

# Preface

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This collection arises from a conference called ‘Local Intermediaries in International Exploration’, which was held at The Australian National University in July 2013. Over two days we had 30 speakers present their research on intermediaries of different kinds, who acted as guides, informants, and brokers between local people and the Western explorers and travellers who visited foreign lands in Australia, New Guinea, the Pacific, Asia and Africa.

Our interest, as both conference organisers and the editors of this collection, was to gain new insights into the role and perspectives of Aboriginal people who acted as guides and intermediaries in the exploration of Australia. The diversity of geographies, temporalities, and the cultural backgrounds of the intermediaries and explorers alike, combined with the innovative approaches taken by the conference participants, offered myriad viewpoints, and richly informed our own project on Australian Aboriginal history. This collection follows an important thread that weaves through many papers: the question of how to recover the histories of local intermediaries whose experiences and contributions have long been excluded from the histories and even effaced in the original accounts. The chapters in this collection are primarily concerned with questions exploring how we recover these ‘hidden histories’ from the archives, how we can interpret these fragmentary histories, and how such histories of Indigenous intermediaries can serve new purposes in the present.

We would like to thank all of the participants who generously contributed rich insights to the conference conversation, especially our keynotes speakers, Felix Driver, John Gascoigne, Len Collard and Dave Palmer, who have all contributed chapters to this collection. We also thank the Australian Centre for Indigenous History who hosted the conference, The Australian National University’s College of Arts and Social Sciences, which provided financial support, as well as

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