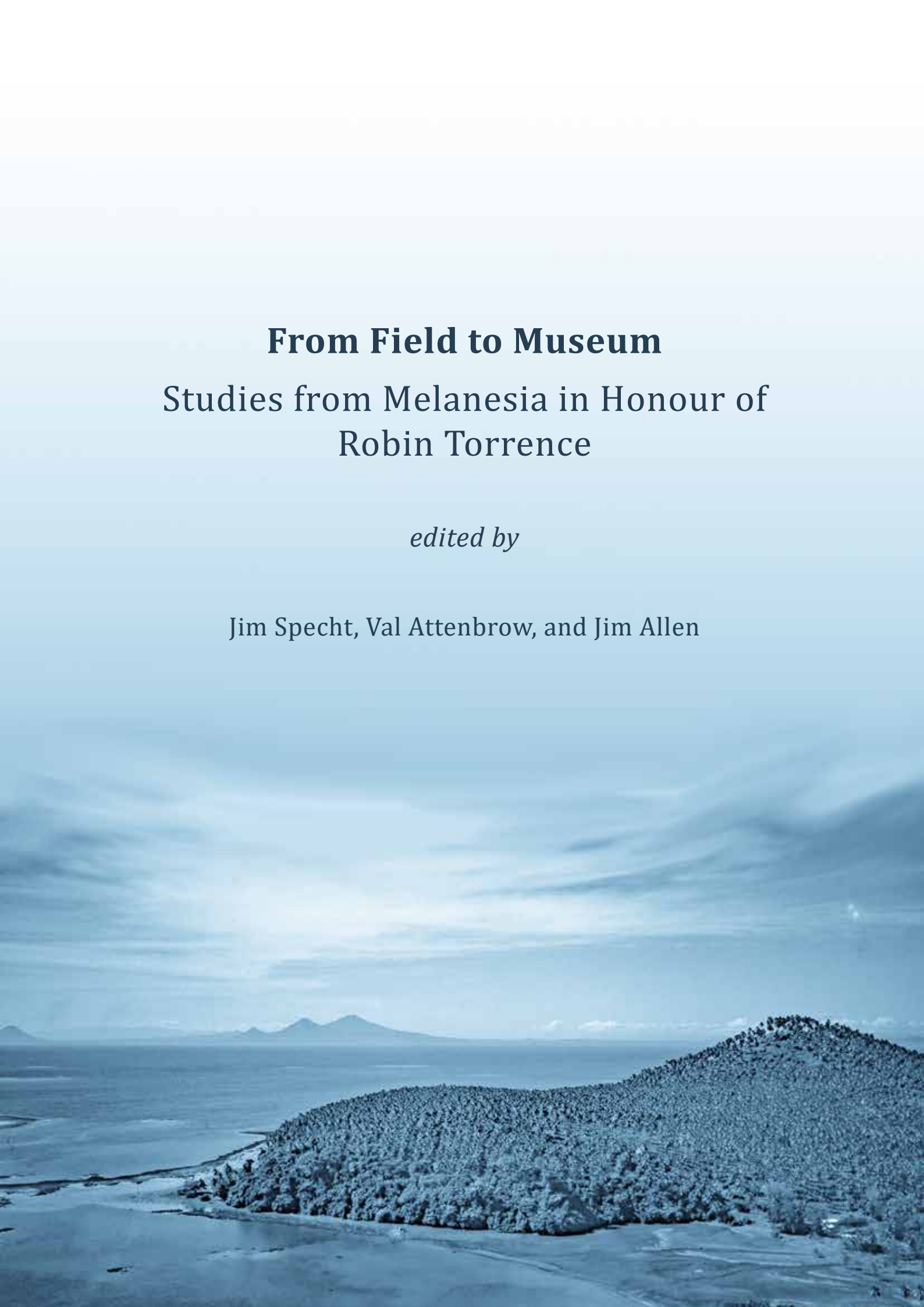
From Field to Museum

Studies from Melanesia in Honour of Robin Torrence

edited by

Jim Specht, Val Attenbrow, and Jim Allen



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Front photo: Aerial view of Garua Island, one of Robin's research areas, with Mt Baki in the foreground and the location of the FAO Lapita pottery site on the ridge to the left. Malaiol Gully and the FAP site are in the foreground but are concealed by vegetation. The volcanoes of Hoskins Peninsula are visible in the distance, with Mt Witori lying behind the nearer twin peaks. West New Britain Province, Papua New Guinea. Photo: Jim Specht, 1989.

