Bringing Gregory Bateson's Sepik collections into the Digital Age. Progress and reflections

Faire passer les collections Sepik de Gregory Bateson dans l'âge numérique

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Bringing Gregory Bateson's Sepik collections into the Digital Age. Progress and reflections

by

Antonia LOVELACE*

ABSTRACT

This chapter reviews the work of the 1984-1995 Bateson documentation project in three stages. First an introduction with an overview of the context and outcomes. Secondly a more detailed presentation of some of the Cambridge Sepik collections under three headings: masquerade, faces and face-painting, animals and birds. Finally the current on-line offer for Sepik art and culture will be reviewed, and suggestions made for future developments. The timing of the Bateson project, during the first phases of computerised cataloguing and before digital photography, left Cambridge with an awkward hybrid result. Now, more than 20 years on, is a good opportunity to review the project outcomes, show their usefulness to date, and reflect on opportunities for sharing and re-engagement.

KEYWORDS: Gregory Bateson, Cambridge Sepik collection, documentation, art, face-painting

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article retrace les trois phases du « Projet de Documentation Bateson, 1984-1995 ». Après avoir présenté le contexte et les résultats, sont détaillées les collections Sepik de Cambridge réunies sous trois rubriques : mascarade, visages et peintures faciales, animaux et oiseaux. Il se termine par un inventaire des mises en ligne de l'art et des cultures du Sepik, tout en suggérant des développements futurs. Le projet Bateson fut entrepris lors des premières élaborations de catalogage électronique, bien avant l'apparition des photographies digitales. Ceci eut pour résultat de laisser Cambridge avec un embarrassant projet hybride. Aussi, quelques vingt ans plus tard, il paraît utile de dresser un bilan du projet, de montrer son utilité et de réfléchir à l'opportunité de son partage et de sa reprise et sa réactivation.

MOTS-CLÉS : Gregory Bateson, collections Sepik de Cambridge, documentation, art, peintures faciales

Gregory Bateson collected around 600 Sepik items for the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (then CUMAA, now MAA – Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology), during his fieldwork amongst the Iatmul of the Middle Sepik from February 1929 to March 1930 and from February 1932 to the spring of 1933. Together with a similar number of field photographs and a few objects from Ernest W.P. Chinnery, Jack A.T. Thurston, C.B. Humphreys, Father Franz Kirschbaum and G. Rogers, this forms a strong corpus of Sepik collections at MAA. The 1984-1995 Bateson documentation project

can be seen as a big step on the way to sharing these collections worldwide.

The Cambridge Sepik collections, however, are fairly well known to specialists, because of the enduring appreciation of Bateson's *Naven* monograph and its revealing photographic illustrations (Bateson, 1980 [1958/1936] and his previous *Oceania* article (Bateson, 1932). Eight items from Cambridge were included in the exhibition "Sepik, Art of Papua New Guinea" (Peltier and Schindlbeck, 2015: cat. 28, 73, 92, 93, 104, 120, 155, 156). The seminar that accompanied this exhibition in Paris in October 2015 was a great

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opportunity for a review of the Cambridge Sepik collections and the Bateson project.

The Bateson project (1984-1995). Context and outcomes

In the early 1980s shortly after finishing the newly created MPhil in Social Anthropology at the University of Cambridge (where I did the option on Social Anthropology and the Work of the Museum), I was drawn to the New Guinea material at MAA. The MAA Centenary Exhibition, held at the Fitzwilliam Museum in 1984, had a section on the importance of the Torres Straits, Massim and Papuan Gulf collections in the early history of the museum under Haddon and Clarke. Bateson has a full page mention in the centenary exhibition guidebook where the authors conclude that

“his ideas were ahead of his time. Bateson left England for the United States and anthropology at Cambridge took a different course.” (Ebin and Swallow, 1984: 24)

It was clear that Gregory Bateson's *Naven* (Bateson, 1980) continued to demand interest and appraisal because of its unusual emphasis on the dynamics within both the ethos and eidos of a culture. His Cambridge collections attracted attention due to the stunning beauty of the masks and figure carvings, and also because of the detailed referencing provided by the collector himself. Bateson used pre-printed labels and personally completed the object index cards, together with several summaries on particular object types. It was an ideal case for a computer database pilot and the Bateson project was launched and publicised to the UK museum profession in the newsletter for the Museum Ethnographers Group (Lovelace, 1985)¹.

As the Museum Documentation Association² was also in Cambridge the University was a seed bed for computerised cataloguing and we were able to use a new revised generation of this technology for data capture, a programme called MUSCAT (Lovelace, 1986). The Sepik material also appealed to me because of my fascination with motif analysis. Influential was Douglas Newton's analysis of the *malu* boards which incorporated many of the Cambridge pieces (1963) and also the work by Reimar Schefold on Sepik hook figures (1966). Later I came across “Mak Bilong Sepik” by Helen Dennett (1975), which is notable for the clarity and range of re-drawn designs it features, and the crediting of individ-

ual contemporary artists where known. Gradually several strands of work came together in the Bateson project: detailed cataloguing on a computer database, pre-digital black and white object photography, and an attempt at motif analyses which often began with pencil then ink drawings.

