

**Reassembling the Collection**  
*Ethnographic Museums and Indigenous Agency*

*Edited by Rodney Harrison, Sarah Byrne,  
and Anne Clarke*



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# 7

## **Creative Colonialism**

### *Locating Indigenous Strategies in Ethnographic Museum Collections*

**Robin Torrence and Anne Clarke**

#### **ETHNOGRAPHIC COLLECTIONS AND SOCIAL RELATIONS**

Over the course of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, thousands of objects made and used by indigenous people were gifted, bartered, and looted as Western nations expanded their colonial enterprises across the world. The material culture of colonized peoples was transferred from the realm of local cultural practice to a globalized capitalist marketplace and transformed into a commercial commodity. Not only did objects acquire monetary values far removed from their original contexts of production and use, but they also gathered symbolic capital through the practices of collection, classification, and display in public and private spheres alike. Many of these indigenous objects now form the nuclei of the extensive ethnographic collections housed in public museums and private collections around the world. Rather than be viewed as simply a product of the desires of Western consumers or an outcome of asymmetries in power, these collections are better understood as the consequences of complex and entangled social relationships (commercial, personal, official) between collecting and producing communities (e.g., Byrne et al. 2011b; Gosden, Larson, and Petch 2007; Newell 2006; Gosden and Knowles 2001; Thomas 1991). A new culture primarily grounded in the specifics of the local context



FIGURE 7.1

Map of Papua New Guinea, showing Central Province (shaded area) and Port Moresby. Map by Molly O'Halloran.

resulted from the trade and exchange of objects (Thomas 1994), although the social relations were also subject to the ebb and flow of larger economic, political, and historical forces (Bennett 1995, 2004). Given the dynamic role that museum collections played in past societies, it is no longer useful to envisage them as static entities. By adopting new theoretical and methodological approaches, they can be converted into rich sources of information about historical processes. Through tracing how the contents of these assemblages of ethnographic objects changed over time, we can witness the ways in which unique cultural practices and social relations emerged in specific colonial settings as a result of webs of interactions in which material objects played a central role (Clarke and Torrence 2011; Gosden, Larson, and Petch 2007; Gosden and Knowles 2001:59).

Our case study of ethnographic artifacts demonstrates the power of museum collections to draw out the complexities of social relations in colonial society. Following ideas and methods proposed by Gosden and Knowles (2001) and Thomas (1991), we use museum collections from Central Province (figure 7.1) to illuminate processes underlying the construction and creation of colonial society in British New Guinea. Based on patterns expressed in these museum collections, in terms of relative quantities,

presence and absence, and material properties and decorative styles, our chapter identifies strategies adopted by indigenous communities to create, sustain, or avoid social interaction with Westerners and also considers how objects were used in the creation of new indigenous self-identities. Our approach focuses only on the indigenous side of the "collecting encounter" (Adams 2009:17), a necessary counterpoint to previous detailed historical analyses of Western traders and collectors in the Pacific region (e.g., Buschmann 2009; O'Hanlon and Welsch 2000; Peterson, Allen, and Hamby 2008; Quanchi and Cochrane 2007). Even when divorced from their makers and users, objects now hidden from public view and shut away in museum storerooms provide a new and important source of information about the societies in which they circulated (see also Byrne et al. 2011a).

### ARCHAEOLOGY AND ETHNOGRAPHIC COLLECTIONS

Since the goal of our research is to understand how entangled social relations in colonial settings led to the generation of new cultural behaviors for both Western and indigenous participants (Gosden and Knowles 2001), it is important to hear the voices and track the behaviors of these two groups. Given the biases inherent in written texts, achieving this aim demands new concepts and approaches. The much quoted observation by Thomas (2000:274)—"it is striking just how difficult it is to recover and characterize indigenous agency in any specificity, from the historical record"—sets out the basic methodological and theoretical challenge for those interested in identifying the role of indigenous communities in the formation of museum collections. To tackle this challenging task, our research on ethnographic collections and nineteenth- and early twentieth-century auction and sale catalogs uses an object-centered approach central to archaeological research (see the discussion of "archaeological sensibility" in the introduction to this volume; see also Clarke and Torrence 2011, 2012; Torrence and Clarke 2011; Torrence 1993, 2000). We argue that museum collections share important characteristics with materials retrieved from an archaeological excavation in that many museum objects are accessioned with little or no accompanying documentation about who made them, what they were used for, how they were made, what they were called, or how they were perceived by their original owners. For archaeological and ethnographic museum artifacts alike, the major variables available for study are the material properties of the objects themselves and their associations with other items.

A key archaeological concept relevant to the analysis of museum collections is the "assemblage," which refers to "an associated set of contemporary

artifacts that can be considered as a **single unit for record and analysis**" (Darvill 2008; see Gosden, Larson, and Petch 2007 on the museum as a "field site"; also see the introduction to **this volume**). We argue that since the groupings of ethnographic objects found on the shelves of museums (i.e., collections) share many of the same **properties as archaeological assemblages** (e.g., they were collected from **the same region or by the same person**), it is appropriate to use **archaeological principles to link the material attributes of objects to behavior and on this basis to infer the broad social processes that underpinned the exchange of material culture in colonial Papua New Guinea**.

Following archaeological principles, **our use of inference is based on the assumption that both individual objects and assemblages are the consequences of human actions**. In our case study, **the behaviors took place within the local context of negotiations between the indigenous people who made and offered the objects for exchange and the explorers, scientists, missionaries, traders, government officials, anthropologists, collectors, and other outsiders with whom they interacted**. Consequently, we assume that museum assemblages are representative **outcomes of the different kinds of material exchanges between local groups and Western outsiders**. Through a number of case studies, **our collaborative project has developed a range of archaeological approaches for reconstructing social relations from ethnographic museum collections/assemblages**. These include analyses of (1) assemblage composition in terms of **the relative proportions of artifact types or the presence or absence of key types**, (2) **artifact production and decoration**, and (3) **one-off exchanges identified through a biographical approach** (Kopytoff 1986; Clarke and Torrence 2011, 2012; Kononenko et al. 2010; Philp 2009, 2011; Torrence 1993, 2000; Torrence and Clarke 2011; see also Harrison 2006, 2011a).

Crucial to making inferences about **historical processes from artifacts in museum assemblages is the simple observation that the movement of an object between two individuals or social groups requires some form of social interaction**. In fact, as discussed in Sahlins's (1972) **foundational study**, **the exchange of objects is widely used to create, mediate, sustain, and negate social relations within and between different groups**. In the cross-cultural setting in which items from Central Province were exchanged, **negotiation between strangers was likely to have been the main form of social interaction since physical violence and stealing were relatively rare**. Writing about a similar colonial setting in Australia, McBryde (2000) elegantly showed that in contact situations in which there was a wide disparity of power relations, such as in the early days of the Port Jackson colony in Australia, **indigenous**

**people used items of material culture, such as hats, to mediate their interactions with the British colonists, choosing how and in what social contexts they were exchanged**. In another case study, Torrence (2000) discussed how the Admiralty Islanders from Papua New Guinea made changes in the way **obsidian-tipped spears and daggers were made and decorated, in order to attract and make material profits from exchanges with European traders**.

