Mainland Magic: Interpreting influences across Cape York-Torres Strait

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Torres Strait has proved to be a fertile ground for archaeological interpretation, culminating in detailed regional interpretations for occupation and settlement. Until recently, the consensus was that the islands were permanently settled in the late Holocene by colonizers from the north (Barham 2000; papers in McNiven and Quinnell 2004, but particular Barham et al. and David and McNiven). This was based on a coalescing of archaeological dates around 2,500 years ago (assumed to be the commencement of occupation), which resulted in flows of connection extending from Papua to Cape York:

> *The close correspondence of earliest dates from Saibai, Dauar and adjacent coastal PNG suggest that Torres Strait may have started to act as a route for the southwards transfer of maritime and coastal subsistence technologies, following the arrival of founding Melanesian populations, possibly equipped with the double-outrigger canoe, some time around 2,500 BP.* (Barham et al. 2004, 57)

The discovery of an 8,000 year old date for the Badu 15 site (on the western island of Badu) refined but did not demonstrably alter this interpretation, although permanent settlement was pushed back by 500-1000 years. In this interpretation, David et al. (2004: 75) present 3 phases of occupation, spanning the period of sea level rise and stabilization. In Phase 1 (8-6,000 years BP), 'Ancestral Cape York' was still connected to the Australian mainland was permanently occupied by mainlanders. In Phase 2 (6,000-3500/3000 BP), sea level had stabilized and the newly formed islands were visited occasionally by Australian mainlanders. It was in the final phase, Phase 3 (beginning around 3500/3000) that the islands were 'colonized' by people from the north and northeast (David et al. 2004: 75).

Recently, these interpretations have been rigorously overhauled in McNiven et al. (2006: 73) who propose a 'dual demographic model' involving 'local Australian settlement expansion 3800 years ago followed by Papuan influx 2600 years ago'. We believe the idea of a mainland 'expansion' (rather than pre-existing seasonal presence before 3,800 years ago) is premature although there is a slight intensification in the existing archaeological evidence at this time. McNiven et al. (2006: 74) see the presence of the land bridge between Papua and Australia prior to 8,000 BP as evidence that '…the degree to which they [the early settlers] might be described as genetically 'Aboriginal' (Birdsell 1993: 440) or 'Melanesian' (or a complex mixture of both) is a matter for speculation…'. After 2,600 years ago, McNiven et al. (2006) appear to see more cultural similarities between the emerging 'Torres Strait islanders' and their northern neighbours than with those in the south. Ethnographic evidence suggests that while the Cape York-Torres Strait-Papuan region was a 'hotspot' of social engagement and exchange relations,

geographical proximity had a significant effect on linguistic and other cultural elements. Thus, Top (northern) islanders had many connections with Papuans as well as other islanders. This extended through to the southwest where islanders were linked with the mainlanders of Cape York. These connections were enhanced by a number of formal exchange routes that extended from Papua down the east coast of the Australian mainland.

The confirmation by David et al. (2004) of people on the 'Ancestral Cape York Peninsula' from the time of sea level rise was a significant discovery while the inclusion of a mainlander presence in the re-interpretation by McNiven et al. (2006) was an important development. In this paper, we focus on these 'Ancestral Cape York' peoples, particularly speculating on the nature of interactions following the appearance of settlers in the Western islands of Torres Strait around 2,600 years ago. While McNiven et al. (2006: 73-74) note that there is currently no direct information on the nature of interactions between these two groups, we propose that current interpretations stem from particular readings of the ethnographic evidence and that alternative theoretical frameworks could prove useful. We propose a more subtle reading of the evidence that accounts for the development of regional exchange networks in the region.

'North-to-south' flows across Torres Strait?

The ethnographic evidence on which archaeological interpretations are based is drawn largely from the work of Haddon and others who were part of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to the Torres Strait at the end of the 19th Century (Haddon

1901-35; Barham et al. 2004: 3; David et al. 2004: 65, McNiven et al. 2006). Haddon et al. left an exceptionally rich ethnographic legacy, as Barham et al. (2004: 3) point out:

> *The information gathered during two field seasons in 1888 and 1898, subsequently through correspondence, and during his brief visit of 1914, produced an ethnographic baseline study that is unparalleled for any group of indigenous people on the Australian continent.*

Haddon emphasized 'north-to-south' cultural flows within the region; that is, from Papua into the Torres Strait and then to Cape York:

> *… Haddon (1890, 1907, 1921, 1935) was in no doubt that culture contact in the later periods had predominantly been from PNG southwards.*
>
> (Barham et al. 2004: 41)

However, we argue that while the Cambridge Expedition provided an excellent resource in terms of much of the observational data and material collections, caution should be exercised when adopting Haddon's interpretations. These were social evolutionary in nature which clearly affected his interpretation and the following (rather lengthy) quote shows:

> *The miserable condition of the Australians precluded them from having much to offer to the Torres Straits Islanders in the way of exchange. Probably the only imports were throwing-sticks and javelins. The Muralug men obtained these from the mainland according to Macgillivray (II. P. 18) and this I can confirm. It is likely that these may also have found their way to Mabuiag (p.81), though it is probably that the more northern islanders would usually make their own weapons. Various travellers refer to the bow and arrow and bamboo tobacco-pipe being found at Cape York, and it has* ***got into ethnological works*** [our

> emphasis] *that the Cape York natives use these implements. Possibly before the advent of the white man, an occasional Australian may have had a pipe and smoked it or even have possessed a bow and arrow, but these were never adopted by the people.* (Haddon 1904: 295)

McNiven et al. (2006: 52) refer to this as a '…racialised migrationist theoretical framework…' and note that it was typical of late 19th century ethnography.