In the computer database the original accession records by Bateson were kept separate from the newer more detailed descriptions, which went above. As the detailed comments on Bateson's few published field photographs were so greatly appreciated it also seemed crucial to print and catalogue all those in the MAA archive. Gwil Owen, the museum photographer, produced master prints of these black and white field photographs, of which there are over 600 (around 400 from the Sepik).

The Bateson documentation project resulted in a six-volume printout, a typescript in ring-binders with interleaved object photographs and sketches and some of Bateson's field photographs. The six volumes of the Bateson Project Report (1984-1995) are as organised as follows:

1. Introduction, including current assessment of Bateson's work and motif analysis tables.
2. Sepik Food Provision; Canoeing; Warfare; Raw Materials and Tools.
3. Sepik Food Preparation and Pottery; Paint-trays; Containers – general and for narcotics; Fly whisks; Toys.
4. Sepik Currency and Trade; Furniture and Furnishings; Architectural Details.
5. Sepik Figure carvings; Modelled and Carved Heads; Masks and Sacred relics; Musical Instruments.
6. Bateson's New Britain material and other non-Sepik collections.

Each catalogue section begins with an essay reviewing Bateson's own comments and summarising other sources, a structure largely inspired by the *Iatmul-Objektkatalog* at Basel Museum für Völkerkunde (Obrist *et al.*, 1984). Basel was an obvious first choice for a research visit. The large group of Basel PhD researchers, studying different topics in different places in the Middle Sepik under Meinhard Schuster, had made a huge impact on the understanding of particular object meanings and usage, directly recorded in the *Iatmul-Objektkatalog*. To make the motif analysis worthwhile it was crucial to view as large a sample of comparative pieces as possible, take colour photographs and sketch details. The MAA Crowther-Beynon fund provided a grant for travel to Basel, then to the USA, to visit museum collections on the eastern seaboard

1. Bateson's work has continued to inspire many others (for example: Silverman, 2001; Herle and Moutu, 2004; Moutu, 2013).

2. The MDA developed out of the Information Retrieval Group of the UK's Museums Association in the 1970s to promote national standards and good practice in documentation, it was not part of the University of Cambridge but the first director, Martin Porter, was well known.

FIGURE 1. – Figure hook 1935.71, which Bateson was told represents the human ancestor Kworem-Avwun, front and back views (© MAA by Antonia Lovelace, 1985)

and consult Bateson's field notes in the Library of Congress³. Later it was possible to visit Berlin, to examine the Sepik material already published with black and white photography in the 1960s (Kelm, 1966-1968).

The effort at motif analysis was time-consuming, and one of the reasons the project expanded to fill many years' work, despite the fact that it soon became clear that without local knowledge and comment the motif analyses themselves can only take us so far. I finally "let go" and completed the database in 1995. The Bateson project was presented at the Pacific Arts Association – Europe meeting in Cambridge in 1998, but the full-time commitments of my work as a curator of World Cultures in Glasgow, then Leeds, were very absorbing, and for a variety of reasons the bulk of the project has since remained unpublished.

However, the partly printed collation deposited in 1995 has proved useful to visiting researchers, and was used during the PhD and partnership between Andrew Moutu and MAA from 2000 onwards, which resulted in the exhibition "Paired Brothers,

Concealment and Revelation" and accompanying booklet (Herle and Moutu, 2004). Moutu conducted intensive doctoral field research from 2001-2002 in Kanganamun so brought a particularly relevant perspective to the interpretation of the collection (Moutu, 2013). He also provided comments on Bateson's Sepik field photographs, which were added to the catalogue and made public online in 2014, during the period when Moutu was director of the National Museum of Papua New Guinea (2010-2016). The exhibition booklet reproduced several key Bateson field photographs as well as illustrating the new carvings acquired by named artists through Moutu's efforts. The carving of an initiate resting his head on his mother's brother's lap by Raymond Amongsingwemi and others is a strategic and brilliant work (Herle and Moutu, 2004, front cover). Another key piece, carved by Ngomotu, demonstrates the process of creative transformation by showing the fish woman Mariamngawinjowa with her two children (Herle and Moutu, 2004: 9). Working in partnership with indigenous peoples and their museums is a key fo-

3. Bateson's field notes and the abundant field notes and photographic records from the joint field trip Bateson made after his marriage to Margaret Mead in 1938 are both now part of the South Pacific Ethnographic Archives described on the website for the Institute for Intercultural Studies at <http://www.interculturalstudies.org/resources.html#archives> hence referred to as LibC SPEA. Mead's Sepik material was examined at the American Museum of Natural History, and the Sepik collections at the Metropolitan Museum, where Douglas Newton was of great assistance. The Peabody Museum in Cambridge Massachusetts and the Essex Peabody Museum in Salem were visited. Christian Kaufmann later sent through to Cambridge, England, a photocopy of Basel Museum für Völkerkunde's Objekt-Katalog, and for ease of cross-reference I added in their numerical object codes as a separate data field in the Cambridge computer catalogue.

cus of the work at MAA, as is responsible contemporary collecting (Herle, 2005).