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From Field to Museum—Studies from Melanesia in Honour of Robin Torrence. Preface

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This collection of 16 papers by 32 authors covers a diverse range of topics on archaeological materials and museum collections. The papers range in geographical coverage from Sarawak in Malaysia to Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, but their main focus is on Papua New Guinea (PNG). Their time frame covers 6000 or so years down to the present. These wide geographical and temporal spreads are held together by a common thread: the varied relationships of the authors to Dr Robin Torrence, who retired from the position of Senior Principle Research Scientist at the Australian Museum in 2020. Over the last 35 years in Australian studies Robin has taught, supervised, examined, mentored, conducted fieldwork and museum research, or been a co-author with all of the first authors and most of the others.

Robin's association with Australia began through encounters with Australian archaeologists at conferences while she was teaching Archaeology at Sheffield University in the United Kingdom in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Several visits to Australia resulted from these encounters, and Robin's European experience in the production and exchange of obsidian tools was quickly matched to Richard Fullagar's study of obsidian artefacts from Manus Province in Papua New Guinea recovered during the Lapita Homeland Project of 1985 (Fullagar and Torrence, 1991). In 1988 and 1989 she joined Specht's Australian Museum project in the Talasea area of West New Britain Province, PNG. By 1991 she had moved permanently to Australia and began her own project on the obsidian sources of West New Britain's Willaumez Peninsula and Garua Island. A flow of significant papers resulted dealing with the sources and their geochemical characterisation, the production, value and exchange of obsidian stemmed tools in Middle Holocene times (Torrence *et al*., 1996; Torrence and Summerhayes, 1997; Araho *et al*., 2002; Torrence, 2004; Torrence, Swadling *et al*., 2009) and the social and economic significance of obsidian in general (Torrence, 2005, 2011, 2016; Torrence, Kelloway and White, 2013; Torrence *et al.,* 2018).

Robin's focus on stemmed obsidian tools of the Middle Holocene involved the geochemical characterisation of New Britain obsidians to aid the plotting of past artefact movements that could cast light on social relationships and trade routes (Torrence and Swadling, 2008). She initially worked with Wallace Ambrose of the Australian National University and the late Roger Bird at the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO) using the PIXE-PIGME technique to analyse obsidian source materials and artefacts (Bird *et al*., 1997). With the development of portable XRF (pXRF) equipment, she rapidly adopted this new technique and with her partner Peter White visited museums in Australia, the United Kingdom and Europe to analyse obsidian collections from the Papua New Guinea region. This resulted in an extensive corpus of data indicating significant transport of obsidian artefacts from the Willaumez Peninsula sources to locations throughout the PNG islands and mainland during the Middle Holocene (Torrence, Kelloway, and White, 2013). This theme is taken up in this

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volume by Christian Reepmeyer, who explores issues of social connections and cultural identity through the use and exchange of New Britain and Banks Islands' obsidian in Vanuatu and the SE Solomon Islands. Following the work of Attenbrow *et al*. (2017) in Australia, Robin encouraged the extension of the application of pXRF analysis in the Willaumez Peninsula-Hoskins area of northern New Britain to non-obsidian stone artefacts (Pengilley *et al*., 2019), and here Alana Pengilley extends this application to items from New Britain's south side. These two studies open new avenues for tracking the movement of stone tools over time and enhance our previous reliance on obsidian artefacts and pottery to understand past socio-economic networks.