Haddon's field studies focused on Murray and Mabuiag islands although visits were made to other parts. Beckett (1972) reports that he collated documentary evidence and corresponded with a number of people to supplement his own extensive fieldwork. But there was one omission: '[t]he literature is voluminous, but he missed little of importance except for the Brierly notebooks which have only recently come to our attention' (Beckett 1972: 310). The 'Brierly notebooks' refer to the evidence recorded by Oswald Brierly who was the artist on the survey vessel, the H.M.S. *Rattlesnake* who visited the area in 1848-49. Brierly interviewed Barbara Thomson, a shipwreck survivor who had lived with the Kaurareg people of southwestern Torres Strait who traditionally intermarried with Cape York peoples, with whom they shared much of their daily life. In the following sections, we show how these perspectives coloured Haddon's interpretations and how they have continued to dominate subsequent work`.

Our concern revolves around the assertion that cultural flows in the region were essentially 'north-to-south' and we contend that this stemmed from the theoretical framework of the Cambridge Expedition and the fact that it was more focused on the

northern fringe of Torres Strait. While Haddon was perhaps the first to suggest that the origin of Torres Strait peoples was from both northern and southern 'mainlands', he also proposed a later colonization by peoples from Papua (Barham et al. 2004: 41; McNiven et al. 2006). Haddon himself acknowledged that there are some problems with this scenario, particularly in relation to linguistic evidence that suggests that Kala Lagaw Ya (the language of Western Torres Strait Islanders) is Australian rather than Papuan in nature (Barham et al. 2004: 41; cf. McNiven et al. 2006). In contrast, most of the cultural suite was considered by Haddon to derive more recently from Papua. Haddon's interpretation was driven by a perspective that placed emphasis on technology and material culture and ranked horticultural societies at a higher level of social evolution than hunter-gather societies. This is illustrated in his emphasis on the material rather than the ritual aspects of exchange in the quote above. Papuan and Torres Strait peoples had horticultural practices and it was perhaps assumed that they would be more influential in regional interactions.

Archaeological interpretation in Torres Strait has also been influenced by Lawrence (1989**,** 1991, 1994, and 1998) who used Haddon (1890, 1901-35, McCarthy (1939) and Moore 1979) in developing a picture of customary exchange in the region. He challenged the idea (drawn from these sources) that customary exchange in this region was '…a system of fixed, formalized, point-to-point trade routes…' On the basis of his own research, which included the oral testimony of Torres Strait and Papuan peoples, he suggests a more localized picture. Lawrence undertook fieldwork in Papua which, coupled with the inherent biases in the ethnography, may have confirmed 'north-to-south' cultural flows.

While Lawrence brings important perspectives to a discussion of exchange in the region, his analysis is constrained by a number of factors. First, while localized exchange networks undoubtedly operated across the region, it is our contention that two systems may have been simultaneously in operation. Localized exchange, such as described by Lawrence's informants, may have constituted the most common form which was largely responsible for the circulation of material items including foodstuff and other resources. This form of exchange would probably have been based on individual connections and was an important element of the economy. This type of exchange might have been associated with many items of material culture. By contrast, the exchange described in documentary sources appears more formalized, involving long distances and we argue that this may have been the mechanism for the exchange of ceremonial elements. The latter would have included the exchange of rituals, songs, and narratives and, although associated with some material culture items, would have been largely non-material. Thus, while Lawrence challenges the existence of formalized trade routes, we offer the possibility that two, perhaps interconnected, systems were in operation. Our point is that there is a strong relationship between economic interpretations and a focus on material culture. In this instance, Lawrence's analysis has importantly revealed the limitations of a reliance on documentary sources that privilege the 'trunk route' view of exchange; however, his own analysis is perhaps just as selective. It is our contention that privileging tangible, material items of exchange necessarily privileges 'north-to-south' flows and that consideration of *non-material* elements may present a very different picture.

