FOOTSTEPS ON MALAKULA:
A REPORT ON A PHOTOGRAPHIC RESEARCH PROJECT

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During the course of my doctoral and postdoctoral research in Vanuatu, I have often felt as if I was following in the path of previous Cambridge anthropologists. Bernard Deacon, whose own ‘footprints’ have been traced several times (see Gardiner 1987, Larcom 1986, Clifford 1997), and who died in Malakula in 1927, captured in his diary some of the same elations and doubts about the practice of anthropology that I also experienced; Tom Harrisson, the founder of Mass Observation, who worked on Malakula as an ornithologist, civil servant and movie star in 1935 (see Harrisson 1937), also attended my Cambridge college, Pembroke; and it was Kirk Huffman, who commenced his work in Vanuatu as an erstwhile doctoral student of Peter Gathercole, who initially encouraged me to conduct research in the archipelago. During his time as curator of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre (1976–89), Huffman developed a series of indigenous research initiatives, starting with the Oral Traditions Project, which trains local fieldworkers to record their own language and other local practices (see Geismar and Tilley 2003, Bolton 2003), and has had a strong impact on the configuration of anthropological research in contemporary Vanuatu.

In the context of continuing work by Cambridge researchers in Vanuatu, my own research in Vanuatu, Europe and America has intersected most with one of the earliest Cambridge anthropologists: John Willoughby Layard (1891–1972). When curating the exhibition Vanuatu Stael: Kastom and Creativity at the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, I included many artefacts that Layard collected in the field, in order to provide a historical context for the new collection of contemporary art and artefacts I had made during my own research. My most recent work, as part of the Getty Photographic Project, has focused on researching Layard’s photographic images and their impact both in Vanuatu and in Cambridge.

Layard, a student of both William Halse Rivers and Alfred Cort Haddon, first went to the New Hebrides (the name Vanuatu was taken after independence in 1980) just after graduating from his fourth year studying anthropology at Cambridge. He had travelled with Rivers to Australia in order to attend the meeting of the British Association of the Advancement of Science, held in Melbourne in 1914. The outbreak of war inevitably affected the group of Cambridge anthropologists. Haddon abandoned his plans to take Layard on ethnological-survey work in a naval gunboat down the New Guinea coast, and Rivers suggested that the novice anthropologist accompany him to the New Hebrides, at that time run by a joint authority: the Anglo-French Condominium. Rivers was keen to develop his interests in mapping patterns of cultural diffusion in Melanesia (see Rivers
1914), intrigued by a recent publication by the Swiss ethnologist Felix Speiser that described a series of ‘megalithic’ ritual complexes in some parts of the archipelago (Speiser 1913).

Together, Layard and Rivers travelled to the capital of the New Hebrides, Port Vila. In consultation with the British Resident Commissioner, Merton King, they left almost immediately for Malakula, in the north-central region of the country. On 28 September 1914 they landed on the Small Island of Atchin, part of a string of islands that fringe the coast of north-east Malakula (Plate 1). They alighted into a community highly suspicious of the unexpected arrival of white men. Over the years, the people of Atchin had suffered from punitive encounters with the colonial navy, after violent altercations with colonial settlers (Monnier 1991). They had only recently evicted a despotic Irish trader and his family from the island, and were waiting to see if they would suffer the consequences (see Geismar forthcoming a). Rivers and Layard spent their first week on Atchin living in an abandoned Roman Catholic mission-house, and, according to Layard’s unpublished autobiography, were assiduously avoided by local people. After several days, Rivers, much to Layard’s chagrin, took advantage of a passing skiff to undertake survey work from
the relative comfort of various mission stations throughout the archipelago. He left Layard to undertake one of the earliest periods of intensive, solitary anthropological fieldwork in the history of British social anthropology, co-terminous with Malinowski’s first sojourn in the Trobriand Islands.

