

Beyond bridge and barrier: Reconceptualising Torres Strait as a co-constructed border zone in ethnographic object distributions between Queensland and New Guinea

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Abstract

For over 200 years, Western scholarship has presented Torres Strait variously as a bridge and barrier to cultural influences between mainland New Guinea and Australia. An alternative approach is to see Torres Strait as neither a bridge (permeable boundary) nor a barrier (impervious boundary) but as a socially and culturally co-constructed *border zone*. Central to this new approach is conceptualisation of the Coral Sea Cultural Interaction Sphere (CSCIS) that centres on a series of ethnographically-known, canoe-based, long-distance maritime exchange networks that linked communities and information on objects over a distance of 2000 km along the south coast of Papua New Guinea and the northeast coast of Australia. The CSCIS emphasises Indigenous agency and the shared/selective uptake of objects and ideas by potential recipient communities across Torres Strait and their New Guinea neighbours to the north and mainland Australian neighbours to the south. Object distribution maps created using data derived from anthropological texts and museum online catalogues reveal continuities and discontinuities in the distribution of selected objects across the study area. These maps illustrate three forms of object uptake: (1) shared uptake of double-outrigger canoes and bamboo smoking pipes between New Guinea, Torres Strait and Australia; (2) selective uptake of dog-tooth necklaces and cone shell armbands between New Guinea and Torres Strait and not Australia; and (3) selective uptake of nautilus bead headbands and shell-handled spearthrowers between Australia and Torres Strait and not New Guinea. Archaeological evidence for temporal changes in the geographical spread of pottery indicates that the CSCIS was historically dynamic, with numerous reconfigurations over the past 3000 years. Enhanced understanding of the CSCIS requires the addition of contemporary Indigenous perspectives.

Introduction

One of the most celebrated waterways in the anthropological world is Torres Strait, the 150 km-wide stretch of sea separating the mainlands of New Guinea and Australia. This celebrated status owes much to the famous 1898 Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits led by Alfred Haddon (Herle and Rouse 1998). The Strait was also represented as the world's most clear-cut cultural boundary between the agricultural world to the north (Melanesia) and the hunter-gatherer world to the south (Aboriginal Australia) (Harris 1995). As museum shelves rapidly filled with ethnographic objects during the nineteenth century, it became apparent that Torres Strait was also a major boundary for object distributions. That is, many objects were restricted in distribution to New Guinea, others restricted to Australia, while some object types spanned Torres Strait and continued across adjacent regions of New Guinea and Australia. The complex boundary role of Torres Strait was encapsulated in the phrase 'bridge and barrier'. This phrase, coined in the early 1970s, was the theme for the Torres Strait Symposium held at the Australian National University in Canberra in 1971 'to assemble the facts relevant to the supposed significance of Torres Strait as a biological and ethnic frontier' (Walker 1972a:vii).

This paper critically examines the heuristic value of conceptualising Torres Strait as a cultural 'bridge and barrier'. On both theoretical and empirical grounds, the 'bridge and barrier' concept needs an overhaul and would be better served by conceiving of Torres Strait as a 'border zone' co-constructed as a result of maritime exchange interactions between Torres Strait Islanders and New Guinea peoples to the north and Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal peoples

to the south. I illustrate the heuristic value of the 'border zone' concept through a series of case studies demonstrating continuities and discontinuities in the distribution of ethnographic objects between New Guinea, Torres Strait and northeast Australia (i.e. Cape York Peninsula).

I argue that broad-scale sharing of cultural traits on both sides of Torres Strait resulted from linking of New Guinea, Torres Strait and Cape York Peninsula communities through a continuous series of canoe-based, long-distance maritime exchange networks underpinning what I term the 'Coral Sea Cultural Interaction Sphere' (McNiven 2021a). As such, shared (continuous) cultural traits between New Guinea, Torres Strait and Cape York Peninsula expressed shared acceptance and uptake of these traits. Alternatively, restriction of selected 'Papuan' cultural traits to New Guinea and Torres Strait expressed rejection of these traits by Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal peoples, whilst restriction of selected Aboriginal cultural traits to Cape York Peninsula and Torres Strait expressed rejection of these traits by New Guinea communities. In each of these scenarios, continuities and discontinuities in the distribution of ethnographic objects between New Guinea, Torres Strait and Cape York Peninsula were the result of communities exercising agency in cultural trait acceptance and rejection. I conclude that the Coral Sea Cultural Interaction Sphere was historically dynamic with numerous re-configurations over the past 3000 years.

Bridge and Barrier (Re)conceptualised

Over the past two centuries, Western scientific theorising on the role of Torres Strait as marking a meaningful boundary between the cultural domains of Melanesian New Guinea and Aboriginal Australia have emphasised cultural essentialism

and downplayed Indigenous agency. Most theorising concerned whether Torres Strait operated as either a barrier or bridge to the movement of cultural ideas between the two continental land masses. The following discussion critically examines how different paradigms, usually underpinned by colonialist and hierarchical representations of Indigenous peoples and cultures, have variously employed the bridge and barrier concepts. This discussion sets the scene for a new paradigm that reconceptualises Torres Strait as a co-constructed border zone that emphasises Indigenous choice and agency.

Cultural Barrier

The sentiment of Torres Strait as a bridge and barrier to the distribution of cultural phenomena was born in the nineteenth century with a dubious pedigree. Torres Strait as a *barrier* was the dominant view of nineteenth century anthropologists interested in macro-scale cultural patterns and the distribution of cultural phenomena between New Guinea and Australia. That is, Australia and New Guinea were conceptualised as two very different cultural realms with Torres Strait seen as an impervious boundary. The research paradigm was *essentialism* with a racialised (and indeed often racist) research agenda fixated on documenting so-called deep-seated cultural, biological, intellectual and moral differences between the Indigenous peoples of New Guinea and Australia. In this guise, Torres Strait was configured as a racial boundary separating New Guinea peoples to the north (classified variously as ‘Papuan’, ‘Melanesian’ or ‘Negroid’) from Aboriginal peoples of mainland Australia to the south (classified variously as ‘Australian’ or ‘Australoid’) (e.g. Howitt 1904:15, 28; Huxley 1870; Keane 1896:281; Prichard 1847:4; Topinard 1878:495). Torres Strait Islanders were seen as physically and culturally different to the Australian race and part of the Papuan race (Earl 1853:189, 238; Haddon 1890:388, 1935:410; Howitt 1904:3; Jukes 1847:I:295-297, II:232, 236; Keane 1896:283; MacGillivray 1852:I:275, II:2-3, 79-83), ‘Negroid’ (Huxley 1870:406) or Melanesian race (Haddon 1901:18) (see also Howes 2013:140-141, 149; Mulvaney 1966).

During the nineteenth century, Western scholarship conceived of Torres Strait as one of the most important cultural boundaries in the world. As first noted by Lt. James Cook in 1770, Torres Strait Islanders practiced plant cultivation (agriculture and horticulture) in common with New Guinea whereas Australia was a continent of hunter-gatherers (e.g. Cook 1770; Curr 1886:78-79; Gerritsen 2008). The absence of pottery (e.g. Smyth 1878:I:xxxvii; Wallace 1879:93; Wood 1870:16) and the bow and arrow (e.g. Lubbock 1865:350; Wallace 1879:94) in Australia marked Aboriginal peoples as fundamentally different to the rest of the world in terms of technological development. Again, Torres Strait marked this technological boundary. As scholars of the colonial history of anthropology and archaeology know well, such essentialised differences were expressions of the theoretical paradigm of social evolutionism. In short, Aboriginal Australians were seen as less developed and less advanced compared to their northern New Guinea neighbours (e.g. Anderson 2007; Ballard 2008; David and Denham 2006; Douglas 2008, 2014; Godsen and Head 1999; McNiven 2006, 2020; McNiven and Russell 2005).

Cultural Bridge

Despite the popularity of Torres Strait as a cultural barrier amongst late nineteenth century anthropologists, certain New Guinea objects moved southwards in canoes through Torres Strait to Australia. For example, Aboriginal peoples of Cape York (northeastern tip of mainland Australia) obtained bows and arrows through exchange from neighbouring Torres Strait Islanders to the north (e.g. Gregory 1886:133; Smyth 1878:I:182; Wood 1870:46-47; Worsnop 1897:123). Indeed, seeing Torres Strait as a cultural *bridge* grew in popularity amongst anthropologists during the first half of the twentieth century as evidence mounted for the north-to-south movement of selected classes of ethnographic objects from New Guinea to Australia. Ronald Hamlyn-Harris (1915:10) noted that ‘More writers than one have referred to presumed Papuan culture on Cape York Peninsula, and the list of objects illustrating it is now a formidable one’. Couched in a classic colonialist and pejorative trope, Hamlyn-Harris (1915:10) added: ‘The Queensland aboriginal [sic] was never an inventive genius, and his implements and weapons are remarkably constant, but that he is a born mimic and imitator is very apparent’.

Cultural Diffusion

The idea of Torres Strait as a permeable boundary to cultural diffusion increasingly developed through the twentieth century. However, the notion of Torres Strait as a one-way bridge for the north-to-south movement of cultural traits and certain classes of objects became entrenched. The research paradigm was *diffusionism* with a research agenda focused on documenting the transfer of so-called ‘advanced’ cultural traits (and objects) from New Guinea into Australia. A major exponent of this diffusionist approach was Fred McCarthy at the Australian Museum in Sydney. McCarthy (1940) listed over 50 cultural traits (mostly different types of objects) forming part of Aboriginal Australian cultures, especially those in north Queensland, which he interpreted as being ‘introduced’ from ‘New Guinea via Torres Strait’. On the surface, some objects on his list are plausible candidates for a New Guinea origin, such as outrigger canoes, bows and arrows, and fishhooks. In other cases, the list includes cultural traits whose New Guinea origin was hypothetical, such as stone axes, multi-pronged spears, shell containers and bullroarers. Herbert Noone (who was a colleague of McCarthy) quipped: ‘So much evidence has been put forward to indicate that the Australian aboriginal [sic] has brought, or borrowed, many traits of his culture from overseas sources, that one is led to look for anything of his that is left’ (1943:279). McCarthy believed that no examples existed of south-to-north movement of objects or cultural traits of Aboriginal origin diffusing from Australia into New Guinea via Torres Strait.