Returning to the Bateson project itself, rather than work since, we should take note of Bateson's own comments on the wide range of Middle Sepik art. In his *Oceania* article Bateson distinguished six types of Iatmul decorative art in a series progressing from the elaboration of useful details on objects (e.g. the careful binding for hafting axe-blades), through the ornamentation with shells, feathers and leaves, then the use of non-representational geometric designs, the addition of purely conventional faces, the broad use of totemic representations, to the final apogee of the realistic representations found on wooden portrait heads, and over-modelled skulls (Bateson, 1932: 261-262). This progression is partly reflected in the order followed by the Bateson project report, where the figure carvings, and particularly the most sacred heads and musical instruments come last. However, Bateson's many references to Iatmul totems and patterns indicate that this initial Western outsider's progression does not match the insider's model.

The outside analyser can never be certain that even the basic geometric pattern differences have no meaning, or are just "conventional". Bateson describes Iatmul fascination with the

"nature of ripples and waves on the surface of water. It is said secretly that men, pigs, trees, grass – all the objects in the world – are only patterns of waves." (Bateson, 1980: 230)

Different clans assert the primacy of their own elemental totems as causation for the wind and waves. So the same pattern will have different meanings for different clans. We need more ethnographies that record direct testaments from Iatmul and other Sepik artists, to better understand the wealth of Sepik art. A good recent example is the account by Claytus Yambon on carving with stone versus iron tools in Melanesia: Art and Encounter (Yambon, 2013: 120).

Because of the graded, secret and competitive nature of Iatmul men's sacred knowledge Bateson was only told the name of a clan ancestor depicted in a carving 11 times: – for one canoe mask, two figurative suspension hooks, six *mai* masks and water drums⁴. The figure hook 1935.71, which Bateson was told represents the human ancestor *Kworem-Awun* (fig. 1), is painted with red clay and ochre and naturalistically carved in the round. The torso and back are carved with a very complex keloid scar-pattern, like the scales of a crocodile on the back. Bateson notes that these very complex scar patterns are more common to the Sawos than the Chambri, from which the carving was said to have been looted. He made sketches of crocodile scar

patterns at Mindimbit (fig. 4.2.1 in the Bateson project). In his general notes on figure hooks he also warned that the Iatmul description of a given hook as a particular ancestor was an identification that probably only occurred in a ritual context, for example when that ancestor's name songs were being sung. Then the hook figure would be specially decorated with totemic plants such as hibiscus flowers and hung with baskets of offerings (Bateson's general notes on hooks at MAA, partly reproduced in the 1934 Sepik Display Handbook).

Faces and heads are much more detailed than the rest of the body on the figure carvings, and only on a small proportion of carvings are the genitals particularly clear. This is so for a unique item in Bateson's collection, used to press down the heads of initiates (fig. 5.1.1a 1935.19 ceremonial pillow). Andrew Moutu recognised the importance of the figure pair 1930.336 and 1930.337 as a pair of elder and younger brothers able to represent moieties (Herle and Moutu, 2004: back cover), and there is another figure pair 1935.38A and B with obvious female genitals.

Masquerade

Capturing the drama of masquerade requires more than a collection of masks, and Bateson describes many elements of different masquerade contexts, and left us with several key field photographs, such as that of the *wagan* dancing with nets holding a fish carving (Bateson, 1980: Plate XVIII B) and *wagan* plant sculptures (Bateson, 1980: Plate xxxviii A). He also acquired a good selection of musical instruments, which are part of the graded sacra revealed to male initiates. The pair of flutes, 1930.496 and 1930.497, from Malingai, are exceptional (Peltier and Schindlbeck, 2015: 272, Cat. 155 and 156). Bateson's short article in *The Eagle* introduced the topic of Iatmul music (1935), a subject now much better understood.

Bateson's collection includes ten examples of the Iatmul *mai* masks (he used the spelling *mwai* but *mai* is now more commonly accepted), which are paraded and danced at the conclusion of junior initiations, descending from a special platform built in front of the men's ceremonial house. He did a detailed sketch of the full costume which incorporates the *mai* mask, in a field notebook (GN1), and it is good to compare this with the description and photograph of a mounted *Mai* mask by Barry Craig taken in Korogo in 1981 (Howarth, 2015: 46 and 48).

