

CALL BACK TO MOANA NUI:
MUSEUM RESEARCH FOR PACIFIC ISLANDER ANCESTORS AT THE UNIVERSITY
OF MICHIGAN

by
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There are no photographs of human remains in this thesis.

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To my family, I would not be able to study at such a fantastic University and do this meaningful research without all the sacrifices you have made to allow me to take this path. I carry you all with me every day, even when we're separated by thousands of miles. I am able to push forward and aim big because I know I have your love to support me. Hu guaiya hamyo. Te quiero todo.

ABSTRACT

Museum collections can be great homes for magnificent art and experience, but they can also be cages for the physical and spiritual remains of indigenous peoples in their collections. In this thesis three Pacific Islander skulls donated to the University of Michigan Museum of Anthropological Archaeology were analyzed through non-traditional methods to reconcile questionable documentation and provenance information. Due to limited provenance information within the museum record, the study focuses on the visual, cultural, and osteological analysis of each skull to understand specific cultural practices unique to communities and islands each skull has been removed from. Visual analysis of iconographic designs, stylistic elements, and cultural practice methods reveal inconsistencies in the museum documentation and spark discussion on possible interpretations. One suggestion discussed in this thesis is the conflation of cultural goods and human remains made specifically for commerce, and the difficulties that arise in provenance research and repatriation when considering human remains that were not used for ancestral worship or cultural purposes when setting the groundwork for repatriation.

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Introduction

Deep jungles filled with dangerous and untempered tribes of savage cannibalistic peoples—a view of the South Pacific and Melanesia that has been perpetuated throughout Western interpretation by everything from the accounts of the infamous Captain Cook, fictitious works of Melville, and the ghastly expeditions led the Lahey brothers. The Pacific and its peoples have been poked, baited, and forced into the pernicious labels of savage and old worldly, still hanging on to the deepest corruptible nature of man. Melville's novel *Typee*, a twisting self-inserting narrative published in the 1800s, targets the cannibalistic stereotypes that plague the South Pacific and build upon the notion that the region is an unsafe and dangerous place for the Western world. The Lahey excursion into Papua New Guinea directly sought out untouched parts of Papua New Guinea and their filming and portrayal of Pasifika (in reference to Pacific Islander) life supported the idea of Papua New Guineans as untouched peoples. James Cook the most infamous, in Pacific studies, British explorer's goal of discovering the North-West Passage took him to dozens of island nations where he cajoled and attempted to plunder the kingdoms of resources and spiritual sovereignty. This fascination with the South Pacific as a place of exotic dangers, and later beauties, spread rapidly throughout Western interpretation and media. Films like *Moana* (1926), the first documentary film ever made, and every rendition of Nordhoff and Hall's *Mutiny on The Bounty* adding to a growing captivation with owning, distorting, and controlling Pasifika bodies and culture. Moana meaning ocean in 'Ōlelo Hawai'i, is central to Oceanic values and is best explained through Epeli Hau'ofa concept of the ocean as the greatest connector in his work "Our Sea of Islands. " For Flagthery, director of *Moana* (1926), the term moana was simply an exotic tokenization of Pasifika culture, similar to how collectors saw the belongings and actors they took to fill galleries.

The fascination then reached a new sweeping height in WWII when the United States occupied more space and islands than ever before, with dozens of bases and stations set up all over the Pacific. Bases were established across Polynesia and Melanesia, such as the Naval Base at Guadalcanal or the Airfields at New Hebrides [Vanuatu], during the war for launching bomber groups and later in Micronesia, Tinian, for the launching of nuclear weapons (National Park Service). The Pacific War, expanding the presence of American forces in the Pacific, placed soldiers on the shores of these islands after years of exposure to interpretations of the Pacific from sources such as Melville and *Moana*. With a new group of people and buyers who had been introduced to the region as a land of untouched oddities, the boom of WWII soldiers fostered a niche uptick in commercialization and commodification of Pasifika culture and cultural items. While posted in the region, soldiers would purchase various culture objects like clubs, mats, and even parts of Pacific islander bodies to bring back after their stations. From this boom sprouted an even larger market for Pasifika-made and inspired objects of culture that could be easily bought, traded, and carried back home with soldiers.

Over the generations the desire to own Pasifika objects, belongings, and bodies, brought large assemblages of cultural objects and relatives out from their home lands and seas into Europe and the Americas where they resided in public and private collections or were lost during exchanges. The demand and market spurred on by WWII only served to further expedite this exportation of cultural goods and human remains, increasing the prevalence of Oceanic pieces in collections around the world. Filling up private and institutional collections, such as the Yale Peabody Museum, some of the most ornate and decorative objects no longer live in their home regions (Figure 1). Collections across the United States were largely affected by this influence, with the majority of Oceania collections

consisting of predominantly Melanesian and Polynesian objects, belongings, and ancestors.

The practice of mass collecting was commonplace all over Melanesia, but was most prevalent in Papua New Guinea as sailors and merchants would sail up and down the Sepik River collecting and buying whatever they could find.



Figure 1. Hall of the Pacific, Yale Peabody Museum

The practice of collecting to fill up private collections and institutions has resulted in difficulties in repatriation and origin based work felt today, and will likely still be for the upcoming decades. Since this mid-twentieth century period of collecting there have been many changes in how items, belongings, and human remains are acquired, but not much has been done broadly to address the damage that has resulted from these unethical collecting practices. Focused on collecting and purchasing, the boom in cultural item commodification highlighted quantity over everything else, pushing the preservation of documentation and provenance to the backburner.

Provenance and Collections

Provenance, the age-old plight of museum researchers, refers to the historical origin of an object, art piece, belonging, and/or ancestor. Originating from the French term "to come from," *provenir*, provenance refers to the ownership of an object, tracking it as it changed hands from the point of creation, moment of collection, and any further transfers, sales, or donations that occur after that (DePaul University Library). Provenance is a close cousin to the term *provenience*, which specifically marks the "findspot" of an object within an archaeological excavation or survey, pinpointing the locational information of a find (Anderson 2024). Within archive spaces, provenance has expanded into a less rigid definition and has shifted to be in conversation with *context*. Context in an archaeological understanding is all the additional information that is recorded during the excavation of a find, such as physical descriptors, position, and composition, and the spatial relationship a find has to other features within the site. In archives and museum collections, context covers the root information of an "object's creation, use, and interpretation" (Anderson 2024). Essential to understanding the history of an object, provenance allows museums and researchers to preserve the life story of a piece in their collection. Considering its position as a core aspect in collections documentation, one would assume that provenance would be carefully recorded and collected when objects are collected and accessed. However, it was not always professionally required and therefore objects collected prior to the 1980s frequently do not possess this documentation.

In 1970 the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) held their General Conference meeting in Paris where the "concern over, and international cooperation in responding to, the problem of pillage of cultural property and loss of archaeological material during the 1960s" resulted in the Convention on the Means of

Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration). This Convention urged afflicted parties to establish formal measures and guidelines “to prohibit and prevent the import, export and transfer of cultural property” (UNESCO). In addition to the call for attention to more ethical treatment of cultural property, the Convention pushed for international adoption of prevention methods in the form of the regular establishment of inventories and export certificates, the highlighting of approved traders, the developing of procedures to take criminal or administrative actions, and the creation of education campaigns around cultural patrimony. Prior to this Convention the United States followed what is known as the 1934 U.S. National Stolen Property Act (NSPA), which targeted the trafficking, sale, or receipt of stolen goods—among “securities, moneys, fraudulent State tax stamps”—by any individual and decreed that they would be fined and prosecuted under the title of this Act (U.S. Code Title 18: Sections 2314 and 2315). The U.S. may have enacted NSPA well before the Convention, but did not follow explicit procedures towards the preservation of cultural patrimony until the signing of the Convention on Cultural Property Implementation Act (CCPIA) in 1983 as a response to the UNESCO Convention. CCPIA, enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives, pulls directly from Articles 7(b)(1) and 9 of the 1970 UNESCO Convention and allows the U.S. to fully impose import and export restrictions when the sanctity of cultural patrimony is threatened. Under the ordinance of this law, museums and collecting institutions must be able to trace the provenance of any accessions of purchases to 1983.

International negotiation and regulation suggestions over proper documentation practices did result in the increase of provenance information after 1983, but did result in great reflection of collections documentation for objects gathered prior to 1983. This is still a

major issue for most museums that had collecting periods prior to 1983 as they are left with many assemblages lacking this necessary information. Research into provenance based information and documentation is an unglamorous and sometimes costly (in time and funds) project. However, without this research there will be a limit to how far a collecting institution can progress in endeavours to righting the unethical practices of the past. For repatriation efforts this kind of research is essential to narrowing down nations, communities, and even families of origin. Provenance research should always be the first step in any repatriation project, and advancing without doing proper due diligence can be dangerous for the communities and individuals involved.

Framing

This thesis project centers on provenance-based research and approaches the Oceania ethnographic collection at the University of Michigan Museum of Anthropological Archaeology (UMMA), specifically three Pasifika ancestors housed within the collection. With an end goal of starting a repatriation process for these Indigenous human remains—listed as originating from the Solomon Islands, New Hebrides, and German New Guinea—this thesis project looks to merge both contemporary research practices and Pasifika-based care values. In this paper I refer to the Pasifika understanding of human remains as living ancestors/deities when discussing the three ancestors within the UMMAA collection. It is a goal for this paper to examine the museum’s responsibility to repatriate skulls removed from the Pacific by archaeological or ethnographic methods regardless of documentation status.

Throughout the thesis, I rely on the terms Near Oceania, Remote Oceania, and Oceania as defined by Dr. Patrick Kirch (2017) in “On the Road of the Winds: An Archaeological History of the Pacific Islands before European Contact,” to denote regional

areas of the South Pacific. Oceania, of the Blue Continent, refers to all the Austronesian island nations in the South Pacific excluding the Philippines, Indonesia, and Taiwan. Oceania has also been used as an alternative term when speaking of all the Pacific Islands. Most commonly read through the influence of Epeli Hau'ofa's "Our Sea of Islands," Oceania also serves as a reframing for how the sea is a highway of connections rather than borders between land masses.