Cultural Interaction

During the late twentieth century, the idea of Torres Strait as a one-way bridge for cultural diffusion was given a makeover by anthropologists and archaeologists. In its new guise, Torres Strait was a two-way permeable boundary with a research paradigm emphasising cultural *interaction* and a research agenda focused on examining gradual or clinal changes in cultural differences between New Guinea and Australia. For example, Peter White (1971:187) suggested that subsistence

practices reveal that ‘the Torres Strait area might be characterised in many aspects as a transition zone, for there is clearly no sharp break between Papuan agriculturalists and Australian hunter-gatherers’. At the 1971 Torres Strait (bridge and barrier) multidisciplinary symposium, Jeremy Beckett (1972) similarly pointed out that previous ideas on cultural differences between Aboriginal and Papuan societies had been overstated and based on spurious ‘stereotypes’ and ‘defective data’. A few years later, David Harris (1977) produced new ethnographic evidence demonstrating that the old idea of a dichotomy between Melanesian ‘horticulturalists’ and Aboriginal ‘hunter-gatherers’ was simplistic and did ‘more to obscure than to clarify the real complexity of traditional subsistence economies’ between New Guinea and Australia (see also Lourandos 1980). This revised view has continued to be supported by ethnographic evidence showing that numerous groups across New Guinea collected so-called ‘wild’ plants whilst numerous Aboriginal groups across Cape York Peninsula modified the growing conditions of numerous plant resources, including the planting and ‘cultivation’ of yams (e.g. Hynes and Chase 1982; Roscoe 2002). As Harry Lourandos (1988:152) stated, ‘many Australian hunter-gatherers differ mainly in terms of degree, and not kind, from New Guinean hunter-horticulturalists’. In this sense, Torres Strait ‘has functioned neither as a barrier to, nor as a bridge for, the ‘transmission’ of agriculture into Australia’ (Harris 1995:854). In short, ‘the notion of an expansive agricultural frontier resisted by northern Australian hunter-gatherers, is not supported’ empirically (Florin and Carah 2018:53).

Cultural Filter

James Baldwin (1976:11) rightly pointed out that selective movement of cultural traits from New Guinea to mainland Australia indicated that Torres Strait was ‘no single incontestable boundary line separating Australian and Melanesian peoples’. He hypothesised that the ‘Torres Strait trade system’ mediated interactions between Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal Australians such that exposure of Cape York Aboriginal peoples to Papuan cultural traits was selective. As such, ‘Perhaps the best way to view the Torres Strait trade system is as a “cultural filter,” allowing certain culture traits to pass through and diffuse into Australia, but blocking the passage of others’ (Baldwin 1976:16). In short, Baldwin (1976:16) argued that the Torres Strait trade system ensured that Aboriginal people were ‘denied access’ to a range of Papuan cultural traits. The ‘cultural filter’ model was endorsed by Anthony Barham and David Harris (1983:529, 541), adding that it underpins how ‘Torres Strait has functioned in the past in its dual role as a cultural bridge and barrier’. I agree that engagement with the Torres Strait ‘trade system’ was an important process whereby Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal peoples were exposed to Papuan traits. However, David Lawrence’s (1994:289) detailed reassessment of Torres Strait exchange reveals that the notion of a formalised and rigid trade system is ‘fundamentally incorrect’. Instead, customary exchange across Torres Strait was much more ‘flexible and open, tied to changing social, political and cultural factors’ (Lawrence 1994:241). It was about the movement of objects and ideas and the cementing of personal and kin-based social relationships, often through marriage. Visitor and host negotiated the list of objects and ideas exchanged through intense social interaction. Such a

social context is antithetical to hosts being ‘denied access’ to the cultural repertoire (e.g. objects) of their visitors.

Cultural Border Zone

My feeling is that ideas of Torres Strait as a ‘bridge’, ‘barrier’, and/or ‘filter’ need a theoretical overhaul, particularly because none of these concepts adequately explain similarities and differences in the distribution of objects between New Guinea and Australia. However, by overhaul I do not wish to throw the proverbial baby out with the bathwater. Aspects of diffusionism and interaction remain useful and relevant. Missing from past approaches, however, is the notion of *agency* and giving greater emphasis to people and communities deciding to accept or reject cultural traits and controlling the degree to which different classes of objects were shared between New Guinea and Australia (see Rowland 2018:230). It is unlikely that Cape York Aboriginal peoples were ‘denied access’ to ‘Papuan’ cultural traits by Torres Strait Islanders given the extensive canoe-based voyaging interactions that took place between both groups (see below). Uptake of ‘Papuan’ cultural traits was not a case of restricted access but a matter of choice. As Josephine Flood (1983:224) rightly noted, Cape York Aboriginal peoples ‘were selective, taking what was most useful or appealing from overseas, but rejecting other items’. This issue of choice also extended to the exposure of New Guinea peoples to Aboriginal cultural traits via Torres Strait.

Torres Strait takes centre stage with the agency paradigm but neither as a bridge (permeable boundary) nor barrier (impervious boundary) but as a socially and culturally co-constructed *border zone*. Whereas in the past emphasis was placed more on the importance of differential exposure and access to objects and ideas, the border zone approach emphasises the acceptance or rejection of such objects and ideas by potential recipient communities across Torres Strait and their New Guinea neighbours to the north and mainland Australian neighbours to the south. This new emphasis on cultural choice and the agency of recipient communities is an acknowledgement that sharing of objects and ideas was the norm across Torres Strait. Indeed, I argue that such cultural sharing facilitated by sea-based mobility, interaction and networking operated at a geographical scale well beyond Torres Strait and included the southern coast of Papua New Guinea and the northeast coast of Queensland.

Coral Sea Cultural Interaction Sphere

In 2004, I coined the concept of the ‘Coral Sea Cultural Interaction Sphere’ (CSCIS) (McNiven et al. 2004:284-285). The CSCIS is a heuristic framework to explore the way peoples in north Queensland and southern Papua New Guinea shared information on objects and ideas via Torres Strait. The basis of the CSCIS is a series of ethnographically-known, canoe-based voyaging, and long-distance exchange networks that linked communities along more than 2000 km of coastline. That is, the 1200 km-long coastline of southern Papua New Guinea, the 150 km-wide Torres Strait, and the east coast of north Queensland extending south from Cape York for at least 600 km to Lizard Island. McCarthy (1939:179-191, Fig. 15) first detailed and linked these long-distance exchange networks (‘trunk trade routes’) as the basis for the diffusion of cultural traits from New Guinea into northeast Australia via Torres Strait. Trunk trade routes extended along coastlines and connected with trunk trade

routes that extended well inland along rivers. These maritime voyaging and exchange networks provide the mechanism for the movement, sharing, and exchange of ideas and objects across southern New Guinea and northeast Australia. Cultural choice informed by cultural beliefs and values provide the process for selective uptake of cultural practices and ensuing continuities and discontinuities in object distributions between New Guinea and Australia. This mechanism and process provides the basis of my notion of Torres Strait as a co-constructed cultural border zone.

Canoe-Based Voyaging Networks

Six major canoe-based voyaging exchange networks and numerous small exchange networks linked communities along the 2000 km of coast comprising the CSCIS (Figure 1). First, the Massim network focused on islands off the southeast tip of mainland Papua New Guinea. This exchange network, dominated by the famous *kula* exchange (Irwin et al. 2019:Fig. 1; Leach 1983:Map 1; Malinowski 1922; Macintyre and Allen 1990:Figs 4-6), articulated with the southeast coast of mainland Papua New Guinea (Mailu region) by inland and coastal exchange routes (Tuetting 1935:24-26). Second, the Mailu network linked coastal communities of the southeast coast of Papua New Guinea with the Massim region to the east (Irwin 1978, 1985). Mailu seafarers undertook trading expeditions that extended from Mailu Island westwards for ~170 km to Maopa (just east of Hood Bay) and eastwards for up to 530 km to Rossel Island (Saville 1926:152). As such, the Mailu and their trading partners linked mainland communities along the entire 350 km coastal strip from Hood Bay to the Papuan Tip (see also Chalmers 1887a:124-125; Malinowski 1915; Seligman 1910). Third, a Motu-Hood Bay network that emanated from Port Moresby and extended eastwards to Hood Bay (Skelly et al. 2018). According to Seligmann (1910:92), the Koita of the Port Moresby region undertook trade expeditions that extended eastwards for ~140 km to Aroma village (located 15 km east of Hood Bay). However, it is more likely that such trading involved the Motu and not the Koita (Oram 1982:9). Fourth, a Motu-Papuan Gulf network involving the Motu of the Port Moresby region who undertook their famous *hiri* trade expeditions in large multi-hulled *lagatoi* canoes through the Gulf of Papua (Barton 1910; Dutton 1978, 1982; Skelly and David 2017; Seligmann 1910). These trading expeditions extended westwards to the 'Purari Delta' (Oram 1982:5) and perhaps to Goaribari Island (Chester 1878:9; Stone 1880:64, 188; cf. Barker et al. 2012). Francis Williams (1924:125) added that the 'Urama and the Goaribari have sent a number of [trade] expeditions to the Purari Delta', a distance of around 100 km by sea. Leo Austin (cited in McCarthy 1939:185) noted that trade links between the Purari and Goaribari also extended westwards to the Bamu River and then onto the mouth of the Fly River and Mawatta opposite Torres Strait. He added that shells from Torres Strait have been traded eastwards as far as Goaribari (cited in McCarthy 1939:186; see also Rhoads and MacKenzie 1991:43). As Rob Skelly et al. (2018:184) point out, trading expeditions emanating from Port Moresby and Mailu linked villages across the Gulf and Central Provinces 'into a vast, articulating network of exchange that implicated much of the south coast and beyond'.