A useful framework for linking negotiation to material items can be found in Humphrey and Hugh-Jones's (1992) argument that the process of **bartering creates equality**. As they show, neither side wins or loses, because **successful exchange can occur only if both parties are satisfied with the outcome**. For example, Gammage (1998:58) records how European and Papua New Guinea participants were equally delighted with the outcomes of their bartered transactions: "The Europeans thought food cheap, shell worth two or three shillings buying a thousand pounds of *kaukau* or a fair-sized pig. Enga thought the line paid amazingly well: a *kina* for a big pig, priceless salt for mere vegetables.... The profits were enormous. People took care not to show that they were being overpaid, but fifty years later they recalled the trading gleefully." In the same vein, Strathern (1992:248) describes an occasion when local people from the Hagen area of the New Guinea Highlands would not exchange their stone axes, spears, or pigs with the newly arrived and highly perplexed Australian explorers because **the shells, steel axes, and other trade goods the latter had brought were just not desirable enough**. The Hageners were prepared to engage in barter only when they were convinced that these white strangers were actually **human beings**, as was demonstrated when the latter offered the culturally appropriate gold-lip pearl shells.

In Central Province, bartering was probably the most common, but not the only, form of exchange between indigenous groups and Westerners. The spheres of interaction proposed by Sahlins (1972)—generalized, balanced, and negative reciprocity—are a useful way to start thinking about the multiple kinds of negotiation that might have characterized indigenous-outsider interactions. Sahlins made the insightful observation that although each of these forms of exchange generally operates within a particular class of social relations (respectively, family, various kin groups, and strangers), a common strategy is to use exchange to reduce social distance and draw people into a more intimate social sphere. In other words, exchange creates the ties that bind. So, for example, the presentation of a "pure gift" with no expectation of return (generalized reciprocity) is a common way to establish a closer social tie with someone outside the immediate family and create the social obligations that come with being close kin.

In this chapter, we focus on the way local people in Central Province negotiated social relations within an early colonial setting by making, offering, and withholding objects in their dealings with outsiders. Since, as is well illustrated by the Hagen example, the material properties of an artifact are instrumental in shaping the character of the exchanges that create and maintain social relations, we have reconstructed past social interactions by studying the museum objects used in these transactions. Following this basic principle of inference, we have detected strategies used by Papua New Guineans to engage in and profit from Western trade, which in turn contributed to the formation of new identities within this colonial society.

### SITUATING THE COLLECTIONS

The choice of Central Province, Papua New Guinea, for our case study is a deliberate one. As the region surrounding the British and Australian government headquarters in Port Moresby, it provides an excellent place to monitor social interactions during the history of this colony. Negotiating social relations through exchange with various kinds of "strangers" has been integral to both the ancient and recent history of cultural groups in this region. Well-known prehistoric trade links stretched north and south along the coast and between coastal and inland regions (e.g., Irwin 1985; Allen 1977), and communities not far to the west had long been in contact with bird of paradise traders from Southeast Asia (Swadling 1996). The well-known, long-distance *hiri* exchange system, which linked Motu groups residing near Port Moresby with trading partners in the Papuan Gulf to the west, was still flourishing when Westerners first arrived (e.g., Barton 1910; Dutton 1982; Groves 2011:26–29).

Our exploration of the entangled social relations (Thomas 1991) that characterized colonial life in Central Province focuses on a series of ethnographic collections for which we have good chronological control. Analyses were made of a substantial collection of approximately twenty-five hundred items housed at the Australian Museum (Sydney), which were supplemented with information from collections at the Macleay Museum (University of Sydney), the Queensland Museum (Brisbane), and the British Museum (London). The data enabled us to compare and contrast historical accounts and government records with changes in the strategies used by the indigenous communities to create social relations with the wider range of outsiders they encountered between first contact and the first decades of the twentieth century.

We begin with a brief summary of the key historical processes that formed the background to the social relations forged through the exchange

of artifacts. The first period, 1875–1884, includes the early explorations by scientists, prospectors, and adventurers; the beginnings of commercial trading; and the founding of Christian missions. At this time, Western superiority over the local population was not at all well established. Outsiders visiting or attempting to establish settlements in the region would have been highly outnumbered in any conflict. Perhaps more important, explorers were heavily dependent on the local population for basic resources, including food, water, and shelter. In the second phase, 1884–1900, the British began to exert authority over the region by making a formal claim to the British territory of New Guinea in 1884 and by establishing a crown colony in 1888, supported by the formal presence of an administrator based in Port Moresby. In these early years of the colony, inland regions of Central Province barely experienced the effects of Western contact (Groves 2011:30–59). Furthermore, there was very little physical control over the indigenous population, although the establishment of a Native police force in 1888 (Groves 2011:52) began to play an important role in colonial governance. During the third phase, 1900–1925, the Commonwealth of Australia assumed authority over the newly established territory of Papua. It was not until the end of this period, however, that Australian authorities effectively exerted control via censuses and a head tax (Ryan 1972; Oram 1976). After 1925 very little material from Central Province was accessioned by the Australian Museum.

It is highly significant that 93 percent of well-dated artifacts from Central Province in the Australian Museum were collected during the first two phases, before social relations became formalized within the context of a wage-based economy, as, for instance, in the description of exchanges between plantation workers and anthropologists by Gosden and Knowles (2001). In contrast, when the artifacts in the Australian Museum were collected, what are now typically envisaged as ethnographic items played such a central role in the negotiations between local communities and Westerners (cf. Barker 2001) that their physical attributes reflect the nature of these ongoing interactions.

