *Stone age economics.* ((London): Tavistock Publ., 1972).

Walter Goldschmidt, Alexander Lesser, and Elman Service.[150] Harding premised his study on their shared view that "the environment of a culture consists of surrounding or neighboring cultures, and that essential attributes of a culture are consequently the product of adaptation to its cultural or superorganic environment."[151] They argued in essence that "cultures are molded by their particular engagements within a wider field of relations."[152] Harding set out to study how neighboring cultures traditionally connected by the trade system of the Vitiaz Strait shaped one another and adapted to pressure created by outside forces.

With this theoretical approach, Harding wrote a standard ethnography: as he states in the preface its "aims are empirical or ethnographic; no major theoretical hypotheses or methodological refinements are put forth."[153] Reviewers agreed that it is "clear" and "straightforward" but noted that it lacks analytical depth."[154] One reviewer called the project ambitious for an inexperienced fieldworker but described the monograph as "lifeless" and "a pedestrian volume" because it primarily tracks the movement of goods and has "an almost complete lack of theoretical perspective."[155] Despite its limited theoretical contributions, the ethnography is a useful guide to the collection for its descriptive analyses of the goods in motion in the Vitiaz Strait.

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[150] Harding, *Voyagers,* v.
[151] *Ibid.*
[152] *Ibid.*
[153] *Ibid.*
[154] Cyril Belshaw, "Voyagers of the Vitiaz Strait: A Study of a New Guinea Trade System. THOMAS G. HARDING," *American Anthropologist* 70, no. 4 (1968): 786–87; K. A. McElhanon, review of *Review of Voyagers of the Vitiaz Strait: A Study of a New Guinea Trade System*, by Thomas G. Harding, *Oceania* 38, no. 3 (1968): 233–34; Thomas R. Williams, review of *Review of Voyagers of the Vitiaz Strait: A Study of a New Guinea Trade System*, by Thomas G. Harding, *Ethnohistory* 18, no. 1 (1971): 94–95.
[155] Belshaw, "Review," 786.

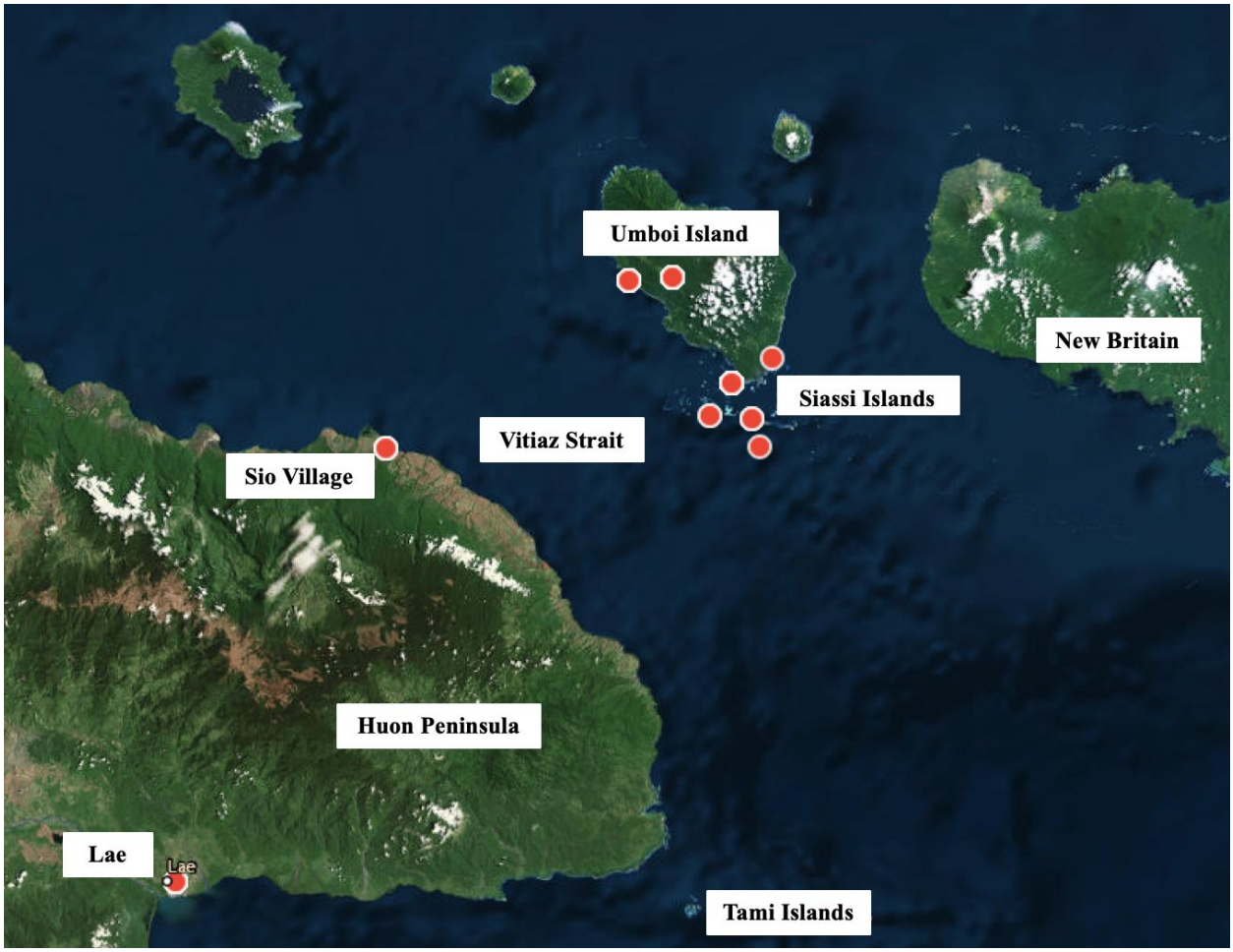

Figure 17. Map of Object Provenance, Harding-Sahlins Collection

Table 2. Objects in the Harding-Sahlins Collection; 73 of 103 total items.