A focus on material culture and a discussion of exchange that is concerned primarily with tangible rather than intangible elements of this complex process fits well with archaeological perspectives that are largely drawn from objects and other physical evidence. For example, figures in Lawrence (1998) show patterns of customary exchange drawn from Brierley (1849-50), Moore (1979), Haddon (1890 and 1935) and Landtman (1927) that illustrate that within a system where a plethora of items were exchanged, Cape York was a comparatively minor player. But Moore (1979), citing Brierly's evidence, speaks of northern Cape York as being something of a 'cultural hub'. He says that the Kaurareg of Muralag (Prince of Wales Island):

> *...made frequent visits to Cape York and Mount Adolphus Island, where they had extensive contact with Aborigines and other Islanders from as far afield as the Murray group, Saibai, and occasionally even people from mainland Papua. Mount Adolphus apparently produced yams in great profusion and became the chief meeting place and provisioning point for canoe parties arriving from all directions. Obviously it would also have been a nodal point for the diffusion of new ideas and artifacts.* Moore (1979: 19-21)

This suggests that Cape York and Mount Adolphus Island or Muri (as it is known in Cape York) were key places of interaction for people from one end of the Strait to the other. This begs the question of *why* these people made the long trek (from as far away as Papua) to the Australian mainland. Could this be only for the ochre, the throwing sticks and spears as suggested by Lawrence's evidence? Or were these items merely the material evidence of an exchange of powerful ritual performances and associated narratives and songs? We are suggesting here that a material-based treatment of

exchange can provide only part of the story. This is in contrast with evidence from the Australian mainland in which exchange is characterized as being 'driven' by ceremonial imperatives (e.g. Sutton 1978).

To fully understand interactions across the region, all aspects of exchange should be considered. The adoption of interpretations emphasizing 'north-to-south' cultural flows is premature without an understanding of the southerners' (perhaps non-material) contributions. An emphasis on material culture was 'built into' Haddon's task – he was, after all, making an ethnographic collection. The 'material' essence is then further distilled in Lawrence's work. Interpretations by archaeologists, on the basis of Haddon, Lawrence and others could thus show nothing other than a material culture ('north-to-south') bias, downplaying Australian contributions. In the following section, we focus on the Australian mainland and on debates (drawn from work undertaken in this region) that were emerging within the embryonic discipline of anthropology.

Insert figure 1:

Australian Story

On the Australian mainland, Ursula McConnel and Donald Thomson were anthropological contemporaries of Haddon, working in Cape York. As a new convert to Anthropology, Thomson (who began his career in eastern Cape York) was admirer of Haddon and adopted his evolutionary perspective:

> *It was my good fortune to work on the fringe of the region made famous by the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits under the leadership of Dr. A. C. Haddon, F.R.S., and I was able to trace the movement of Papuan culture that had extended into Torres Strait, where it had been studied in great detail by Dr. Haddon and members of the Cambridge Expedition.* (Thomson 1966**:**13)

This was Thomson's first anthropological fieldwork and it appears that he was heavily influenced by Haddon's work.

McConnel had differences of opinion in relation to both Haddon and Thomson (e.g. McConnel 1936). These differences are at the heart of our critique of contemporary archaeological interpretation in Torres Strait. In the following sections we will lay out the debate that ensued between McConnel, Thomson and Haddon regarding cultural flows in the Cape York-Torres Strait-Papuan region. While McConnel did not deny 'Papuan influences' in Cape York, the debate revolved around whether myths can be used to identify migratory patterns or whether they are suggestive of more subtle 'psychological' and 'sociological' issues (McConnel 1936:70). In the first part of the 20th Century, the theoretical pendulum favoured the historical approach of Haddon: nearly a century later, McConnel would find more support amongst contemporary anthropologists for her 'psychological' and 'sociological' approach. At the very least it is apparent that the question of cultural flows was not then (and is not now) acquitted. While there was undoubtedly movement of people, ideas and objects from north-to-south in the region, evidence as to what was flowing back the other way was overlooked within

an evolutionary, materialist framework. We will now turn to a brief examination of some of this material.

Sivirri, Kwoiam and the Hero Cults

Based on fieldwork undertaken during the late 1920s, Thomson (1933, 1934, 1957) provided accounts of 'hero cults', which he said had 'a strong Papuan affinity'. He argued that these 'entered the area by way of the Torres Strait', sweeping down both coasts of the peninsula considerably modifying the culture. Yet he also argued that these were 'super-imposed on the existing totemic structure' (1972:2). Thomson noted that Haddon and others on the Cambridge Expedition had observed 'hero cults' of a similar type in the Torres Strait. These 'cults of the Brethren', articulated around seven brothers (Sigay, Mayaw, Malo, Seu, Kulka, Pineca & Diberi), who journeyed during the mythological past, not from Papua but from the eastern side of Cape York (W. MacFarlane to Haddon 1888-1929 PMB MF 959; Haddon 1904:64-66, 373-378; 1935: 391-393).

According to Haddon, these cults facilitated regional integration throughout the Torres Strait through mutual visiting at various 'lodges' for annual ceremonies (Haddon 1935: 386). While the myths associated with these cults include heroes who originated in Cape York, Haddon argued that the cults were originally introduced from Papua to Torres Strait and then to Cape York:

> *The cults of the Brethren came to a people who…had totemism. The new cult replaced…the indefinite communal association of a totem with its clan for a definite personal relation with superhuman beings, thus it is no*

> *wonder that it became predominant…The cults of the brethren everywhere provided a synthesis which…had been lacking. All the men could now meet as members of a common brotherhood, which was impossible under the earlier conditions, and a feeling of solidarity and an intense pride in their new cults was engendered.* (Haddon 1935: 397)

For Haddon and also Thomson, the importance was in the *origin* of these ceremonial complexes (and associated myths) and what this suggested about actual migrations and cultural flows within the region. The evolutionist paradigm is evident in their assumption (perhaps in spite of contrary evidence) that the cults themselves had been introduced into the mainland by way of the Torres Strait. Their interpretations emerged within a *milieu* in which it was assumed that hunter/gatherers were less advanced than horticulturists and that the dominant direction of diffusion would be from more to less advanced peoples. In this region, that suggests that cultural flows were more likely from the horticulturalists in the north to their hunter-gatherer neighbours in the south.