Fifth, a Torres Strait network that involved dozens of residential island communities and indirectly connected the adjacent mainland coasts of New Guinea to the north and

Australia to the south (Haddon 1890, 1904; Landtman 1927; Lawrence 1994; Moore 1978; Vanderwal 2004). The Top Western Islanders of Torres Strait also had exchange relationships with the Marind anim of the southeast corner of Papua province in Indonesia (McNiven 1998:107-109). Sixth, an eastern Cape York Peninsula network that extended from Torres Strait southwards for at least 600 km to Lizard Island (McNiven 2015a; McCarthy 1939:180-182; Mulvaney 1976). Alfred Haddon (1935:88) noted that Central Islanders of Torres Strait used to voyage southwards to visit 'islands off the east coast of Queensland, particularly the Sir Charles Hardy group and the Forbes Islands, whither they resorted every south-east season to live for a while and to barter'. According to the 'Koko Ya'o people of Lloyd Bay', Torres Strait Islanders 'came frequently in big canoes to Mitirindji (Quoin Island) off the mouth of the Pascoe River to obtain supplies of stone for their axes, and it is probable that tobacco was one of the important articles of exchange brought down during these voyages' (Thomson 1939:82). Quoin Island and the Sir Charles Hardy/Forbes Groups are located around 200 km southeast of Cape York. All of this ethnographic information on exchange networks reinforces Mike Rowland's (1995:9) comment that 'a chain of trade networks did link Papuans of the Gulf with the Aboriginal groups of Cape York'.

David Moore (1978:323-324) argued that little historical evidence exists for either long-distance voyaging along the west coast of Cape York Peninsula or Torres Strait Islander sailing expeditions down the west coast. He was of the opinion that 'the undoubted Torres Strait influences down both coasts of the Peninsula were carried more by intertribal land contacts than by direct contact with Islanders arriving by sea' (Moore 1978:324). Yet, Ursula McConnel (1953:3), who undertook extensive anthropological fieldwork with Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal communities, stated that 'It is not surprising, therefore, to find cultural similarities existing also between the [Torres Strait] Islands and the Cape York mainland, particularly where direct contact by canoe has been made ... This external influence extends further south on the eastern coast than on the western Gulf coast, because the eastern coast is more accessible by canoe'. Barham and Harris (1983:538) concurred, stating that the double outrigger canoe of Torres Strait Islanders 'was presumably the principal means by which northern ideas and artefacts penetrated the Peninsula'. Rowland (1987:42) similarly argued that 'The extent of canoe penetration from Papua New Guinea into Australia is of crucial importance since canoe transport may have provided the major mechanism for the introduction of other items of material culture' (see also Barham 2000:233). The interlinking of these six major exchange networks along the south coast of New Guinea and along the east coast of Cape York Peninsula indicates that it was theoretically possible for objects and/or ideas about objects to exhibit shared uptake along the entire 2000 km length of the CSCIS.

Mapping Object Distributions

In the second half of this paper, I use a series of ethnographic examples to illustrate how certain types of objects are geographically pervasive (due to broadscale shared uptake) along the length of the CSCIS while other types of objects are geographically restricted (due to selective uptake). I have divided the examples into three different groups: first, objects with shared uptake between New Guinea, Torres Strait and



Figure 1. Ethnographically known maritime exchange networks along southern Papua New Guinea and northeast Australia linking communities along more than 2000 km of coastline. Maritime exchange networks underpinned the Coral Sea Cultural Interaction Sphere over the past 3000 years.

north Queensland; second, objects with selective uptake between New Guinea and Torres but not north Queensland; and third, objects with selective uptake between Torres Strait and north Queensland but not New Guinea. Each object type is associated with a distribution map showing the location of individual examples of objects (marked by a dot).

The object distributional data and associated maps were assembled using a wide range of anthropological and ethnographic literature (e.g. books and journal articles), along with keyword searches of numerous museum online catalogues in Australia and overseas. I consulted numerous museum online catalogues in Australia (University of Queensland Anthropology Museum in Brisbane, South Australian Museum in Adelaide, Macleay Museum in Sydney, Museums Victoria in Melbourne, and Museum of Australia in Canberra), New Zealand (Auckland Museum), United Kingdom (British Museum and Horniman Museum in London, Archaeology and Anthropology Museum in Cambridge, Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, Bristol Museum, and National Museums Scotland in Edinburgh), Europe (Tropenmuseum and Museum Volkekunde in Leiden, Musée du quai Branly in Paris, and Musée d'Ethnographie in Genève), Canada (University of British Columbia Anthropology Museum in Vancouver), and USA (Peabody Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and American Museum of Natural History in New York City, Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC, Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell University in New York, Phoebe Hearst Museum of Anthropology in Berkeley, Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture in Seattle, University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Philadelphia, Bowers Museum in Orange County, and Wake Forest University Anthropology Museum in Winston-Salem).

The resulting distribution maps provide a 'big picture' view of object distributions, although they are in some respects an artefact of where objects have been documented/collected. As Barry Craig (2005:497) cogently noted, 'there are huge gaps in the literature. There is a need for many more studies of specific material cultures and how they are linked with neighbouring cultures through gift exchange, trade, marriage, warfare, migration and the like'. My database of hundreds of plotted object locations is under construction and continues to grow as I obtain access to more museum catalogues.

A key ethical challenge for any large-scale cultural survey of objects covering a study area that encompasses three countries and nearly 1000 language groups is object confidentiality and contemporary community input, voices and perspectives. In terms of object confidentiality, no objects used in this paper are known to be of a secret-sacred nature. Furthermore, most museum online catalogues of ethnographic objects state explicitly that online users should exercise cultural and personal discretion in viewing objects and that strict cultural protocols prohibit display of culturally sensitive objects (e.g. human remains and objects with human remains). Some museums (e.g. Queensland Museum) do not allow use of object distribution data without demonstrated community permission. The absence of direct and explicit community input is an acknowledged limitation of this study. While most ethnographic sources cited in this paper describe objects based on direct observation of use and discussion with local community members, individual voices are invariably silenced in most early ethnographic studies; however, exceptions do exist (e.g. Haddon 1935). In the case of museum objects, it needs to be acknowledged that these 'were acquired through stealing, looting, confiscating, punishing and other nefarious means. But they were also gifted,

commissioned, bought and traded – albeit often, although not always, in situations of unequal power produced by colonisation’ (Sculthorpe et al. 2021:19).

Shared Uptake – New Guinea, Torres Strait and North Queensland

Ethnographic objects with a pervasive geographical distribution across New Guinea, Torres Strait, and north Queensland are consistent with Torres Strait Islanders facilitating the shared uptake of these objects between the continental landmasses of Australia and New Guinea. Two object types illustrate this broad-scale uptake: double outrigger canoes and bamboo smoking pipes.

Double Outrigger Canoes

In the broader study region, the largest area for double outrigger canoes is Torres Strait and the northern half of Cape York Peninsula, with isolated occurrences in western West Papua and eastern Papua New Guinea (Figure 2). The key published source of information on New Guinea, Torres Strait and Cape York Peninsula double outrigger canoes is Haddon (1937). In Indonesian New Guinea, dugout canoes fitted with double outriggers were restricted to Waigu Island located off the northwest coast of the Bird’s Head (Haddon 1937:328-330) and Cenderawasih (Geelvink) Bay located to the east of the Bird’s Head (Haddon 1937:324-326; Held 1957:Fig. 31). In Papua New Guinea, double outrigger canoes occurred on Nissan Island located east of New Ireland (Haddon 1937:116) and possibly in the Louisiade Archipelago in the southeast (Haddon 1937:254; but see Wood 2018:220), and along the southwest coast opposite Torres Strait to the Fly River mouth (Haddon 1900:426). All Torres Strait Islander communities employed these vessels (McNiven 2015b). Coastal Aboriginal peoples of Cape York Peninsula also used double outrigger canoes. On the east coast, they were recorded at Cape Grenville (Roth 1910a:11), from Night Island (near Lockhart River) to Claremont Point (near Stewart River) (Roth 1910a:12-13, Fig. 11; Thomson 1934a:243-244, Pl. XXIX, 1952:2), and the Stewart River region (Hale and Tindale 1934:120-121; Thomson 1956:36). On the west coast of Cape York Peninsula, double outrigger canoes occurred at the mouth of the Batavia River (Haddon 1937:186, Fig. 113c; Roth 1910a:11-12, Fig. 10, Pl.VI.1) down to the Edward River (McConnel 1930:104, 1953:24-25). Further to the southwest, peoples of the Wellesley Islands in the southern Gulf of Carpentaria employed double outrigger canoes following contact with missionaries in the early twentieth century (Allen 1980:97; Memmott 2010:86, 91).