Hauser-Schäublin's reports give us much more detail and context for how the named ancestor spirit is invited to enter the physical form, and

4. Clan ancestor names are given for the canoe mask 1935.144; the figure hooks 1935.62 and 1935.71, the *mai* masks 1935.28, 1935.30, 1935.34, 1935.35, 1935.165 and 1935.166; and the water drums 1935.21A and 21B.

FIGURE 2. – Two Awan masks, field photograph, village not known, 1930 (© Gregory Bateson)

the full complexity of the performance (Hauser-Schäublin, 1976-77 and 1981). She witnessed the carving of *mai* masks and the ritual surrounding this at Kararau in 1972 and also the final preparations for the exhibition of some *mai* masks in the same village in 1979. A Bateson photograph in the Library of Congress shows a temporary stage with many *mai* performers crowded on it (LibC SPEA Container 92 Tambunum 1930?), that is very similar to one of Hauser-Schäublin's photographs (Hauser-Schäublin, 1981: 49, Abb. 2). Barry Craig brings this up to date in his chapter on masks in "Myth and Magic", with his own photographs from Kaminimbit and Korogo, and a comparison between the *mai* mask ceremonies of the Iatmul in the Middle Sepik and the Brag masks of the Murik Lakes (Craig, 2015: 45-49).

In 2004 Andrew Moutu wrote a label for the *mai* mask 1935.165, for the "Paired Brothers" exhibition, which amplifies and then caveats Bateson's *mai* notes:

"*Mwai* are typically long-nosed masks, named after the local word for nassa shells, which are fixed onto the carving with oil and wood. There are two types of *mwai* masks. the wider one is female and the narrower is male. Each *mwai* mask has a personal name specific to a clan. There are particular *mwai* masks, which are owned by clans throughout the entire Iatmul region. When a nephew is shown his mother's *mwai* or helps to carve a *mwai* for his mother's clan, a *naven* ceremony may be performed by the nephew's mother's brothers. *Mwai* masks are shown publicly but much of their cosmological significance is known only to a

few initiated men. In order to conceal this information, Gregory Bateson was told only that there was something mysterious about *mwai* masks." (MAA database record for 1935.165 on-line in 2014 at <http://maa.cam.ac.uk/category/collections-2/catalogue/> not available May 2017)

The only example of the broader, larger and multi-faced *awan* masks for the senior men's house at Cambridge is one collected recently by Moutu and made by Peter Bonapan in Tam-

bunum (Herle and Moutu, 2004: 40). The MAA Bateson photographs include one showing two such masks, or the major elements of two *awan* in storage in the men's house (fig. 2). In the Library of Congress archives is a photograph of children putting the top mask on a small *awan* structure (no. 20731 on back of photo print), and another of children watching a young person wearing a sago palm-spathe fish mask (no. 20736). Bateson was able, however, to collect a strong group of seven Sawos basketry helmet shaped masks, mostly from Nggaigo Revwi (Gaikorobi), and there are two other large long snouted or beaked basketry masks at Cambridge, source and place of origin unknown. The palm spathe or basketry supports for the Iatmul *mai* and *awan* were often made by or recycled from previous creations by the Sawos, and the contrast and inter-dependence between these artforms is still being explored. Some *awan* include very lively animal totem forms which suggest very close relations which Sawos makers (Kaufmann, 2010: Photo 8, Museum der Kulturen Basel Vb 22114).

Bateson also collected five of the lesser canoe masks, with their broader faces and flat backs, which are attached to the "shields" at the front of war canoes. Berlin and AMNH also have a selection of these. Bateson only collected the masks, not the shields. Peltier and Schindlbeck note in the description of the masked shield Cat. 183

"Each canoe carried the name of a clan ancestor and the feathers around the object are linked to this ancestor. In the Middle Sepik, as part of certain ceremonies,

Figure 4 Formal Progression in Conventional Faces (Figure 1.2.2b in Bateson Project]

FIGURE 3. – Some Middle Sepik face-painting design options (© MAA Bateson Project Figures 5.2.2c and 5.2.2h)

these shields could be placed on the large slit gongs.” (Peltier and Schindlbeck, 2015: 299, my translation)

Faces and face-painting

The motif investigation showed that eye and mouth shape are the most varied of the different

facial features in Sepik art. Bateson found that some eye shapes do relate to specific animals or spirit types. The goggle-eyed faces carved on the majority of Iatmul lime gourds are identified as the faces of Windsimbu wood spirits (Figure 3.4.1f in the Bateson project). A similar palette-framed goggle-eyed face appears on a skull rack at Basel. One of the canoe masks collected by Bateson,

Face Painting Figure 5.2.2c Type 3: Transverse

Face Painting Figure 5.2.2c Type 4: Transverse

FIGURE 4. – Formal progression in conventional faces (© MAA Bateson Project Figure 1.2.2b)

1935.144, has a similar pinched or goggle eye surround, but this has the name of a clan ancestral spirit of the carver, Kwoliu. A simple eye mask, collected by Bateson, 1930.157A, has a similar shape, and Florence Weiss reports that it is worn during a Windsimbu festival (Weiss, 1984: A2).