Ursula McConnel undertook extensive work in Cape York from about the 1920s. She challenged Thomson's interpretation in the analysis of two Cape York ceremonial complexes (McConnel 1936). The first was associated with the crocodile I'wai/Iliwayi that he had observed among Sandbeach people in north eastern Cape York.[1] The second was related to the Shiveri (also Siverri, Chiveri, Tyiveri) complex recorded by both Thomson and McConnel in the Mapoon (Batavia River) area of north western Cape York. According to these myths, Shiveri was responsible for introducing ceremonies associated with his name and for making the first dug-out canoe and drum. He then

1 Among the Koko Ya'o (Kuuku Ya'u).

travelled north through Torres Strait, forming islands along the way and fighting as a great warrior. McConnel's Mapoon informants told her that Shiveri's storyplace is on Janie Creek, south of the Batavia River. They stated that he voyaged to Mabuaig in the central western islands of the Torres Strait and was known there as Kwoiam/Kuiam (McConnel 1936, 1932).

Haddon (1904: 67 and 367) also recorded Kuiam narratives that similarly placed his origins on the Cape York mainland. In these, he was said to have carried a spear and spear-thrower (mainland style), as opposed to the bow and arrow of an Island warrior. He apparently had the physical attributes of the Australians and he did everything in 'mainland fashion'. Landtman (1917: 47), who was Haddon's student, provides Kiwai (Papuan) perspectives on Kuiam, Kiuam, or Kuiamo of Mabiaug in which he was a willful child who bullied other children and was constantly scolded by his elders. He killed his mother and then, blaming everyone for making him wild, he killed his whole tribe in a bloodlust of retaliation. He killed people on Mabuiag and Badu (islands in western Torres Strait) and in New Guinea as 'pay back'. Landtman also recorded that he carried the characteristic 'throwing stick' and spear. He was said to have decorated himself with fringes of split coconut leaves that covered his face, that he carried ornaments of war and sang a war song as he went about the killing sprees.

Laade (1967), who undertook ethnomusicological research in the region during the early 1960s, collected further myths on Shiveri and Kuiam in Northern Cape York and Torres Strait. He noted that there were a number of versions regarding Kuiam's origins and that these differed from those collected by Thomson and McConnel at Mapoon that identify

Shiviri and Kuiam as the same character. He argued that the two only became identified as one relatively recently (since the 1880s) as a result of the intensive contact between northern Cape York and Torres Strait peoples in the trepang and pearlshell industries (Laade 1967, 1970). Laade (1970:290) suggests that this facilitated discussion amongst Cape York and Torres Strait peoples and that the mainlanders took a special interest in Kuiam because (in some versions), he is identified as a mainlander. According to Laade (1970:290-91),

> *The people of Mabuiag now generally say: Kuiam came from Mapoon, thus referring to the Aboriginal myth of Tyiverri, but without knowing Tyiverri's name. If asked how they knew this they replied that certain Mapoon people had told them so…Exchanging and discussing tales, among themselves and with strangers, is a very common thing and it is this that makes stories travel and being modified and incorporated into the local mythology far from the place of their actual origin.*

Laade's suggestion that the conflation of Kuiam and Shiviri is the result of recent contact is challenged by Brierley's observation of significant contact that predated the full assault of the maritime industries (Moore 1979). The fact that Kuiam is identified as a 'mainlander' (again pre-dating the maritime contact) also suggests that contact between people within the region did not develop *just* from contact in the maritime industries but rather emerged from a complex system involving intermarriage as well as trade and exchange (Moore 1972, 1979).

McConnel argued against using the myths to determine *actual migrations*. She was not convinced by Thomson's suggestion of a Torres Strait origin for the cults, arguing that

the I'wai and Shiveri ceremonial complexes were Australian cults concerned with travelling ancestors or totemic beings. Thus, they were not 'non-totemic hero cults' introduced from the north, but associated with 'island fashion' merely because of their mythic travels:

> *The heroes of the islands are I believe relics of the totemic heroes who, freed from totemic trappings by the change over to village life, and reflecting the attributes of chieftainship, have risen phoenix-like from the pyres of their totemic ashes as heroes with predominantly human characteristics.* (McConnel 1936:90)

She implies that Thomson's evidence was based on limited field experience in the Peninsula, suggesting (with some acidity) that his interpretation was tainted by this:

> *...Had Dr Thomson had previous experience of totemism in its unspoilt form in more secluded parts of the Peninsula, I venture to think that his interpretation would not have been so dominated by the evidences of island contacts in the eastern tribes.* (McConnel 1936: 88)

McConnel proposes that myths, rather than being read as 'history', are suggestive of relationships – the 'psychological and sociological' factors. She states:

> *The point of interest to me is not how non-totemic hero-cults became superimposed upon the totemic culture of the mainland, but rather how it comes about that certain of the mainland totemic heroes have come to be identified with outside cultural traits…*
>
> *The association of Iwai the crocodile hero in the Koko-yao tribe with island fashions may, as in the case of Shiveri and Nyunggu, just as well be interpreted as the absorption into the mainland totemic culture of customs*

> *common to these northern tribes and the islanders as to the importation of hero-cults as such into the Peninsula...* (McConnel 1936:82)
>
> *It is my suggestion that hero-cults are an integral part of the totemic complex and that it is the more elaborate dancing fashions rather than the cults as such that have been introduced from Papua or superimposed upon the totemic culture of the islands and mainland.* (McConnel 1936:90)

We suggest that in relation to contemporary interpretations of Torres Strait archaeology, the ethnographic evidence should be employed as evidence of *relationships* rather than migratory patterns.

Following McConnel, we suggest that the superimposition of 'island fashion' onto existing mainland ritual complexes must be considered. McConnel discussed the presence of mainlanders with bows and arrows (see above) with Haddon when she visited Cambridge in 1933 and states that he ameliorated his views as a result (McConnel 1936:70). It is unclear whether Thomson similarly adjusted his views and he does not reference McConnel in subsequent publications (eg Thomson 1957). We suggest that subsequent researchers, following Haddon have emphasized north-to-south flows. Further, the focus of some researchers (such as Laade and Lawrence) was in the north and as a consequence, confirmed a northern perspective. In Papua, people see things with a Papuan focus; in Torres Strait with a Torres Strait focus. Like McConnel, however, we suggest that in order to present an accurate regional picture, Cape York perspectives must be included.

Similar to what has been documented for other parts of Australia, the routes of travelling ancestors are subject to creative interpretation and elaboration in accordance with changing social and political relations. The regional circulation of narratives about travelling ancestors and contested claims about their places of origin can be interpreted as attempts to assert ritual priority in the face of contact. A claim that Shiviri of northwestern Cape York and Kuiam of the Torres Strait are one and the same may reflect an attempt by Mapoon people, through the travels of their totemic ancestor, to engage with others in distant communities and to perhaps also influence them at long range.

In the Torres Strait, Kuiam is exemplified by his use of spear and woomera; in and around Mapoon, Sivirri carries a bow and arrow (McConnel 1957: 24). As we have stated elsewhere,

> *The spectre of each is transposed onto the other- the two are in essence interchangeable. In Torres Strait, Kuiam inter alia, symbolizes connection with people to the south, and on the mainland Sivirri symbolizes connection to the north. Each stands metonymically for the distinction between yet the affiliation with the other.* (Henry et al. 2003:10)

The exchange and creative elaboration of myths of traveling ancestors associated with regional ceremonial complexes might be interpreted as an attempt to communicate and defend identities and political desires in the context of an expanding world and the intensification of social connections beyond the local realm.

Beckett (1975) argues that the myths of Aukam and Tiai, as told in western Torres Strait, are related to myths told along both the western and eastern coasts of Cape York Peninsula. Further, Rumsey (2001:11) suggests:

> *It is not at all implausible that these myths are all related in a single chain of transmission, since the earliest historical records and oral history attest to regular social contacts among people at every link: mainland and Kiwai Island Papuans with Torres Strait Islanders and western Torres Strait Islanders with Cape York Aborigines… even now after seven thousand years of separation between the two land masses, what we see in the Torres Strait is not a sharp boundary between two categorically distinct culture areas but a continuum of related peoples and socio-cultural forms.*

Sutton (1978; 1987; 1988; 1995) has described ceremonial complexes or ritual cycles in the Cape Keerweer area of north western Cape York:

> *The great ritual cycles of the region, in which the linked and ordered elements are song/dances commemorating the leaving of totemic centres by hero-figures, have survived relatively well under settlement conditions of recent times. They have been dominant in the modern ceremonial activities of house-openings… and organised public festivals in urban and other centres. Essentially, these ritual cycles link clans along a mythic track not as totemic corporations (possessors of totems) but as landholders in charge of totemic centres. North of Archer River the cycle is Chivirri, south of there to Knox River it is Apalacha (and Thu'a, see*

below), at Kendall River and a little way south it is Keyelpa (other dialets: Pucha), and in the Holroyd River area it is Wanama. (Sutton 1978:151)

Reference to these five regional ritual cycles was made at the Laura Aboriginal Dance and Cultural Festival in 2003. The dancers from Aurukun were introduced before their performance with the announcer naming all five ritual cycles, but noting that only Wanama and Apalacha dances were being performed that day. He also commented that the ritual cycle named Saara, also called Chivirri, was named after a character known as Kwoiam in the Torres Strait[2].

We suggest that regional ceremonial activity was flourishing well before the development of the maritime industries and European colonization. Such activity is an expression of regional networks of relationship that evidence vital social, ceremonial and economic exchanges among people that continue into the present.

We have explored the Sivirri-Kuiam narratives, not as 'historical charters' but rather as being constitutive of a dynamic symbolic geography. The ultimate aim is to understand how this cosmo-political landscape developed across the region and how it may have been transformed over time. Understanding of this dynamic landscape will provide a framework for the interpretation of archeological evidence.