### STRATEGIC GIFTING

Although the trade in artifacts in Central Province was partially driven by external factors, such as the high demand for ethnographic objects and curios by collectors and museums in Europe, the exchange of objects between source communities and outsiders was also integral to successful communication and peacemaking, especially prior to the creation of the pidgin language, Police Motu. Gift giving played an important role in initiating

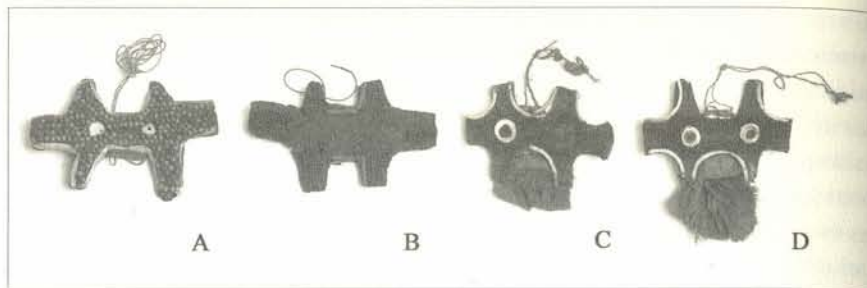


FIGURE 7.2

Fighting or mouth ornaments from the Australian Museum collections. A (B.6297) and B (B.6298), obtained by Liljeblad, may be copies of the traditional types shown in C (E.348) and D (B.6419). Photos by Emma Furno, reproduced with permission from the Australian Museum.

and shaping interactions. Papuans in Central Province and elsewhere offered gifts as a way of initiating or strengthening ties with an outsider because these new social relations could enhance their status locally, open up avenues to desirable commodities, or even provide a way to rid the community of unwanted and potentially dangerous goods, such as objects used in sorcery, in much the same ways as described by Barker (2001) for the early history of Oro Province.

Objects known as “mouth” or “fighting” ornaments, known in a local language as *musikaka*, appear to have been very popular with Europeans, possibly because these combined the traits of “exotic,” “colorful,” and “bizarre” with “savage” and “war-like” (figure 7.2). During warfare, these sorcery objects were supposedly held in the mouth by grasping a thick woven ring mounted on the back, but at other times they were suspended from the neck by a cord (e.g., Stone 1880:116–117; Murray 1912:231). They were first described by early visitors such as Turner (1878) and Stone (1880:116–117) and were illustrated in the influential catalog of Pacific objects published by Edge-Partington (1996[1890–1898]:1:274), which soon became a key guide for collectors.

The Australian Museum’s examples of *musikaka* from Central Province are made of either turtle shell or wood that was cut into a shape with three opposing arcs and then outlined with boar’s tusk. The surface was decorated with red or black seeds (*Abrus precatorius*) in various patterns, and shapes resembling “eyes” were usually created with shells. Many also have a pouch fashioned from plant material to which parrot feathers and other materials used for sorcery were attached; it hung below the body of the ornament (e.g., see figure 7.2C, D). Similar mouth ornaments appeared

in contemporary British sale and auction catalogs (e.g., Oldman 1976:no. 56, object 14 [15029]; Webster 1895:objects 210, 465), but compared with other types of objects, they are relatively rare in museum collections. The Australian Museum has nine extant artifacts of this type, with eight acquired between 1883 and 1887; four additional specimens obtained in 1878 were destroyed in a fire, and two more purchased in 1883 have been de-accessioned or are missing.

It seems likely that the two mouth ornaments in the Australian Museum’s Central Province collection in which turtle bone (rather than wood) was used for the foundation were strategic gifts offered to people with whom it was beneficial to forge social ties (see figure 7.2C, D). Both of these objects were donated to the museum by ministers from the London Missionary Society: Rev. William George Lawes and Rev. William Wyatt Gill (see Chalmers 1886). Such rare objects with spiritual power may have been gifted to create social ties with the men who were actively involved in the barter of trade goods, which were used by the church to obtain necessary supplies of food (Lawes 1876–1884). Although the missionaries may have been eager to demonstrate the savagery of their converts by collecting objects involved in sorcery, it also seems highly likely that their trading partners made a strategic decision to present these gifts as a way to improve their local status through connections with outsiders, to better position themselves in terms of access to supplies of trade goods, or possibly to remove potentially dangerous objects from the community. The presence of other objects used in magic and ceremony—which are absent from other contemporary assemblages—in the assemblage acquired from Lawes at the Australian Museum indicates that local people gifted or offered different objects to a long-term resident whose social ties were useful and valuable than they did to passing traders (cf. Clarke and Torrence 2011).

#### ATTRACTING INTERACTIONS

As in other parts of the globe, even during the earliest encounters, creativity and experimentation were fundamental indigenous strategies for negotiating with Western explorers, traders, missionaries, and government officials (e.g., Thomas 1991; Meleisea and Schoeffel 1997; Torrence 2000; Harrison 2002, 2004a, 2006; Kononenko et al. 2010). The communities in British New Guinea were clearly eager to barter for European trade goods, such as cloth, beads, and metal objects (Davies 2011; Philp 2009). Analysis of the museum collections reveals a number of strategies used by indigenous producers to attract and increase the volume of trade: (1) manufacturing copies of well-known objects; (2) devising acceptable substitutions



for popular goods; (3) inventing items that would appeal to Western tastes; and (4) enhancing traditional artifacts to attract attention. Innovative trade objects were cleverly created to appeal to the desires of outsiders. Based on observations over time, the producers created goods that conformed to European imaginings about "savages," or they altered "traditional" goods and motifs to be compatible with the buyers' specific requirements (cf. Silverman 1999; Schildkrout and Keim 1998:5–6; Graburn 1976).

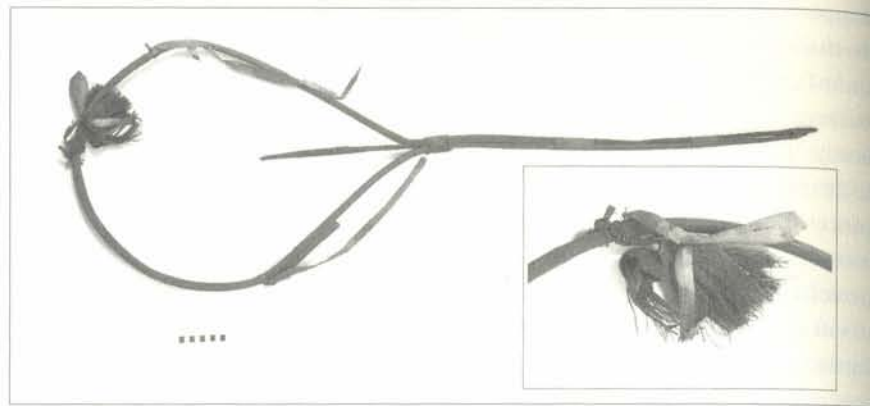
Abundant examples of these four kinds of creativity and experimentation characteristic of colonial interactions are represented in the Central Province assemblages sold to the Australian Museum by Captain Hillel Fredrick Liljeblad in 1885 (seventy-four objects) and 1890 (eighty-three objects). The historical record has not captured much information about Liljeblad, except that he was born in Finland in 1849, captained ships in the early colony from about 1884 when he navigated the British "annexation squad" to Port Moresby (Artifact 2009), applied for a land grant in Port Moresby in 1891 (result unknown), and died in Sydney in 1924 (Liljeblad and Lillieblade 1993:29). We know that he was present at the ceremony when Britain officially claimed the new colony on 7 November 1884 (Artifact 2009) and that he was master of the London Missionary Society ship *Ellengowan* when it arrived in Sydney in February 1885 (State Records Authority of New South Wales n.d.). He is also referred to as an "informed local" (Edelfeld 1887:127). Liljeblad collected objects from Central Province and other parts of British New Guinea, and in 1906 he sold the Australian Museum a drum from German New Guinea. We can imagine that Liljeblad was typical of many early travelers to the region whose aim was primarily to profit from trade. As a ship's captain, he traveled widely and presumably had many opportunities to barter and perhaps, through repeated visits, to establish longer-term "business" relationships with some local communities. Many of the objects Captain Liljeblad collected conform to other contemporary Central Province material in the Australian Museum, but his assemblage provides especially good evidence for the experiments typical of the bartering that characterized cross-cultural interactions in Central Province. We use a selected sample from Liljeblad's assemblage to illustrate some of the creative strategies used by indigenous artifact makers to increase their engagement in barter with outsiders.