Object	Quantity	Provenance	Type
Earthenware Pot	2	Sio, New Guinea	
Wooden Bowl	11	Mandok & Malai, Siassi Islands	
Adze	21	Tarawe village, Umboi Island	Craft Good
Bark Cloth	2	Mandok, Siassi Islands	
Net Bag	1	Sio, New Guinea	
Tortoiseshell Ornament	1	Umboi Island	
Tortoiseshell Armlet	8	Mandok, Siassi Islands	
Shell Ornament, Pendant, or Bracelet	4	Mandok, Siassi Islands	Valuable
Plaited Armlet	1	Umboi Island	
Boar's Tusks	2	Umboi Island	
Wooden Forked Needle	7	Mandok, Siassi Islands	
Wooden Food Spatula	6	Mandok, Siassi Islands	
Mortar & Pestle	5	Umboi Island & Siassi Islands	Tool
Bone Spatula	2	Tarawe Village, Umboi Island & Mandok, Siassi Islands	
Canoe Paddle Blade	1	Aramot, Siassi Islands	

Harding began his fieldwork in September 1963. He spent six months in Sio village on the northeast coast of New Guinea, two months in the inland Komba-Selepet region, one month with Sahlins in the Siassi-Umboi Island area, and an unspecified length of time in several coastal communities. Together, Harding and Sahlins made the collection in June 1964 in the Siassi-Umboi region. They assembled the collection with methods that differed from those of previous collectors. While collectors in the early twentieth century exchanged Western trade goods such as axes and tobacco for ethnographic objects, Harding and Sahlins purchased the objects with cash provided by their National Science Foundation grant. Sahlins recalls that many of the villagers were eager to sell them the objects.[156] Aside from two earthenware pots, a net bag, and a wooden mortar which they collected in Sio, the objects in the collection come from the Siassi-Umboi region. From their central location, the anthropologists would have had access to most of the goods that traveled around the trade system.

The composition of the collection, as outlined in Table 2, materializes Harding's description of the trade system of the Vitiaz Strait. After ten months of immersive study, Harding knew which products were involved in the trade system and understood their significance in a variety of contexts. Chapter 4 of his study summarizes the seasonal and multidirectional flow of three dozen products which he divided into three categories: "food, craft goods, and valuables." Food and consumable products are not included in the collection; however, the collection contains at least one example of half of the items Harding described as craft goods[157] as well as half of the items he categorized as valuables.[158] Objects used as utensils or tools, including wooden ladles, bone spatulas, bark cloth beaters, and forked needles, constitute a third major

[156] Marshall Sahlins, email correspondence with author, February 11, 2019.
[157] The craft goods he collected include earthenware pots, wooden bowls, stone adzes, bark cloth, and net bags.
[158] The valuables he collected include boars' tusks, tortoiseshell bracelets, shell ornaments, and plaited armbands.

category of the Harding-Sahlins Collection but are not described in Harding's study as a main product of trade.

While each object had an important role in the societies they studied, Harding and Sahlins did not explain why they chose to collect these particular objects. It is clear that they had an external motivation to assemble a collection—they proposed it in their NSF grant and had to spend the funds on the collection. Nevertheless, they had control over its composition. How did the men, through their collection, choose to portray the Vitiaz Strait trade system?

Figure 18. Forked wooden needle, UMMAA 25338, Mandok, Siassi Islands

Harding opens his ethnographic chapter about the the Siassi Islanders with an unattributed quote, presumably said by one of his Siassi informants: "God gave us two occupations — making canoes and making fish nets."[159] It may seem peculiar that a member of a seafaring community would not include sailing as one of its God-given occupations, yet these two occupations sustained the third, around which all of Siassi life was organized.

Dwelling on a cluster of small islands, the Siassi Islanders relied on trade to provide them with the food they could not cultivate and the goods they could not manufacture. Through carefully calculated exchanges, Siassi traders strategized to turn the transactions in their favor: for example, a sailor might trade one pig for as many as ten packets of sago on Umboi Island, which he might trade for one hundred earthenware pots in Sio, which he might finally trade for ten pigs in New Britain.[160] In this way, the correct sequence of exchanges could turn six coconuts, which had little value, into one pig, which had great value. These high rewards justified not only the risks of voyaging but also the initial investments of labor needed to sustain trade — namely, the labor it took to make canoes and fishing nets. While a single canoe paddle blade in the UMMAA's collection stands for the canoe-making activities of the Siassi people, a handful of tools represents their net-manufacturing industry.

The Siassi used forked wooden needles such as UMMAA 25338 (pictured above) to make fishing nets to sustain themselves. Harding and Sahlins collected five forked wooden needles, a mesh pin, and a wooden net-maker in Mandok. It is probable that these net-making tools were manufactured in the Siassi Islands, as Harding does not identify them as a product of

[159] Harding, *Voyagers*, 118.
[160] *Ibid.*

trade in the larger Vitiaz Strait trade system. Villagers on the eastern coast of Umboi Island supplied Siassi people with rolls of bark strips that they spun to create the fiber used to make nets. Long lengths of bark fiber would be wound around these wooden forked needles, which would carry the thread in loops and knots to create nets of different sizes. The collectors reported that these tools were used to make "seine nets" for reef fishing that stretched to between sixty and one hundred feet in length. According to Harding, half a dozen fishermen in canoes would arrange a seine net in the shape of a semi-circle in shallow water. Other men sitting in canoes or wading through the water would drive schools of fish into the net, trapping them as the net closed into a circle.[161] Because these harvests of fish allowed the Siassi to subsist and carry out trade, net-making was an important part of Siassi life. However, there are no nets in the collection. From a practical standpoint, it would have been difficult for Harding and Sahlins to transport a sixty-foot net to Ann Arbor. The tools used in net-making are a embodiment of fishing's crucial role in sustaining Siassi culture. Harding's ethnography provides a key to the life history of an object described simply as a "wooden forked needle" in museum documentation, showing how it fits into the broader social world he encountered.