Layard remained on Atchin for the best part of a year. He immersed himself in native life, befriending many Atchin men and youths, travelling with them to the neighbouring Small Islands, to the adjacent island of Ambae, and to South-West Bay, Malakula, as they voyaged to trade pigs and mats as part of the generation-long ceremonial complex of male status acquisition known as maki. He was to later consider this period one of the happiest in his life, and his Malakula material was to nourish him throughout his professional career. His hurried return to England in 1915, to fight in the war, precipitated a crisis in his health. He was unable to enlist or complete his writing up and remained in a fugue state for many years. Perhaps inspired by Rivers, his earliest mentor (and psychiatrist/psychologist), he gradually abandoned anthropology in favour of psychology, first training under Homer Lane and then Carl Jung, and eventually becoming a successful psychoanalyst.

Between 1914 and 1915, Layard collected what has come to be considered one of the most detailed and accurate sets of early ethnological data about customary life in Vanuatu. Whilst almost all of his notes remain unpublished, his monumental Stone Men of Malekula (1942) is testament to the intensity with which he worked. Stone Men of Malekula, ostensibly based on only three weeks of fieldwork on Vao (although Layard draws heavily on his material from Atchin to give general context for much of his analysis), was the first in an unrealised series of monographs detailing life on each Small Island. On his return from the field in 1915, Layard donated a collection of approximately 400 artefacts to the Cambridge Museum. He also gave the museum copy-prints of his images, which were incorporated in the Haddon Photographic Collection in 1935. His field notes and documents (including an unpublished Atchin manuscript) were posthumously deposited in the Mandeville Special Collections, Mandeville Library, University of California, San Diego (MSS84).

Towards the end of his life, Layard began to re-think the publication potential of his Malakula material. He attempted to arrange a reprint of Stone Men and to this end was in close contact with a number of anthropologists in Britain, the US, and Australia. One of these was Peter Gathercole, who even arranged for a research assistant, Janice Hebditch, to visit Layard regularly and transcribe some of the working drafts of the Atchin manuscript. Kirk Huffman, a student of Gathercole’s, then conducting research into the Cambridge Museum’s Malakula collection, visited and interviewed Layard several times just prior to his death in 1972.

In a similar spirit to this festschrift to Peter, our present project acknowledges and follows in the ‘footprints’ of these combined initiatives to make Layard’s work more widely available. One of our objectives, in keeping with the desires of both Layard and ni-Vanuatu (citizens of Vanuatu), is to make our research into Layard’s images and the wealth of his unpublished material accessible – not only to CUMAA visitors, Pacific scholars and those interested in the history of anthropology, but to Small Islanders themselves. In collaboration with Anita Herle, Kirk Huffman and
Ralph Regenvanu, the current director of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, I am working on a monograph which will publish many of Layard’s photographs for the first time, reunited with their original captions, and drawing on the unpublished field notes, diaries and manuscripts in San Diego (Herle and Geismar forthcoming). We intend the book to trace the history of Layard’s images, from their inception in the context of his anthropological training in Cambridge, to their uses in both Cambridge and Vanuatu, into the present day. In turn, we hope to develop a historically grounded awareness of the importance of photographic images to the cross-cultural constitution of anthropological knowledge and social practice.

To this end, in the summer of 2003, having spent several months researching Layard’s images and updating their catalogue records in Cambridge, I went back to Malakula carrying photocopies of Layard’s images. I subsequently visited Layard’s archives in San Diego, an event that significantly added to the information about the photographs I had already gathered. This report gives an introductory account of some of the encounters in the Small Islands of Vao and Atchin, between Layard’s photographs and the descendents of the people he originally worked with.

Walking with photographs

I first visited Vao in 2000, undertaking doctoral research into how local carvers were using newly passed national copyright legislation to regulate the production of their work. There, by local request, I spent many afternoons trying to translate excerpts from Stone Men of Malekula into Bislama, the national pidgin of Vanuatu – unlike Atchin islanders, Vao islanders are Francophone, and are not able to easily access Layard’s text. This proved to be an extremely frustrating task. Jeremy MacClancy has compared the bulk, volume and density of Stone Men to that of a brick, with a footnote commenting that ‘Professor Needham thinks that “two bricks” might be a more apt description’ (MacClancy 1978). My fumbling efforts were making that voluminous text even lengthier. During my stay, working so closely with Stone Men, I came to appreciate the depth of Layard’s research. I talked about the documentation in the book with Vao islanders, focusing on the production of vertical slit-drums, carved and painted with elaborate faces. I was struck at that time by the sympathy between Layard’s account and those of present-day islanders, and by the incredible detail that Layard had recorded in such a small amount of time.