Mid-nineteenth century European mariners documented Torres Strait Islanders voyaging southwards down the east coast of Cape York Peninsula (McNiven 2015a:51). It is safe to assume that such observations are a proxy for the southern extent of double outrigger canoes because Torres Strait Islanders only voyaged in such vessels (McNiven 2015b). John MacGillivray (1852:II:15) observed double outrigger canoes extending from Cape York southwards for a distance of nearly 900 km to Fitzroy Island near Cairns. Oral histories of Torres Strait Islanders also document voyaging up to 600 km south of Cape York to Lizard Island (Laade 1969:39, 1973:159).

The use of double outrigger canoes by Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal peoples was due to ‘Papuan influence’

according to anthropologists (e.g. Davidson 1935:12; Edwards 1972:14; Haddon 1937:190-193; Hale and Tindale 1934:121; McCarthy 1940:268, 297; McConnel 1953:9, 25; Rose 1987:67; Spencer 1922:73; Thomson 1934b:233, 1952; Wood 2018:214-215). This view is also widely accepted by archaeologists (e.g. Beaton 1985:18; Flood 1983:223; Golson 1972:392; Lourandos 1997:47; Mulvaney and Kamminga 1999:322; Rowland 1987, 2018). It often assumed that the ultimate origin of double outrigger canoes in New Guinea is Island Southeast Asia (particularly Indonesia), with their presence in Torres Strait attributed to westerly influences via the south coast of West Papua (Doran 1981:92; Wood 2018) or easterly influences from Island Melanesia (Haddon 1920:122; Wood 2018).

However, it is clear from Figure 2 that Australia (Torres Strait and Cape York Peninsula), at least in the recent past, was the key area for double outrigger canoes and not Papua New Guinea. Such a geographical focus is in many respects more consistent with an ‘endogenous’ development, possibly focused on Torres Strait (Barham 2000:249). As Rowland (1995:11) noted, ‘without chronological control it is difficult to determine whether out-riggers were invented in Papua New Guinea and the concept transferred to Australia or vice versa; or if out-riggers were independently invented in both areas’. Whatever the case, Torres Strait and the adjacent coast of Papua New Guinea to the immediate north and adjacent coastline of Cape York Peninsula to the south shared a tradition of double outrigger canoe manufacture and use.

Bamboo Smoking Pipes

Bamboo smoking pipes occur widely across New Guinea and Torres Strait with their distribution continuing southwards along more than 1000 km of the northeast coast of Queensland (Figure 2). The key published source of information on New Guinea and Torres Strait smoking pipes is Haddon (1946). For Indonesian New Guinea, additional published sources are available mostly for the Asmat on the south coast (e.g. Konrad et al. 1996). Across northern Papua New Guinea, supplementary sources take in the Highlands (e.g. Blackwood 1978:58-62; Boylan 2017a:276, 2017b:398; Lemonnier 2017:197; Sillitoe and Sillitoe 2017:485), and the Upper Sepik and Torricelli and Star Mountains (Craig 1990, 2017, 2018; Cranstone 1990:47-48). South of the Highlands, supplementary sources are available for the south coast (e.g. Crawford 1981:376; Lawrence 1994:443; Vele 2018) and Fly River basin (e.g. Quinnell 1983:142, 144; Schaffarczyk 2008:Appendix 7, 29). The additional source for bamboo smoking pipes in Torres Strait is Moore (1979:281-282, 1984:51, 56, 93, Pls 11, 20, 71).

Major sources of ethnographic information on bamboo smoking pipe use by Cape York Aboriginal people are Herbert Hale and Norman Tindale (1934) and Donald Thomson (1939). The southern-most known example of a bamboo smoking pipe was obtained from Aboriginal people of the Russell River located immediately south of Cairns (located 900 km south of Cape York) in the late nineteenth century (Hamlyn-Harris 1915:11). The geographical distribution of these objects matches in many respects the distribution of bamboo plants. That is, mainland Queensland’s two native species of bamboo (*Mullerochloa moreheadiana* and *Neololeba atra*) occur along the east coast of Cape York Peninsula and co-occur down to Tully located approximately 1000 km south of Cape York (Franklin 2008).

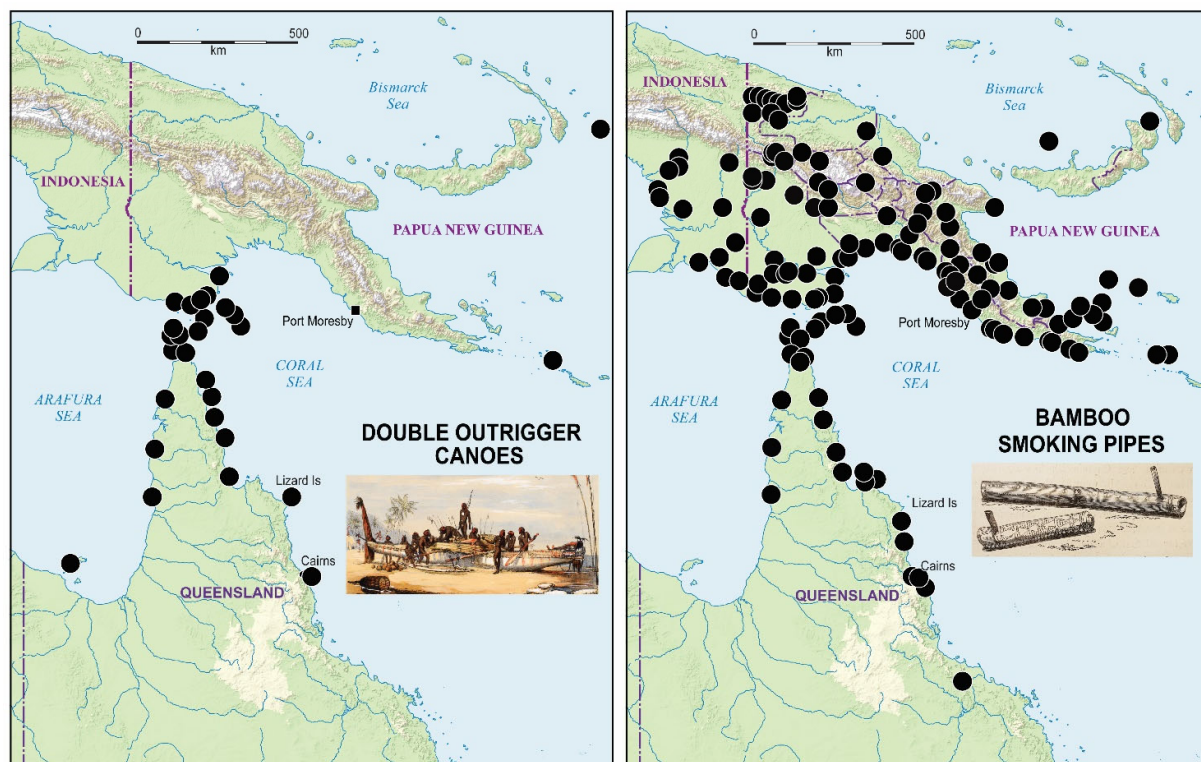


Figure 2. Left: Distribution of double outrigger canoes across the study area (Inset: Torres Strait canoe from Melville 1849:Pl. XIX). Right: Distribution of bamboo smoking pipes across the study area (Inset: Torres Strait bamboo pipes from Jukes 1847:I:165).

Hale and Tindale (1934:144) added that ‘all the coastal tribes of Princess Charlotte Bay depend upon drift-bamboo for their supply, and as the current which carries this to their shores operates only for a limited period each year these pipes are prized, are used for long periods, and, if necessary, are repaired with wax or gum’. The anthropological consensus is that manufacture and use of bamboo smoking pipes by Cape York Aboriginal peoples is a result of New Guinea (‘Papuan’) influence via Torres Strait (e.g. Flood 1983:223; Haddon 1935:304; Hamlyn-Harris 1915:11; MacGillivray 1852:I:126; McCarthy 1940:268, 298; Moseley 1879:356; Thomson 1939:83; Thorpe 1926:491-492). While a Papuan origin is plausible, this conclusion remains far from demonstrated. If correct, it indicates broad-scale sharing of the practice of smoking using bamboo pipes between New Guinea and northeast Australia and a decision by Cape York Aboriginal peoples to take up this practice.

Selective Uptake – New Guinea and Torres Strait (and not North Queensland)

Objects with a restricted geographical distribution across New Guinea and Torres Strait (but not north Queensland), or north Queensland and Torres Strait (but not New Guinea), are consistent with mainland communities flanking Torres Strait to the south and north respectively rejecting the uptake of these objects for a broad range of social and cultural reasons. Dog tooth body adornments and *Conus* armbands provide two informative ethnographic examples of objects with selective uptake across New Guinea and Torres Strait but not north Queensland.

Dog Tooth Body Adornments

Across the island of New Guinea, especially in Papua New Guinea, many groups use dog tooth body adornments, usually in the form of necklaces or pectorals associated with marriage payments and gift exchanges (Figure 3). Distributional details on dog tooth body adornments across New Guinea and Torres Strait are provided as no published overview of these objects is available (Table 1). Dog tooth body adornments were made and traded across many regions of New Guinea, including Indonesian Papua/West Papua and Papua New Guinea.

Within Australia, use of dog tooth valuables is limited to Torres Strait and most were imported from New Guinea. Leila McAdam’s (2008:450) survey of tooth adornments made and used by Aboriginal Australians revealed no examples made from dog teeth. Indeed, tooth objects are unknown for Cape York Peninsula (McAdam 2008:449). A rare literary reference is F. Thompson and William Chatfield (1886:471) who noted that Aboriginal people of Natal Downs Station at Cape River located 200 km southwest of Townsville in Queensland wore ‘chaplets of the teeth of wild dogs or kangaroo’ during ‘corroborees’. James Edge-Partington (1898:132.16) illustrates a ‘charm’ consisting of a ball of resin to which is attached a dog’s tooth via a short length of string thought to be provenanced to the Kimberley region of northern Western Australia. This charm was the only dog tooth object listed by Kim Akerman (2018) in his overview of ethnographic use of bone, shell, and teeth body adornments by Aboriginal Australians. Walter Roth (1897:109) described a ‘tooth ornament’ made and used by Aboriginal people of northwest Queensland that was ‘formed of two kangaroo (rarely dingo) teeth’.