A brief caption to a sketch of a small face in one of Bateson's field notebooks tells us that a heart-shaped face-frame is termed *wande* and

"sago-beetle, *puk-puk* (crocodiles) have *wande*, man has no *wande*, but *wande* may be put on carving of a face", also that "Spirals are also called *wande*. Scales or *pukpuk* are *wande*." (LibC SPEA Notebook GN1, page not numbered)

The heart-shaped face frame is noticeable in three miniature heads, which Bateson identifies as representations of the sago beetle or *parangun*, but also in the shape of the painted, inner, unshelled area of many *mai* masks. The same heart-shape frame occurs as a secondary or partial form, similar to a hair-line in many "conventional" faces. The problem is that under the heading of "conventional" faces both faces of animals, which are probably totems, faces of a class of spirits, the wood-spirits, and faces of unknown significance are grouped. Slight structural changes in line, mass and decoration, give rise to enormous variation in these conventional faces, as captured in this diagram (fig. 3).

One hypothesis to investigate is whether the detailing and variation in the decoration has any correlation with the symbolic importance of the

object itself. Such detailing is clearly evidence of dedication and effort by a maker or artist, but often it is not clear how much others value these efforts. And the sparse decoration on many ancient or small and concealable sacra would contradict this thesis. A related issue is what sort of object does an artist have the most potential to develop in their own way. Only future discussion with a range of Sepik artists might elucidate this issue properly and because meanings shift over time it may be that we will never know what particular images truly meant or mean now.

We do know that taking heads was a key religious activity, promoting the prosperity and pride of a village, as was preserving ancestor heads. A head was a key to the complex object assemblage made for a man's funeral display, as part of the *mbwatnggowi* figure (Bateson, 1980: cover image and Plate xxvii). Heads were also required for the correct completion of the sacred men's houses where the most sacred ritual items, masks, figure carvings, the debating stool and musical instruments were kept.

Carved faces and heads occur repeatedly in Middle Sepik art. Miniature heads decorate string bags, heads top the wooden hooks used to hang up items in the domestic and sacred houses. Three dimensional "portrait" heads, carved out of light pith, feature in elaborate dance ornaments for the buttocks⁵. We still do not know the full range of meanings for the use of these different types of heads in these different contexts, and because of

5. MAA collections include the dance ornaments 1935.8 & 10a, and 9, which can be compared with AMNH 80.0/ 7337 collected by Mead from Aibom (find this by searching for Dancing bustle at <https://anthro.amnh.org/pacific>) and MetMuseum 1981.415.2 (at <http://metmuseum.org/art/collection> search using this number).

the protection of sacred knowledge, we may never be privy to their full resonance.

The object type that draws more attention by visitors than any other is the over-modelled, and often highly decorated human skull (see Kocher Schmid, 2009). Two stand out in the Cambridge collections, 1930.410 which has a white face painting design on a reddish background, and the remains of a flying fox headband, and 1930.411, also finely painted, which has a nassa shell decorated nose extension. Bateson collected two other plain over-modelled skulls and there are three others at Cambridge. Bateson describes the modelling and painting in detail and he also took a series of photographs showing the process of painting over-modelled skulls. Similar more modern photographs of the preparation process have been published in the two recent exhibition catalogues⁶. The skull of a beautiful long-nosed person was cherished and re-used (Bateson, 1980: caption to Plate xxxv). Schindlbeck confirms that these overmodelled skulls could be exchanged, unlike secret clan objects which were never (or rarely?) given away (editor's comment). Thinking about the international appreciation of these artefactual human remains and possible ethical shifts it is worth noting that the regular appearance of Sepik over-modelled skulls in artbooks and on many museum websites is in strong contrast to the long campaign against such a use of Maori "Toi Moko" heads. Most museums now respect Maori wishes, for these heads not to be shown, and many have participated in the process of their repatriation to New Zealand⁷. No hint of any such repatriation demands has come out of Papua New Guinea.