[161] *Ibid.,* 87-89.


Figures 19 - 20. Rectilinear wooden bowl, UMMAA 25394, Malai, Siassi Islands


Figures 21 - 22. Oval wooden bowl, UMMAA 25296, Mandok, Siassi Islands

Corresponding with their important role in the Vitiaz Strait system, eleven wooden bowls made in the Tami Islands comprise 10.3% of the objects in the collection, by quantity the second most common item type. Due to their high craftsmanship and durability, Tami bowls were "among the most outstanding artistic products of New Guinea."[162] People throughout the Vitiaz Strait system commonly used the bowls as "serving dishes, especially in ceremonial distributions," and as wealth objects in brideprice payments.[163] Varying in length from ten inches

[162] *Ibid,* 38.
[163] *Ibid,* 39.

to four feet, the bowls came in three forms: zoomorphic (in the shape of a bird, fish, or turtle), rectilinear (see UMMAA #25304, in **Figures 19 and 20**), and oval (see UMMAA #25296, in **Figures 21 and 22**). Their makers would carve bowls in these shapes from a hardwood called *kwila* (*Intsia bijuga*) before incising them with geometric or anthropomorphic designs. The bowls would then be stained black with volcanic mud enriched with manganese or graphite and polished to a smooth finish. Powdered white lime would be pressed into the incised lines to accentuate the designs. The bowls in the UMMAA's collection are sturdy but worn from apparent use — portions that were once stained black are fading to a deep reddish brown hue.

Harding's informants reported that the Tami Islanders once sailed as often as the Siassi traders and monopolized wooden bowl production until the 1930s, when they stopped voyaging as frequently. Tami bowls became scarce, and the Siassi Islanders began carving imitation bowls to satisfy the demand. However, Siassi bowls were inferior because they "lack the symmetry, precision of detail, and durability achieved by Tami carvers."[164] According to the handwritten inventory list in the collection's accession file, the design of the oval-shaped bowl pictured above (UMMAA 25296) is Tami in origin but the bowl may have been a Siassi imitation. When they purchased it in the Siassi village of Mandok, Harding and Sahlins solicited information from its seller who reported that "rich people served root crops to their children from bowls of this type and size in the old days" but that today bowls like this one were only "occasionally used as dishes by children on ritual occasions."[165] Due to the relative rarity of true Tami bowls, they circulated in ritual spheres of trade in the Vitiaz Strait. All eleven bowls that Harding and Sahlins collected are fine specimens, but the rectilinear bowl (UMMAA 25304) in particular is "of

[164] *Ibid,* 40.
[165] Marshall Sahlins and Thomas Harding, Memo to University of Michigan Museum of Anthropology, ca. 1965, Accession 2976 Records, UMMAA

'museum piece' caliber"[166] in the Tami Islands style. While Tami bowls had special ritual significance, Harding categorized wooden bowls in general as "craft goods" rather than valuables because the majority that circulated were imitation Tami bowls or softwood bowls made on the mainland that did not have special status. Harding and Sahlins chose to collect the finer bowls available to them rather than a representative sample of the bowls in use in the Vitiaz Strait trade system.

It is useful to place objects like the forked needles and wooden bowls in context with Harding's ethnographic arguments. He summarizes his conclusions: "Amidst the cultural shambles created by the encroachment of European culture, the trade system, by a seeming miracle, survives."[167] Like other Melanesian ethnographers of his era, Harding studied a traditional institution at a moment of cultural change. As a proponent of cultural evolution, he explained changes to the trade system in evolutionary terms: "The larger explanation of the persistence of the trade system lies in the adaptability it has exhibited in the face of external pressures."[168] When the Tami Islanders began producing fewer wooden bowls, the Siassi Islanders, who relied on the trade of Tami bowls, began manufacturing imitation bowls to compensate for the shortage to sustain the system; when the government discouraged traditional warfare, Siassi Islanders found that they could travel to new locations without fear of hostility, and thus trade expanded; when more men began migrating to work as wage laborers, fewer men remained in villages to maintain trade-friend relationships, and therefore trade diminished. Subjected to outside pressures, the trade system adapted and persisted in new political and social

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[166] *Ibid.*
[167] Harding, *Voyagers*, 186.
[168] *Ibid.,* 187.

environments. But the trade system was not invincible — Harding predicted that it would succumb to external forces in the next decade.

Does the collection illustrate a system in "shambles created by the encroachment of European culture" or does it illustrate the persistence of traditional ways? Again, the composition of the collection reveals Harding and Sahlins' intentions. Aside from one bilum or string bag that is decorated with small colorful plastic beads, the objects in the collection are made from materials such as wood, bark fiber, natural dyes, seeds, and shells that would have been locally accessible through the trade system. The objects are craft goods, valuables, and tools in their traditional forms; none are items that Westerners introduced or items transformed by Western technologies. Like the forked wooden needle used to make nets, the items were used in traditional activities. Additionally, the collectors chose to include only fine examples of wooden bowls made by Tami Islanders rather than the more common imitation bowls. If Harding's data are reliable, a very similar collection could have been made in the Siassi-Umboi region a century earlier. Harding came to the Vitiaz Strait to study a traditional trade system; the collection portrays it in an idealized traditional state rather than in its present acculturating form. Because of the abundance of objects made with local materials in idealized traditional forms, the collection portrays a version of the Vitiaz Strait trade system from the moments before supposedly irreversible cultural change took place.

As a whole, the collection provides adequate representation of the traditional things in motion in the Vitiaz Strait trade system. It is not representative of all of the communities Harding studied, as it was made during one month, primarily in one region. Yet the most important crafts, valuables, and tools that people used and exchanged are present. Harding and Sahlins did not

claim to have made the collection in a systematic way so as to accurately portray the trade system as they encountered it. However, even an arbitrary selection of items acquires authority when grouped together as a collection, regardless of a collector's intentions. Therefore, it is important to understand these collectors' perspectives because their views determined how the trade system would be represented in and remembered through the collection. In his ethnography, Harding sought to show that the trade system persisted in spite of cultural change, and the collection supports his central thesis whether or not he intended for it to do so.