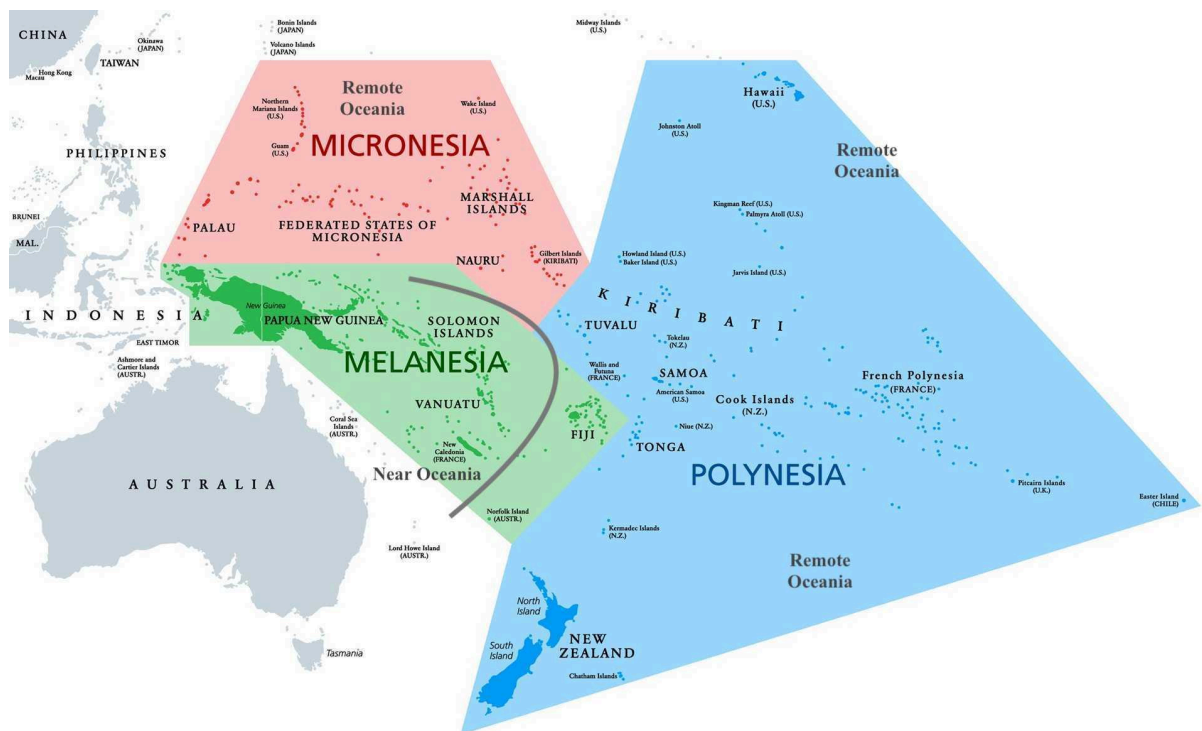


Figure 2. Map of Moana Nui, Oceania (labeled)

Kirch describes Near Oceania as referring to the island nations immediately close to the Bismarck Archipelago, now a part of Papua New Guinea, and includes New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. Separated for its density of rich biodiversity, Near Oceania is defined for its regional proximity to the Bismarck Archipelago and to the ancestral launching point for further migration into the South Pacific. The region is also described as the homelands for

the development of Lapita culture, a voyaging group with distinct material and cultural practice signatures during the Neolithic (Kirch 2017). Remote Oceania refers to the remaining island nations in the South Pacific, reaching as far West as Palau, as North as Hawai‘i, as far East as Rapa Nui, and to the Southernmost point of Aotearoa. The term Remote Oceania highlights the decrease in biodiversity and increase in distance between islands the further away from Near Oceania an island nation is.

The terms Near and Remote Oceania also serve as an alternative to the essentialist categorical terms coined by explorer Jules Dumont d'Urville to refer to Oceania and its peoples; Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia (Figure 3). Separated based on land mass, number of islands, and racialized descriptions of the people who live there, these terms have a complex social history rooted in otherism and the division of Oceania peoples. The term Melanesia had been assigned to the peoples of the islands of Papua New Guinea, Fiji, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu, and New Caledonia for their dark complexions in relation to other Pacific Islanders, namely Polynesians, and white Europeans. While based in racialized ideologies, the monikers of Melanesian, Micronesian, and Polynesian have been adopted by the peoples of this region and have been reclaimed as regional unifiers and a source of proud identities. In this paper I will use a combination of these terms, using Melanesian when referring to regionally cultural specific patterns, Near and Remote Oceania when examining a wider scope of Oceania.

Background: UMMAA's Oceania remains collections

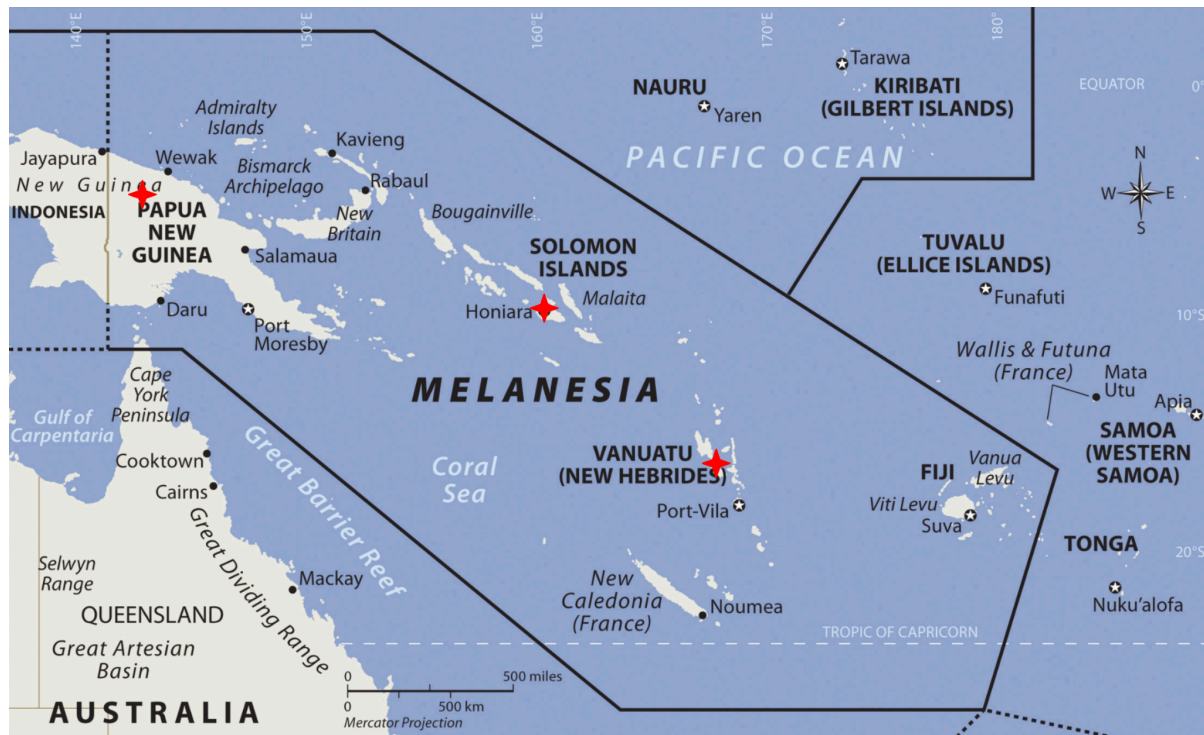


Figure 3. Melanesia Map (labeled indicating the points of reference for the three skulls in UMMAA's care according to their documentation at the start of this thesis research.)

The thesis considers the remains of three Indigenous Pacific Islanders housed at the University of Michigan Museum of Archaeological Anthropology. The remains, which consists of three skulls, were donated to the museum between 1945-2000. Unfortunately when the skulls were donated to the museum they did not come with significant documentation regarding their island nation origins or history of ownership. This has served as a barrier for both conversations around repatriation and proper recognition of remains as ancestors of living communities. In this thesis I detail my examination of the island origins of all three ancestors, opening a door to future conversations with Pasifika communities.

In 1945 the UMMAA received the first Pacific Islander ancestor into their collections. Coming from a trade with the Chicago Field Museum, a common practice of museums at the time, a single skull (without their mandible), arrived at UMMAA alongside a lime holder,

tortoise shell arm ring, wooden mask, string and shell bag, wooden club, shell axe (hafted), wooden figure, shell ring, and wooden pillow [take picture of these collection]. The assemblage from the Field Museum had been categorised as New Guinean in origin and was accompanied by the limited provenance documentation and contextual information the Field Museum was originally provided.

The museum received its next Pacific Islander ancestor in 1986 when Marlene Thomas donated a single overmodeled¹ skull (mandible intact), a wood shield, and wood and stone fighting club to the collections. Thomas had not been the original collector of the skull; she purchased the skull from an Australian Art dealer in 1971 for AUD\$200 alongside three other objects, including the fighting shield that was donated, which was purchased for AUD\$150. Thomas purchased a total of 11 known objects/belongings/ancestors from Australia, but only donated three of the listed purchases. The locations of the other remaining eight purchases are unknown. The information received from Thomas was also similarly limited and the only provenance and context the museum has originates from what the dealer shared with Thomas, that the skull was from Malekula, New Hebrides [Vanuatu].