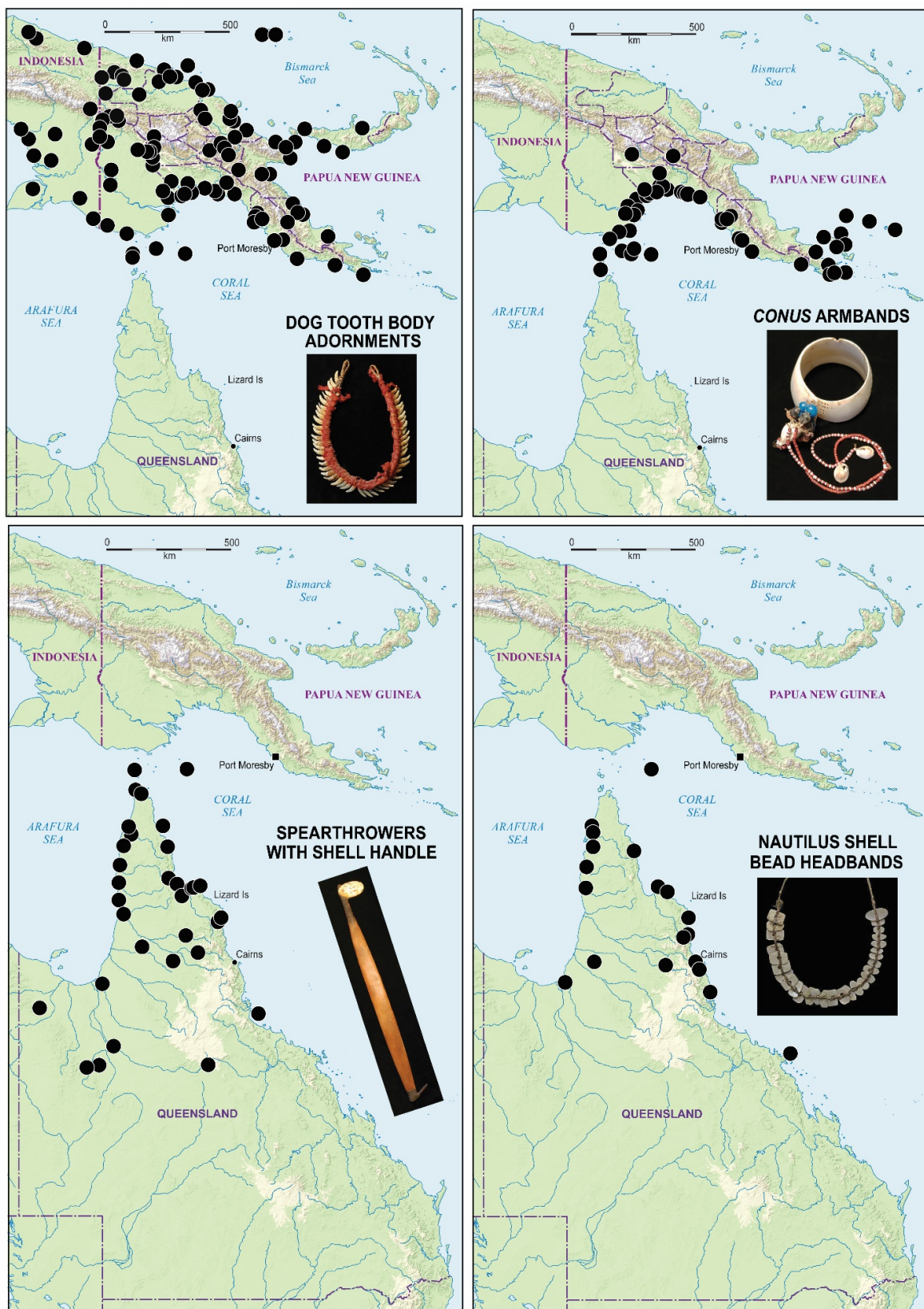


Figure 3. Top left: Distribution of dog tooth body adornments across the study area (Inset: dog tooth necklace, Gulf of Papua, private collection). Top right: Distribution of *Conus* armbands across the study area (Inset: *Conus* armband, Gulf of Papua, private collection). Bottom left: Distribution of shell-handled speargrowers across the study area (Inset: Cape York Peninsula speargrower, private collection). Bottom right: Distribution of small-bead nautilus shell headbands across the study area (Inset: Nautilus shell bead headband from the Mulgrave River region, Southeast Cape York Peninsula, British Museum Oc.1895,-.250 © The Trustees of the British Museum).

Table 1. Dog tooth body adornments across New Guinea and Torres Strait.

Region	References
Indonesian New Guinea (south coast)	Bergman (1961:Pl. 45); Corbey (2010:37); Gerbrands (1967:49, 51, 62, 66, 82, 85); Goo (1996:87); Helfrich (1996:39); Hoogerbrugge (2011:185, 189, 252, 257); Neverman (1939:16, Fig. 19); Serpenti (1977:177-178); Wirz (1922:x, Pls 9.1, 13.2)
Indonesian New Guinea (north coast and inland)	Austin (1923a:342); Boelaars (1981:56, 113, 158, 189); Brongersma and Venema (1962:80-81, 205, Pl. 13); Kirsch (2006:83); Kooijman (1959:Fig. 94, 1962:19); Oosterwal (1961:16); Schoorl (1976:10, 58, 60-61, 1993:86-89); Serpenti (1977:10, 177-178); van der Leeden (1962:97); van Nunen (1973:16)
Papua New Guinea (Highlands)	Austen (1923b:130); Ballard (1994:145); Blackwood (1978:50-51); Boylan (2017b:Fig. 12.25); Brown (1970:255, 1995:165); Cranstone (1971:136, 138, 1990:45); Ernst (1984:92, 231); Keil (1974:71); Kelly (1974:11-12, 215); Kooijman (1962:16); Oldham (1923:42); Schieffelin (1977:13-16); Schuurkamp (1995:190); Skelly (1919:70)
Papua New Guinea (Sepik River)	Daalder (2009:Fig. 137); Hogbin (1935:398, 402, 405); Lipset (2005); Mead (1938:193, 275, 319, 328); Somare (1974:32)
Papua New Guinea (Ramu River)	Conton and Eisler (1976); Edmundson and Boylan (1999:Pl. 31.3); Fortune (1998:144); Keil (1974:71, 174, 180, 184); Kaspruś (1973:33); Moyné and Haddon (1936:270, 274, 280); Smidt and Eoe (1999:Fig. 13.20); Welsch (1998:Fig. 4.11)
Papua New Guinea (north and northeast mainland coasts)	Beaver (1920a:97-98); Daalder (2009:Fig. 135); Harding (1967:49-52, 55, 128-133); Hogbin (1947); Hood (1936:26); Maaz (2016:273); MacGregor (1897a:30); MacKenzie (1991:Pl. 2); Neich and Pereira (2004:52, 72); Schellong (1889:150, Pls VII.14, VII.15); Welsh (1998:Figs 2.31, 2.46); Williams (1930:38-39)
Papua New Guinea (north and northeast islands)	Fortune (1935:124, 154, 200); Harding (1967:132-133); Hogbin (1935:376); Mead (1930:119-122, 126-127, 1938:319); Ohnemus (1998:305, 415, Fig. 373); Wedgewood (1948); Welsch (1998:112, Fig. 2.46)
Papua New Guinea (southeast coast)	English (1894:65); Egloff (1979:91); Fowler (1922:50); Girard (1956:411); MacGillivray (1852:II:323); Miamba (2018); Morton (1885:72); Oram (1982:13); Saville (1926:162); Seligmann (1910:89); Specht and Fields (1984:23); Stone (1880:77, 93, 166); Williams (1930:Pl. VI)
Papua New Guinea (Gulf of Papua)	Austen (1948:19-20); Barton (1904:19); Clune (1943:Pl. opp. 163); Kowald (1894:62, 64); MacGregor (1891, 1892:53, 1893:40, 1897b:43); Petterson and Petterson (2008:42); Specht and Fields (1984:97, 149, 151); Williams (1940:57-59, 118, 200, 279, 303); Young and Clark (2001:77, 188)
Papua New Guinea (Fly River and Trans-Fly)	Beaver (1920b:77, 229); Depew (1986:59, 229); Jear (1905:70); Landtman (1927:26, 1933:41, 87, 214, Pl. XI.203); Lawrence (1994:436, Fig. 74; 2010:Pl. 11); Lyons (1921:26); MacGregor (1897b:43); Murray (1914:23, 1918:49); Murray and Ray (1918:44)
Australia (Torres Strait)	Florek (2005:29, 58, 79); Haddon (1904:202, 293, 1908:113-114, 185-186, 1912:41, 236, 1935:296); Hunt (1899:10); Lawrence (1994:436); Moore (1984:46, 48, 69, 77, Pls 5, 17, 34, 46)

The absence of dog tooth body adornments amongst Cape York Aboriginal peoples has nothing to do with raw material availability given that dogs (dingoes) occur across mainland Australia. The idea of dog tooth body adornments was rejected by Cape York Aboriginal peoples given likely knowledge of the existence of such objects through interactions with Torres Strait Islanders. Clearly, Aboriginal peoples of Cape York Peninsula, as for most parts of Australia, considered adornments manufactured from dog (dingo) teeth to be inappropriate. Sue O'Connor and Jane Balme (2019:177) argue that this 'lack of dog teeth beads may reflect the high status of dogs in Aboriginal societies'. Although dog tooth body adornments across New Guinea and Torres Strait had very high status as exchange valuables, it is clear that dogs in Melanesian societies had a fundamentally different ontological status to that in Aboriginal Australian societies.