Chapter 4
Art & Ethnography in the Sepik River Region: The Guddemi Collection

Figure 23. Sago spathe painting depicting the *pandanus* plant, UMMAA 89-17-39

Encased in clear plastic bags, the 124 sago spathe paintings are stacked on the shelves of the University of Michigan Museum of Anthropological Archaeology (UMMAA) in the Research Museums Center. Removed from the heat and humidity of the East Sepik Province of Papua New Guinea, the paintings have warped and cracked during the thirty years that they have been in the UMMAA's climate-controlled storerooms. Small holes mark the places where Sawiyano men attached these paintings to the ceiling of a young boys' initiation house in 1983. Made from the flattened bark-like spathes of sago palms, the panels bear the outlines of mythically significant spirits, plants, and animals in hues of red, black, white, brown, and yellow. Through the medium of sago spathes, Sawiyano men transmitted their origin story to the next

generation. Following fifteen months of fieldwork, University of Michigan graduate student Phillip Guddemi collected these paintings from the ruins of the abandoned ritual house and donated them to the UMMAA.

Figure 24. Kwoma ceremonial house ceiling, Arts of Oceania Gallery, Metropolitan Museum of Art

When visitors step into the Oceanic Gallery of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Met) in New York City, they find themselves in a Kwoma ceremonial house. The arched display spans eighty feet of the gallery, creating a ceiling under which 274 vibrant sago spathe paintings hang. At either end, the superstructure tapers to a point from which narrow, carved finial posts project outward. In the early 1970s, the Met commissioned a group of Kwoma artists to create the paintings, which they would typically place on the ceilings of steeply pitched ceremonial houses

in which yam harvest celebrations are held. The designs on the panels correspond to specific clans, which collaborate to create the houses. The panels are arranged on the ceiling in no particular order, creating a richly textured collage of swirling forms and intersecting lines.

The sago spathe paintings in the two collections are similar in form and function, yet their two institutions conceive of them differently, defining one collection as objects of ethnography and the other as objects of art. While at one time the material culture of Papua New Guinea could only be found in anthropology museums or museums of natural history, it also found a home in art museums in the late twentieth century when the Western art world invited so-called 'Primitive' Art into the establishment. These two collections were made just after this transitional time, and as a result, the differences in the ways that the paintings were collected and are displayed reflect the attitudes these two institutions have toward the material culture of Papua New Guinea.

Individuals who promoted this new attitude toward Primitive Art defined their approach in opposition to early anthropological or ethnographic exhibition strategies. Ethnographic displays present objects in their historical and cultural contexts and explain how they function in social, religious, and technical terms.[169] As Sally Price, anthropologist and author of *Primitive Art in Civilized Places*, explains "the viewer is invited to form an understanding of the object on the basis of the explanatory text rather than to respond through a perceptual-emotional absorption of its formal qualities."[170] For example, Franz Boas exhibited ethnographic objects in the Northwest Coast Hall of the American Museum of Natural History in "life groups" featuring

[169] Sally Price, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
[170] *Ibid*., 83.

mannequins making use of ethnographic objects.[171] With this approach, museum visitors could grasp the meanings and functions of unfamiliar objects, ideally developing an understanding of the cultures that created and used them. In the ethnographic approach, appreciating an object's aesthetic features comes secondary to understanding its uses and meanings.

When exhibiting an object as an object of art, the museum showcases it for its aesthetic qualities. Price elaborates, "the museum visitor's task-pleasure, for both Primitive and Western objects, is conceptualized first and foremost as a perceptual-emotional experience, not a cognitive-educational one"[172] It is presumed that the viewer can appreciate the object without having to understand the value system within which it was created. As a result, labels of art objects may provide a small amount of information about cultural context but above all draw the viewer's attention to the aesthetic qualities of an object.

In this newly expanded definition of art, there is a distinction made between Primitive Art and Western Art that has several important implications. The public broadly assumes that Primitive Art is created "spontaneously and less reflectively" than Western Art.[173] Curators make an "assessment of what goes on in the heads of artists and viewers" to decide what information to include in labels.[174] Because it is viewed as arising from a creative instinct rather than from an intentional artistic practice, Primitive Art is often anonymized, attributed to an ethnic group or region while Western Art is identified by an artist's name. Additionally, Western Art typically sells for greater sums than Primitive Art because it fits neatly into Western aesthetic frameworks.

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[171] Ira Jacknis, "Franz Boas and Exhibits: On the Limitations of the Museum Method of Anthropology," in *Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture* (Univ of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 75–111.; See Chapter 3 for more information about Franz Boas' perspectives on exhibits and influence on the development of anthropology.
[172] Price, *Primitive Art*, 83.
[173] Price, *Primitive Art*, 84.
[174] *Ibid.*.

The creators of Primitive Art may not conceptualize the category of 'art' as Westerners do. By comparing the Sawiyano sago spathe paintings housed in the UMMAA and the Kwoma sago spathe paintings displayed in the Met, we see that the categorization of objects as art or ethnography has little to do with the paintings' inherent qualities and much more to do with the attitudes of their collectors and the ideologies of the institutions that own them.

The Sawiyano, who created the UMMAA's collection, live in western Papua New Guinea near the West Range, in an area that is bounded by the Sepik River to the north and the May River to the south. The Kwoma, who created the Met's collection, live more than 100 kilometers east of the Sawiyano in the Washkuk Hills, north of the Sepik River. The Sepik region is one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse regions in Papua New Guinea due to its "geographic diversity, inaccessible terrain, patterns of language contact, and language attitudes."[175] The Sawiyano and Kwoma are 'hill people' or 'jungle dwellers' as opposed to 'river people' or 'river dwellers' because they do not regularly navigate the Sepik River and subsist on sago grown in the swamplands and hills.[176] For many Sepik societies, ceremonial houses are an integral part of religious and social life. Despite their similar mode of subsistence, the Sawiyano and Kwoma have different cultural traditions; thus, the paintings have unique iconography and serve distinct purposes.