On my second visit in 2003, I wanted to find out how Layard’s photographs, as forms of visual knowledge and history, connected to the contemporary knowledge base of Small Islanders, and to find out what memories of Layard the images evoked. From the perspective of the curators of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, my collaborators during research, there is an understanding that historical images are vital tools in the revitalisation of past practice in the present – a process conceived of explicitly as ‘revival’. For example, historical photographs have been used by researchers to revitalize the production of barkcloth in the island of Erromango (see Huffman 1996a) and to reinvigorate the making of mats on Ambae (see Bolton 2003). During my visit, Layard’s photographs inspired a rethinking of the past and
a retelling of history between researchers (both foreign and native) and men from the Small Islands. The photographs were positioned as active agents of history in the present, they elicited responses that engaged both with contemporary island politics and with the political events that occurred around the time of Layard’s stay in the islands.

I travelled to Vao and Atchin with Numa Fred Longga, the curator of the Malakula Cultural Centre, a satellite of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre. Numa was also interested in recording the histories encapsulated within Layard’s images, many of which intersected with his own family connections to Atchin (Numa is from an adjacent Small Island, Uripiv). Upon arrival in each island, we organised a general public meeting, where the photographs could be passed around and displayed, and where we explained the purpose of our visit: to find out as much as we could about Layard and about the content of the images. Vianney Atpatun, the former curator of the Malakula Cultural Centre (himself from Vao) had already worked on Layard’s images in the 1980s, as had other researchers, including Kirk Huffman, and copies of *Stone Men of Malakula*, some of them photocopied, were also in circulation. Because of this, many images were already familiar to islanders. Whilst we wanted our meetings to be as public as possible, they generally ended up comprising the extended families and close connections of our hosts – men who had connections to the fieldworker program of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, or who had personal connections either to Layard or to Numa Fred Longga.

As well as holding these relatively public meetings, we also met more intensively with smaller groups of older men. Layard focused primarily on the ceremonial activity of men, and women feature very little in both his images and his writings. This reflects not only his own interests, but a gender segregation that is at the heart of much customary knowledge and practice in Malakula. As a result of this, most of our meetings were attended primarily by men, and we conducted almost all of our research with men. As a woman, I was careful to highlight that I did not want to ‘go inside’ or record information that only men should know or discuss, and tried to focus on the broader context of the images and their importance in the present day. Whilst my status as a woman was not made explicitly problematic, it was understood that there were certain aspects of research that it was inappropriate for me to participate in. Whilst women looked at the photographs with me in private at mealtimes, and in the evenings after we had finished work for the day, the ‘official’ commentaries we recorded to be placed in museum archives next to Layard’s images were made by the elder men that we worked with. We recorded these commentaries in either Bislama or the languages of Atchin and Vao, with Numa translating the non-restricted information into Bislama.

As research with the Vanuatu Cultural Centre is configured as a collaborative project, men of Atchin occasionally used my tape-recorder to document issues that emerged in relation to my research into Layard for themselves. Not all of the recordings were translated for me from Atchin language into Bislama. Occasionally, Numa Fred left a part of a narrative untranslated from Atchin language into Bislama, because it was not appropriate for me to be party to that information. This reflects some of the complex, hierarchical and often restrictive
politics around knowledge common throughout Vanuatu. Here, language was an effective, albeit friendly, form of control – if there was any sensitive or secret information, it was not translated into Bislama, thus excluding all outsiders such as myself, although I could still be present during the conversation. In this sense, the recordings that I made during research were not only part of a museum research project, but became part of a locally ordered archive. I have since sent back copies of these recordings to both the Malakula Cultural Centre, and to the Small Islanders, where they will be filed in very different ways to my own recordings or the recordings kept in the Vanuatu Cultural Centre.

Our meetings also drew us out into villages. In discussing the photographs, our main activity was to walk with the images from hamlet to hamlet, across each island. In doing so, we were not only showing the images to islanders, we were revisiting the places that were depicted in them. In this way, the photographs proved to be important links between people and places – we were increasingly encouraged to configure our research around the process of re-photographing Layard’s images, held up by the people of the place in the places where they were originally taken.