In rare instances, non-dental dingo body parts were considered appropriate for body adornments by Aboriginal Australians. For example, Walter Roth (1897:108) recorded dingo 'knuckle-bones' used as hair adornments in Queensland. Head ornaments with tassels of dingo tails are known for Western Australia and the Lake Eyre region of South Australia (Archaeology and Anthropology Museum, Cambridge, E 1914.70.2, E 1914.70.3, 1923 1500). The missionary William Kennett obtained a head ornament/necklace made of dingo tail fur from Gudang Aboriginal place at Somerset, Cape York, in the 1860s (British Museum, Oc.6944; Lifu 2015:169; Sculthorpe 2015:233, Fig. 21). Kennett also collected a 'charm' in the form of a 'native dog' mandible (with '6 teeth remaining')

painted with red ochre at Cape York (British Museum, Oc.6947).

Conus Armbands

Conus armbands made from the outer (body) whorl of large *Conus* shells have a highly restricted distribution to the northwest and southeast coastal regions of New Guinea (including Torres Strait) but not mainland Australia (Figure 3). They were high status valuables used as ceremonial regalia and as part of marriage and trade/exchange payments. Unlike *Conus* spire disc and pearlshell body adornments, *Conus* armbands were rarely traded inland (see Hughes 1977:51, 196). Distributional details on *Conus* armbands across New Guinea and Torres Strait are provided as no published overview of these objects is available (Table 2). In Indonesian New Guinea they are localised to the northwest in the Bird's Head and Cenderawasih Bay regions. Despite distribution along 1200 km of Papua New Guinea's south coast, the ethnographically known manufacture of *Conus* armbands occurred in only three areas – the Massim and Mailu in the southeast corner of the country and around Port Moresby. The northern Massim region is the centre of *Conus* armband manufacture and use in Melanesia. Most Massim *Conus* armbands were valuables of the famous *kula* exchange network. The Mailu similarly manufactured *Conus* armbands as wealth and regional exchange objects but also modified armbands imported from the Massim. Mailu armbands were traded westwards to the Hood Bay region and whence traded further westwards to various villages before reaching Port Moresby. Motu people of Port Moresby also manufactured

Table 2. *Conus* armbands across New Guinea and Torres Strait.

Region	References
Indonesian New Guinea (Bird's Head and Cenderawasih Bay)	De Clercq and Schmeltz (1893:35, Pl. VIII.14); Edmundson and Boylan (1999:52, Pl. 38); Held (1957:33, 96, 361, Figs 29, 44); Pétrequin and Pétrequin (2006:163-164); van der Sande (1907:124, Pl. XVII.5)
Papua New Guinea (Massim)	Campbell (1983:231, 233); Davidson (2012:58-59); Firth (1983:96); Fortune (1932); James (2018); Macintyre and Allen (1990:126-127); Malinowski (1922:502-504, Pl. XVI); Seligmann (1910:513-514, Pl. LIX); see also Jenness and Ballantyne (1920:34-35, 71, 79, 81, 101, 111, 141); Lauer (1976:26-28, Pls 11, 12); Chalmers (1887a:124-125)
Papua New Guinea (Mailu)	Malinowski (1915:559, 622-623, 640, 643-645, Pl. XL.2); Saville (1926:152-156, 164, pl. opp. 193)
Papua New Guinea (Mailu: Massim imports)	Bastard (1922:54); Malinowski (1915:622-623, 640); Saville (1926:161); Tueting (1935:25-26)
Papua New Guinea (Hood Bay: Mailu imports) (Port Moresby: Hood Bay imports)	Bevan (1890:23, 27); Chalmers (1887b:82); Goldie (1876 cited in Moore and Mullins 2012:52); Seligmann (1910:71-72, 77-78, 89, 91, 93, 145, 185, 753); Specht and Fields (1984:19, 23); Stone (1880:93); Turner (1878:479); see also Swadling (1994:139)
Papua New Guinea (Port Moresby)	Haddon (1900:275); Oram (1982:13)
Papua New Guinea (Roro and Mekeo: Port Moresby imports)	Haddon (1900:275, 277); Seligmann (1910:93, 204); Specht and Fields (1984:97); Turner (1878:481)
Papua New Guinea (Papuan Gulf/Purari River: Port Moresby imports)	Barton (1910:109); Chalmers (1887a:124-125); Clark (1923:158); Williams (1924:Pl. opp. 182, 1940:Fig. 3, Pls 10, 15); Young and Clarke (2001:188, 205)
Papua New Guinea (Papuan Gulf/Goaribari Island and Kikori River: Port Moresby imports)	Austin (cited in McCarthy 1939:185); Gwilliam (1982:42, 55); Murray (1912:189); Specht and Fields (1984:151); Williams (1924:125)
Papua New Guinea (Papuan Gulf/Turama River: Port Moresby imports)	Austin (1948:16, 19); Schaffarczyk (2008:Appendix 7, 165)
Papua New Guinea (Fly River mouth)	Landtman (1933:43)
Papua New Guinea (Fly River mouth: Torres Strait imports)	Beaver (1920b:75, 77, 164-165, 228); Haddon (1908:186, 1912:236, Fig. 225, 1935:50); Jiear (1905:70); Laade (1969:7); Landtman (1927:214); Lawrence (1994:306, 347-348)
Australia (Central and Eastern Torres Strait)	Haddon (1904:76, 224, 294-295, 1912:56, Figs 76, 225, 1935:88, 91); Laade (1969:37); Lawrence (1994:438); Moore (1984:73, Pl. 37)

armbands and both these and imported *Conus* armbands were traded westwards to Roro and Mekeo peoples.

Papuan Gulf peoples obtained nearly all *Conus* armbands either directly or indirectly from visiting Motu in exchange for sago during their famous *hiri* trading expeditions that extended westwards to at least the Purari River. As Jim Allen (1984:428) notes, 'some of the armshells reaching the Gulf had travelled through at least three otherwise discrete trading networks, and must have provided a strong material element of integration between them'. From the Purari River, armbands were traded westwards to Goaribari Island and the Kikori River and even across to the Turama River at the western end of the Gulf. Kikori River and Turama River peoples also obtained *Conus* armbands from the west through a complex exchange route beginning in Torres Strait (Austin 1934:5-7, 1948:16, 19).

Conus armbands in the Trans-Fly region (e.g. Kiwai Island) came in two forms – a smaller armband form and a larger form better described as a cuff (Beaver 1920b:64-65; Davidson 2012:5-6; Landtman 1927:26, Fig. 25, 1933:43, Fig. 52; Lawrence 1994:358, 437-438, Figs 21, 77, 2010:153-154). Some armbands were manufactured locally while most were imported from Torres Strait as payment for canoe hulls and other items. The Central and Eastern Islanders of Torres Strait manufactured *Conus* armbands.

As with dog tooth body adornments, availability of *Conus* shells along the Great Barrier Reef indicates that lack of use of *Conus* armbands by Cape York Aboriginal peoples had

nothing to do with raw material availability. Aboriginal peoples of north Queensland would have known about *Conus* armbands through interactions with Torres Strait Islanders but rejected the uptake of these objects as they were beyond social and cultural requirements.

Selective Uptake – North Queensland and Torres Strait (and not New Guinea)

Spearthrowers with shell handles and small-bead nautilus shell headbands are examples of ethnographic objects found across north Queensland and Torres Strait but not New Guinea. While knowledge of these object types would have been absent for most communities across New Guinea, such is not the case for communities along the south coast of southwest Papua New Guinea who had intense interactions with their Torres Strait Islander neighbours to the south. Such interactions imply exposure to and rejection of these objects by these mainland peoples.

Shell-Handled Spearthrowers

The Cape York Peninsula type of spearthrower is highly distinctive and easily distinguished from other spearthrowers from across mainland Australia. They feature a vertical or angled peg to engage the butt end of a spear and two oval sections of baler shell (*Melo amphora*) attached to the handle end with bees wax or resin (Best 2003:138-148; Davidson 1936:469-473; Hale and Tindale 1933:99-101; Roth

1909:197-201; Schall 1985:59-60). Cape York Peninsula spearthrowers (with shell 'handle') occur across most of Cape York Peninsula and northwards to the central western islands of Torres Strait (Figure 3). They extend 900 km along the east coast of Queensland from Cape York to Dunk Island (e.g. Allen 1980:72-73; Bennett 1927:409; Best 2003:Fig. 6.44; Brayshaw 1990:66, 268; Cooper et al. 1981:175; Davies 2002:72; Dixon and Huxley 1985:Pl. 91; Hale and Tindale 1933:Figs 82, 86-88; Hutchinson et al. 1915-1930:53; Khan 1996:63-64, 2003:62-63, 72, 2004:39, 55, 79-80; McCarthy 1957:77; McConnel 1953:27, Pl. 10; Mjöberg 1918:Pl. 200.c; Roth 1897:149, Pl. XXI:Fig. 371, 1909:Pl. lviii; Rowlands 2010:248-249; Schall 1985:77-80). MacGillivray (1852:II:18-19) observed that 'The throwing-stick in use at Cape York extends down the N.E. coast [of Queensland] at least as far as Lizard Island ... At the end a double slip of melon shell, three and a half inches long, crossing diagonally, serves as a handle'. Roth (1897:149) recorded that the northern Mitakoodi people of Clonagh and the adjacent northern Kalkadoon people of Grenada also used Cape York Peninsula style spearthrowers made by neighbouring Nouun people who obtained the shells for the characteristic 'handles' through trade from Normanton located 300 km to the north in the southeast corner of the Gulf of Carpentaria (cf. Best 2003:143).