Beginning with fighting mouth ornaments, the two examples sold to the Australian Museum by Liljeblad (see figure 7.2A, B) are radically different from the published examples noted previously and from the remainder of the collection. We propose that Liljeblad's objects represent poor-quality copies made specifically for sale to outsiders. It is possible that

supplies of used items had run dry by the time Liljeblad purchased these, as the traditional items are unlikely to have ever been available in large quantities, unlike the numerous spears, bows, and arrows that were freely bartered around the same time. Neither of Liljeblad's mouth ornaments is surrounded by boar's tusks. In one case, unmodified plant fiber is used to frame the object (see figure 7.2A), whereas in the other example, small pieces of wood are preserved around only part of the outline and may never have been applied to the entire periphery (see figure 7.2B). In addition, the pouches on the backs of the objects are quite small, and the parrot feather decorations are absent. The base of the larger object is a piece of metal (see figure 7.2B), whereas the other is made from a much softer wood than what was used in the more traditional objects (see figure 7.2A). The selection of metal is important. Was this material specifically chosen to increase the value of the item, since metal was highly prized among indigenous communities, or was the metal intended by the maker to appeal to Western tastes?

The second creative marketing technique exhibited in the Liljeblad collection is the substitution of an artifact type or style for one that required much less effort or skill to produce. Good examples of this strategy are Liljeblad's two lime gourds: neither is decorated, unlike all the other contemporary artifacts of this type in the Australian Museum collection and widely known from Central Province (e.g., Cranstone 1961:pl. 23a). Furthermore, both of the lime gourds he collected have an unusual shape compared with the majority of the decorated examples in the Australian Museum's Central Province assemblage. In these cases, we hypothesize that someone took advantage of an opportunity to make an exchange and offered his or her own gourd (both have lime in them), because at that particular moment, he or she did not have a decorated one to hand.

Sometimes, substitutions were expedient, as in the case of Liljeblad's lime gourds, but over time the community might devise a whole new artifact form just for the purpose of increasing their access to barter. Representing the third way of attracting opportunities for trade, Liljeblad's collection includes several new object types specifically made for sale (e.g., figures 7.3 and 7.4). The most well-known are the "man-catchers" outed by Michael O'Hanlon (1999) as recent inventions (cf. Cranstone 1961:fig. 32). Although possibly derived from tools used to hunt pigs, they are flimsy and clearly nonfunctional since the loop, which was supposedly for capturing the victim, was rarely large enough to fit over a human head. There are twenty-seven man-catchers in the Australian Museum's Central Province collection; there are relatively secure collection dates for sixteen of them, and all but two of these belong in our first phase. Man-catchers

**FIGURE 7.3**

This short-handled, decorated man-catcher, collected by Liljeblad (Australian Museum B.6321), was much more portable than the more common, larger objects of this type. The inset focuses on the nonfunctional plant material banners and the cluster of fibers and nuts tied to the sides of the hoop. Photos by Finton Mahoney, reproduced with permission from the Australian Museum.

are also present in auction and sale catalogs of the late nineteenth century (Torrence and Clarke 2011). They were made in the region west of Central Province as well, but the documentation for the collections does not enable precise proveniences. Their manufacture and sale were relatively short-lived (Torrence and Clark 2011:46–47). The earliest example (now missing) in the Australian Museum register was accessioned in 1880. Man-catchers were probably not produced much after 1885, possibly in line with the overall shift in emphasis at this time from weaponry to body ornamentation (Clarke and Torrence 2011).

Liljeblad sold ten man-catchers to the Australian Museum in 1885 (B.6321-001–003; B.6320-001–007). Seven are typical examples with long handles in the range of 2.5–3.0 meters and ornamented with strings of plant material and seeds. Although these decorations might have detracted from their role as a killing implement, the buyers were perhaps more interested in attractive ornaments. Three, however, have very short handles, approximately 0.6–0.7 meters long, and may represent a further innovation involving miniaturized copies of the original concept (figure 7.3). A number of scholars have shown that items produced mainly for sale to tourists or travelers are often made to be easily transportable (cf. Torrence 2000; Graburn 1976; May 1977).

A fourth strategy for attracting barter was to increase the object's appeal in the eyes of potential collectors. A tobacco pipe collected by

**FIGURE 7.4**

Strategies to attract buyers included enlarging the size of the object and enhancing it with elaborate attachments, as in the case of this large tobacco pipe (1 meter long), which was decorated by burning, from the Liljeblad collection (Australian Museum B.6173). Photograph by Lauren Fuka, reproduced with permission from the Australian Museum.

Liljeblad is a good example because of its large size and the addition of decorative elements (see figure 7.4). Not only is this by far the longest item in the Australian Museum's Central Province pipe collection, but it also has an extra appendage, in the form of a branch off the main stem of bamboo, that was deliberately not removed and that was even decorated in the same fashion as the main body of the pipe. A string banner dangling from this unusual appendage was also added to ensure that the artifact captured everyone's attention. A very similar example from Central Province is in the British Museum; feathers are tied to a similar appendage (Cranstone 1961:pl. 22a). One described as a "very curious specimen" is presented in Webster's sale catalog (1897:object 151). Perhaps the maker had noticed that some buyers were especially fond of large and gaudy artifacts, a concept that fits with the common desire in England for objects to decorate the walls of public rooms in grand houses (cf. Torrence and Clarke 2011). Enlarging the size of the decorations to attract buyers was a strategy employed also by makers of Admiralty Island obsidian-tipped spears and daggers in nearby German New Guinea (Torrence 2000:118).

#### ASSERTING IDENTITY

Another useful illustration of the complexities surrounding the ways in which Papuans used items of material culture to attract and create social

relationships with outsiders is the production of bamboo tobacco pipes. The decoration of these objects also shows how the process of exchange with outsiders folded back on itself and played an active role in the way indigenous communities reshaped their own local identities as a reaction to colonization. Like the other inventions discussed previously, bamboo tobacco pipes helped open up new avenues for trade with Westerners, but at the same time these items also provided a means by which locals asserted their own cultural identities.