These acts of re-photography used the existing visual record to consolidate more contemporary connections between persons and their places. In many instances, the islanders we worked with were the direct descendents of the people whom Layard had originally photographed. At that time I had not yet had access to Layard’s captions, held in San Diego, in which he names most of the people in his images. This was immensely frustrating to myself and the people of Atchin and Vao, as it was hard to definitively identify particular people. This led to a further connection between contemporary islanders and places, as often the site of the photograph was easier to identify than the person within it. In this way, Layard’s images became very tangible links between places, people and their ancestors, and the taking of a new set of photographs became an important articulation of people’s connection to their ‘ground’, and of the contemporary tracing of these histories.

The process of walking with photographs and of re-photography was not without contestation: on occasion we were not allowed to photograph a site because the person who ‘owned’ the place, and from whom we needed to receive permission, was not present. There were also several disputes about who indeed had the right to have their photograph taken in particular places: in one instance we had to return to a dancing-ground later in the day and photograph an elder who had not been present during our first visit. He had been angered, not because of any prior connection that he held to Layard, but because he was the most authoritative person in that area, and therefore we should have taken his photograph first as a matter of protocol. The relationships that people drew to the images were thus based on a series of other relations in both the past and the present.

The issues of ‘relatedness’ that working with Layard’s images brought into the open indicate some of the potential controversies that can arise when information gathered during a very different time, and within a very different set of power relations, is brought back to a local community, and highlight that photographic practice is always negotiated between photographer and photographed. The process
of what is often called ‘visual repatriation’ is not like an archival research project undertaken in a museum, where a researcher can sit quietly with images and documentation. Taking images back into communities is about replacing information within a contemporary political landscape, moving from ‘archive’ to ‘living entity’ (Edwards 2003: 92). Fortunately, our research was relatively uncontested, and we could show Layard’s images fairly publicly. This was largely due to the outreach work of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, which is generally valued extremely positively, and the commitment of contemporary researchers to collaborate with communities and conform to certain expectations about research practices and products (especially by sending back to local communities copies of photographs and tape-recordings). Other researchers have found the context for visual ‘repatriation’ to be more politically loaded (see Bell 2003). Taking for granted the complex political field that research practice and images inhabit, I now want to write briefly about some of the differences in how the images were received between Atchin and Vao, and to draw out Layard’s impact on both of these islands.

Vao
On Vao the sites of the nasara (sacred dancing grounds) Layard photographed have been carefully maintained in almost the same form as they were in 1914. With
enthusiastic villagers, we tried to match each piece of dry-stone walling, each rotted tree stump and slit-drum, to its echo in the photographs, and we re-photographed each site, often with one of the chiefs holding Layard’s image (Plates 2 and 3).

Whilst almost the entire island of Vao has by now converted to Catholicism, the traditional dancing grounds (nasara) have been well maintained. They are the sites of ancestry, memory and identity for present day islanders. Indeed, despite increasing numbers of tourists visiting the island, and an increasing dependence of islanders on the tourist economy, there has been a move to ban them from visiting the nasara unless they pay a large sum of money. Just before my visit, Vao islanders had drafted and approved a cultural tourist policy in order to effectively enforce this. Certainly it is forbidden to take photographs in the nasara without paying a fee. We felt very honoured to be given permission to take these images with the support of local chiefs. At the end of my stay, I presented the chiefs with a camera of their own, and have since sent back copies of all the photographs I took to them, as I had after my first visit in 2000. In this way, the taking of a new series of photographs has fostered a sense of good-will and participation with research projects.