In Torres Strait, MacGillivray (1852:II:17, 82) observed Kaurareg people of Muralag (Prince of Wales Island) and the adjacent mainland at Cape York using spearthrowers (Moore 1984:43, Pl. 3). He also saw people on Naghir in central Torres Strait in possession of a spearthrower 'precisely similar to those of Cape York, from which place they had probably been procured' (MacGillivray 1852:II:34). Haddon visited Mabuyag in 1888 and reported that 'The javelins and throwing-sticks I obtained at Mabuiag from the Badu men above mentioned, were of precisely the same pattern as those I procured in North Queensland. Many were doubtless of local manufacture, but I believe some of the throwing-sticks were imported' (Haddon 1890:334; see also Haddon 1912:196-197, Fig. 200; Herle et al. 2015:Fig. 16). Haddon (1890:331) stated that use of Cape York Aboriginal spearthrowers by Torres Strait Islanders was 'the only instance in which the Papuans have borrowed from the Australians'. Thorpe (1926:491) similarly considered the use of the Cape York spearthrower by Murray Islanders as one of the few examples of 'the Papuans borrowing from the aborigines [sic]'. According to McCarthy (1939:182), 'Baler-shell spearthrowers from Princess Charlotte Bay have been collected on Murray Islands and in the Daudai district [coastal area of Papua New Guinea adjacent to Torres Strait], Papua (Australian Museum specimens)'. He hypothesised that these spearthrowers 'passed in trade to the western division coast in Papua (Australian Museum specimen)' (McCarthy 1940:303).

The 'Daudai' spearthrowers in the Australian Museum are very rare as they are not mentioned in material culture surveys of the region (e.g. Davies 2011; Landtman 1933). The legendary narrative of the warrior hero Kuyam indicates that peoples of the Daudai region were aware of these spearthrowers. For example, Landtman (1933:57) noted that 'In their folk-tales the Kiwais [mouth of the Fly River] are familiar with the kúbai, or spear-thrower. It is particularly associated with Kuiamo, the hero of Mabuiag island in Torres Straits, who also appears in Kiwai folklore. It is said in the

tales that he used to throw báura spears by means of a kúbai'. This information indicates that peoples of the New Guinea coast adjacent to Torres Strait were aware of spearthrowers but chose not to include them as a part of their technological repertoire, except in rare and presumably special circumstances.

MacGillivray (1852:II:84) stated that the boomerang and spearthrower 'may be considered as true Australian inventions'. Hamlyn-Harris (1915:11) considered 'the woomera and woomera spear' used by Torres Strait Islanders to be 'of the mainland aboriginal [sic]'. Davidson (1936:473) was of the opinion that the Cape York Peninsula type of spearthrower with its distinctive shell handle 'originated in the Cape York Peninsula'. McConnel (1953:11, 27) similarly noted that this type of spearthrower is 'indigenous' to Australia. McCarthy (1940:303) implied that the Cape York Peninsula spearthrower was of Aboriginal origin as he included it as an example of one of a number of 'Traits traded from Cape York to Torres Strait'. Despite this view, McCarthy (1939:94-95, 1940:268, 297) included 'Melo-shell ornaments' used in the manufacture of Cape York spearthrowers as an example of a 'trait introduced into Australia from New Guinea, via Torres Strait'.

Nautilus Shell Bead Headbands

Pieces of nautilus shell (*Nautilus* sp.) were used for a range of utilitarian (e.g. drinking vessels) and decorative (e.g. body adornments) purposes in New Guinea and northern Australia. For this study I focus on body adornments comprising strings of numerous small rectangular- or oval-shaped beads made from tabs (~1.0 cm x 0.5 cm) of nautilus shell. Within the study region, small-bead nautilus shell headbands are restricted in distribution to Cape York Peninsula and eastern Torres Strait (Figure 3). In Torres Strait, Haddon (1912:36, Pls VIII.2, IX.2,3) recorded that these objects were 'worn across the forehead on festive occasions' (see also Moore 1984:67, 93, Pls 32, 70). For Aboriginal peoples of Cape York Peninsula, ethnographic information is similarly sketchy (e.g. Allen 1980:7; Hale and Tindale 1934:140-141; Khan 1993:116, 172-173, 1996:47-48, 2003: 32, 2004:96, 99-100; McAdam 2008:Figs 9, 10; McCarthy 1957:65; McConnel 1953:15, 24, 34; Rigsby and Chase 1998:209; Roth 1910b:32; Rowlands 2010:196-198; Schall 1985:22-25).

Nautilus are a pelagic cephalopod mollusc found across the tropical, subtropical and temperate waters of the world, including seas surrounding New Guinea and Australia (House 1987). Although an open sea animal, nautilus shells wash up on beaches. Therefore, the absence of small-bead nautilus shell headbands in New Guinea is unrelated to raw material availability. As with *Conus* armbands and Aboriginal people, New Guinea people considered small-bead nautilus shell headbands beyond social and cultural requirements. Nautilus shells occur on east coast beaches of Australia (including eastern Cape York Peninsula) but rarely on the western beaches of Cape York Peninsula (House 1987:Figs 1, 3). Schall (1985:87) rightly notes that nautilus shell 'was probably more easily obtainable in eastern than in Western Cape York [Peninsula] waters'. Such availability is consistent with McConnel's (1953:24) statement that nautilus shells used by the Wikmunkan of Western Cape York Peninsula were 'traded from East Coast and Torres Straits'. Roth (1910a:18-19) recorded that nautilus shell necklaces were traded along the east coast of Cape York Peninsula. In this

connection, McAdam (2008:243) noted that ‘There is a strong correlation between the movement of some shell species [e.g. nautilus] and major trunk trading routes’ (see also Schall 1985:87). Despite their absence in New Guinea, McCarthy (1940:268, 297) included nautilus shell-bead headbands as an example of a ‘trait introduced into Australia from New Guinea, via Torres Strait’.

Discussion

Incorporating Community Perspectives and Voices

The Coral Sea Cultural Interaction Sphere (CSCIS) is a construct of Western scientific research. Although it is founded upon anti-colonialist critiques of previous research, and centres Indigenous choice and agency in terms of object uptake and use, initial formulation of the CSCIS is largely mute in terms of contemporary Indigenous perspectives and voices. The first steps towards inclusion of Indigenous voices is represented in the Queensland Museum’s 2022 exhibition *Connections Across the Coral Sea: A Story of Movement*. Geraldine Mate, Principal Curator (History, Industry and Technology) at the Queensland Museum, notes that the ‘Coral Sea Cultural Interaction Sphere is a fundamental underpinning of the exhibition’ (Mate 2021:5; see also McNiven 2021b). Contemporary Indigenous input was critical to the exhibition’s success: ‘First Nations people from across the region, including Traditional Owners from Torres Strait Islands, and from Dingaal and Ngurumungu Country, have provided information about how these objects were made and used, bringing a valuable perspective as owners and knowledge holders, to this exhibition and the associated research’ (Mate 2021:4; see also Ulm and McNiven 2021). An important dimension of Indigenous voices in the exhibition is the use of traditional names for objects. As Sophie Price, Assistant Curator, Anthropology, Queensland Museum, explains: ‘By working firsthand with communities and discussing the correct use of language, we are trying to reconnect formerly disconnected names with items they belong to’ (Price 2021:21). Broad community interest in the documentation and display of cultural objects in the exhibition is summed up well by Shailand Deeral-Rosendale, Walmbaar Aboriginal Corporation: ‘to see all the artefact here ... we’d like to share our knowledge’ (Queensland Museum 2022).

The next stage of research on the CSCIS has enormous scope to work collaboratively in partnership with Indigenous communities in Australia, Papua New Guinea, and Indonesia. For large-scale object surveys such as the CSCIS project, such collaborations cannot be comprehensive as engaging every community across hundreds of language groups is logistically impossible, financially prohibitive, and ultimately unrealistic. A feasible alternative is engagement with a selection of communities who put forward individuals to help bring a range of contemporary perspectives on different object types. In some cases, such perspectives may furnish counter-readings to non-Indigenous historical recordings and narratives. Exemplary in this regard was incorporation and publication of a wide range of contemporary Torres Strait Islander perspectives on 60 objects from the Haddon collection (University of Cambridge) loaned to the National Museum of Australia in Canberra for an exhibition in 2001–2002 (Herle 2002; Philp 2001). More ambitious was the extraordinarily well-resourced ‘five-year program of

community consultation’ involving 27 communities and more than 200 First Nations Australians to obtain contemporary perspectives on some 150 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander objects on loan from the British Museum for the *Encounters* exhibition at the National Museum of Australia in 2015–2016 (Arthur and Withycombe 2015:36; cf. Robinson 2017). On a smaller but no less important scale was the process of engaging contemporary Indigenous perspectives on historical ethnographic objects from multiple source communities for the *Excavating MacGregor: Reconnecting a Colonial Museum Collection* project between the Queensland Museum and Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery (Chan 2018). The incorporation of contemporary perspectives into exhibition displays and associated catalogues range from authoritative essays to appended vignettes that in some cases border on tokenism (see Edmundson 2017:891). Such perspectives or ‘voices’ are also increasingly becoming common in non-exhibition-related publications on Oceania objects in museums (e.g. Brunt et al. 2012).