More than fifty over-modelled skulls, portrait heads, and other instances of face-painting were compared to come up with a typology of face-painting designs. The variations on the forehead, around the eyes, nose, cheeks, chin and jaw-sides were examined and mapped onto a generic fairly broad face outline, as if a real face had been flattened out. The typology takes into account the number of highlighted areas, bands or lines on the face; and the direction which these and distinct pattern elements such as hooked circles, take over the face contours. The main types are 1) Highlighting Central Face Areas; 2) Radiating from Central Face Area; 3) Transverse; 4) Forehead discs and hooks. Types 3 and 4 are reproduced together here (fig. 4). In the long term it would be great if this typology could be reviewed and improved by another researcher using a larger sized sample, of at least 200 over-modelled skulls. Bateson obtained a clear description of the de-

capitation by the ritual clan partners of a homicide from an informant called Kambuamkelabi: the pressing of the bleeding neck against each of the slit gongs, onto which a head tally is cut, and the curing of the heads over a ceremonial fire, before the flesh is removed (Bateson Project 5.2.1 Overmodelled Skulls: 49). A long note with the sample of modelling earth in the collection gives a detailed description of the process of modelling and painting (1930.373). But there is no mention of any specific meanings for any particular designs. Only certain men know how to do the face painting, but

"any man may be expected to model [...] Artists were much rapt during both processes." (Bateson Project 5.2.1 Overmodelled Skulls: 49)

A key factor that the Bateson Project typology of face-painting does not address is the use of different colours. Eric Silverman has a comment about this from his more recent fieldwork in Tambunum

"Carved and painted faces often display a pattern of thin red and white swirling lines, which signify menstrual blood and semen respectively – in other words, somatic reproduction. This pattern is painted on the faces of young men during the *tshugukepma* ritual, which enacts cosmic creation and the totemic (re)production of the world... Eastern Iatmul say that tourists like this pattern, which they also paint on the faces of tourists. In the context of tourism, this style represents village identity, but it also allows Eastern Iatmul men to continue to reflect on traditional idioms of gender, reproduction, and cosmology." (Silverman, 1999: 64)

Animals and birds

Crocodiles, fish, pigs and birds recur with the greatest frequency after human/ancestor faces and figures in Middle Sepik art. Details of their variation were recorded and after a trial period it was decided that only crocodile and bird designs had enough variation to warrant any in depth comparisons. Crocodiles are clearly visible on many canoe prows, such as 1930.206, but also in several mixed figure carvings. Crocodiles feature in myths of origin (Herle and Moutu, 2004: 8) and are said to "eat" initiates during Bandi rituals (Herle and Moutu, 2004: 24). Only some of the crocodile features varied to a noticeable extent. These were the crocodile headtop, eyes, snout, jaws, jawtop and facetops (fig. 1.3.3g-h). But even with crocodile designs, the different ren-

6. Bateson's photographs are archived at LibC SPEA Bateson Tambunum 1938 Leica stills 29-R sheet 2b, and 29-Z sheet *1b. Nicholas Garnier has a 2003 colour photograph in Peltier and Schindlbeck, 2015: 82 fig. 20 and Des Bartlett's 1953 photo appears in Howarth, 2015: 167.

7. Go to the Te Papa museum website at <https://www.tepapa.govt.nz/about/repatriation> for full information on the repatriation history and process.

ditions of different totems are not well enough known, or possibly not distinctive enough, to give us any valid comments at present. Bateson was told that the carving 1930.203, a fish/crocodile mixed figure, must be kept hidden, wrapped in palm bracts. He commented

"Note the raised eyes of the fish (fish/crocodile or *Kami*), I think the object is for showing to the novices."

In the photograph of this object in *Oceania* (1932: pl. ix right a) Bateson says that these objects

"are exhibited by Iaua (nephew) of the dead at mortuary ceremonies and represent the ngwail of the dead man. The emblem would be tied on a pole."

The 1930.203 catalogue card continues:

"In the ceremonial houses it is usual to see a very large skull of a crocodile preserved. Into the spaces in the dossum of this skull are fixed pieces of pith which project like the eyes (of this fish). These piths are carved with surface squares (to represent scales?)."

This eye-bulge hook curve is an instance of a type of body protrusion that Bateson became very aware of, along with other protruding knobs and tiny hook-curved on particularly sacred carvings, often at the site of natural body protrusions such as nipples or navels, or joints such as elbows or knees. Their metaphysical meaning may relate to ties between the living and spirits, as in a comment seen on a Sawos model float, collected and documented by Markus Schindlbeck, and which was on show in Basel museum:

"Hooks were said to pull a spirit across into the spirit world, or back into this."

Bateson described the saw-fish face on some shields as "conventionally anthropomorphic" (Bateson project Figure 2.3.5b). Here the distinguishing feature is the extended triangular snout (below the mouth) with its zigzag edges. A photograph of a man holding a real sawfish rostrum or "snout", taken by Des Bartlett in 1953 is shown in "Myth and Magic" (Howarth, 2015: 22).

One carving of a tree-kangaroo 1930.406, seems fairly realistic (except for the shortness of the tail), whereas with 1930.333, and other sago beetle composite figures, we are back to the zone of totemic accretion. Another insect/flute player combination is on the single flute ornament 1930.535, similar to a cicada flute ornament illustrated by Paul Wirz (1959: Abb 4) whereas the *kami*-like pigs on the flute ornaments that were part of the Paris/Berlin/Zurich Sepik exhibition (1930.496 and 497) definitely represent an elder and a younger brother according to Bateson.

