

Melanesian Archive created

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

In an effort to preserve and catalog records of the traditional ways of life of rapidly changing Melanesian societies, the first comprehensive Melanesian Archive has been started by two faculty members in the Department of Anthropology at the University of California, San Diego.

The archive, which is intended to collect copies of unpublished materials on Melanesian peoples, is the brainchild of Profs. Donald Tuzin and Fitz John Poole. It is now being developed as the Melanesian Studies Resource Center in cooperation with the UCSD Central Library, which is creating a complementary and comprehensive collection of published materials on the Melanesian region.

These two collections and the considerable interest in Melanesia represented among several UCSD faculty, post-doctoral scholars and graduate students in the Department of Anthropology will make UCSD the premier center for Melanesian studies in the United States.

"Our goal is to assemble the most comprehensive collection of unpublished papers on Melanesian ethnographic topics, including works obtainable from the estates of deceased scholars," Poole said.

"There are many unpublished papers of excellent quality and special interest on Melanesia that are written for private circulation or symposia, circulate briefly in narrow personal networks, and then largely disappear from view," he added.

"These documents are a significant part of the literature in our field, but they remain unavailable to most scholars and often are not identified in the usual forms of bibliography."

The project, which was begun with campus funding, is currently financed by a grant under Title II of the Higher Education Act and is housed in both the Department of Anthropology and the Central Library.

"The response to the idea of the project so far has been extremely gratifying," said Poole, who has himself conducted research on New Guinea, perhaps the best known island in Melanesia. "Scholars recognize the obvious value of preserving a treasury of written materials that might otherwise be lost and of establishing a means by which this resource becomes cheaply and easily available. In years to come, research on tribal peoples will be done entirely in archives, and we hope to establish a model for such an archive."

As the material is gathered and cataloged it will be made available on microfiche to any interested scholars, and periodic bibliographies of the holdings of the archive will be issued.

Poole emphasizes that the collected materials would be shared with the people of Melanesia and thus provide them with some measure of return for the years of research which have been conducted there by hundreds of scholars.

"The archive promises a program for the systematic repatriation of information to all of the major academic institutions of the region," he said.

In a rapidly modernizing world, Melanesia remains one of the most fruitful areas of research for anthropologists and others interested in the study of tribal peoples.

"It's one of the few remaining areas where access to tribal people is still possible," said Poole. "The Melanesian region exhibits an enormous range of variation in the kinds and degrees of social change that people have experienced. In the more remote areas, there are still groups who have remarkably little knowledge of the outside world."

Poole, who joined the UCSD faculty last year, has spent several years living with a mountain tribal group in the interior of New Guinea studying the socialization of children and rituals of male initiation.

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