In the present, Vao islanders draw heavily on the published resource of Stone Men of Malekula. Chief Jean Mal Varu, of Togh Vanu, the station where Layard based most his research on Vao, has a folder which contains photocopies of the maps and genealogies in Stone Men of Malakula, to which he has added new generations and geographic changes (Plate 4). I asked if I could record a formal

statement about the importance of Layard’s work that we could put with the images in the archive of the Cambridge museum. His official comment was:

Thank you. When John Layard was here, so were my ancestors. John Layard came and took down everyone’s histories, and put them inside his book. I think this is a very good thing. Because when you people come to follow up on his work, we can tell you that what he talks about, in Stone Men of Malekula, is true. It is still alive. My own [family] line is in Stone Men of Malekula, it is alive today. I am glad because when you two come back here to see if what John Layard wrote was true, I can tell you everything here is still alive … When you show us the photographs we can see that everything in the photos, the dancing grounds in the photographs, everything is alive, is still here … John Layard
didn’t make any mistakes or write anything that was wrong

… I hope that all my future generations are glad that all of
these pictures are still here. (Chief Jean Mal Varu, talking on
Vao, 19 July 2003, translated from Bislama)

Chief Mal Varu’s statement highlights how the work we were doing is seen as
a further contribution to the documentation of Vao life and tradition that Layard had
initiated. The photographs and tape-recordings we sent back will became part of a
local dossier that contains the work of previous anthropologists. Working on Vao,
it was very apparent how important the work of anthropologists can be to the self-
image of local people, and how anthropological records can be used to consolidate
identities – both personal and collective. In this way, anthropological information is
never neutral. It is continually being used. We certainly saw how the practice of
photography in the present day, and the reception of Layard’s images, could be used
strategically to develop and protect notions of cultural property on Vao.

Atchin

There were several differences between Vao and Atchin islanders’ responses to
Layard’s photographs. In Atchin material remnants of the nasara are still present,
but proved much harder to re-photograph. Indeed, looking at the photograph both
invoked and helped to overcome a sense of physical loss. Subsequent to the general
conversion of most islanders to Seventh Day Adventism (the first SDA Missionary,
Mr Parker, arrived in 1912 and was present during Layard’s stay; a Roman Catholic
Mission had already been and gone, and there was also a Presbyterian presence),
there was a general cessation in ritual practice, including that of the maki. Coconut
trees to make copra were planted on many of the nasara, and cattle were brought
over to graze on the island. In the present day, new churches have been built as new
denominations have entered the island, and many of sites of old nakamal are now
totally overgrown. At the same time, places and stories are still present in oral
histories and other forms of local knowledge. In this way, walking around Atchin
with Layard’s images was like a form of archaeology – we used the photographs to
dig down, beneath the overgrown bushes or the coconut trees to the layer beneath,
which was made visible on the paper images for the first time in many years.
Digging down with images we uncovered, amongst other things, one of the last
standing slit-drums on the island, at Senhar, and the last remaining piece of wood
of a nakamal Le Berong Marur.

An Atchin elder, Job Mark, reformed and recorded this memory for us as we re-
photographed the now overgrown site of the nakamal Le Berong Marur (Plates 5 &
6). He stood by a stone upon which lay the last piece of wood symbolizing inter-
land warfare, looking at Layard’s image of the house in all its glory:

My nakamal is called Leberongmarur. This nakamal was here during
the time of fighting, when the men of Ruarr were fighting with the
men of Emil Parav. They fought and fought and ran them off, and
carried back a large piece of wood from their nakamal and brought it to my nakamal, Leberangmaru, and placed it here. This fight involved every man from Rurar. They brought the wood and put it in my nakamal. It stayed there, then the men of Emil Parav [an another station on Atchin] wanted it back, so we told them, you can’t take it, it is our kastom now. If you want to take it back, then you have to make for us something first, then take it back. If you don’t then it will stay here forever. Now you can see, a small piece is still here. It was a big piece of wood, but only a small piece still exists. I am almost old now, but when I saw it in the nakamal, it was almost completely rotted already, but I saw it, and my grandfathers told me one of the stories of my nakamal. (Job Mark, talking on Atchin, 21 July 2003, translated by myself from Bislama)

In Job Mark’s narrative, he connects the wooden fragment of the now lost house to Layard’s image in order to recuperate the history of his descent group, of inter-island warfare and its subsequent resolution. In this context, the analogy I made above between visual research and archaeological practice is not far-fetched. The year before my visit to Atchin, the Vanuatu Cultural Centre had run one of its regular archaeological digs, part of the work of the Vanuatu Cultural and Historical Site Survey (VCHSS), which aims to survey and map important customary sites.
throughout the country. During the dig, several items were uncovered that dated back to the Lapita period, around two thousand years ago. The practice of archaeology on the island brought to Atchin islanders a different view of history, which extended their view of the past back much further than themselves, or even their direct ancestors.