Volcanic landscapes have held Robin's interest ever since her days as a doctoral candidate on the island of Melos in Greece (Torrence, 1986), and West New Britain provided many opportunities for her to take these interests further. They included being in the field during the eruption of Pago within the crater of Mount Witori in 2002 and co-authorship of a monograph on the volcanoes of the southern Willaumez Peninsula (McKee *et al*., 2005) that was followed a few months after publication by one of the volcanoes entering an eruptive phase. Robin's collaboration with a range of volcanologists, soil specialists and others in Australia, New Zealand, the USA, and the UK has yielded important advances in our knowledge and understanding of the histories, dating and impacts of the volcanoes of central New Britain. This has led to the refining of the stratigraphic records and chronologies of the eruptive histories of Witori and Dakataua volcanoes over the last 10,000 years (Neall *et al*., 2008; Petrie and Torrence, 2008; Torrence, Neall and Boyd, 2009; McKee *et al*., 2010). Here, Vince Neall and his colleagues present important new results on the geochemistry of tephras from these eruptions that greatly enhance our capacity to distinguish between volcanic events across thousands of square kilometres.

Much of the fieldwork for this archaeological and volcanological research was carried out within a broader framework of retrieving data from archaeological sites under threat of destruction by the development and expansion of oil palm plantations along the north coast of New Britain (Torrence, White and Kononenko, 2013; Specht and Torrence, 2007). Among the results of this research was the discovery of a partly-destroyed hillock on Numundo Plantation with obsidian artefacts exposed more than 4 metres below ground surface under series of volcanic ashes. Now named archaeological site Kupona-na-Dari, this archaeological site predates the Last Glacial Maximum and is among the oldest evidence for human occupation of the Bismarck Archipelago (Torrence *et al*., 1999, 2004). Numundo Plantation is preserving this remnant of the hillock, now known by some locals as 'Robin's grassy knoll.'

As well as these 'big picture' projects Robin has addressed the microscopic end of the scale by promoting studies of usewear and residues on stone and other artefacts and the identification of phytoliths and ancient starch granules to address aspects of past lifestyles that generally do not leave macroscopic evidence. The usewear studies have been greatly enhanced by Nina Kononenko choosing to make Australia, and Sydney in particular, her new home, a move that was strongly supported and encouraged by Robin. Their subsequent collaborations have produced significant results, including identification of Lapita age obsidian tools as probable tattooing implements (Kononenko and Torrence, 2009; Kononenko *et al*., 2016; Torrence *et al*., 2018). In this volume Nina combines with Pip Rath to explore some of Robin's ideas about the specialised production of stemmed obsidian tools, a topic also pursued by Paul Dickinson. These two papers neatly complement each other, suggesting the probable existence of a highly-structured workshop-style production system on Garua Island in which groups of specialists and novices produced a range of stemmed tools.

The phytolith and usewear studies have thrown light on the functions of stone tools from archaeological sites and in museum collections (e.g., Kealhofer *et al.*, 1999; Barton, 2007), on human responses to landscape change (Parr *et al*., 2009; Torrence, 2016), and on the Lapita period settlement structure at site FAO on Garua Island, West New Britain (Parr *et al*., 2001; Lentfer and Torrence, 2007). The starch research resulted in a ground-breaking book titled *Ancient Starch Research* (Torrence and Barton, 2006) that received the somewhat dubious honour of receiving the 'Bookseller/ Diagram Prize for the Oddest Title of the Year.' Be that as it may, reviewers of the book gave it unanimous high praise and strong recommendations. Four of the contributors to that volume are represented in the present one. Huw Barton uses usewear and residue analysis (phytoliths and starch) to identify the function of a collection of cylindrical stone tools in the Sarawak Museum, Malaysia, concluding that they were used for processing sago. Carol Lentfer and Alison Crowther, in combination with the late Roger Green, investigate the subsistence base at the Lapita pottery of Nenumbo (RF-2) in the Solomon Islands, concluding that evidence is consistent with the presence of domesticated crop plants and a significant shift from seeded to unseeded banana varieties through time.