The third Pacific Islander UMMAA received was donated in 2000 by Virginia Wetmore and Hazel Coe. Similar to the other two instances of acquisition, the donation included a single overmodeled skull (mandible intact). Unfortunately the pattern of lack of context continues: the only documentation accompanying the ancestor was a location provided by a brother-in-law of the original collector, Harold E. Wallace (also brother-in-law to Wetmore and Coe) who seems to have procured the skull while stationed near Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands. These three ancestors' skulls have remained in the UMMAA collections since they were accessioned, though they were rehoused in the 2010s when the

¹ A skull covered and built up by layering organic mixtures in a “paper-mache” fashion to reflect facial features which are then painted and decorated.

collection shifted of the old Ruthven facility to their current facilities at the Research Museum Center (RMC).

With UMMAA focusing on addressing the history of their collections through existing projects such as ReConnect/ReCollect, this project was also able to get its footings. ReConnect/ReCollect is a provenance and repatriation centered program that included research into the ethical care of Indigenous human remains that were removed from the Philippines by projects spearheaded by the University of Michigan. The ReConnect/ReCollect project, and its critical reflection into this institution's colonial legacy paved the groundwork for similar projects, such as this thesis project. In 2025, Dr. Tiffany Fryer stepped into the role of Curator of Ethnology at UMMAA. One of the first projects she hoped to pursue was addressing the scant documentation concerning the Pasifika ancestors and exploring options for repatriation, or at minimum more culturally-attuned care. The current state of the provenance documentation for the three ancestors makes it near impossible to return them home if that is the wish of their communities. Due to the incomplete records and potentially incorrect information, further research was required to determine the islands of origin and tribe of origin for each ancestor prior to contacting any island nations or tribal officials. Dr. Fryer invited me to aid in this endeavor. With an end goal of a repatring the human remains, this project was given precedent over assessing the 1,300 other Oceanic objects and belongings housed at the UMMAA.

Methods

This thesis examined three Pasifika skulls housed at The University of Michigan Museum of Anthropological Archaeology in an attempt to unveil the communities and islands of origin for each ancestor. Taking the limited documentation accompanying the

skulls, I investigated the donors and known history of ownership prior to accession. Notably the documents provided were sparse and required the support of additional research into iconographic and cultural identifiers on the skulls. Needing to accommodate for limited documentation, I hoped to use visual analysis of the cultural stylistic designs, patterns, and presentation of each skull to provide greater insight into the specific postmortem practices and rituals that could have led to the presentation of each ancestor in their current state. Combining visual analysis and research into the three listed islands of origin, I aimed to determine if the skulls do actually originate from the island nations they were described as being collected from by the donors and art dealers. Visual analysis was used primarily as a tool to gather as much information as possible about each ancestor to attempt to uncover their island nation home before contact was made with any of the communities. Once there was a high likelihood the island origin of the ancestor was found, then a call went out to community members and leaders of that island. Osteological analysis of each skull also helped shed light on cultural practices by allowing the determination of age, sex, and potential ancestry, though the last feature is contentious and would only be used as suggestive supporting information.

Existing provenance/museum documentation

According to accession forms and accounts from donating parties, the three ancestor skulls are reported to have originated from the Solomon Islands, New Hebrides [Vanuatu], and German New Guinea [New Guinea]. The ancestor from the Solomon Islands (UMMAA identification no. 2000-4-1) was collected by Lieutenant Harold Edward Wallace who served in the US Navy during WWII in the South Pacific (Figure 4). Wallace, as reported by the family, was “stationed on an island 15 to 20 miles east of Guadalcanal in 1943 and 1944...[and] had a PhD from the University of Michigan in parasitology” when he first came

across the ancestor according to a letter from the donors (Accession #1986-19). Based on the accounts from his relatives, Wallace had collected the ancestor from this island region while working on mosquito control for the US government, but no specific island within the island chain was mentioned. Beyond the island name little more was shared with the accession team during the arrival of the ancestor at UMMAA. In this project, this ancestor will be referred to as the ancestor from the Solomon Islands as an alternative to using assigned numerical identifiers until the proper island nation is identified.

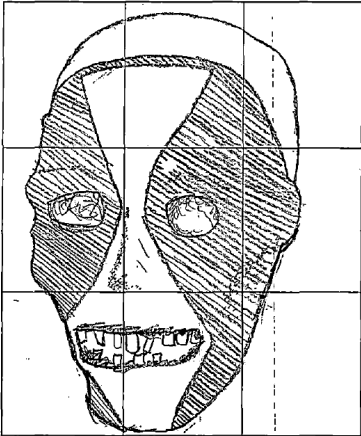
CONDITION REPORT: MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY													
Reported by: <u>E. Bridges, D. Bleckley</u>	<u>2000.04.1</u> Catalog #/Accession #/ Loan #												
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Rough sketch: 	Description: <u>Human cranium and mandible</u> <u>modeled with plaster over fibers.</u> <u>Painted with a geometric design</u> <u>in black and orange-red. Teeth</u> <u>are bared.</u> 												

Figure 4. Solomon Islands ancestor intake sheet

The ancestor from New Hebrides (UMMAA identification no. 1986-19-3) was purchased by Marlene Straka Thomas from a dealer in New South Wales, Australia alongside a “Wood and stone fighting club from the highlands of Papua...and large, black, wood, fighting shield from Arebunkera in the eastern highlands of New Guinea.” (Figure 5). Unlike the other two belongings purchased, the ancestor was listed as originating from Malekula, New Hebrides. This specific island, Malekula, within the island nation of New Hebrides is listed both physically on the display case the ancestors rests in and on the museum documentation. New Hebrides was the name assigned to the islands of Vanuatu by James Cook in 1774 and had still been in use when they were collected. The name New Hebrides will be used instead of Vanuatu to stay consistent with museum documentation. Although museum documentation notes their purchase from a dealer in Australia, no further identifying information was provided during the time of accession.

DESCRIPTION AND REMARKS:

Three items purchased by the donor from a dealer in Australia. She had little information concerning the specimens other than what was included on the original receipts. Note that these items were acquired when Australia was administering the source territories. Thus Papua and New Guinea were not yet combined as a single political entity.

The specimens are:

86-19-1: Large, black, wood, fighting shield from Arebunkera in the eastern highlands of New Guinea.

86-19-2: Wood and stone fighting club from the highlands of Papua.

86-19-3: Overmodeled (clay) human skull from Malekula, New Hebrides

Figure 5. New Hebrides ancestor and accompanying materials card

The third ancestor is listed as originating from around the Kaiserin Augusta River in German New Guinea (UMMAA identification no. 17721), but was given to UMMAA as a trade exchange from the Chicago Field Museum of Natural History in 1945. The ancestor had

been traded alongside a lime holder, tortoise shell arm ring, wooden mask, string and shell bag, wooden club, shell axe (hafted), wooden figure, shell ring, and wooden pillow by the Field Museum (Figure 6). In return, UMMAA had sent over objects from the Aleutian Islands. Although the Field Museum did not share if there was a date of collection recorded, this ancestor was originally collected by Captain H. Voogdt from “Kaiserin Augusta River, Singrin, 25 miles up” (Figure 7). The name Kaiserin Augusta River was assigned to what is now known as the Sepik River in the 1880s when New Guinea was still under German control. Regrettably, no further provincial information was available through the accession forms and accompanying papers. The name GNG (German New Guinea) will be used instead of Papua New Guinea to stay consistent with museum documentation. Negative images and photographs were included with the accession information for the ancestor from New Hebrides and the Solomon Islands, respectively, but are not used in this project for the sake of identification in respect of the ancestors who were photographed.



Figure 6. Chicago Field Museum, Melanesia transfer, taken by me

A
147678
ENT
(1005)

FIELD MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY.

Country German New Guinea

Locality Kaiserin Augusta River, Singrin, 25 miles up.

People

Name Skull (g) Same as 147677. Left zygomatic arch is broken.

Stock.

Memo. 1150 - 10/1/45 - Ecd. 8 v. f. mch.

Collection Capt. H. Voogdt
Gift of Mr. Joseph N. Field

Notes

Acc. 1088

Width Length Height Price

Figure 7. Chicago Field Museum, ancestor card

Project Preferred Name	Museum No.	Date of Accession	Date of Acquisition
Solomon Island ancestor	2000-4-1	03/08/2002	Not known
New Hebrides ancestor	1986-19-3	08/21/1986	2/10/1971 (purchased)
GNG ancestor (German New Guinea)	17721	10/01/1945	1943-1944

Table 1. Ancestor naming convention, created by me

Visual identification

All three skulls have unique visual presentations that vary in structure, style, color, and design. The skull of the GNG ancestor is a small cranium, a skull without a mandible, completely covered in a red-ochre-like pigment with visibly detailed carvings on the frontal region of the cranium (Figure 8, right). The carved design swirls across and spans the entire frontal area in a kidney shape from just under where the bregma should be, intersecting the coronal and sagittal sutures, to just above the brow ridge (Figure 7, left). Creating an almost

mirror image of the design, the carvings have very slight variation between the left and right, with more visible spacing between the carved lines on the left than the right and a potential carving mistake in the innermost left section. The bregma, or where it should be, is drilled away for the sake of what appears to be a mounting hole and shows signs of bowing in a circle around the drill hole. Along the left parietal the number 1005 is visible and written in pencil, while along the left temporal the number 43527 is written in black ink. The orbital and nasal sockets appear to be filled with dry brittle cork-like material carefully cut to fit nearly perfectly within the sockets. On the palate of maxilla are more numbers, 17721 written in red ink and 147678 written in black ink. 17721 is also written on the paper tag yoked to the right zygomatic arch. There is no further evidence of postmortem decoration or modification.