When Guddemi began his fieldwork in October 1986, large portions of the May River region were absent from the ethnographic record. In the mid-1960s, Meinhard Schuster carried out an ethnographic study of "the Painters of the May River" for the Museum der Kulturen in

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[175] Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald, "Language Contact along the Sepik River, Papua New Guinea," *Anthropological Linguistics* 50, no. 1 (2008): 13.
[176] *Ibid.*; Phillip Guddemi, "Mumukokolua': Sago Spathe Paintings among the Sawiyanö of Papua New Guinea," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 23 (1993): 67–82.

Basel, Switzerland to provide contextual documentation for its earlier collections.[177] He also collected paintings from a male ritual house created by the Warumoi, a group that lived near the Sawiyano, for the Museum der Kulturen. In 1984, the ethnographer Robert Brumbaugh described the Sawiyano ritual cycle in broad terms during a brief stay near Sawiyano territory. In a report, he mentioned that the Sawiyano had just begun a ritual cycle, the first in a number of years.[178] Guddemi had been searching for a field site; based on these two surveys, he decided to study "in detail the Sawiyano ritual system and the place that sago spathe paintings have in it."[179]

In his dissertation project, Guddemi described the types of houses that the Sawiyano constructed during men's initiation ceremonies.[180] The circular *nunu* houses were made for the initiation of young boys and were considered less sacred than the rectangular *yafi-nu* houses made to initiate men into the highest ritual grade. Populations dispersed in Sawiyano territory came together to construct the houses, and as a result, the completion of the ritual cycle depended on groups' solidarity. During the construction of *yafi-nu* houses, men learned the full Sawiyano origin story, which was information that senior men kept from women and uninitiated men. Paintings were sacred because, according to the story, the creator being Awoufaiso thought the Sawiyano into being through the medium of sago spathe paintings. The first Sawiyano men had *ku* or designs painted on their bodies and were immortal; when the men failed to trust Awoufaiso, he "cursed them in anger, bringing death and sorrow, sorcery and menstruation and sex, into the world" and the *ku* disappeared from their bodies. Men recreated these *ku* on sago

[177] Meinhard Schuster, *Die Maler vom May River.*, 1969.
[178] Robert Brumbaugh, "Origin Myths of the Left May River," *Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies*, 1984.
[179] Guddemi, "Mumukokolu," 67.
[180] Phillip Guddemi, "We Came from This: Knowledge, Memory, Painting and Play in the Initiation Rituals of the Sawiyano of Papua New Guinea." (University of Michigan, 1992).

spathe paintings during each ritual cycle. At the conclusion of each cycle, the houses and paintings inside would be left to decay *in-situ.*

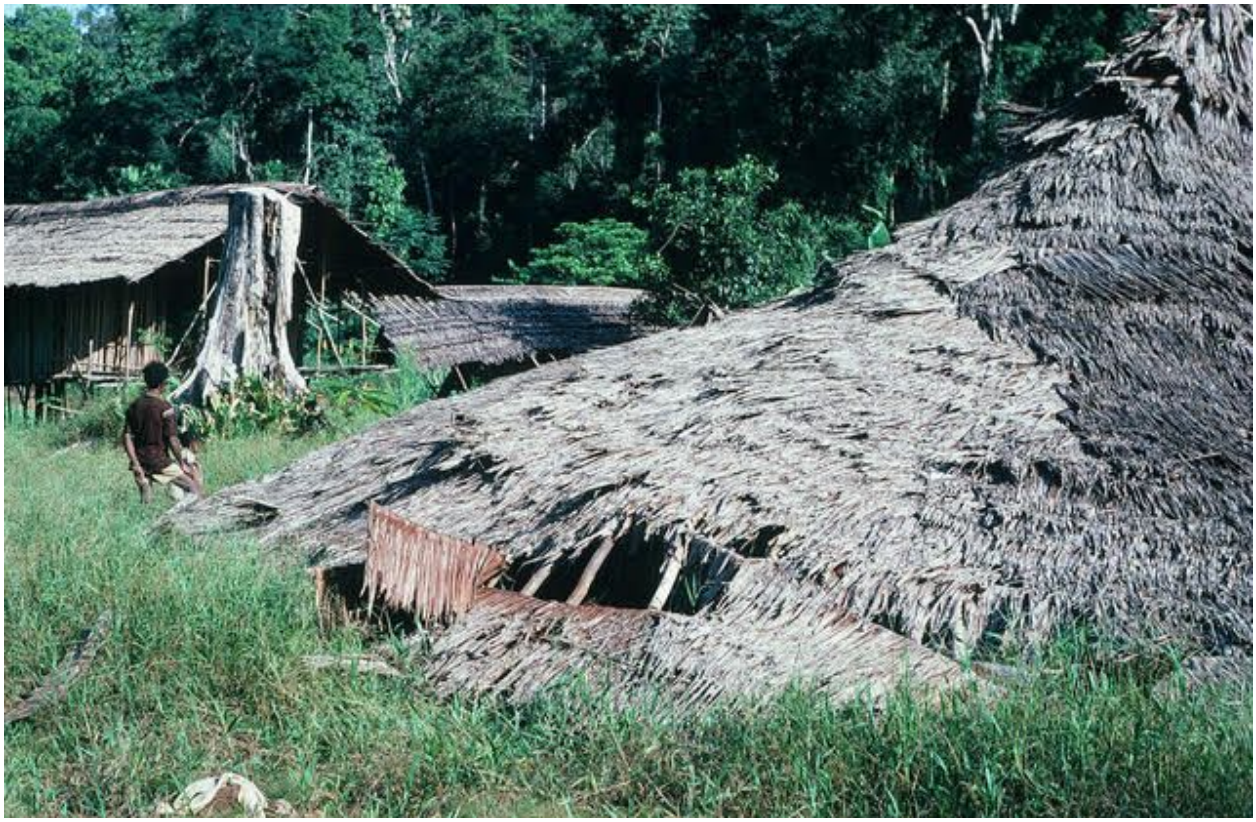

Figure 25. Ruined *nunu* house, circa 1987. Photo: Phillip Guddemi.