Colonization, migration or exchange?

Current archaeological interpretations suggest either *colonization* or (more recently) *migration* of northern peoples into Torres Strait in the late Holocene; we suggest that

2 Such regional ceremonial complexes were also the basis on which dance festivals were organized during the 1970s through the Aboriginal theatre Foundation.

more subtle processes were at work, characterized by dynamic and transformative *social engagement* exemplified by exchange. The difference between the approaches is ideological. When 'northern peoples' moved into Torres Strait, they must have engaged with 'mainlanders' who saw the islands as part of their territory.

David et al. (2004) interpret Badu 15 between 6000 and 3500/3000 BP as evidence of occasional 'visits' by the mainlanders. They state that it is unlikely that Torres Strait islands were accessed from Papua during this time period (David et al. 2004: 74). This is based on the fact that either sea crossings of up to 68km would have been required (considered difficult) or because evidence of such has not been found in places (such as the eastern islands) where considerable archaeological investigation has been undertaken. On the other hand, sea crossings from 'ancestral Cape York', are much shorter (maximum 18km) and they fit within the timeframe in which land use has been interpreted as intensifying and the use of offshore islands commencing. This led them to suggest that (David et al. 2004: 74):

> *These parallel trends imply that use of Badu during the mid-Holocene was part of systematic territorial and sea-based expansions across much of northeastern Australia, and we therefore suggest that they took place from Australia rather than from southern Papua.*

This interpretation implies that from 6000 to 3/3500 BP, the western islands of the Torres Strait (at least) were part of the cultural landscape of the northern Cape York – 'ancestral Cape York – peoples.

Greer (1996a, 1996b, 1999), McIntyre-Tamwoy (2002a, 2002b, 2004) and Greer et al. (2002) illustrate that in a contemporary context, the landscape in northern Cape York is

imbued with cosmological meaning and teeming with spirit beings. Certain practices are adhered to in order to increase specific resources, introduce humans to country and to ensure safety when working or travelling through particular areas. The landscape is a 'cultural landscape' in the sense that it is constructed from and by the beliefs, stories and practices of these people. While there are problems with extrapolating concepts and values back into the past, it is actually unavoidable. David et al. propose that there were 'occasional visits', but this term is loaded with meaning. In some societies, such practices might imply peripheral territory that is seldom visited (and perhaps easily given up). In northern Cape York, highly significant places were (and are) not necessarily visited often, but no lessening of meaning and significance should be inferred by this.

The revised interpretation in McNiven et al. (2006) favours 'migration' by Papuans around 2,600 years ago. After this point, current interpretations see the emergence of a 'Torres Strait' identity that draws primarily from the north. What then happened nearly 4,000 years ago at this early 'moment of contact' between the 'Ancestral' Cape York peoples (whose territory presumably included what is now the Western Islands) and the northern settlers? Were the 'mainlanders' overpowered and did they retreat in the face of 'colonizers' or 'migrants'? Or did the two populations mingle, and in so doing, were both transformed? What was the nature of this mid-late Holocene engagement and what happened to the 'mainlanders'?

Rather than 'colonization' or 'migration', we prefer the idea that the two populations became entangled. This is drawn from Thomas (1991) who sees 'diversity' where others see 'dominance':

> *I have emphasized the continuing dynamism of local societies, but for many other writers cultural difference and plurality have long been on the point of extinction: Malinowski lamented the fact in the opening pages of 'Argonauts of the Western Pacific', his great work on Melanesian exchange, and it is still possible, sixty years later, for ethnographic film producers to display a 'Disappearing World'. The technology which has enabled us to measure this vanishing heterogeneity, this process through which the world system has become encompassing, consists in the visual inspection of material culture.* (Thomas 1991: 207)

This is the idea that when populations come into contact, they are more likely to 'mingle' and become entangled rather than for one to disappear – the trick is in a way of seeing. We suggest that this notion of transformation explains the complexity in the linguistic evidence noted above. Certainly, if 'northerners' moved into Torres Strait at any point in the past, the long-established 'Aboriginal' residents would have been looking on with more than mild 'interest'.

But were these people 'colonizers', 'migrants' or 'refugees'? The Papuan story for the settlement of Torres Strait recorded by Lawrence (cited in McNiven et al. 2006: 51) depicts the 'migrant's as people running away, suggesting they were 'refugees' and raising questions regarding the power relations that might have pertained in the newly entangled groups. Why run to Torres Strait? As McNiven et al. (2006: 74) point out, contact between these groups probably extended back to '…land-bridge times of lower sea level at least 8000 years ago'. We suggest that they may have run to Torres Strait because of pre-existing relationships, that is, to their exchange partners. But when and why did these exchange relationships emerge?