Birds are often shown fairly realistically in Iatmul art, there are many clearly detailed examples amongst the spear-thrower ornaments at Cambridge. Bateson names seven birds in English in his cataloguing notes, and two in Iatmul: cock or fowl; cockatoo (white or grey); duck?; eagle; egret; *fire far*; hawk; hornbill; *ian bun munga*. The most varied and distinguishing features of the different bird carvings are the beaks and head-tops. Bateson dwells on the importance of eagle totems symbolising the aggressive power of the men in the village (Bateson, 1980: 251). Eagles with outstretched wings often feature on the top of mens' house finials (MAA 1930.112 and 113 collected by E.W.P. Chinnery). The other most commonly depicted birds on a whole range of items are cocks or fowls, and cockatoos. Both are carved on lime sticks and spear-throwers. There are also two individual cock carvings in the Bateson collection, and a cockatoo on a drum and a dagger. A ceramic cock appears on an Aibom made ceramic house finial. Birds often perch on the shoulders or back of other figure carvings, sometimes in pairs, as in the hook figure 1935.62 and 1935.75. More local information is needed to understand what it might mean for a figure to have a pair of birds on its shoulders (1935.62) or either side of the torso (1935.75).

Sepik digital museum offers 2017 and beyond

Like other museums MAA aspires to present more and more of its collections on-line. In 2014-15 a public query using the term Sepik for looking up collections or objects brought up 1990 responses from their website at <http://maa.cam.ac.uk/category/collections-2/catalogue/>. However, only a handful of Sepik object entries had photographs attached. In order to undergo significant improvements the collections catalogue web pages are currently off-line (Spring 2017-2018). Preparing for the Sepik seminar at musée du quai Branly in September 2015 was a good opportunity to compare the websites of institutions with major Sepik holdings to gauge the progress made to date, and the options for improvements in the future. The search began by using the term "Sepik", and tried other alternatives such as names of peoples, too.

Five institutions starred highly in this review: the musée de quai Branly presents full details of 3114 Sepik objects and field photographs; the British Museum London has 1430 listed (but only a small proportion of the items are photographed); Staatliche Museum, Berlin 916; the American Museum of Natural History, New York 956; the Metropolitan Museum, New York 656.

None of the detailed work of the Iatmul Objektkatalog at Basel is yet on the website of the rebranded Museen der Kulturen Basel (<https://www.mkb.>

ch/en/programm.html) which has no catalogue pages. In addition to Basel quite a number of other European museum institutions known to have significant Sepik holdings provided no on-line listing or summary of these, including Bremen, Übersee-Museum (www.uebersee-museum.de/en/); Hamburg, Museum für Völkerkunde (<http://www.voelkerkundemuseum.com/>); Zürich, Museum Rietberg (<http://www.rietberg.ch/de-ch/sammlung/abteilungen/ozeanien.aspx>).

But you can get a glimpse of the Museen der Kulturen Basel Sepik collection in the short film “Die Welt mit Anderen Augen Sehen” available on their website, including the interior of the Abelam spirit house. Similarly the National Art Gallery and Museum in Port Moresby has no on-line catalogue but in 2015 the website had film of its masterpieces, made by the independent traveler Vic Stefanu, and in March 2018 although a search for this on the museum’s own website pages timed out on Google (last seen at <http://www.museumpng.gov.pg/index.php/galleries/masterpiece>) one could still see the film on Youtube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c_k_C2mh0c4.

In addition to museum specific websites the search also found a key project website – the Upper Sepik Central New Guinea Project at <http://uscngp.com/about/> with details of around 2500 objects and field photographs plus research papers. Plus the anthropologist Eric Silverman also has a useful fieldwork related website with many Tambunun New Guinea photographs and colour illustrated articles at <http://www.eksilverman.com>. Both the photographs and articles are free to download.

Of course, there are many issues in on-line databases with the proper mapping of information. For example “Bateson, G.”, is in the MAA database often entered in Context, rather than Source, so if one searches for all the items collected by Bateson, which one would usually expect to be under source, only a few come up. The listing of motifs is also under Context, and makes little sense as a list of motif names without any diagrams. Hopefully in a future version the motifs could be entered as graphic elements as well, possibly under a separate field.

On-line databases should prove very helpful once information on objects can be closely linked on screen with photographic images. Using scans of pre-existing photographs seems an efficient way to improve the efficiency of the system. MAA could do this using the mainly black and white photographs taken for the Bateson project in 1984-86. However, nowadays one would also want to take new larger digital photographs in colour, and from several viewpoints.

Only a few institutions currently provide information that satisfies at least minimal expectations regarding the quality and depth of relevant details such as origin, ethnographic context and provenance or the availability of at least one image per item. So it is clear that many institutions are still only part-way down this digital access route.