Beyond Bridge and Barrier

Differences in ethnographic object distributions between New Guinea, Torres Strait and Australia reveal important insights into cultural trait sharing and reception, at least over the past couple of hundred years. Continuities in distributions of certain classes of objects (e.g. double outrigger canoes and bamboo smoking pipes) between New Guinea, Torres Strait and northeast Australia reveal shared exposure to and uptake of selected cultural traits consistent with cultural interaction and linked maritime exchange networks underpinning the CSCIS. At the same time, discontinuities in the distribution of other classes of objects, such as restriction of dog tooth body adornments and *Conus* armbands to New Guinea and Torres Strait (but not mainland Australia) and shell-handled spearthrowers and small-bead nautilus shell headbands to Torres Strait and Australia (but not New Guinea), reveal selective uptake. In all cases, these continuities and discontinuities in object distributions, coupled with acceptance and rejection of selected object types, point to communities across New Guinea, Torres Strait and northeast Australia exercising agency and choice. In this guise, the role of Torres Strait as a ‘bridge and barrier’ (*sensu* Walker 1972b) to cultural trait movements between New Guinea and Australia is reconceptualised as a ‘border zone’ with cultural trait boundaries the outcome of interactions by Torres Strait Islanders with New Guinea Melanesians to the north and Aboriginal Australians to the south. While Torres Strait as a border zone encompasses the ‘bridge’ concept, it rejects the ‘barrier’ concept and associated notions that Aboriginal peoples were ‘denied access’ to ‘Papuan’ cultural traits by Torres Strait Islanders (*sensu* Baldwin 1976). This view accords with Melissa Carter’s (2002:8) archaeological findings that ‘confirm that the islands of the Torres Strait have never existed in cultural isolation nor acted as a barrier to either northern or southern influences’.

Alan Rumsey (2002:11) stated that ‘Torres Strait is not a sharp boundary between two categorically distinct culture areas but a continuum of related peoples and sociocultural forms’. On a broad scale, and certainly in terms of subsistence practices, the cultural continuum idea has a sound empirical basis. However, in some respects, the border zone concept is at odds with ideas of clinal variations in cultural phenomena

between New Guinea and Australia via Torres Strait. With Torres Strait marking the southern boundary of dog tooth body adornments and *Conus* armbands, and the northern boundary of shell-handled spearthrowers and small-bead nautilus shell headbands, it is clear that in some circumstances that the Strait represented a significant cultural boundary.

A central tenet of the CSCIS is the potential for broad-scale sharing of cultural traits and ideas along the 2000 km of coastline between the southeast tip of mainland Papua New Guinea through to at least Lizard Island off the east coast of Cape York Peninsula. The basis of such broad-scale interaction is a series of ethnographically-known long-distance maritime trading/exchange networks that potentially allow objects made in southeast Papua New Guinea to reach the northeast coast of Australia. Yet no ethnographic evidence exists for the movement of objects along the more than 2000 km length of the CSCIS. However, broad-scale sharing of ideas along this huge distance exists in the localised manufacture and use of bamboo smoking pipes across Papua New Guinea and Torres Strait and down the east coast of Australia for a distance of 900 km south of Cape York. Even in the case of discontinuous and restricted object distributions, the scale of sharing is considerable. For example, the occurrence of double outrigger canoes in Torres Strait and northwards to the mouth of the Fly River in southwest Papua New Guinea and southwards along the east coast of Australia to Fitzroy Island near Cairns reveals shared knowledge and uptake of this distinctive object type along more than 1100 km of coast. Similarly, the occurrence of *Conus* armbands in Torres Strait and along the south coast of Papua New Guinea into the Massim region reveals shared knowledge and uptake of this similarly distinctive object type along nearly 1500 km of coast. However, shared use of particular objects such as bamboo smoking pipes does not mean shared understanding of the scale of such usage. For example, Aboriginal peoples of Cape York Peninsula probably had no knowledge of bamboo smoking pipe manufacture and use by Massim peoples, and vice versa.

Conclusion

It is clear that ethnographically known canoe voyaging and trading/exchange networks indirectly linked Aboriginal peoples of north Queensland and Melanesian peoples of southern New Guinea via Torres Strait. Such coastal and maritime connections provided an extraordinary opportunity for the sharing of cultural ideas and traditions and objects of various forms. The shared tradition of use of double outrigger canoes and bamboo smoking pipes expressed these broad-scale connections. Yet restricted uptake of other types of objects indicates that shared knowledge of objects did not always translate into shared uptake of objects. The fact that shell-handled spearthrowers and small-bead nautilus shell headbands were used across far north Queensland and Torres Strait (but not New Guinea) and dog tooth body adornments and *Conus* armbands were used variously across New Guinea and Torres Strait (but not north Queensland) reveals that certain objects were rejected for a range of social and cultural reasons. Indeed, it is likely that reasons for acceptance and rejection were object specific and that no one answer can explain the complex patterns of object distributions spanning the Coral Sea Cultural Interaction Sphere.

To complicate matters further, reasons for acceptance and rejection of different types of objects by Aboriginal peoples of north Queensland and Melanesian peoples of New Guinea would have varied through time. Continuities and discontinuities in the geographical distribution of object types spanning north Queensland and southern New Guinea would have changed over time due to reconfigurations of trade/exchange networks and changing social and cultural circumstances. Such ebbs and flows of interactions reinforce the point that the CSCIS should not be seen as a cultural institution but rather as a heuristic and conceptual lens through which to investigate the changing geographical dimensions of long-term material culture continuities and discontinuities. In this guise, the exchange and mobility networks depicted in Figure 1 express a nineteenth century ethnographic reality. Archaeological research will determine to what extent these nineteenth century lines of connection need to be redrawn for more distant time periods. For example, archaeological research on pottery sourcing and distributions along the south coast of Papua New Guinea and Torres Strait indicates that exchange networks of the past 1000 years differ to what was happening 1000–2000 years ago and 2000–3000 years ago (see McNiven 2021a).

Ethnographic versus archaeological information on pottery manufacture and use across the study region indicates that the CSCIS has a considerable time depth and dynamic history. Ethnographically, pottery manufacture and use were restricted to New Guinea with no ethnographic evidence of pottery use by Torres Strait Islanders and Cape York Aboriginal peoples. However, archaeological research reveals pottery use along the south coast of Papua New Guinea over the past 2900 years (David et al. 2011; McNiven et al. 2011), and introduction to Torres Strait 2600 years ago (McNiven et al. 2006; Wright and Dickinson 2009) and to Lizard Island 2000–3000 years ago (Tochilin et al. 2012; Ulm and McNiven 2021). Clearly, the ancient shared tradition of pottery manufacture and use across New Guinea, Torres Strait and Cape York Peninsula did not carry forward into ethnographic times. Recent pottery finds reveal the potential of archaeological research to shed light on the historical dynamism and reconfiguring of the CSCIS over the past 3000 years. The pottery finds not only bring into sharp focus the tangible reality of the long-term changing nature of social and cultural connections between New Guinea and Australia, but also that much more research is needed to document and understand these cultural dynamics.

Documenting the CSCIS is an ongoing process that includes further investigation of museum collections both in Australia and overseas. In addition, working with some of the hundreds of Indigenous communities across the 2000 km span of the CSCIS to record their stories and oral traditions on reasons behind the sharing and selective uptake of objects will add new cultural dimensions to issues of choice and agency raised in this paper. Indeed, such collaboration will likely identify other classes of objects that further demonstrate processes of sharing and selective uptake. In addition, working with communities will be critical to determining the reliability of European records of voyaging networks and exchange relationships. For example, oral histories are starting to emerge from Torres Strait to indicate that Torres Strait Islander voyaging down the Great Barrier Reef was far more extensive and systematic than indicated by nineteenth

century European records (e.g. Lui 2008:68-69). Such knowledge emergence may also extend to First Nations communities documenting the nature of interactions and exchange relationships between these Torres Strait Islander voyagers and coastal Aboriginal groups (see Haddon 1935:77, 88, 394; Thomson 1939:82; see also McNiven 2015a:51). Of critical importance will be recording current First Nations perspectives on historically documented/collected ethnographic objects to help bring objects out of their colonial past and into the contemporary world. In this sense, the CSCIS is about forging connections and relationships both past and present.

Acknowledgements

For helpful information on museum collections of New Guinea and Australian Indigenous material culture I thank Rebecca Fisher, Kate Khan and Michael Mel (Australian Museum, Sydney), Brit Asmussen and Dave Parkhill (Queensland Museum, Brisbane), Stephen Zagala (South Australian Museum, Adelaide), Chris Urwin (Museums Victoria, Melbourne), Julian Millie and Catherine Thorpe (Anthropology Museum, Monash University, Melbourne) and Lisa Graves (Bristol Museum). For helpful information on New Guinea material culture I thank Rob Skelly (Monash University), Barry Craig, Richard Aldridge and Col Davidson, and on Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal material culture I thank Lindy Allen. Thanks to Rachel Hendery for the invitation to present an earlier version of the paper at the 'Across the Sea' workshop at the University of Western Sydney in October 2018. I presented another version of the paper at the Oceanic Arts Society (OAS) in Sydney in June 2019. Thanks to Jim Elmslie for the invitation to present and OAS audience members for helpful and informative feedback. Base maps courtesy of CartoGIS Services Manager, The Australian National University, Canberra. Tim Denham provided helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper, as did two anonymous referees.

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Citation: McNiven, I.J. 2022 Beyond bridge and barrier: Reconceptualising Torres Strait as a co-constructed border zone in ethnographic object distributions between Queensland and New Guinea. *Queensland Archaeological Research* 25:25–46. <https://doi.org/10.25120/qar.25.2022.3885>