Guddemi didn't intend to create a museum collection. Although he said that he might collect Sawiyano art in the proposal for the Fulbright Award he received, he did not consider collecting anything until discovering a ruined ritual house filled with paintings. The ritual cycles had stopped in the early 1970s due to the presence of missionaries and government officials who disapproved of traditional beliefs and practices. Many men at that time left the Sawiyano villages to work on copra plantations on the coast, making it difficult to sustain the ritual system. Two *yafi-nu* houses and one *nunu* house were built in the 1980s as attempts to revive the cycle. Only

the *nunu* was completed; however, no group of young boys completed the full *nunu* initiation.[181] Guddemi attributed these unsuccessful attempts to disagreements among senior men, interruptions due to deaths, and "a failure of solidarity among the participants."[182] In 1987, Guddemi found the ruins of the abandoned *nunu* (pictured above). Because he wanted to examine the paintings, he paid several men to bring them to the place where he was staying. He asked his informants to explain the motifs on each of the paintings and recorded their descriptions on three-by-five notecards. Nearly all of the paintings created in the cycle were present in the ritual house, and he commissioned Sawiyano men to make the few that were absent. Guddemi searched for a museum to house the collection before deciding on the UMMAA and his advisor Roy Rappaport arranged for the collection to be flown back to the University of Michigan where it was accessioned in 1988. The collection contained between ten and fifteen duplicate paintings which he donated to the National Museum of New Guinea in Port Moresby.

The Met's sago spathe paintings were not discovered in the field but rather were commissioned for the purpose of exhibition nearly twenty years earlier. The ceremonial house ceiling was "born as an idea when [curator] Douglas Newton and [director] Robert Goldwater were about to visualize the future role of the collections then to be transferred from the Museum of Primitive Art to the Metropolitan Museum of Art."[183] Douglas Newton was then the curator of the Museum of Primitive Art (MPA) and shared the museum's goal of recognizing the 'Primitive' Art of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas *as* art. In 1930, philanthropist, politician, and Met board member Nelson A. Rockefeller had founded the MPA after the Met refused to collect Pre-Columbian art from the Americas, claiming that the works did not fit with its current

[181] Guddemi, "We Came from This," 469-70.
[182] Guddemi, "Mumukoloua," 69.
[183] Christian Kaufmann, Final Fellowship Report, May 26, 2007, Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

collection of largely European art. Rockefeller and the MPA "strove to study, collect, and exhibit the artistic traditions of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas as works of fine art rather than approach them through an ethnographic or anthropological lens, the prevailing institutional tendencies that had long isolated those traditions from the larger history of art."[184] The MPA's galleries exhibited Primitive Art in the decontextualized style of an art museum rather than in the contextualized format of an anthropology museum. Rockefeller's ultimate goal for the MPA "was to have the non-Western collection he was forming become part of the Metropolitan Museum."[185] In 1968, he saw this goal through. The Met established a new department, the Arts of Africa, Oceania and the Americas, and acquired the MPA's holdings as well as Rockefeller's personal collection. The new Michael C. Rockefeller Wing would be built to exhibit these pieces, raising works of Primitive Art to the status of the European masterworks already on display.

Newton made frequent trips to the field to collect art for the MPA, including five trips to the Sepik River region between 1964 and 1973.[186] By the 1960s, pressure from the colonial government and missionaries had begun to have an effect, and many groups stopped or slowed the production of traditional arts resulting "in large numbers of works, no longer in use in their original contexts, becoming available for collection and entering the art market."[187] The MPA seized this opportunity to gather important works of Sepik art for its collection. In this context, the MPA collected half a dozen bark paintings from a ceremonial house ceiling made by the Iwam people in the May River region, near the Sawiyano. The paintings were damaged by a

[184] Alisa LaGamma et al., "The Nelson A. Rockefeller Vision: Arts Of Africa, Oceania, And The Americas," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 72, no. 1 (2014): 4-5.
[185] *Ibid.*, 11.
[186] *Ibid*.
[187] *Ibid.*, 27.

conservation treatment and thus were never put on display. When imagining the future of the new Oceanic gallery at the Met, Newton and MPA director Robert Goldwater decided to commission a ceremonial house ceiling from similar panels made by the Kwoma people as a showpiece of the gallery.

Art historian Christian Kaufmann studied Kwoma art and artists in the early 1970s and provides context about the paintings' role in Kwoma life. He reported that ceremonial houses were the site of celebrations for yam harvests and other occasions. Men would paint symbols associated with their respective clans on the bark panels, but the designs did not constitute sacred or proprietary knowledge. Not all ceremonial houses in the past had been decorated by carvings and paintings, but he noted that "since 1969, however, each village is making an attempt to erect at least one building decorated in the full traditional way."[188] In 1973, there were three fully decorated ceremonial houses in Kwoma villages and two being built, a surge of artistic production that allowed the Met to commission its ceremonial house ceiling.

In the early 1970s, Newton visited Mariwai village, the community chosen to make the paintings. He took photographs of the artists with their paintings and recorded the names and meanings of the motifs, including frogs, water, insects, and plants. Newton did not ask the artists why they had chosen to paint these specific elements for the Met's display. In a study of the Met's Kwoma paintings, Kaufmann concluded that the artists had followed "the structural plan of one special type of a Kwoma ceremonial house, showing decorative elements in abundance, and allowing for a certain degree of flexibility in integrating non-Kwoma elements."[189] Created

[188] Christian Kaufmann, "Art and Artists in the Context of Kwoma Society," in *Exploring the Visual Art of Oceania: Australia, Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1979), 313.
[189] Christian Kaufmann, Final Fellowship Report, May 26, 2007, Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

by named artists as works of art, they were produced for their aesthetic qualities rather than to replicate a Kwoma ceremonial house with complete accuracy.