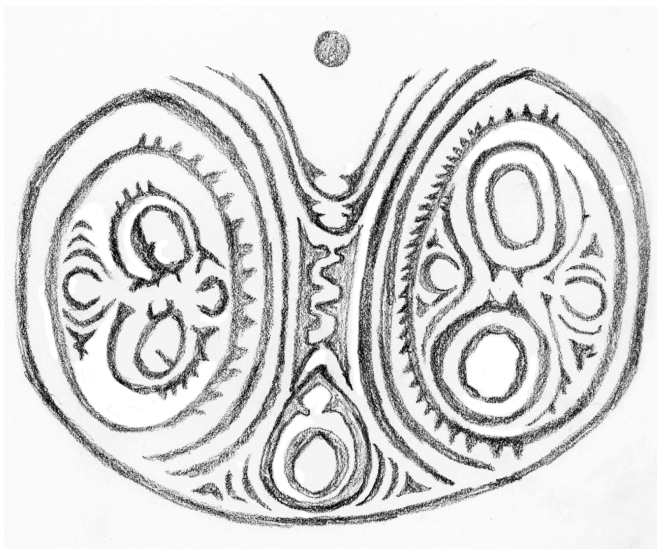
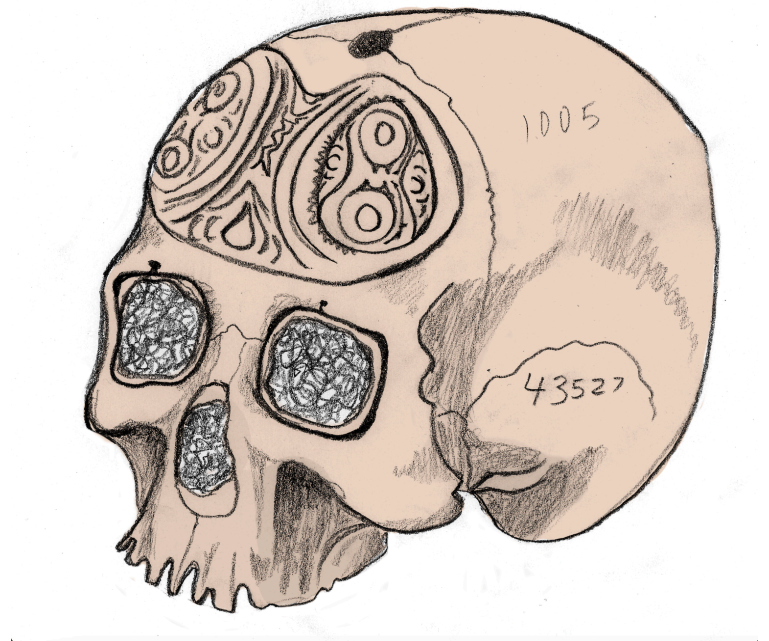


Figure 8. Left: Drawing of skull etching, Right: Drawing of GNG ancestor (by Carly Salazar)

The skull from the Solomon Islands ancestor is dissimilar from the GNG ancestor skull. Someone has instead layered material--what looks like a mixture of clay and coconut

husk--over the entirety of the Solomon Islands skulls' splanchnocranium and facial skeleton. Facial features have been added to the skull covering the front of the cranium and over the attached mandible (Figure 9). The mandible appears to be attached to the cranium with thin strips of lauhala (pandanus) used as cordage to likely tie the condylar neck to the zygomatic arch, keeping the mandible in place. The overmolded features also likely help to stabilize the mandible and prevent it from moving. The overmodeled surface is built out to replicate strong prominent features of a large nose, high cheekbones, and prominent brow ridge. A red-orange hourglass shape appears directly in the center of the face, splitting the facial regions into thirds. The hourglass shape consists of an upside down triangle starting from the top of the frontal pointed down to supraorbital ridge/glabella where it is met by a diamond shape that covers the nose and mouth down to the bottom of the mandible. The rest of the overmolded features are covered by a dark black pigment with visible cracks across the surface of the entire face. The mouth is displayed open and bearing a mix of splintering wooden teeth and a few molars that originally belonged to the skull. The orbital cavities are exposed and unfilled, allowing a glimpse into the makeup and structure of the overmodeled layer. Inside the cranium, looking up into the foramen magnum, there are thicker strips of lauhala bunched up filling the cranial cavity.



Figure 9. Drawing of Solomon Islands ancestor (by Carly Salazar)

Similarly to this skull, someone had also modified the skull of the New Hebrides ancestor to display similar overmolded features. However, this skull is completely covered by the clay-coconut husk mixture (Figure 10). There is some distinction between the facial molding and the rest of the molding as there seems to be a concentration of thicker clay-coconut husk mixture layered on the face and a thinner crackling layer covering the rest of the skull. Over the back of the parietal and occipital regions there is an additional covering of light grey natural/animal fiber spanning the area. In the fiber pieces of dust, yarn, and other matrices are visible. The overmodeled skull is also decorated with pigments—this time with red, black, and white. The patterns seen on this skull do not have the same level of symmetry as the Solomon Islands skull as the red and black pigments cover the face, splitting roughly in half. The white pigment extends around the empty orbital sockets and shoots straight down

ending at the open mouth. The mouth is notably missing almost all teeth save a few back molars, with very clear sockets where they had once resided. The mouth is built out further on this skull, just like the rest of the facial features such as the large nose, very defined cheekbones, and brow. Pieces of the overmodeled layer have peeled away and flopped down over the edge of the right side of the skull. In addition to its postmortem modeling, this skull had been further modified with display in mind: at some point it was mounted on an acrylic stand within an acrylic and wood display case. On the wooden base the following is written “Overmolded skull Malekula, New Hebrides.” The acrylic case is removable and secured in place with four small gold screws. For the sake of the blessing ceremony, which is covered in *Continuous Care*, and visual and osteological identification, the acrylic case was removed. I requested that the acrylic case remain unattached from the base and removed from covering the skull even after the blessing ceremony concluded in an effort to reduce the further commodification of this ancestor.



Figure 10. Drawing of New Hebrides ancestor (by Carly Salazar)

Osteological identification

Osteological analysis was done on all three skulls in an effort to better understand the individuals and to support the findings from visual and literature analysis. Another goal of osteological analysis was to use the identification of sex and age to determine if the findings match with known preferences in sex and age of individuals who normally undergo postmortem modification in specific island regions. Under the guidance of UMMAA's Osteology Inventory Specialist, Irene Hochgraf-Cameron, I was able to analyze the sex and age of each individual through osteological analysis of the degree of prevalence and absence of features on the skulls. This osteological analysis occurred separately to visual analysis and

involved only non-metric data collection and non-destructive practices. The procedure for osteological analysis for all three skulls included; pathology, taphonomy, age, sex, and ancestry identifiers. The metrics for age and sex determinants were derived from two foundational osteological texts geared around non-metric data measurements, Jonathan Haas's (1994) "Standards for Data Collection from Human Skeletal Remains" and Tim D. White and Pieter A. Folkens's (2005; see especially chapters 6 and 7) provided necessary information on proper terms and the anatomy of the skull. Since the only skeletal remains present for osteological study were three skulls, specific sections on skull-based analysis and identification had to be used.

Determining Sex and Age

Haas's cranial morphology guidelines served as the primary framing for my methodology here, targeting diagnostic determinants visible specifically on skulls. In particular, the "Scoring system for sexually dimorphic cranial features" chart provided instructions for how to determine the likely sex of a skull through an analysis of five specific aspects of skull morphology (Figure 11). The chart aims to provide direction to determine the "robusticity of the nuchal crest, size of the mastoid process, sharpness of the supraorbital margin, prominence of glabella, and projection of the mental eminence" (Haas 19). The chart, alongside detailed instructions and guidelines on how to assess each feature, then grades the features on a five-point scale. The scale grades features based on the level of robustness or gracility a feature possesses, with feminine scoring the lowest and masculine features scoring the highest. The chart showcases the most extreme features on either end for the sake of clear demonstration and ease of replicability. The examination into the five feature determinants of sex were also supported further by an examination of the gonial angle, gonial flaring, frontal

angle, and frontal bossing when the main five data points were unavailable. This was suggested by Irene to account for the great deal of surface area the overmodeling covers.

Within this section it is noted that “estimating sex based on cranial features can be a challenging process,” especially considering variation in populations (Haas 1994, 19). Conversations with Irene also revealed that sex-based analyses of skeletal morphology can be complicated by the effect of testosterone and muscle prevalence [or something that makes this sentence more active]. Testosterone and other hormones affect the growth of muscles all over the body, including the head, and can in the long term change skeletal features. There can be difficulties in determining the sex of skeletal remains if not done in relation to age and pathology as these three factors greatly influence findings. This is particularly the case when examining the sex of younger skeletal remains that have not undergone puberty or much older remains. With younger skeletal remains there can be some difficulties in determining whether the remains belong to a young girl or a young male, similarly with older aged remains there can be difficulties in identification between older postmenopausal women and older men due to the effect of hormones on skeletal growth.

