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Conclusion: Highlights from the *Uncovering Pacific Pasts* exhibition

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The *Uncovering Pacific Pasts* exhibition opened to the public in the respective participating institutions in March 2020. The geographic scope of the objects installed for display spanned from Canberra, Australia, to Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, from Cologne, Germany, to Canterbury, New Zealand, and from Honolulu, Hawai‘i, to Honiara, Solomon Islands. While *Uncovering Pacific Pasts* was being installed in gallery spaces, a novel coronavirus – COVID-19 – was spreading like wildfire through communities across the globe, closing public collecting institutions to visitors and wreaking devastation on the health and livelihoods of millions of people. In many instances the *Uncovering Pacific Pasts* displays were only able to be opened to the public for some weeks, in other instances the exhibit’s display period was extended or delayed into the future. Indeed, the closure of public collecting institutions and public spaces quickly extended to entire lockdowns of all but essential services of entire towns and cities, including their universities, in the UK, Europe, New Zealand, Australia and the USA. This resulted in significant delays in the production of this catalogue and the postponement of Collective Biography of Archaeology in the Pacific (CBAP)-affiliated events such as the *Histories of Archaeology* conference.¹

¹ The *Histories of Archaeology* conference was held at The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia, 22–25 November 2021 as an online event.

One of the main benefits of the *Uncovering Pacific Pasts* exhibition format was that the displays dispersed across the world would form a combined exhibition presented online. The exhibition website – www.uncoveringpacificpasts.org – showcases the objects that were displayed in the participating institutions, and this catalogue expands upon the website in telling the objects' stories and contextualising them historically. The catalogue publisher, ANU Press, is a peer reviewed open-access university press, enabling free, unlimited downloadable content to interested viewers and readers. Accessibility to the *Uncovering Pacific Pasts* object stories, and to the broader topic of histories of archaeology, was a primary objective of the CBAP Project. As is evident in the physical movement of objects from communities to foreign lands, itself a hallmark of the colonial past of many of the displayed objects themselves, in many instances the cultural custodians of the objects have little access to their removed cultural heritage in the present day. The format of the *Uncovering Pacific Pasts* exhibition was one way to remedy that. Other ways have encompassed community consultations (see Appendix) and the inclusion of Indigenous voices by some of the participating museums in their *Uncovering Pacific Pasts* displays (Figure 36.1).² The responsibility to engage with collections' cultural custodians and the pivot to online interactive content in museum practice are of course not new, but in the case of *Uncovering Pacific Pasts* they have provided a vital platform to engage not only with local Indigenous communities but the wider public in the COVID-19 era.

Archaeological materials often represent a significant component of the collections held by museums. Unfortunately, these collections also represent some of the objects least likely to be exhibited for display. In the case of the mortar and pestle and carved stone from the Papuan Official Collection at the National Museum of Australia, their inclusion in *Uncovering Pacific Pasts* constitutes the first time since their collection around 100 years ago that these objects have been displayed to the public (Figure 36.2; see also Edmundson, **Chapter 21**, this volume). Given that this collection represents one of the very few major national collections of material culture amassed by the Australian Government in its colonial administration of international territories, this is an important contribution of *Uncovering Pacific Pasts* in highlighting to the general Australian public ways in which our nation has actively engaged in colonial collecting enterprises.

2 For the personal reflections of five Indigenous scholars from Oceania on the object displays at the Harvard University Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology visit: www.peabody.harvard.edu/uncovering-pacific-pasts.



Figure 36.1. *Uncovering Pacific Pasts* display showing ‘Voices from the Pacific’ at the Harvard University Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA. This exhibition was on display from March 2020 to March 2021.

Source: Ingrid Ahlgren.

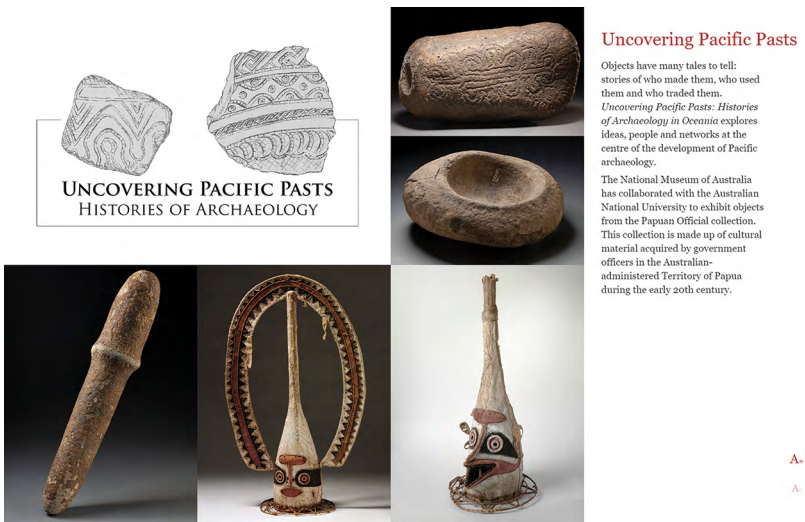


Figure 36.2. Digital object label for the *Uncovering Pacific Pasts* display showcasing objects from the Papuan Official Collection at the National Museum of Australia, Canberra, Australia. These objects were on display from February to July 2020.

Source: Laura Cook.