When the Michael C. Rockefeller Wing opened in 1982, 100 of the 274 Kwoma paintings were displayed in a significantly reduced version of the current exhibit. While the arched ceiling now runs parallel to the wall of windows that stretch to the roof in the largest gallery in the wing, the panels were formerly attached to the ceiling of a dimly lit gallery set off from the main exhibition space. From the highest point of the ten-foot tall gallery, the panels were attached to the ceiling edge-to-edge, curving slightly downward. Floor-to-ceiling cases containing other New Guinea sculptural arts faced inward and several cases stood beneath the ceiling.

When the Met re-installed its Oceanic Galleries in 2007, Newton's original vision for the Kwoma ceiling was realized. In a press release that accompanied the opening of the galleries, the Met declared: "Greatly expanded and raised to its full height, the new Kwoma ceiling imparts a cathedral-like atmosphere to the gallery; it will now be seen and appreciated in its full grandeur for the first time."[190] By comparing the Kwoma ceiling to a cathedral, the Met raised the Primitive Art in the gallery to the height of sacred Western Art.

While the Met's display treats the sago spathe paintings as works of art, Guddemi treated the paintings he collected as ethnographic objects, from which he could learn about the religious and social life of the Sawiyano. The paintings and the ritual system within which they were embedded were the subjects of his dissertation. Guddemi provided descriptions of the significance of each painting to the UMMAA but little else; all other information is externalized

[190] The Metropolitan Museum of Art, "New Galleries for Oceanic Art," November 14, 2007

in his dissertation and in the articles he has published since. As a result, the collection is an ethnographic supplement to the project, which aids in laying out the Sawiyano ritual system.

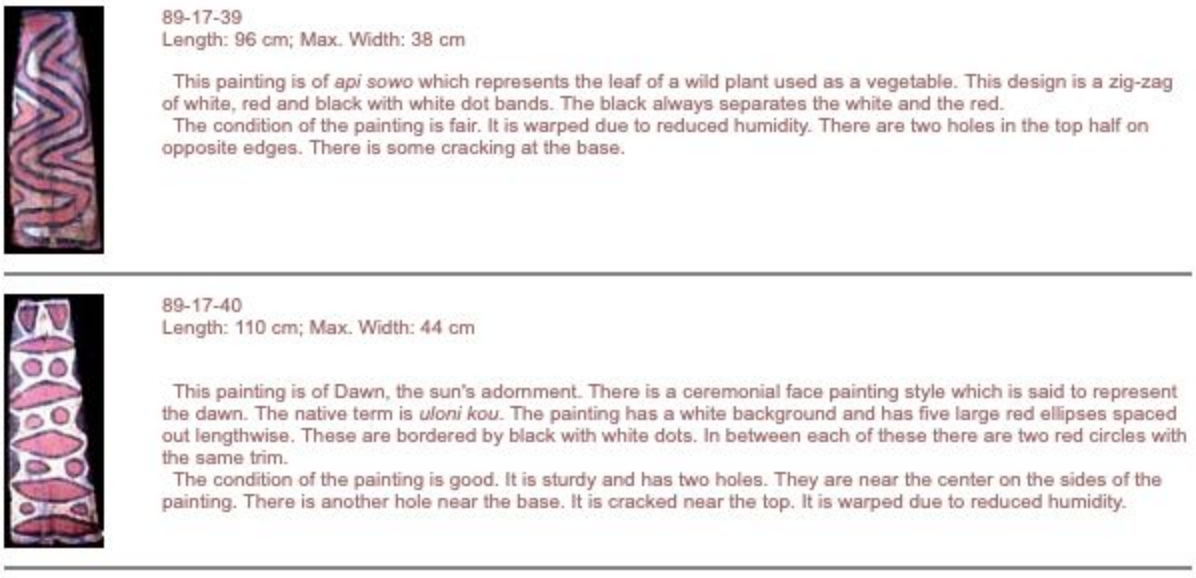

Figure 26. Sago spathe painting digital exhibit.

Only a few years after the UMMAA accessioned the paintings, it created a digital exhibit with Guddemi's collection.[191] The exhibit begins with a short description of his project and a brief explanation of the Sawiyano ritual system. Each of the paintings is featured in a tiny rectangular photograph on the left side of the webpage. Next to each photograph is the painting's catalog number, its dimensions, and a description ranging from one to fifteen sentences in length. These descriptions report the physical condition, significant features, and meanings of each painting as explained to Guddemi. Displayed individually in a virtual format, the exhibit explains the objects and their roles in the Sawiyano ritual system to the viewer. In collection as in

[191] The digital exhibit can be found here: http://webapps.lsa.umich.edu/umma/exhibits/sago/sagoexhibit.html

presentation, the sago spathe paintings are unquestionably ethnographic objects.

Figure 27. 'Hunting magic' painting embedded in the forest, ca. 1987. Photo: Phillip Guddemi.

Viewed in their institutional contexts, the Sawiyano sago spathe paintings are objects of ethnography and the Kwoma sago spathe paintings are objects of art. Yet these categories are Western ones, imposed on objects that were not thought of as belonging to either category in their original contexts. The painting pictured above was one of the first that Guddemi found in the field. Created by the Yuono, a nearby group, Guddemi "was informed that if a wild pig wanders under or near such a painting, it is fated for a hunter's arrow."[192] The act of painting did

[192] Phillip Guddemi, "Gender, Encompassment, and Ritual: Sago Panel Paintings of the Sawiyanoo of East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea," *Pacific Arts* 12, no. 1 (2012): 32.

more than decorate a sago spathe; it had a kind of magic force. Thus the paintings were not aesthetic or cultural but something different entirely.