'Change' and uncertainty are well known to evoke ritual responses among humans everywhere. For example, Chippendale et al. (2000: 71) describe the connection between 'foraging life-ways' and 'shamanistic' practices. We suggest that 'shamanistic practices' may have been invoked in response to a broad spectrum of changes (both welcome and unwelcome) to the *status quo*. Such changes may have been environmental - whether global (such as sea-level rise) or local; they may have emanated from outside the society (e.g. people arriving from elsewhere) or they could be internal. In other contexts, ritual responses have been interpreted in the archaeological record. For example, Brumm and Moore (2005) see significant changes in 'symbolic behaviour' across the Australian continent beginning around 6-7,000 years ago. In Arnhem Land, Chippendale et al. (2000: 68-69) relate changes in the rock art and archaeology from the earlier art styles to the Simple/Yam Figure complex to changes in ritual activity associated with sea level rise.

Similarly, we suggest that environmental changes that accompanied sea level rise between 8-6,000 years ago may have prompted an intensification of ritual activity in the region. While these changes may have been subtle and taken place over long periods of time, they would have been evident in a society with strong oral traditions. We suggest that changes in the cultural landscape would have required rituals aimed at managing or controlling or appeasing the forces responsible. The need for effective ritual solutions may have led groups to seek knowledge and information from their neighbours, amplifying existing connections. The very process of island formation may have led to an intensification of or at least some change in the way that ceremonial exchange was

conducted. The creation of islands led to constraints in terms of the resources available which may have led to a system of localized exchange aimed at offsetting this. Also, prior to sea level rise, exchange would have been undertaken overland (on foot) presumably with neighbours. The island seascape meant that voyages became necessary requiring planning, timing and magic (to ensure safe conditions) and sea-craft. This may have led to heightened ceremonial activities at events that, while perhaps intermittent or irregular, brought together much larger groups of people than previously. Importantly, such events would have greater visibility in the archaeological record. Harris (1977) has described the dependency between different island populations, arguing that island groups of horticulturalists and hunter-gatherers should be conceptualized as forming unified economic communities which must have contributed to the development of *regional* exchange networks. Beckett (1972: 319) confirms this and reminds of the role of ritual:

> *Throughout the area there was a complex division of labour which, at least in some instances, induced people to refrain from producing goods which they could have produced, but to import them instead. The acephalous societies of both Australia and Melanesia were characterized by the creation of 'artificial' interdependences by means of ritual and trade.*

Thus, when Papuans 'ran away' to Torres Strait, they were running to those most likely to receive them – their exchange partners - within a framework of existing regional exchange relations. This supports the explanation provided by McNiven (2006) for intensified occupation of the western islands of Torres Strait around 2,600 years ago, but casts a different shadow on the power relations that may have existed between the resident population and the settlers. This regional network of exchange would have had a

dynamic of its own once it emerged and subsequent 'changes' would have served to further amplify the system.

The relationship between change, ritual and exchange has been observed elsewhere in Australia in the recent past. Mitchell (1994, 1995, 1996) attributes an expansion of ceremonial exchange systems in Arnhem Land to Macassan contact (at least the last 400 years and perhaps as much as 800 years ago). He sees changes in resource use (particularly the exploitation of turtle and dugong) in relation to technological innovations (watercraft and metal harpoons) brought in with the Macassans. In our scenario, the spectre of Macassan visitation may have led to an intensification of ceremonial activity which required more intensive exploitation of foods (e.g. turtle and dugong) associated with this. This was more attainable with Macassan technology and thus the 'cause' was inexplicably bound into the 'solution'.

Regional exchange: Cape York connections

Ethnographic evidence suggests that Cape York and Torres Strait people were in contact with in a range of situations and circumstances. As previously noted, the lives of the Gudang of Cape York and the Kaurareg of southwest Torres Strait were entwined on a daily basis. They exchanged marriage partners (perhaps implying secondary rights) and places such as Podaga (Evans Bay) and Muri (Mount Adolphus Island) within Gudang country were key nodes for exchange and for these groups but also other Torres Strait people and Papuans (Moore 1979). The evidence for the participation of Cape York peoples in regional exchange is extended down the east coast of Cape York to Princess Charlotte Bay by McCarthy (1939). Despite this, Lawrence (1989, 1991, 1994, and

1998) and more recently Vanderwal (2004) have focused on Torres Strait and Papuan connections, with the implication that exchange is more vibrant in the north. This may be due to the greater presence of material objects which enhances the 'visibility' of these networks. But do more objects indicate greater levels of exchange? We think not, and cite the abundant Australian evidence that illustrates a rich network based on the exchange of ritual performances. Ritual exchange may directly include specific ritual objects but the event itself provides opportunities for other sorts of exchange. While the paucity of 'objects' obtained from Cape York has been noted by a number of authors, evidence from Barbara Thomson hints at the ritual contribution of Cape York people when she tells us that the Kaurareg obtained the 'chalk' (pipeclay) and red ochre bodypaint they used in the 'headhunting ritual' from Cape York people (Moore 1972: 337). Thus, the absence of a rich material culture at the Cape York end of this regional exchange network does not necessarily indicate *limited* engagement, but rather a *different* engagement: one that revolved around the exchange of ritual performances. But what stimulated the need for the exchange of these performances?