Additionally, although not verifiable in museum records (particularly challenging due to the patchy nature of museum records from the turn of twentieth century or before), museum curatorial staff consider it highly likely that the majority of the objects and archival material displayed in *Uncovering Pacific Pasts* at, among others, the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley, the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum – Cultures of the World, Cologne, the Museum am Rothenbaum – Cultures and Arts of the World (MARKK), Hamburg, and the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum, Honolulu, are also being displayed for the very first time. As Jeanette Kokott, curator of Oceania Collections at MARKK, reflects:

I find it fascinating that this project directs attention to aspects of collections which until now had mostly gone unnoticed within the framework of prevailing research questions and exhibition topics. (Jeanette Kokott pers. comm. 2020)

One of the main highlights of the *Uncovering Pacific Pasts* exhibition is that it has shone a light on the value of archaeological collections – their usefulness in informing disciplinary histories and most importantly, the interest that local Indigenous communities have in re-engaging with archaeological objects and the places those objects have come from. For the community from Rakival Mission on Watom Island, the display of the Lapita potsherds at the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum – Cultures of the World, Cologne, Germany (Figure 36.3), and the historical mystery that surrounds the Lapita sherds from Museums Victoria provide an avenue for reconnecting with the tangible heritage of physical space that is their current site of worship and renewing social collective memories focused on their heritage. The possibility of re-engaging with objects that connect people with their ancestors is a powerful and important one for current Oceanic peoples. As Tarisi Vunidilo states in a poem that reflects on the Fijian *liku* (skirt) exhibited at *Uncovering Pacific Pasts* in the Harvard University Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, it is vital to ‘Na kenai tukutuku meu wasea vei ira na makubuda me ra kua ni guilecava na maqosa ni ligadra na buda / share [these objects] with our grandchildren of tomorrow so they must not forget the work of our grandmothers’.³

3 Video copyright President and Fellows of Harvard College. Featuring Fijian *liku*. Gift of the Smithsonian Institution, 1867. Copyright Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology, President and Fellows of Harvard College, PM 67-24-70/659.



Figure 36.3. *Uncovering Pacific Pasts* exhibition at the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum – Cultures of the World, Cologne, featuring Lapita potsherds excavated on Watom Island by Father Otto Meyer and local assistants. This exhibition was on display from March to August 2020.

Source: Oliver Lueb.

In addition to the object stories told here, some astute readers will have noticed that there are additional objects present online for which there are no written chapters. Several museums and collecting institutions decided to mount displays but were unable to contribute chapters within the catalogue timeframe, some examples being the South Australian Museum (Figure 36.4) and the Vanuatu Cultural Centre (Figure 36.5). Other participants sought to engage students as a way of facilitating learning about the history of archaeology, another main focus of the CBAP Project. A notable highlight includes the animation of drawings from William Davenport's ethnographic collection to complement their display at The University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. During his fieldwork Davenport collaborated with several local male artists who provided him with beautiful drawings and recounted the myth of Karemanua. Students from the University of Pennsylvania Spring 2020 Fine Arts Department animation program have turned these drawings into an animated retelling of the myth.⁴

4 To view the animation visit: vimeo.com/404053459/677a7906f9.

This creative adaptation of archival materials showcases how objects and archives can be reimagined and reinterpreted not only by their cultural custodians but also by younger generations. This reimagining of objects creates multiplicities of object stories. The diversity of object stories in *Uncovering Pacific Pasts* not only illustrates changing interpretations of objects from original collectors to later scholars but also demonstrates the changing methods and approaches of archaeologists to the material past. The University of Pennsylvania Museum's petrographic analysis of Davenport's plainware sherds (Katz and Boileau, **Chapter 35**, this volume) and the use of geochemical analysis on the *Pandora* finds (Mann, **Chapter 3**, this volume) to answer provenance questions are good examples of how an object's reimagining can be underpinned by modern archaeological methods.



Figure 36.4. *Uncovering Pacific Pasts* exhibition at the South Australian Museum. These objects were on display from March 2020 to August 2021.

Source: Stephen Zagala.



Figure 36.5. Vianney Atpatoun, a retired employee of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre/Vanuatu Kaljoral Senta (VKS), in front of the *Uncovering Pacific Pasts* exhibition on display at the VKS in Port Vila from November 2020. An extension to the current exhibition is planned for display from early in 2023.

Source: Matthew Spriggs.

Another major aim of *Uncovering Pacific Pasts* and the CBAP Project more generally has been to highlight the significant contributions of historically marginalised voices in the histories of archaeology and anthropology and the important roles they have played in our fields of study. The displays at the Musée de Tahiti et des Îles – Te Fare Manaha, Puna'auia, Tahiti, and the Mana Gallery, Rapa Nui (with future exhibitions planned at the Museo Antropológico P. Sebastián Englert – Museo de Rapa Nui, the Fiji Museum and the Vanuatu National Museum), touch on the important contribution of Indigenous scholars and interlocutors to Pacific archaeological research.⁵ Much more work remains to be done. Since the CBAP Project's official conclusion on 30 March 2020, former CBAP postdoctoral fellow Dr Emilie Dotte-Sarout has embarked on a new research project focusing on some of the hidden figures of our

⁵ Such contributions are discussed particularly in Brooks, **Chapter 9**; Howes, **Chapter 16**; Van Tilburg, **Chapter 18**; Spriggs, **Chapter 28**; and Dotte-Sarout et al., **Chapter 30**, all this volume.

history. Her *Pacific Matildas: Finding the Women in the History of Pacific Archaeology* project aims to investigate the scientific lives of the first women who conducted archaeological work in Oceania, and will document their hidden contributions, ensuring their stories and legacies become part of broader narratives in the history of science.⁶

We hope that the object stories showcased in the *Uncovering Pacific Pasts* exhibition, this catalogue and the other published research resulting from the CBAP Project ignite an enthusiasm for future scholarship on the history of archaeology in the Pacific. Many stories still remain to be told.

⁶ See: www.uwa.edu.au/projects/pacific-matildas-finding-the-women-in-the-history-of-pacific-archaeology.

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