A. C. Haddon's extensive treatise *Smoking and Tobacco Pipes in New Guinea* (1946) comprises an analysis of 250 pipes based on materials held in the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology and the British Museum (Haddon 1946:1). This seminal study sets out the basic methods of manufacture, the types and regional styles, the methods of decoration, and speculations on the origins and timing of tobacco smoking in Papua New Guinea. The main methods used to produce the mostly geometric designs were identified as carving, incising, burning, scraping, and intaglio (1946:9–10). Haddon (1946:13) made the interesting comment that on many pipes the decoration is “carelessly executed.” The symmetry of the geometric designs is often skewed because they do not match around the circumference of the pipe, and in many cases the lines are poorly made and uneven. He proffers the explanation that this may be due to a lack of skill, slovenly workmanship, or “influences which can or cannot be traced” (1946:13).

Haddon's observations about the poor execution of the designs on many of the pipes he examined are well supported by our own study of the Central Province assemblage in the Australian Museum. Many pipes display design elements that are mismatched in the round, lines that are poorly incised or burned, or designs that appear to be incomplete. It seems that artisans were still learning to convert an existing set of designs to a differently shaped surface. Once again, an artifact collected by Liljeblad illustrates the experiments people were undertaking to increase their opportunities for trade. One of the earliest pipes Liljeblad sold to the Australian Museum has a small area that is crudely decorated by incision (figure 7.5). Surprisingly, among the irregular scratched designs are two poorly executed human figures. They are slightly reminiscent of scrimshaw designs, which were perhaps observed by someone who had participated in European or American whaling expeditions. In any case, the crudeness of the decoration shows that it was made by someone with little experience in the technique of incision and who also lacked a clear conception of what elements should be placed on a pipe. Overall, the poor quality of much of the decoration on tobacco pipes suggests manufacture by unskilled

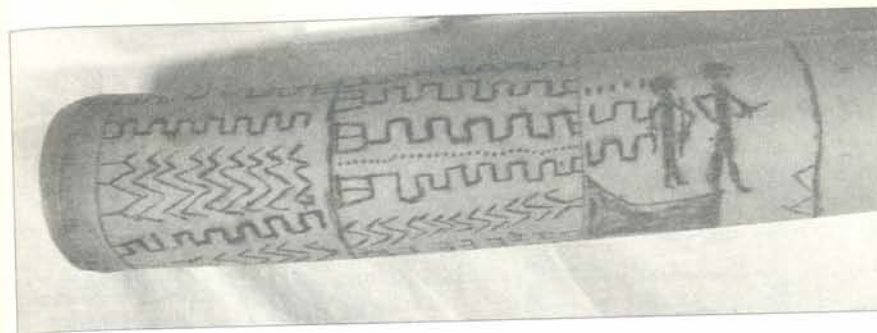


FIGURE 7-5

*A crudely incised design on a tobacco pipe collected by Liljeblad (Australian Museum E.27469) exemplifies the experimental nature of early ornamentation. Photograph by Robin Torrence, reproduced with permission from the Australian Museum.*

producers or by people who were experimenting with a new medium in order to increase opportunities for exchange.

Another possibility is that tobacco pipes were made quickly and with minimal attention to detail because they were produced for sale rather than personal use. Many of the pipes appear to be nonfunctional because they are so long and large that drawing the smoke to fill the pipe would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible (Deveni Temu personal communication 2010). In fact, most of the pipes in the Australian Museum collection bear no evidence in the form of smoke stains or residues that they had ever been used. Some are clearly unfinished: for instance, the hole for placing the tobacco is absent, or the pipe stem is blocked because the internal septum of the bamboo was not removed.

The date of the earliest decorated pipes from Central Province supports the proposal that these objects were specifically made for sale to outsiders. Undecorated pipes of a relatively small size are well known from photographs of people apparently placed in seemingly natural situations, as opposed to those dressed up and posed for the occasion. For example, a line drawing and short article entitled “Native of New Guinea” that depicts a man called Mayr, who was brought to Sydney by the trader Andrew Goldie (*Sydney Mail* 1879), contains a long description of the method for using these new and unusual artifacts. Importantly, this early depiction of a pipe in the personal possession of a Papuan man is plain and undecorated. This makes a direct contrast to the Australian Museum assemblage of seventy-five pipes, of which only one is plain.

Having discovered that plain bamboo pipes were not attractive to

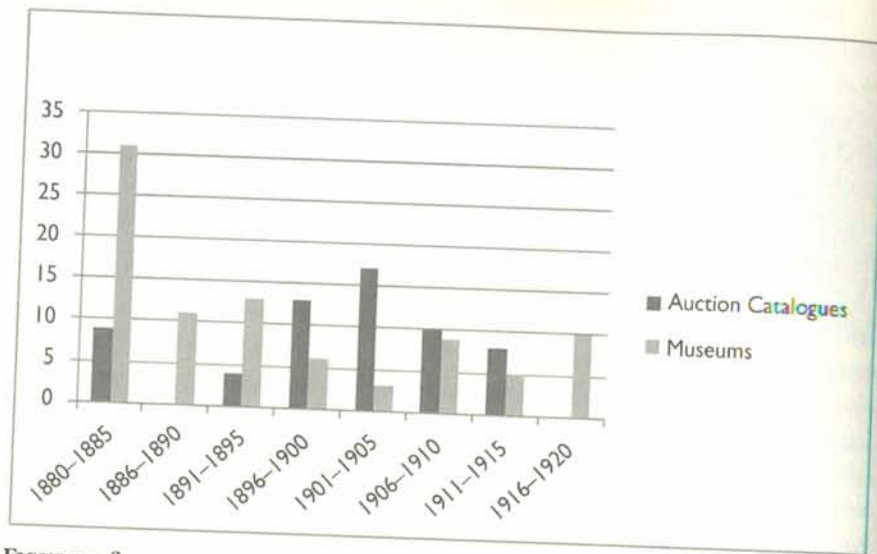


FIGURE 7.6

Summary of the chronological distribution of well-dated tobacco pipes from Central Province now held in the Australian Museum, Queensland Museum, or British Museum or offered for sale in the contemporary Webster and Stevens catalogs.

Western buyers, the indigenous makers made a calculated experiment devised to attract social relationships with strangers. Registration data from the Australian, Queensland, and British Museums, together with information from the Webster, Oldman, and Stevens auction and sale catalogs (as discussed in Torrence and Clarke 2011), show quite clearly that tobacco pipes only began to appear in museum collections from around 1880 onward (figure 7.6). Significantly, there are no tobacco pipes in the British Museum from the exploratory journey of HMS *Rattlesnake* along the south coast of New Guinea in 1849–1850 (Philp 2009). The earliest Central Province collection in the Australian Museum, donated by Lawrence Hargrave in 1876, does not contain tobacco pipes, nor does the collection of 246 objects purchased from Andrew Goldie, which was registered in 1878. There is only one tobacco pipe in the Goldie collection in the Queensland Museum. Although the exact collection date is unknown, it is not prior to 1880 (Susan Davies personal communication 2010). As figure 7.6 shows, the number of tobacco pipes entering museum collections peaked between 1880 and 1885. The smaller amounts between 1896 and 1910 largely represent a lag effect of objects that were recycled through the auction houses and artifact sellers.