While 'art object' and 'ethnographic object' are artificial categories imposed by Western collectors and institutions, Sally Price proposes a third option that "may reflect a more realistic picture of both the nature of the aesthetic experience and the nature of art in Primitive societies."[193] She argues that both Westerners and "Primitives" perceive objects in a way "that reflects their own cultural education."[194] In light of these equally valid perceptions, "anthropological contextualization represents, not a tedious elaboration of exotic customs that competes with 'true aesthetic experience,' but rather a means to expand the aesthetic experience beyond our own narrowly culture-bound line of vision."[195] Aesthetic appreciation is better informed by cultural context; art and ethnography are not mutually exclusive modes of description, but should work together to do the work of translation in the museum, a zone of cultural contact.

[193] Price, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places*, 93.
[194] *Ibid.*
[195] *Ibid.*

Conclusion

The 311 objects in the four collections have undergone a series of transformations as they have moved from their original contexts in New Guinea into the custody of museums. The objects were created from wood, shell, and bone; used in daily life and ceremonial settings; and exchanged for trade goods and cash. From many named and unnamed source communities, they were sent via ship and plane to museums in the United States. There, staff transferred information in field documentation — whether abundant or scarce — into paper catalog books and digital databases. The objects were removed from shipping crates, inscribed with catalog numbers, and housed securely in boxes custom-made from archival-quality blueboard and sheets of polyethylene foam.

The objects were not destined to become museum specimens: they became ethnographic objects because a collector decided that they should be. Ethnographic objects are simultaneously a single fragment removed from a larger cultural whole and a metaphor for that larger cultural whole. Thus, the power to represent a culture rests with the ethnographer. As a result, collections are not simple samples of material culture: they are imbued with the perspectives of the individuals who collected and curate them. By studying these individuals' perspectives, we may understand how collections are biased. Studying the field documentation in combination with the objects themselves may produce a fuller picture of the objects' social lives and life histories than documentation alone.

The first collection was almost completely unprovenanced; the last was the subject of a doctoral dissertation. Over the course of this 113-year period, anthropology developed as a discipline and practice and material culture fluctuated in perceived relevance to the field. The

value of an ethnographic collection connected to the collectors' backgrounds and purposes for creating collections. To Joseph Beal-Steere and Alfred Buell Lewis they were ethnological specimens which could be studied to answer questions about regional patterns in material culture; to Captain Heinrich Voogdt and Heinrich Umlauff they were curios which became profitable commodities; to Thomas Harding, Marshall Sahlins, and Phillip Guddemi they were ethnographic objects connected to their specific field sites and research questions.

Studies that place the collections in their historical context — including this one — tend to focus on the collectors; however the people who created and used the objects shape the collections too. The objects are scattered on shelves and in drawers, arranged according to type rather than by collector or collection to save space. On first glance, it would be nearly impossible to match an object with its collector without the museum's records. Although the objects are primarily associated with their collectors in its records, the collector and museum intended for the objects to represent the cultures that created them. A closer look at the objects reveals that indigenous agency is preserved in the range of objects present in and absent from the collections. Their materials and methods of manufacture can lead back to their source communities too. This data can in turn reveal information about the physical and social environments in which the objects were produced, including what materials were available, what exchange networks the groups maintained, and what role the objects might have served in their original contexts. The documentation that the collectors produced in the field is a key that can lead us to answers to new questions that arise.

Forgetting for a moment whatever purpose that a collector imagined a collection would have, what has been done with these objects since they became collections? Very little. Papua

New Guinea is not a strength of the UMMAA's ethnographic collections and the museum has never had a curator who specializes in the material culture of the Pacific. Aside from these four, there are a few minor collections from Papua New Guinea, but these are mostly souvenirs donated to the museum. The collections have been used in Anthropology courses as illustrations of the material culture of Papua New Guinea, but, for the most part, they have remained on shelves in storage.

What futures do ethnographic collections like these have? While the discipline treats the objects as neutral scientific specimens that represent a fixed moment in time, some argue that museum objects are "embedded" in the present and act "within a larger, dynamic cultural, and discursive system."[196] In this context, objects interact with the present moment and are continuously transformed by it. James Clifford asks what would happen if museums "saw themselves as specific places of transit, intercultural borders, contexts of struggle and communication between discrepant communities?"[197] He argues that beyond being static repositories, museums are "contact zones, places of hybrid possibility and political negotiation, sites of exclusion and struggle."[198]

Since Phillip Guddemi collected the sago spathe paintings for the UMMAA in 1988, museums have begun to re-define themselves as contact zones. Through collaborative partnerships with source communities, they develop exhibits, digital catalogs, and research projects that provide all parties involved with mutual benefits.[199] These partnerships give source

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[196] Ramesh Srinivasan et al., "Diverse Knowledges and Contact Zones within the Digital Museum," *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 35, no. 5 (2010): 736.
[197] James Clifford, "Museums as Contact Zones," in *Representing the Nation: A Reader: Histories, Heritage and Museums* (London: Routledge : Open University, 1999), 451.
[198] *Ibid.*
[199] For example, see Conaty 2003 and Bohaker et al. 2015.

communities access to the collections and their associated information, returning in some sense what was separated from them at the moment of collection.

The Mariwai Project, named for the village of Kwoma artists who painted the Met's ceremonial house ceiling panels, is one such partnership that may offer a way forward. It is "a long-term and wide-ranging artistic, research, and cultural exchange project" that engages the Met's exhibit with Kwoma community members and artists around the world.[200] The Project has begun creating a 360-degree film inside a ceremonial house in a Kwoma village and plans to bring Kwoma community members to New York City to hold a house-naming ceremony for the Met's exhibit.

Ethnographic objects are not mere fragments of a larger cultural whole; they are relevant to the social world. Studies that untangle collections' complex life histories reveal possibilities once concealed by the biases of their collectors. Museums must build upon these possibilities through collaborative partnerships such as the Mariwai Project if they are to transform their collections once more.

[200] Shiva Lynn Burgos, "The Mariwai Project," *Oceanic Art Society Journal* 22, no. 3 (2017): 8.

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