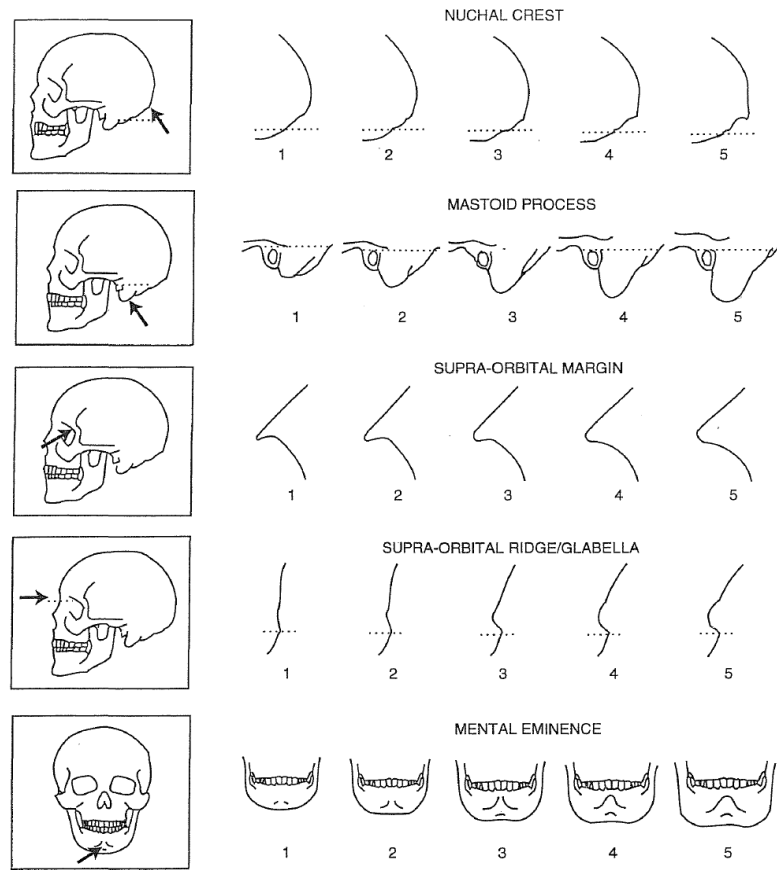


Figure 11. Sex determinants chart (Haas 1994, 20)

The guidelines on how to determine age from skull features also came from this chapter in the section under Cranial Suture Closure. The chapter highlights suture closures on the cranium as the best determinants of age in skull morphology when there are no other skeletal remains that can support a more definite identification of age. He notes that an examination of the sutures can provide the best age estimate when done alongside other attributes, and that a certain level of variability is possible with suture closures patterns. His instructions direct our attention to the “10 ectocranial, 4 palatal, and 3 endocranial” suture locations for grading and analysis (Figures 12 and 13). The grading scale used for suture age identification falls under a sliding scale of blank, 0, 1, 2, and 3. Blank meaning unobservable, 0 representing no evidence of any ectocranial closures, 1 representing slight closure, 2 representing significant closure, 3 or obliterated representing a complete closure of the site

(32). Then taking the grading points of the suture sites, they are added together to provide an age estimate. To complement this suture analysis, I also examined all present molars in the skulls of the three Pasifika ancestors, conducted under the guidance of Irene, to allow for a more robust age estimate when not all features were easily identifiable.

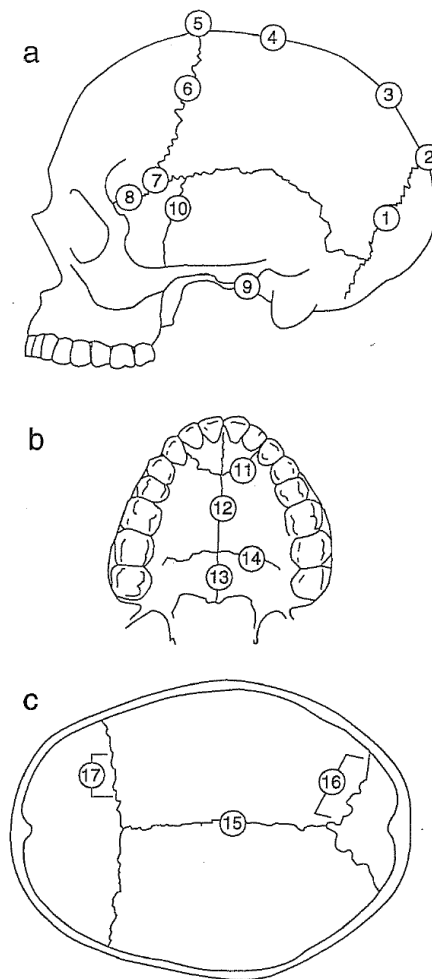


Figure 12. Suture chart (Haas 1994, 33)

Ectocranial Sutures

1. **Midlambdoid.** Midpoint of left half of the lambdoid suture (pars intermedia).
2. **Lambda.** At lambda (pars lambdica) of lambdoid and sagittal sutures.
3. **Obelion.** At obelion (pars obelica) of the sagittal suture.
4. **Anterior Sagittal.** Point on the sagittal suture 1/3 distance from bregma to lambda (at juncture of parts bregmatica and pars verticis).
5. **Bregma.** At bregma (pars bregmatica of the coronal and sagittal sutures).
6. **Midcoronal.** Midpoint of left coronal suture (within pars complicata).
7. **Pterion.** At pterion, within the region of the upper portion of the left greater wing of the sphenoid, usually at the point at which the parietosphenoid suture meets the frontal bone.
8. **Sphenofrontal.** Midpoint of the left sphenofrontal suture.
9. **Inferior Sphenotemporal.** Point of intersection between the left sphenotemporal suture and a line connecting both articular tubercles of the temporomandibular joint.
10. **Superior Sphenotemporal.** Point on the left sphenotemporal suture lying 2 cm below juncture with the parietal bone.

Ectocranial Hard Palate Sutures

11. **Incisive Suture.** Separates maxilla (with canines, premolars and molars) from premaxilla (incisors only).
12. **Anterior Median Palatine Suture.** Score entire length on paired maxillae between incisive foramen and palatine bone.
13. **Posterior Median Palatine Suture.** Score entire length on paired palatine bones.
14. **Transverse Palatine Suture.** Score entire length between maxillae and palatine bones.

Endocranial Sutures

15. **Sagittal.** Full sagittal suture
16. **Left Lambdoid.** Pars lambdica and pars intermedia of the left lambdoid suture.
17. **Left Coronal.** Pars bregmatica and pars complicata of the left coronal suture.

Figure 13. Ectocranial and endocranial suture (Haas 1994, 33)

Physiological Ancestry Assessment

Guided by Joseph T. Hefner's work and publications on non-metric traits and ancestry and with the understanding that using skeletal remains for identification of race-based classification comes with a heavy history rooted in eugenics and racial violence, I also incorporated some physiological analysis into this study with the intent of getting us closer to an understanding about the ancestry of the three skulls in this collection. The decision to conduct ancestry identification on the three skulls did not come from the desire to classify the skulls into any one specific racial category, but rather to use in relation to other findings on pathology, age, and sex based characteristics to increase our collective knowledge about the ancestors. In this study the anterior nasal spine, inferior nasal aperture, interorbital breadth, nasal aperture width, nasal bone structure, and post-bregmatic depression were the features under examination and were similarly graded on a scale from least present to most present.

Drawing and image capturing

As this project has no photos of human remains there was a question if written description alone would provide enough information to support visual identification and analysis. After considering possible avenues, I decided to draw the three ancestor skulls. The sketches were done to help with visual analysis and literature consultation when away from the facilities. Additionally, the sketches also assist in increasing the clarity of the visual analysis sections. Under the guidance of UMMAA's Illustrator/Graphic Artist, Bruce Worden, I learned how to do academic sketches on paper. For the sake of ease, the sketches of the skulls were done in a 3/4th view without a scale. The sketch of the etchings was done on a 1:1 ratio, using a soft measuring tape, to best capture the nuances of the carvings and patterns. From here the sketches were scanned and uploaded into Adobe Photoshop to clean up any smudges and increase the values. Colour was also added in Photoshop to reflect the coloured pigments present on the skulls. The drawing of the New Hebrides ancestor was done without depicting the acrylic case and stand, as well as the wooden base. Throughout this process no photos were taken of any of the ancestors.

Consulting the Secondary Literature

Secondary literature was consulted to give context to the findings of the visual and osteological analysis. Using the sketches I drew, literature found was then used to compare other depictions of ancestors from the three listed island nations in an effort to narrow down an identification. Literature on the cranial postmortem practices from Malekula, Vanuatu; Solomon Islands, Sepik, German New Guinea was sought out during this stage but was not where a majority of information was pulled from. Regrettably, sources on these topics were not the most widely available due to both UofM specific resources and out-of-print status, so

there were some limitations in literature finding. The literature that was used by this project mostly consisted of art-focused books and catalogues, with all of them having been published twenty or more years ago. One art-catalogue, “Golgotha: the Cult of Skulls” by Martin Doustar, an art dealer, was used sparingly to address all three island regions and provide examples of skull modification practices and patterns from each island nation. The catalogue details and shows dozens of skulls from Egypt, Africa, Asia, and Oceania. While the catalogue does cite their sources and claims of provenance, there was still apprehension due to Doustar’s position as an art dealer specializing in “Primitive Art from Africa and Oceania” as is listed on his webpage.

For the Solomon Islands, two works were available to be drawn, Crispin Howarth and Deborah Waite’s (2011) “Varilaku: Pacific Arts From the Solomon Islands” and Deborah Waite’s (2008) “Solomon Islands Art: The Conru Collection.” Haworth and Waite’s co-authored text was published by the National Gallery of Australia and was an accompaniment to an exhibit of the same name that was on display in 2011. As the source material also came from another institution there is the understanding that the pieces displayed in the exhibition book were selected by curators of Pacific Arts as a group of the “finest examples” of Solomon Island art. Additionally there is the possibility that some of the objects may also come from areas of questionable provenance or acquisition on the behalf of the original collectors as nearly all the pieces on display were collected prior to when standard documentation practices were common. However, the objects in the exhibit and booklet do highlight different cultural objects, practices, and art styles unique to the Solomon Islands. For the sake of this study, special attention was paid to stylistic patterns and overmodeled skulls in the collection.