In addition to being a pragmatic strategy to attract trading opportunities, the tobacco pipes introduced a new element in early colonial

society. The ornamentations applied to these artifacts show that the makers were finding ways to assert their local identities as part of their negotiations with the new colonial society. In a description of tobacco pipes from Sogeri in Central Province, Haddon (1946:167) notes that one of the “flagged” designs is “a variant of the design frequently tattooed on the shoulders and in the armpits of coastal women.” He further notes that heavily burned designs on some Central Province pipes “[were] identical with patterns tattooed on Hula and Motu women, and some [were] found as burnt patterns on lime gourds” (Haddon 1946:183; cf. designs on pipe in figure 7.3). The use of traditional tattoo designs cut or burned into the skins of bamboo can be read as an assertion of local identities in the face of the flux and uncertainty that characterized social relationships in the early colonial period. By using body designs, Papuans were inscribing themselves and their local cultural identity onto the objects offered to Westerners. Although the decoration was selected to enhance an item intended for sale, the choice of particular designs that represented clan affiliations can also be interpreted as a forceful assertion of local group identity and as a way to enforce a divide between the makers and the outsiders with whom they were interacting in a purely commercial sphere (cf. Silverman 1999).

At this stage in the history of intercultural negotiations, the designs did not become generalized or pan-Papuan but instead signaled specific localized identities, paralleling the function of the tattoos on which they were based. Haddon (1946) easily identified regionally specific designs on the tobacco pipes in the collections at the Cambridge and British Museums, and these also stand out among the variety of examples in the Australian Museum collection. The choice of tobacco pipes as an object for experimentation in exchange relationships was a particularly strategic response to the challenges of negotiating with outsiders, who also smoked tobacco in pipes, albeit using a different technology and technique, and among whom tobacco was a common trade item. The reconfiguration of the plain pipe of everyday use by the addition of culturally specific body designs can be seen in this context as a Papuan declaration of difference and demarcation.

Decorated bamboo tobacco pipes were created to fill a niche in the newly established market for curios, fulfilling the criteria of being both easily portable and exotic enough to represent the purchasers’ adventures in a far-flung colony (e.g., Graburn 1976). The early and brief appearance of decorated tobacco pipes shows that Papuans recognized the value of everyday objects in establishing and consolidating their relationships with colonial outsiders. Working out which objects and which attributes of the objects best served to underpin and consolidate social relationships may

explain in part the short time period for pipe production. The idea of experimentation and strategy extends to the transference of tattoo designs to pipes as artifact makers recognized that although everyday objects could be bartered for trade goods, decorated items had greater value. The late introduction of decorated tobacco pipes in Central Province, their relatively short period as a collectible item, and the overwhelming predominance of poorly executed decorated examples in the collections all point toward the pipe's being an object that Papuans actively and strategically reconfigured in response to the demands of colonial collectors. It is important to stress that from the perspective of the producers, asserting local identity through these items achieved a great deal more than simply increasing their access to trade goods.

The transformation of ordinary objects into sale items is also reflected in the history of the boat models depicting the traditional outrigger canoe (*vanagi*) and multi-hulled sailing boat (*lakatoi*) (Haddon 1937:220–231). Over time, accurate replicas that were used within traditional society to teach others how to make boats (Dairi Arua Heri personal communication 2011) were transformed by mixing the two different kinds of boat into a single item for sale to tourists. The makers selected a key element of each boat type: crab-claw sails, which are iconic of the *lakatoi*, and the outrigger of the *vanagi*. These were then combined in a way that represented the peoples of the region as a whole, as opposed to a focus on the variations among types and local groups, as was the case with the tattoo designs on the tobacco pipes. In this way, the model boats sold in the market in Port Moresby today (figure 7.7), just like the tobacco pipes of the past, are not just souvenirs, but for the makers, these provide a symbol of who they are and a means for broadcasting their identity more widely (cf. Phillips 1999:48; Silverman 1999:59; Graburn 1999:353).

### SIGNIFICANT BY THEIR ABSENCE

Although local groups were eager to engage in trade with outsiders, they were also careful to control the nature of the social relations created through the exchange of objects. For example, in discussing whether people from the south coast of New Britain should sell an armband, Gosden and Knowles (2001:20) note, "Transactions with outsiders were thus influenced by a range of complex considerations covering attachment to the item to be given up, the nature of the relationship desired with the transactor, and the lure of the items to be obtained through exchange." Unlike in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea (Hughes 1978; Strathern 1992:248) and many other areas of the world where European traders were either forced

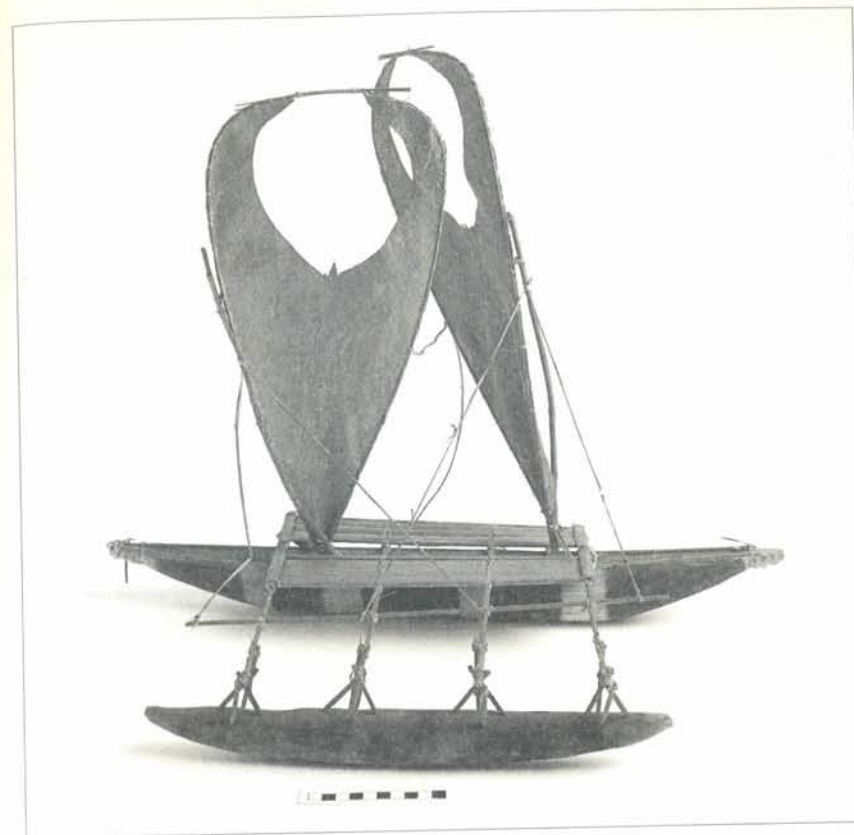


FIGURE 7.7

A boat model collected in 1974 (Australian Museum E.66183) incorporates the properties of an outrigger canoe (*vanagi*) with the sails of the multi-hulled *lakatoi* and reflects the role of souvenirs in identity-forming processes in modern Papua New Guinea. Photograph by Emma Furno, reproduced with permission from the Australian Museum.

