

Preface

In July 2013 we held a conference called 'Local Intermediaries in International Exploration' at The Australian National University in Canberra. This conference sparked a range of stimulating conversations about the diverse experiences and histories of people who acted as intermediaries, brokers and go-betweens in exchanges between European explorers, travellers and colonial administrators, and the Indigenous and local people whose lands they entered. One conversation about the challenges of recovering such hidden histories through European archives led to a collection of essays edited by Shino Konishi, Maria Nugent and Tiffany Shellam, *Indigenous Intermediaries: New Perspectives on Exploration Archives* (Aboriginal History Inc. and ANU Press, 2015).

This collection stems from two other common themes that many of the conference participants explored. Firstly, it highlights the importance of individual biographies in understanding the diverse and complex histories of Indigenous intermediaries. While earlier studies have identified and defined different types of Indigenous guides and intermediaries who assisted European explorers and travellers in Australia and Africa, such generalised typologies do not necessarily accommodate all of the particular experiences of individual brokers. Further, many of these more generalised discussions explore the reasons why local guides were recruited by explorers, but pay less attention to the myriad factors that motivated Indigenous intermediaries to join such expeditions. Consequently, the chapters in this collection reveal that the particular stories of individual brokers still need to be reconstructed in order to deepen our understanding of the histories of Indigenous intermediaries, and especially to recover the individual agency of such figures. Another common theme which arose at the conference was the important reminder that exploration

was essentially a colonial enterprise, and that the explorers' reliance on Indigenous guides highlights their often unspoken awareness that they were in Indigenous territory, not unexplored wilderness.

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