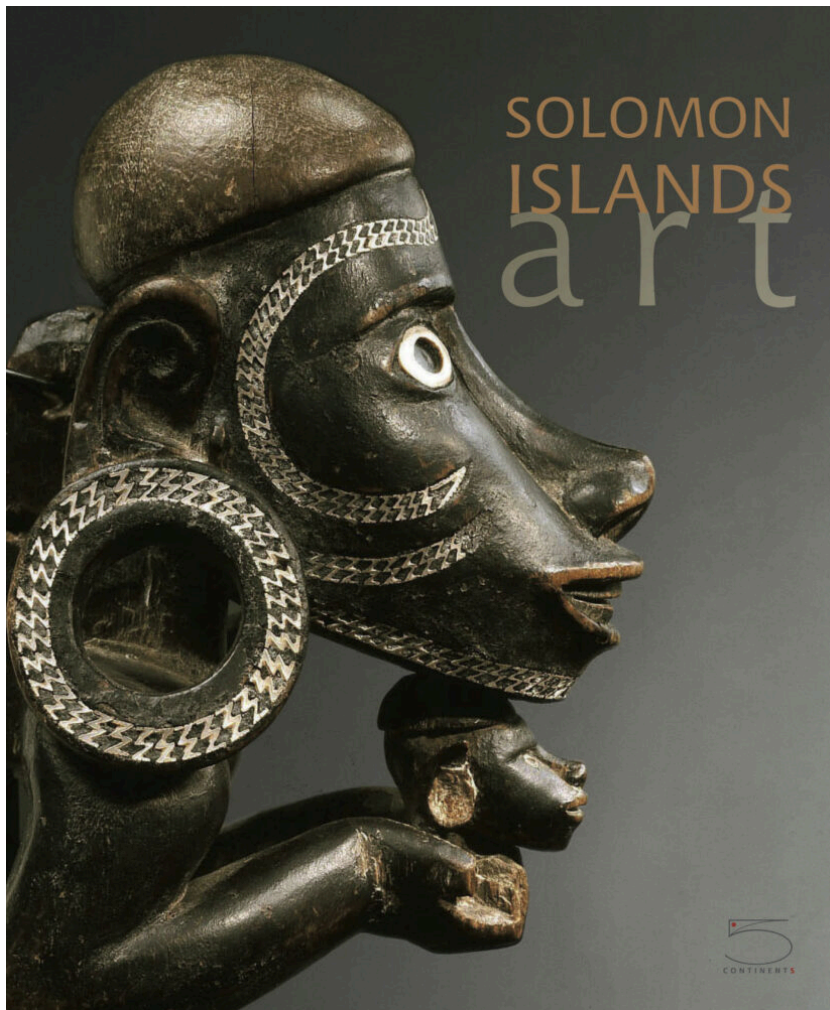


Figure 14. Waite's (2008) "Solomon Islands Art: The Conru Collection" cover

Similar sources were analysed for art and cultural belongings from Vanuatu, which is the modern name for New Hebrides, but there were a great deal more texts and exhibition booklets that were accessible and provided insight into cultural practices on different islands in Vanuatu, such as Bonnemaïson's (1996) "Arts of Vanuatu." In particular, heavy focus was applied to any cultural object, person, or belonging that was listed as originating from Malekula specifically. Through an examination of these source texts I was able to familiarise myself with cultural practices, stylistic elements and patterns, and common cultural objects that come out of Malekula, Vanuatu.

For art from Papua New Guinea there was an even greater abundance of source materials that were accessible to pull into the study, largely due to Papua New Guinea and the Sepik region having the longest history of study, attention, and pillaging out of anywhere in the South Pacific. As the Sepik River, the listed origin of one of the skulls, is one of the longest rivers in New Guinea and Papua New Guinea combined there is some uncertainty around where exactly the skull originates from. This resulted in a much broader search and analysis of art from the Sepik River and regions.

Results

Solomon Islands and New Hebrides Ancestors Results

Visual Identification and secondary literature

Visual identification proved to be very fruitful in conversation with findings from literature exploration. The identification of stylistic patterns of the construction and decoration of the two overmodeled skulls provided the most insight into their islands of origins. Taking their documented islands of origin into account, New Hebrides and Solomon Islands, it's surprising to note how the skulls are constructed similarly. The type of overmodeled mixture seems to be remarkably similar if not the same clay and coconut husk mixture. The prominent features of high cheekbones, brow ridge, jaw, and mouth are also shared traits between the two skulls. The ancestor that was listed as originating from the Solomon Islands, whose overmodeled skull was adorned with an hourglass shape, very closely resembled the ancestor listed from Malekula, the mounted overmodeled skull. Both skulls share the same construction style, clay and coconut husk materials, pigment colorings, and built-out features that are unique to the island of Malekula, which was then later

confirmed by the Curator National Museum of Vanuatu, Kaitip Kami, when he took a look at the sketches (email, 03/12/25).

Overmodeled skulls do occur occasionally across other islands within Melanesia, namely regions of Papua New Guinea and the Bismarck Archipelago, but the specific designs, materials, and features that can be seen on skulls from Malekula are uniquely distinct. Overmodeled skulls from Malekula have strong robust features that closely resemble masculine exaggerated facial features, often expressionless and displayed with their eyes and mouths open (Table 2). Close examination of other examples reveal that Malekula skulls are all built up using a clay and coconut husk mixture. The coloured pigments visible on other examples of overmodeled skulls include bright red-orange, black, white, yellow, and occasionally a vibrant blue. The finish on the overmodeled skulls is always matte and typically reveal cracks that are normally found on the surface of dried clay.

Source	Exaggerated features	Expression?	Eyes Open	Mouth open	Coconut husk/clay	Colors
Kaufmann, Abb. 134	y	none	y	y	y	Black, white
Katsom, Ramparamp (1971.207.200)	y	none	y	y	y	Red, black, white
Katsom, Ramparamp (1971.207.160)	y	none	y	y	y	Red, black
St. Louis Art Museum, rambaramp (138:1978)	y	none	y	y	y	Red, black, white
Brooklyn Museum, rambaramp (2006.41)	No image	No image	No image	No image	y	Red, black, white

The MET, Asen Maki Rambaramp (2000.615)	y	none	y	y	y	Red, black, white
Bowers Museum, Over-Modeled Skull (81.108.4)	y	none	y	y	Vegetable matter, sap	Red, black

Table 2. More reliable examples of other overmodeled skulls from Malekula, Vanuatu, collected by me

Skull modification does occur within the Solomon Islands, but does not share any of the cultural specific stylistic traits or construction techniques used in modifying the skulls from Malekula. Information on modified skulls from the Solomon islands is extremely limited, this study only was able to find and access reputable sources for four skulls, mostly from Howarth and Waite's (2011) "Varilaku: Pacific Arts From the Solomon Islands," but of the reduced sample size there already are clear patterns and shared traits. Of the four I was able to identify in my research, three are also overmodeled and one is not. The three overmodeled skulls are very dissimilar to Malekula overmodeled skulls, with their smooth shiny finish, flat features, colour prevalence, and patternings. All three skulls are black in color with white geometric accents along the supra-orbital ridge, zygomatic arch, and bottom edge of the mandible. One has extra markings from the nose to ear under the zygomatic region and on the glabella. All three have eyes that are painted to varying levels of detail, a built up nose, and open mouth. These overmodeled skulls are described as being built of a hardened "resinous nut putty" instead of the clay and coconut husk mixture that is common to Maleuka. Based on my comparative analysis, I have concluded that the Solomon Islands ancestor at UMMAA is, in fact, from Vanuatu, like its overmodeled kin also held at

UMMAA. [or again, something more active that clearly demonstrates your argument/contribution]

Solomon Islands, osteological findings

Looking at the pathology of the ancestor from the Solomon Islands there was very little of note, only evidence of lots of rugosity and porosity in the nuchal region that could possibly be from muscle strain, though, meaning that we can't conclusively determine whether this ancestor suffered any pathologies. Due to the overmodeled layers there is about only half of the skull visible for analysis. While this skull was both cranium and mandible, the overmodeled features greatly limit any examination of dentition. The few visible teeth show very little wear and appear to be in good shape. Notably the third molars have erupted. My taphonomy examination notes there is a significant amount of dark soil staining and matrix still adhered to the skull, especially on the inferior part of the skull. Additionally there were a few spots on the inferior of the skull, around the foramen magnum, that show evidence of burning through the presence of faint fracture lines. When looking under a strong magnifying instrument, root etchings are also very visible on the inferior part of the skull and there are even pieces of root still clinging to the skull. Some insect activity was noticed, but the extent of insect activity was not possible to determine due to the overmodeled layers.

My analysis of ectocranial and endocranial sutures (Figure 11 and 12) of the ancestor from Solomon Islands revealed varied scoring sutures with the majority of scores falling in the mid tier range (Table 3). Almost all suture points are visible on the skull, save for a few that were covered, and scored within the all three categories. When added together the scores revealed a composite score of 20, but due to a few missing areas has a mean of deviation

between $\pm 0-12$. This score is particularly high and even with the deviation would indicate an age estimation of 25-30.

My examination into sex determination features on the Solomon Islands skull resulted in high scores, at least those that were visible (Table 4). The observable features are much more robust and prominent, with all of them scoring a 3 or higher. These high scores, even with a few missing areas, are indicative of male presentation. Most of the skull is covered by clay and coconut husk, but I was still able to collect non-metric data from the supraorbital margin, supraorbital ridge/glebulla, and mental eminence. Additionally there is all but one feature missing from the examination into ancestry-based traits, with the post-bregmatic depression being the sole visible feature (Table 5).