into or took advantage of using local forms of currency in their interactions with the local community (e.g., Schildkrout and Keim 1998:26), communities in Central Province had a very different attitude about the use of local valuables. Restricting the circulation of these items to within traditional trading partnerships and ceremonial contexts helped maintain a separate indigenous social sphere.

H. M. Dauncey (1913:72–73), a long-term missionary at Delana in Hall Sound (west of Port Moresby), used a photo of items from a local man's personal collection, which he called "a friend's store box," to illustrate the objects used as valuables in this region (figure 7.8). An analysis of the

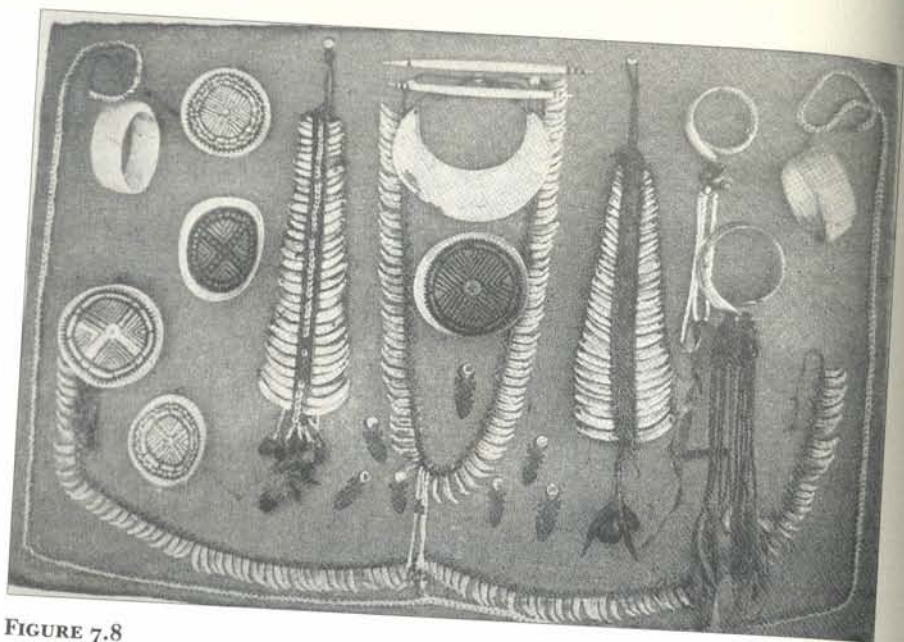


FIGURE 7.8

The content of what Dauncey described as "a friend's store box" illustrates the quantities of the main forms of valuables used in Central Province in the hiri trade network and in other types of exchange that were owned by a single person (Dauncey 1913:36, 73).

material in this box provides a good example of how people in Central Province withheld certain items from circulation with Westerners. For coastal groups in Central Province, the most important valuables were armbands called *toea*, which were made from cone shells and obtained from trading partners to the southeast, particularly in the Mailu area. These objects maintained high value within Papuan groups well into the colonial period (e.g., Barton 1902–1903:18–20; Seligmann 1910:88–89). For example, Dauncey (1913:37) observed that one man was willing to pay nearly half his annual income to obtain a large *toea*. Consequently, the name of these highly valued objects was later transferred to one of the main units of currency in independent Papua New Guinea. As also noted by other studies of museum collections (e.g., Gosden and Knowles 2001; Barker 2001:362; Davies 2011) and auction catalogs (Torrence and Clarke 2011), objects that served as valuables in local cultures were often difficult for Westerners to obtain because the owners would offer them only to people with whom they desired an enduring, special relationship.

The calculated strategy of withholding valued objects in interactions

TABLE 7.1

Comparison of the Occurrence of All Central Province Valuables in the Australian Museum with the Private Collection of a Single Individual from Delana

Valuable	Australian Museum	Delana Chief
<i>toea</i> shell armband ( <i>toea</i> with decorations)	3 (0)	4 (2)
<i>tautau</i> , <i>movio/mobio</i> string of <i>nassa</i> shells	3	1
<i>koiyu</i> cut turtle shell mounted on shell	7	5
<i>mairi</i> crescent pearl shell neck ornament	3	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>11</b>

Source: Dauncey 1913:73.

with Westerners is also well expressed within the Australian Museum's Central Province museum assemblage. Table 7.1 presents an interesting comparison of the total number of objects in the collection that were traditionally used in exchange with the quantity of valuables found in the single store box (Dauncey 1913:73; see figure 7.8). Surprisingly, the museum collection is barely larger than what was in the possession of one individual. Only three *toeas* with adequate documentation to ensure that they were collected in Central Province are present in the Australian Museum assemblage. These were sold to the museum in 1903 on behalf of Milton Flood, who collected them in British New Guinea. In contrast to two of the *toeas* in Dauncey's photo, which have strings of beads or trade cloth attached, the Australian Museum shell armbands are very small and none are decorated. The collection also contains three armbands resembling *toeas* that were collected by Margaret McArthur (2000) in the mid-1950s from the Kunimaipa region, inland from Port Moresby. By this date, however, these objects had lost their original function as trade valuables and had acquired specific local significance as pig magic.

A second type of valuable, seen placed around the edge of the grouping in the box in figure 7.8, is represented by three examples in the Australian Museum. These strings of beads, made east of Port Moresby at Hula by sewing split *nassa* shells onto a thin woven backing, are known as *tautau*

(*taotao*) by the Motu and *movio* (*mobio*) by Roro-speaking groups to the west (Seligmann 1910:89; Dauncey 1913:36). Third, the crescent-shaped, polished pearl shell neck ornament shown in figure 7.8 is called *mairi* in the Motu language (Seligmann 1910:89). There are three examples of *mairi* from Central Province in the Australian Museum collection, but only two were actually used; the third is unfinished, with one side of the shell left unpolished.