At the “Myth and Magic” exhibition of 2015 the National Gallery of Australia tried out large touchscreens with 3D film of many items, an enhancement of the visitor experience highlighted in this promotional video by CSIRO on YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Al-nBP_eCUs, accessed 10 September 2015). 3D photogeometry allows one to see the piece from every facet and one can imagine that collection highlights would benefit from this treatment on-line as well as in the gallery. However, using these on-site facilities may build up unrealistic expectations for off-site access. For example, I expected the map location nodes on the Sepik map at the “Myths and Magic” web pages (<http://nga.gov.au/exhibition/mythmagic/Default.cfm?MNUID=6>, accessed 10 September 2015) to lead through to archive and contemporary photographs of each place, and was then disappointed when these markers just brought up the name of the village in a left-hand column. But a separate link did then take you to Google Earth.

Digital remote access to collections can also be achieved through the use of film rather than on-line databases. Despite the variation in professional quality between the shorter film for the Museum der Kulturen Basel and Vic Stefanu’s record of the National Gallery and Museum, Port Moresby, it is great to have access to these. Two short films of the Sepik exhibition at quai Branly museum featured on YouTube and there was also a good selection of photo stills of the exhibition on their website in 2015⁸.

Embedding film in on-line object catalogues will become more possible as websites become more able to cope with the larger files size. This will be ideal for capturing aspects of live performances such as masqueraders dancing, and potentially for animating some museum collection items, such as masks moving from side to side. Ebook publication has gradually become more illustration friendly and has the potential for impacting hugely on personal digital libraries. For example you can now get an Ebook version of Adrienne Kaeppler “The Pacific Arts of Polynesia and Micronesia” (2008), in colour, you just have to make sure you are reading it on a colour compatible ipad rather than an older kindle. A good intermediate stage is a book with a CD or DVD of

8. At <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ncSDNQ0LDI4> by Fribourg 2012 and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1qXFvVLUAL0> by Scribe Accoupi and one can also still see a good selection of photo stills of the exhibition on their website at <http://www.quaibrantly.fr/en/exhibitions-and-events/at-the-museum/exhibitions/event-details/e/sepik-26753/> (19 December 2015).

illustrations for sharing. Gladys Reichard's South Pacific Designs republished by Dover (Reichard, 2007) comes with a CD-ROM of 394 royalty free images. For the many people who do not have access to University e-libraries fed by JSTOR and similar facilities, the growth of wider on-line publication will be very welcome.

A different way was chosen by MAA Cambridge for presenting their Fiji exhibition: "Chiefs and Governors: Art and Power in Fiji" in 2014, part of the much bigger international Fijian Art Research Project (2011-2014). This project also has a dedicated Facebook site (<https://www.facebook.com/fijianartproject/>) which allows for more direct personal interaction. While a traditional hard copy catalogue for "Chiefs and Governors" is available (Herle and Carreau, 2014), the exhibition and Facebook web-pages ensure low cost international accessibility. Both Facebook and Instagram web-pages could be a route to follow for re-presenting the Bateson project.

One way to reconnect the museum practice to indigenous is evidently by using powerful and light pads for displaying and recording. Lucy Carreau discusses the pros and cons of her experiences of using an iPad in Fiji at the start of the above project. She wanted to elicit comments on both MAA Fijian items, and the watercolours by Gordon Cumming (Carreau, 2014). It was a "learning journey" on both sides. Her experience suggests several practical strategies for using an iPad or tablet to show Bateson's object photos and the motif drawings to people in the Middle Sepik in the future. This would be in addition to donating physical copies of field and object photographs to key local institutions (Peers and Brown, 2003).

Conclusion

Individual researchers and authors now make personal choices about how their on-going work and their relationship with the village and villagers they are linked to is shown on-line. It is interesting to wonder whether Bateson would have followed a similar practice to Silverman had he been working today rather than in the late 1920s and 1930s, and presented his photographs and articles on-line and free to download.

It will eventually be easier for both researchers and New Guinea artists to access and interrogate a huge number of collections of objects, photographs and film on-line. It is already easy to find a good range of illustrations on-line when preparing a presentation for a custom audience. Special efforts are still needed to resolve copyright and space issues for more long-term on-line publications. More and more museums are now

embracing wiki-commons or similar permission formats for photographic re-use. So we can look forward to more detailed comparisons of particular object types, co-authored by PNG Sepik artists and experts, in essay or blog form. Imagine if one was re-publishing articles like those by Douglas Newton on Malu boards (Newton, 1963), with a variety of co-authors and hyperlinks to collection websites. Surely, this will be possible before the next comprehensive Sepik exhibition. Meanwhile we need to ask Andrew Moutu and his Iatmul or Sepik contacts how they themselves would like to see the work progress online. The potential for future collaboration is exciting.

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