Determinants of Age - Ectocranial	Ancestor Solomon
Mid lambdoid	0
Lambda	1
Obelion	2
Anterior Sagittal	2
Bregma	0
Midcoronal	2
Pterion	n/a
Sphenofrontal	n/a
Inferior Sphenofrontal	n/a
Superior Sphenofrontal	n/a
Incisive suture	3
Anterior median palatine suture	1
Posterior median palatine suture	2
Transverse palatine suture	3
Full sagittal	2
left lambdoid	0
left coronal	2
epiphyseal union	n/a
Total	$20 \pm 0-12$

Table 3. Ancestor, Solomon Islands - Determinants of Age,
Collected by Irene Hoffman and I

Determinants of Sex	Ancestor Solomon
Nuchal Crest	4-5
Mastoid Process	3
Supraorbital Margin	n/a
Supraorbital Ridge/Glabella	n/a
Mental Eminence	n/a
Gonial Angle	90 degrees
Gonial flaring	3-4
Frontal Angle	sloped
supermastoid crest	5

Table 4. Ancestor, Solomon Islands - Determinants of Sex,
Collected by Irene Hoffman and I

Determinants of Ancestry	Ancestor Solomon
Anterior Nasal Spine	n/a
Inferior Nasal Aperture	n/a
Interorbital Breadth	n/a
Nasal Aperture Width	n/a
Nasal Bone Structure	n/a
Post-bregmatic Depression	slight

Table 5. Ancestor, Solomon Islands - Determinants of Ancestry,
Collected by Irene Hoffman and I

New Hebrides, osteological findings

Osteological analysis is the most limited with this skull, as almost the entire surface of the skull is covered by the overmodeled features. Pathology is extremely limited due to the lack of bone surface visible, so only very slight cribra orbitalia (porosity of the orbits) can be observed. Few teeth that can be seen through the open mouth, displaying evidence of notable dental wear and completely erupted the third molars. Taphonomy and ectocranial and endocranial sutures are unable to be observed (Table 6). Of the age determinant features, only four are visible but they do score remarkably low. The few features that are visible, present very gracile and are not pronounced (Table 7). While there is a notable lack of diagnostic features and data, the few visible traits are so extreme that the likelihood of this ancestor

being female is still considerable. Unfortunately, only one ancestry feature was visible for analysis (Table 8). Therefore there is no solid evidence to support claims around this data.

Determinants of Age - Ectocranial	Ancestor Vanuatu
Mid lambdoid	n/a
Lambda	n/a
Obelion	n/a
Anterior Sagittal	n/a
Bregma	n/a
Midcoronal	n/a
Pterion	n/a
Sphenofrontal	n/a
Inferior Sphenofrontal	n/a
Superior Sphenofrontal	n/a
Incisive suture	n/a
anterior median palatine suture	n/a
posterior median palatine suture	n/a
transverse palatine suture	n/a
Full sagittal	n/a
left lambdoid	n/a
left coronal	n/a

Table 6. Ancestor, New Hebrides - Determinants of Age,
Collected by Irene Hoffman and I

Determanents of Sex	Ancestor Vanuatu
Nuchal Crest	1
Mastoid Process	1
Supraorbital Margin	2
Supraorbital Ridge/Glabella	n/a
Mental Eminence	sloped
Gonial Angle	45
Gonial flaring	n/a
Frontal Angle	n/a
Frontal bossing	n/a

Table 7. Ancestor, New Hebrides - Determinants of Sex,
Collected by Irene Hoffman and I

Determinants of Ancestry	Ancestor Vanuatu
Anterior Nasal Spine	n/a
Inferior Nasal Margin/Aperture	n/a
Interorbital Breadth	very wide
Nasal Aperture Width	n/a
Nasal Bone Structure/overall shape	n/a
Post-bregmatic Depression	n/a
Nasal overgrowth	n/a
zygomatic shape	n/a
malar	n/a
canine fossa	n/a
palatine suture	n/a

Table 8. Ancestor, New Hebrides - Determinants of Ancestry,
Collected by Irene Hoffman and I

GNG Ancestor Results

Visual identification and secondary literature

Unfortunately, I was unable to find comparative examples of skulls distinctly similar to the skull from GNG. There were examples of iconography styles and elements on other skulls from the Sepik region that could be considered similar to the etched patterns on this skull, but there has been no example found of that specific design. There has also been no examples seen yet of the etching of delicate rounded designs into the frontal region of skulls from Sepik communities. Of the skulls from the Sepik Region that were identified, especially in the Conru 2019 publication, none provided a close enough match to comfortably declare a full identification (Conru 2019, 110-113, 170, 175). The use of red pigment for ornamentation is common across the examples of other modified, mostly overmodeled, skulls from across the Sepik region that I have seen through literature review, but I encountered not examples of it being used to cover the entire non-overmodeled skull (Conru 2019, 110 and 113). There is one skull documented in the Golgotha catalogue that also displays coverage of red pigment on the face of a skull in a similar manner, but this skull is listed as originating

from the Andaman Islands and not German/Papua New Guinea (Golgotha 2014, 180). This skull, with only cranium present, was cleaned away to expose the bone and appears to have delicate features, like the GNG ancestor. Similarly, the skull is covered in red pigment, though not fully like the GNG ancestor. Through discussion with Dr. Stuart Kirsch, Professor of Anthropology with a special focus on Papua New Guinea, I was able to get confirmation that the skull likely did come out of this region, but perhaps not from any culturally specific practice (Communication, 2/25/25). Further study is ongoing and contact is currently pending with representatives from the Sepik region.

GNG, osteological findings

Osteological identification aims to gather non-metric data of the diagnostic features observed on each skull in an effort to gain a better understanding of the sex and age of each ancestor. Looking at the pathology of the ancestor from GNG first, it's noted that there is no evidence of tumors or fractures on the skull, but there is evidence of porosity in the orbits or maxillary sinuses—but nothing of great significance. Importantly, this skull is only a cranium, and was not preserved with the mandible, so dental analysis was limited. From the visible dentition, the third right molar did have an infection at some point and was likely lost antemortem. The dental examination I conducted determined that the rest of the teeth were in good shape. Insect carabase remains are present in the interior sagittal suture, and there are other signs of insect activity throughout the rest of the skull.

My taphonomical examination revealed moderate soil staining and some sections that still had some soil matrix adhered to the bone. There is no noticeable root etching, but there is significant evidence of scraping/sanding everywhere on the exterior of the cranium. Defined scraping and sanding marks are very noticeable all over the skull, with the most prominent

marks seen on the supra-orbital ridge and temporal region. While there are no distinctive cut marks related to defleshing, small bone attachments are missing. At the crosspoint for sutures, the bregma, there is a hole drilled for hanging and the skull showed signs of beveling around the drill point. The analysis of the ectocranial and endocranial sutures (Figure 11 and 12) of the ancestor from GNG revealed very low scoring sutures (Table 9). Almost all suture points visible on the skull scored within the lowest category, and when added together revealed a composite score of 12. Notable, this significantly low score and is normally indicative of very young age, but the presence of an erupted third molar does result in a slightly higher age estimation of 14-17.

My examination into sex determination features on the GNG skull also resulted in very low scores (Table 10). The features are very gracile and not pronounced, with all of them scoring either a 2 or lower. Very low scores are typically indicative of females or young males who have not undergone puberty yet. Because the skull only consists of the cranium, we could not collect non-metric for the mandible, so there are no findings for the mental eminence, gonial angle, or gonial flaring. Additionally, the absence of the anterior nasal spine which was likely chipped away during the scraping/sanding process meant that I was unable to complete an ancestry-based traits assessment based on that feature. The findings related to ancestry-based traits are varied and did not follow metric data collections nor have set numerical systems (Table 11).

Determinants of Age	Ancestor Papua New Guinea
Mid lambdoid	0
Lambda	0
Obelion	0
Anterior Sagittal	0
Bregma	N/A
Midcoronal	0
Pterion	1
Sphenofrontal	2
Inferior Sphenofrontal	0
Superior Sphenofrontal	0
Incisive suture	3
Anterior median palatine suture	2
Posterior median palatine suture	1
Transverse palatine suture	2
Full sagittal	0
Left lambdoid	0
Left coronal	1
Total	12

Table 9. Ancestor, GNG - Determinants of Age,
Collected by Irene Hoffman and I

Determanents of Sex	Ancestor Papua New Guinea
Nuchal Crest	1
Mastoid Process	1
Supraorbital Margin	2
Supraorbital Ridge/Glabella	1
Mental Eminence	N/A
Gonial Angle	N/A
Gonial flaring	N/A
Frontal Angle	1 - very straight frontal slope
Frontal bossing	some, but difficult because of the carvings on the frontal

Table 10. Ancestor, GNG - Determinants of Sex,
Collected by Irene Hoffman and I

Determanents of Ancestry	Ancestor Papua New Guinea
Anterior Nasal Spine	absent
Inferior Nasal Margin/Aperture	between 1 and two. 1) incipient guttered, 2. straight
Interorbital Breadth	intermediate breadth
Nasal Aperture Width	intermediate width
Nasal Bone Structure/overall shape	very round
Post-bregmatic depression	none
Nasal overgrowth	only visible on right, no nasal overgrowth
Zygomatic shape	wide in projection beyond corner of orbits
Malar	forward projecting malar region, moderate prognathism
Canine fossa	very pronounced
Palatine suture	very slight anterior bulging, mostly straight

Table 11. Ancestor, GNG - Determinants of Ancestry,
Collected by Irene Hoffman and I

Discussion

Exploring analysis and arising complications

Even though visual analysis had its limitations, identification-based comparisons proved to be the most reliable and abundant resource for narrowing down the regions each ancestor could hail from. This was particularly the case with the two overmodeled skulls. Breaking down the material usage, colours, and stylistic patterns of each skull allowed for the most direct comparisons with other skulls and examples of art (Table 12). Very soon into the process was it seriously considered that the skull from “The Solomon Islands” was likely also from Malekula, Vanuatu. Regrettably, this quick uncovering did come at the cost of dozens of other ancestors from Malekula who were photographed and both put online and published in art books. The prevalence of Pasifika skulls available for purchase speaks to a continuation of harmful ideologies around Pasifika bodies and ancestors. This trickle down effect has resulted in numerous intuitions, such as the Brooklyn Museum and Saint Louis Art Museum, still owning these ancestors. It was entirely too easy to find other examples of overmodeled skulls listed as originating from Malekula, but nearly no academic sources or community

descriptions of this practice could be found through the resources available to me. It is worth noting that I have an apprehension around using art reseller sites to support my identification of any ancestor as there is very questionable provenance supporting their claims and the ethical concerns around Pasifika ancestors being sold online. So while helpful in initially visualising patterns, art seller websites were not used for this research nor identification. Visual analysis was used primarily as a tool to gather as much information as possible about each ancestor to attempt to uncover their island nation home before contact was made with any of the communities. Once there was a high likelihood the island origin of the ancestor was found, then a call went out to community members of that island. Upon conversing with the Curator Kaitip Kami from the National Museum of Vanuatu in Port Vila, there was a final confirmation from him that the two overmodeled skulls were from Malekula, Vanuatu.