Elaborately carved turtle shell fretworks mounted onto shells, known as *koiyu* (*koio*), were made in the Roro-speaking region that stretches from Hall Sound up to Waima/Maiva. According to Dauncey (1913:36) these were “the greatest treasures of all” for these particular groups. Seligmann (1910:204) reports that they were used in exchanges for taro with groups in the Papuan Gulf area, but no mention is made of their trade eastward toward Port Moresby. The Australian Museum has only seven examples in the collection, compared with five in the single private collection (see figure 7.8).

The scarcity of valuables in the Australian Museum collection is particularly significant because these items continued to be used to cement social links within Papuan groups long after initial contact with Europeans. Clearly, this function was rarely transferred to their relationships with the new outsiders. Even as late as 1913, Dauncey made it clear that valuables were not easy for Westerners to obtain. “It is often reported that anything may be bought from the simple savage for a few beads, a bit of red cloth, or a mirror, but much as you might wish to purchase this collection, nothing you could offer would persuade the owner to part with it” (Dauncey 1913:36).

The paucity of valuables in museum collections raises two issues. Perhaps, since most Westerners just passed through the region briefly, locals did not feel that it was worth investing such valuable objects in establishing formal social relations with them. Gosden and Knowles (2001:95–96) report that only the Japanese trader Komine, a permanent and powerful resident, was able to acquire the gold-lip shells used in ceremonial exchanges on the island of New Britain, although other collectors had tried to obtain them. If we examine the sources of the valuables in the Australian Museum collection more closely, we can find good evidence for the importance of social relations in the exchange of objects. For example, the single short strand of *tautau* collected by Milton Flood is very small compared with the multiple strands obtained by Rev. Lawes, who was a long-term and prestigious resident with whom local people were likely to have attempted to establish close social ties. Interestingly, the three *toeas* sold to the Australian Museum by Flood are also small and undecorated. Flood (1902) wrote to the Australian Museum that he obtained his objects

from an indigenous agent who acquired curios for sale to European residents in Port Moresby as part of a hiri voyage. It seems clear that even when dealing with an indigenous trader, if the exchange took place within a commercial context that would not create long-term social ties, local people were only willing to exchange “valuables” that were clearly substandard.

Second, the deliberate decision to restrict valuables to exchange within an indigenous network clearly shows that not all aspects of traditional Papuan culture were considered open for negotiation or change during the emergence of the new colonial culture. Consequently, one notable aspect of the emergent colonial culture was the creation of separate cultural spheres for locals and colonizers that existed alongside the shared economic sector. In fact, the withholding of local valuables was another strategy used by the indigenous population to actively create a new identity for itself within the developing colonial society.

### CREATIVE COLONIALISM

Ethnographic collections are crucial elements for understanding the social relations of exchange in colonial contexts because they represent the tangible evidence of how indigenous people themselves selected, created, and reworked their material culture strategically and pragmatically. Our assemblage-based analysis of museum collections made in the formative years of the colony (c. 1875–1925) reveals a period of flux, uncertainty, experimentation, and creativity as indigenous Papuans and Europeans alike negotiated the cultural, social, and political challenges posed by colonial rule. Our analysis supports and builds on the model of colonial society in Papua New Guinea set out by Gosden and Knowles. In *Collecting Colonialism: Material Culture and Colonial Change* (2001), they outlined how cross-cultural relationships in colonial society during 1910–1940 on the island of New Britain revolved around forms of exchange. Their key conclusions that “colonialism in New Guinea created a new culture which joined all parties through continuing social relations” and that “objects were crucial to these relations” (2001:10) are echoed in our study. Although our analysis has identified strategies adopted at an earlier time period and in a different region of Papua New Guinea, the study of museum collections has provided specific examples of how emergent colonial culture is locally situated within negotiations over material objects.

Although our analysis supports the emphasis by Gosden and Knowles (2001) on the nature of colonial culture in Papua New Guinea as a shared rather than as an imposed or hybrid entity, the earlier collections in Central Province highlight some key differences with the New Britain colony. The

collections that Gosden and Knowles studied were made well into the colonial period, when relations between the indigenous population and white government officials, plantation owners, and managers had become quite formalized and, as they note, were often focused around performances whose procedures and rules had evolved over time. By that stage, the two sectors of society were carefully segregated, and much cultural work was focused on maintaining differences. In contrast, in Central Province in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth, the local people and new arrivals were still sizing each other up and trying to find ways to interact. The early visitors were also heavily dependent on local populations for the basic necessities of life, such as food and water, and for access to land for exploration or exploitation. At this stage, material culture constituted an important medium of exchange that opened up other avenues for interaction. Consequently, the initial stage of social interaction was characterized by experimentation on the part of both groups.

The strategies employed by indigenous groups in Central Province, Papua New Guinea, to extend their opportunities for engagement with foreign traders (i.e., attraction, assertion of identity, and withholding) illustrate the material pragmatism that characterized the social relations surrounding trade and exchange in early colonial culture. What is especially interesting is that many of the experiments and innovations we have documented in this chapter took place as early as the 1880s, not long after Westerners began systematic trading in the Central Province region. The creation of totally new items of material culture together with the copying of valued items may have had further implications for the indigenous societies that were engaging in active barter with outsiders. Both the inventions and the replicas are likely to have been manufactured by people who lacked experience, perhaps because they did not possess the traditional rights to make or use the artifacts that they were substituting, such as the mouth ornaments used in sorcery. In this sense, then, the innovations represented in the Central Province museum collections might have caused disruptions to patterns of traditional social life. Furthermore, the use of tattoo designs to decorate items like tobacco pipes shows that there was a self-conscious attempt to assert particular local and probably clan identities. The application of these designs to new materials might also have reflected back on traditional practices and local conceptions of identity. Even if the practices we have recognized had only minor local effects, they opened the way for further changes, such as the construction of new identities within the emerging colonial culture.

Were the innovations and experiments illustrated in the museum

collections initiated solely by indigenous people, or did traders such as Captain Liljeblad play a role by perhaps suggesting items to copy, particular substitutions, or even new objects to manufacture? Probably this question can never be fully answered, but identification of the specific origins of the innovations, while intriguing, is not essential. What is more important is the simple observation that increased interaction and negotiation through barter contributed to the beginnings of a new culture in Central Province that was shared by both colonizers and locals and that this was characterized by many forms of innovation and experimentation.

The starting point for our research was the somewhat obvious, but nonetheless profound, observation that ethnographic objects in museum collections owe their origins to the indigenous artifact producers and those who offered them up for barter or sale to various Western explorers, scientists, missionaries, traders, government officials, and adventurers. The creator communities are the ones who, through interactions with outsiders, made decisions about what social links were desirable, which items were appropriate for exchange, and, increasingly through time, how trade goods should be manufactured and decorated. If we capitalize on the simple notion that museum collections are just as much the tangible outcomes of indigenous action as they are a product of Western activities of classification and collecting, then analyses of these intriguing assemblages will produce richer histories of cross-cultural engagement and negotiation.

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