Mention of Lapita pottery introduces two papers dealing specifically with Lapita sites in different parts of Papua New Guinea. Anne Ford, Vincent Kewibu and Kenneth Miamba describe recent discoveries on Fergusson Island in Milne Bay Province where they have recovered transitional pottery from the late-to-post-Lapita phase.

Nick Hogg, Glenn Summerhayes and Yi-lin Elaine Chen discuss Lapita sites in the islands of the Anir group in New Ireland Province. Through compositional analysis of the pottery they argue for a shift in mobility patterns between early and late Lapita times, and the probable movement of pottery to the islands of the Tanga group to the north of Anir.

The paper by Ben Shaw and Simon Coxe takes a completely different tack and examines evidence for cannibalism during the last 500–600 years at sites on Rossel Island in Milne Bay Province. This sensitive topic is generally avoided in the analysis of archaeological human remains. Many village people in Papua New Guinea, however, see the practice as part of their history and heritage.

The second half of the volume consists of papers relating to museum and collection studies not directly related to archaeological fieldwork. Peter Matthews, who contributed to the *Ancient Starch* volume, teams up with Rhys Richards to present an account of the blue-dyed barkcloths of Solomon Islands in the George Brown collection in the National Museum of Ethnology (Minpaku), Japan, raising issues about the identification of the raw materials employed in their production.

The remaining papers reflect a shift in Robin's interests in issues about indigenous agency in the production of museum collections, especially in response to western colonialism. She first expressed this interest in the early 1990s with her study of museum collections of obsidian spear points and daggers of Manus Province, PNG (Torrence, 1993). She returned to this topic in 2000 through an archaeological perspective on European—Manus islander exchange relations (Torrence, 2000). In more recent times she has been a driving force in the development of several projects

on collaboration with the Queensland Museum and the Macleay Museum of the University of Sydney to investigate the composition, acquisition histories and related issues of 19th and 20th century museum collections in Australia and overseas. To date one edited volume has been published (Byrne *et al*., 2011) and another one is in preparation dealing with the major collection made by Sir William MacGregor during his time as Lieutenant-Governor of British New Guinea, now known as Papua, part of the independent state of Papua New Guinea. Initial results have been presented in Torrence *et al*. (2020; see also Chan, 2018).

The present volume includes five papers that reflect these interests. Bonshek writes about a time capsule of wooden bowls made expressly for the Australian Museum by the people of Nangali village on Guadalcanal Island, Solomon Islands to update an earlier collection from their area made by anthropologist Ian Hogbin in the 1930s now in the Australian Museum as part of the University of Sydney collection. Erna Lilje and Jude Philp illustrate the varied ways in which the meaning of objects in museum collections can change through time due to museum practices and the shifting views of curators, the public, and the descendants of the artists and artisans who produced them.

Peter Sheppard's contribution about a Solomon Islands 'war' canoe (*tomoko*) in the Australian Museum neatly fits this pattern. He traces the history of such canoes that were originally used in head-hunting raids and warfare, from the attempts by colonial officials to eliminate their construction to the present-day when they have become a powerful symbol of cultural identity for their producers and are frequently seen at major festivals. Cultural identity is also the theme of the paper by James Rhoads who presents the results of a stylistic analysis of 'spirit boards' produced by communities of the Gulf of Papua in an attempt to trace and define social boundaries.

Finally, Susan Davies and Michael Quinnell examine the visit to Australia in 1897 of James Edge-Partington, famous for his 3-part illustrated record of late 19th century museum collections. Davies and Quinnell look in detail at the production and content of the third part (Edge-Partington and Heape, 1898) that mostly covers items in Australian museums at the time of his visit.

This is a brief and incomplete review of Robin's Australian archaeological career but none-the-less it conveys a clear picture of the energy, imagination, inspiration and dedication that Robin has displayed over the last 30 and more years. In presenting this volume to her, the authors and editors express their thanks and appreciation for her friendship and collegiality, and wish her a successful and productive future.

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