Ancestor	Modified Origin	Age	Sex	Materials	Pigment colours	Features
Solomon Islands	Malekula	25-30	Female	Bone, coconut husk, clay, pigment	Red, black	overmodeled
New Hebrides	Malekula	30+	Male	Bone, coconut husk, clay, pigment	Red, black, white	overmodeled
GNG	Papua New Guinea	14-17	Female	Bone, pigment, cork	Red	etched

Table 12. Overview chart, all three ancestors, collected by me

For the skull from the Sepik region, visual analysis did not reveal concise results, but did open up the conversation around cultural objects and remains that are made for commerce. Upon meeting with Dr. Kirsch, anthropologist with a focus in Papua New Guinea, we were able to discuss a new variable that arose with this study. In the South Pacific there is a long history of cultural objects and distinctly Pasifika objects made specifically for commerce purposes. While not originating from the time of WWII, the period only served to further expedite an exportation of cultural goods and increased the prevalence of fake or replica items. The realm of fakes and replicas are not new to the museum world, nor to the Pacific Islands after the hundreds of years of demand for Pacific Islander belongings by

European explorers and mercenaries. For-commerce production of “Melanesian goods,” objects never meant to be used for cultural or spiritual purposes, spread widely over Papua New Guinea and Melanesia quickly supplying ethnographic collections with hundreds of Pacific-like objects. This boom in the production of these objects in combination with non-standardised collections and acquisition practices limit both the researchers and the objects themselves on how far provenance and contextual information can go. This may just be the case for the ancestor from the Sepik Region, especially considering the presence of a mounting hole.

Close visual examination of the skull afforded the space to explore the different methods, materials, and designs used to adorn the skull. These efforts regrettably did not result in a clear identification. The styles expressed on the skull are almost combative, pulling attention from one possible avenue to another based on how widely different practices seem to come together on this one skull. Based on visual analysis of Sepik region skull practices, this skull falls well out of the bounds of Sepik ancestor practices. Of the many skulls seen from this region, a good number of them are overmodeled skulls with clearly built out features. In the catalogue book “Sepik Ramu Art” (2019), there are four overmodeled skulls shown as examples for skull modification practice in the immensely large region. These skulls are very dissimilar to the skull in the UMMAA collection in their materiality and style. It is possible that the right example just hasn’t been found yet, as further evidence on the skull could bring greater strength to this theory.

The cork that fills the orbital and nasal cavities is not a plant material used in Papua New Guinea art or cultural practices. Cork is most commonly found within the regions of “southwestern Europe and into northwestern Africa in Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia” (Rainforest Alliance). Cork, which prefers to grow in arid climates, is

not naturally found in Papua New Guinea, a humid tropical region, nor anywhere else in the South Pacific (Climate Change Knowledge). There have been no other examples seen of cork being used in Sepik area art or cultural objects throughout the course of this study. Combined with an atypical practice of skull modification, and etching patterns that have no match to other Sepik arts, there is a significant chance that this ancestor was likely modified for the sake of commerce and not cultural practice. The mounting hole and obvious signs of bevelling only further give cause for suspicion.

Continuous Care

Indigenous-centred practices and next steps

Now that the ancestors have better supporting information about their islands of origin, it's time to move forward with contacting the communities and community leaders within those island communities. During the initial stages of this project, due to the uncertainty around the provenance information connected to the ancestors, communities were not contacted. But now that the ancestors' communities have been identified, contact is the necessary next step. For the Papua New Guinea ancestor that was not fully identified, and has been brought under the conversation of "made for commerce," I do believe that the next step is still to seek community assistance to identify these remains. A best attempt has been made to validate where this ancestor comes from, but without further expertise it is unclear how far it can be taken at this stage.

For many communities in the South Pacific, our ancestors and deities are people no matter their physical form. Different island nations have different practices and understandings, but the practising of protecting and preserving one's genealogy is always paramount. The separation of a genealogy chain can have damaging effects on descendants

for dozens of generations, impacting their connections to their past, island, and ways of life. A return of Pasifika bones to their home islands is not simply the correct ethical move, it is also a reunion and replenishing of entire bloodlines and spiritual sources. It is my belief as a Pacific Islander that these three ancestors should be returned home to their islands if their communities would like to call them back. However, as a student involved in museum practice, I must also understand that a return is never straight forward, especially across international lines. So, while we wait, there are measures that can be done here to protect and recognise the ancestors while they stay within the UMMAA facilities. In particular, abiding by community given instruction for housing, care, and naming are all measures that can be taken while waiting for the next major step. All measures and considerations should be done in conjunction with the Pacific Islander community or students and faculty at the current institution, and community members of the communities of origin.

Cultural Responsibility

Prior to officially starting anthropological examination of the skulls, my first responsibility was to seek acknowledgment for the ancestors I would be working with and the protection for both themselves and me during the time we would spend in contact. Having previous interaction with the repatriation of ancestors from my culture, on the receiving side that is, I knew that proper procedure was to reach out to the elders in my community for spiritual and cultural guidance. I was fortunate enough to have trusted and cherished elders guiding my community while away from my home island to turn to, a privilege I know many other Pasifika students do not share when studying in the contiguous United States and especially the Midwest. My elders, pillars in both their academic fields and cultural gifts, were able to support me through a blessing ceremony where we acknowledged the three

relatives. Sharing our intentions and space, my elders helped me convey to the ancestors that they were *seen* and remembered by others from Moana Nui, *our Ocean*. This also allowed me the space to properly introduce myself and my genealogy to the ancestors, allowing for familiarity and ease. While the specifics of the blessing and acknowledgement will live only in the space between our heart and lungs, I hope to use this experience to enlighten other institutions around the cultural responsibilities Indigenous students have to members of their own communities and other communities while working with museum collections and human remains. The process in preparing for such a moment was not easy and came with many demands on one's energy and personhood. Working with human remains is not the same for every person nor community and must be met with grace and respect for the cultural responsibilities others in similar positions may have to face. All further handling of the remains was done as limited as possible within the realm of osteological analysis and with respect to the fact that each of the skulls are people first and foremost. Proper greetings and farewells are given every visit.

Positionality

I have undertaken this project as an Indigenous Pacific Islander student, and it has been led with Pasifika values and practices in compliance with our respect and reverence for our living ancestors first and foremost. As a child of the land and seas of Guåhan (Guam), this project goes beyond the scope of a senior thesis and is a cultural and spiritual call to return fellow Pacific Islanders to their homes. Under the guidance of my community elders, this project seeks to care for the wellbeing of the physical and non-physical remains of three Pacific Islanders housed at UMMAA. Focusing on the importance of utilising Indigenous care practices and Indigenous archaeological methodology, this thesis also hopes to provide

perspective around the experience of an Indigenous student working with ancestors from their home region, including challenges and areas of strength that comes with this positionality.

Conclusion

Most anthropological research of the South Pacific and her diverse communities revolve around the ethnographic studies of clan systems and taboos, linguistic studies of similarities between Austronesian languages, and archaeological studies of migration patterns and early occupation. For the most part this work has been done by external professionals, who cannot trace their genealogy back to the Pacific before the Europeans travelled her seas. Indigenous archaeologists are still the minority globally, and within the South Pacific Indigenous Pasifika archaeologists are even rarer. The majority of our archaeological history was not written by us, and so now we have generations to catch up on. Anthropological and collection practices in the South Pacific got its roots through early contact with Europeans, sailors and mercenaries who would buy, trade, and plunder Pasifika objects, belongings, and bodies. Over the following centuries the Western view of the Pacific warped and shifted to justify the racialisation, sexualisation, and commodification of Pasifika culture and peoples, increasing the prevalence of cultural objects and Indigenous remains leaving the region.

In recent years there has been major public support for the return of ancestral remains to the the Indigenous communities of the South Seas, at the very least to Native Hawaiians or Māori, but even with public support and federal legislation (Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act) there is no simple solution to the shear numbers of ancestors that now live in museum collections. Unfortunately, it is not enough for communities to ask for their ancestors back, or for museums to want to give them back, as the gap in necessary documentation and context for returns to happen is too wide for any one side to close. There

is no accurate estimate or survey that could speak to the amount of Pasifika ancestors trapped in collections across the United States, but it would not be too lofty to assume that the majority of them do not have conceive documentation of their origins and communities. This gap in provenance and context is a major barrier for communities and museums to meet halfway, and is a massive block keeping our ancestors from returning home. This thesis hopes to lessen this hurdle in a small way, by helping the three Pasifika ancestors at The University of Michigan start the first step in their journeys back home. However, this is only one institution and there is much more work that needs to be done for not only the ancestors within collections, but also the ancestors who are still actively being sold online and through art dealers.

Through the interdisciplinary approach of visual cultural analysis, osteological examination, and community knowledge, my research has helped uncover the island nation origins of two Pasifika ancestors within the UMMAA's collection. Originally accompanied by limited and incorrect documentation, three ancestors sat unknown, mislabeled, and unrecognised by their communities and other Pacific Islanders for decades with no ability to answer the call of their homes. The uncovering of the communities of origin for these three ancestors contributes to the potential of a return to their homelands. A reconnection of these ancestors with their communities would help ease the violence and separation caused by their original removal on the behalf of the original collectors.

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