As I was leaving Atchin, we held a meeting to say farewell and where I planned to give the islanders a camera as I had on Vao, so that they could create more of their own photographic record. Instead, I was taken entirely by surprise. Rather than merely expressing the usual farewell formalities, I was carefully interviewed by the group of men I had been working closely with all week, using my own tape-recorder. They described the visit of the VCHSS archaeologists – emphasising that from the important finds that had been made it was evident that Atchin was an important site of history – and they asked what I would be sending back after I had left: what material traces would I leave on the island? Layard had spent only three
weeks on the neighbouring island of Vao and he had published a large book of his findings. Why then, they asked, after a whole year on Atchin had he not published a similar book, with names and places attached to each photograph? Where was this information? Did I have access to it? And what would I do with the results of my own research? When would it come back to the island, to add to the material layers that make up their sense of both past and present identities?

The Cultural Research Policy implemented by the Vanuatu Cultural Centre has encouraged local villagers who collaborate with foreign researchers to expect a high level of return for their participation. They expect not only the return of copies of researcher’s notes, photographs and publications to the community, but that the direction of research itself should benefit community interests and agendas. In response to the questioning of Atchin men, I explained why, to the best of my knowledge, Layard had published very little specifically about his time on Atchin: he had suffered from mental fatigue after his return from the field, he had eventually switched profession from anthropologist to psychoanalyst, and he had incorporated a lot of background information about life on Atchin into *Stone Men of Malekula*. I commented that he had taken many notes and gathered a large amount of information, which I hadn’t seen because whilst his collection of photographs and artefacts are held in Cambridge, the entire corpus of his notes and unpublished writings are held at the University of San Diego. In conclusion, I expressed my desire to strengthen the network between England, America and Vanuatu.

In turn, some Atchin men espoused their own theory about why Layard had published relatively little about their island: he was so deeply immersed in their culture that he knew, as any initiated man would, it would be inappropriate to share the highly restricted knowledge he had gained with a broader, uninitiated public. Many of the memories that we gathered during our trip focused on Layard’s participation in *kastom* ceremonies, his ability to dance and sing in Atchin language, and to wear a *nambas* (penis-wrapper) – the mark of an initiated man. As a result of this conversation, when Herle and I found a publisher for the Layard monograph we emphasised how important it was to make this work available to Small Islanders, but that it might not be appropriate to reprint all of Layard’s writing. We currently have plans to print a ‘second edition’ of the book in consultation with the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, focusing on Layard’s images and captions (that name almost everyone he photographed), which will be fully translated into Bislama. We are also very conscious of the need to get local approval before we go ahead with publication. We have already consulted local communities, through the Vanuatu and Malakula Cultural Centres, about the publication of a manuscript by Layard entitled *Slit-Drums on Atchin* (see Layard forthcoming).

**Research between Vanuatu and Cambridge**

Whilst Atchin men were concerned to bring back information to the island, there has been a long-standing movement of images and information back from archives and museums into Vanuatu, mediated by the Vanuatu Cultural Centre (VCC). The archive of the VCC does in fact hold copies of Layard’s unpublished notes on
microfilm, given by the University of San Diego, and also has copies of Layard’s images, made by Gwil Owen, the photographer at the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, on request by Kirk Huffman. Over the years, following Huffman’s initiative, many more images, and images of objects held in museums, have been ‘visually’ repatriated to the centralised resource of the VCC. Whilst this may have less resonance on Atchin, where many people are not able to regularly visit the VCC, the desires of Atchin men have entered into the VCC, which acts as a safe-house for island kastom. Access to the archive, known as the Tabu Room, is regulated along local guidelines (Geismar and Tilley 2003).

The kinds of memories that are evoked on the island constitute a very different kind of archive, one still based on oral tradition. This in turn is increasingly incorporated into the growing documentary record held within the VCC. The VCC requires researchers such as myself to deposit photographs and manuscripts back in the islands as well as in the VCC archive. In this way the archive is continually expanding with the acquisition of new photographs and audio recordings in which the histories and narratives of local people are recorded in their own voices. Within this process, audio and visual recording technologies are indispensable tools – able to transcend barriers of language and education. Indeed, over the years, the archive of the VCC has focused more on the collection and dissemination of oral histories and images than it has that on more conventional kinds of artefacts. This provides a familiar context for the local reception of historical images such as Layard’s, and also leaves open an institutional space for local opinion, understandings and determination of their own cultural heritage.

Audio and visual technologies are also a vital part of other VCC work. The National Film and Sound Unit has been kitted out with a state-of-the-art recording studio which assists Ambong Thompson in the production of the VCC weekly radio program, the production of music CDs headed by Marcel Meltherorong, and an ongoing video production unit (for instance, one recent production has been a film exploring the impact and importance of wearing trousers to young women, produced by the Young People’s Project, directed and edited by Emily Niras). Local fieldworkers are also trained to take photographs, make films and audio-recordings that they in turn add to the work of foreign researchers in the archive. The work of the VCC with sounds and images links the interests of local villagers to the operations of researchers such as myself working in universities and museums around the world. The importance paid by the VCC to audio and visual documentation, the space they have created for grass-roots opinions and understanding, and the ways in which they have used the historical visual record (see Huffman 1996b), all provide a model for understanding the importance and vitality of anthropological images in the present day, and emphasises the potential impact that museums can have on both their circulation and presentation.

In 2001, I commissioned a series of artists in Vanuatu to create a new collection of objects and images for the exhibition *Vanuatu Stael: Kastom and Creativity*. One of the rationales behind this exhibition, as well as giving ni-Vanuatu a chance to participate actively in forming a collection for display abroad, was to develop the familiar role of the museum as a conserver of cultural property for future
generations. I collected two headdresses from Lamap, southern Malakula. These had been modelled on masks in the collections of the Musée Quai Branly (Musée de l’Homme), photographs of which had been brought back to Lamap by Marcellin Abong, then a curator at the VCC, as part of an on-going local project to research and revitalise customary practices.

In 2001, I talked in detail with Lamap villagers about the ways in which museums abroad had stored kastom for future use (see Geismar forthcoming b). On my return to Vanuatu in 2003, Chief Richard Abong told me with sadness that in the interim his sacred house had burned down. He was glad, however, that that the masks he had given to Cambridge were safe. Now, he said, we can always look at them again, and we will never forget what they look like. In addition to storage in the museum, images of the masks also circulate within Vanuatu through the exhibition catalogue (Geismar 2003). We were able to distribute 150 copies throughout Vanuatu: to the national library, the VCC and within the communities where the objects had been made, as well as internationally to a number of museums and libraries. The exhibition was also visited in Cambridge by Ralph Regenvanu.

In keeping with the perpetuation of networks of both knowledge and visual production, our present research project aims to continue the work that both my anthropological ancestors as well as the forebears of Small Islanders have started – to strengthen the links between Cambridge and Vanuatu by continuing the movement of images and of objects, backwards and forwards, through the museum, between these two places, and to facilitate the networks of shared knowledge that images can engender.

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NOTES


2. Rivers was a member of the 1898 Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to the Torres Strait led by Alfred Haddon: a period of intensive group field-research that was to re-define the theoretical perspectives and methodology of academic anthropology in Cambridge, see Herle this volume.

3. The negatives were held by the museum for many years. Layard’s son, Richard Layard, subsequently, and very kindly, donated the 400 original glass plates in 2003. We are very grateful for his support in our research.

4. In addition of course to speaking the native language of Vao, everyone on Vao speaks French, having been educated through the French Catholic Church. On Atchin, the
predominant Christian denominations are Seventh Day Adventists and Presbyterians. Most Atchin islanders have thus been educated in English.


6. In keeping with their drive to repatriate as much of the documentary record of Vanuatu as possible, the Vanuatu Cultural Centre does hold copies of the Vanuatu material in Layard’s archive, on microfilm. This format, however, is relatively inaccessible to men from Atchin and none of them had been to see it in Port Vila.

REFERENCES


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