Clearly there were times when psychological stresses required ritual healing. In the last 1,000 years in Torres Strait, at least two instances of changes in ritual practices (and other social phenomena) have been identified in the archaeological record. The first occurred between 600 and 800 years ago and the second around 400 years ago (McNiven and Feldman 2003, McNiven et al. 2006, McNiven 2006, David et al. 2005, David and Badulgal 2006, David and Weisler 2006). A number of potential explanations are offered: the Little Ice Age (LIA) that occurred around AD1300, climatic changes associated with Henrich events that occurred around 450 years ago in the Pacific, raiding Papuans and the

presence of the Spanish in the Strait in the early 17th Century. But whatever the cause (and there may have been several), solutions would have been sought in ritual practice. Our interest is in what Cape York may have had to offer in relation to this.

McNiven (2006: 10) confirms '…broader scale cultural changes in settlement, demography, mobility, rituals, seascape construction, social alliances and exchange relationships and a major cultural transformation 600-800 years ago'. In relation to ritual, this includes the appearance of sites such as arrangements of dugong bones and *bu* shells (*Syrinx aruanus*) as well as stone arrangements (McNiven and Feldman 2003, David et al. 2005, David and Badulgal 2006, McIntyre-Tamwoy and Harrison 2004). McNiven (2006: 9) also sees a link between the distribution of these changes and exchange:

> *At the very least the geographical spread of these changes indicates that they were in a sense 'shared' and tied to broad scale social alliances and concomitant exchange relationships that directly and indirectly connected (and continue to connect) island communities…*

What ritual performances might Cape York people have offered within this context of ritual intensification?

We believe that the answer may lie in increase magic, particularly in relation to turtle and dugong, as both (but perhaps particularly dugong) are associated with ceremonial activity. McNiven and Feldman (2003: 176) report that:

While Haddon (1912,151 recorded that '[p]ractices of a magico-religious character were universally employed to ensure the fertility of crops and the productivity of fruit-trees', no such rituals were observed for dugongs. Senior Kiwai people 'believed the bounty of the sea was inexhaustible and the dugong could never disappear' (Parer-Cook & Parer 1990, 33-4). This is a long-held view of the Kiwai, and Landtman (1927, 127-8) believed it explained why 'no rites are performed in order to multiply dugong'.

An intensification of ritual activity suggests increased use of resources associated with this (e.g. turtle and dugong). Alternatively, depletion of these resources associated with climate change might be the *catalyst* for intensified ritual activity. Miller and Limpus (1991: 218) report a '…significant correlation exists between an index of the El Nino Southern Oscillation (ENSO) measured two years before the commencement of the nesting season and the annual green turtle nesting numbers at both Heron Island and Raine Island in eastern Cape York (see also David and Badulgal 2006). In any case, there is potentially a need to ensure the viability of these resources and this would presumably be achieved through intensified ritual activity.

This suggestion is given veracity by two separate lines of evidence. As McNiven and Feldman (2006: 176) note, Hale and Tindale (1933) and Thomson (1934) both described ceremonies associated with dugong increase. Similarly, we have recorded the presence of increase and hunting magic sites ('story places') in northern Cape York that are associated with increase magic (see also McIntyre-Tamwoy and Harrison 2004: 37).

McConnel (1935-36: 454), speaking primarily of the inland Wikmunkan but also their neighbours describes 'totemic cultures' that are associated with increase magic:

> *The chief characteristics of this culture are the existence of totemic centres ('auwa') at which 'increase' ceremonies of the 'Intichiuma' types are performed, and the belief in totemic ancestors ('pulwaiya'), whose supposed original activities, namely the founding of the 'auwa' and the 'increase' ritual, are revealed in myth and drama, and are re-enacted at initiation ceremonies.*

McConnel recorded that these totemic ancestors were associated with particular cults controlled by the clan who owned them. They were also associated with specific story places, the *auwa* or totemic centres at which:

> *...the sacred ritual is believed to have been originally inaugurated and is now performed on special occasions for the perpetuation of the benefits derived from the totemic object concerned.* (McConnel 1935-36: 458)

Importantly for our argument, McConnel (1935-36: 461) reports that while control of these cults are 'clan-owned', their function is 'extra-clan':

> *The more socially important is the social function fulfilled by a 'pulwaiya',* [clan ancestor] *the more tribally owned is its cult and the greater is the sanctity of its 'auwa'.*

Moreover, the totemic heroes are 'incarnated' in totemic objects

> *...which are distributed amongst the various clans and tribes, are complementary and cover practically every recognized aspect of social life, i.e. physical,*

> *physiological, economic, purely social, and spiritual, whilst the associated ritual provides for every practical, social and spiritual necessity as understood by these tribes.* (McConnel 1935-36: 457)

The 'distribution' of these objects and rituals was presumably via regional exchange. Quoting Thomson, McConnel extends this totemic culture to eastern Cape York as well as to the 'northern tribes' (north of the Archer River), '…though one may detect a somewhat different mood' (McConnel 1935-36: 463). McConnel's evidence is important for a number of reasons. First, she emphasizes the existence and importance of totemic cults associated with increase magic; secondly, she alerts us to the fact that they are 'place-based' (requiring travel *to* the *auwa* to obtain benefits) and thirdly, that the benefits bestowed by the enactment of these rituals were enjoyed beyond the clan itself.

The second line of evidence supporting the proposal that increase magic was at the centre of Cape York contributions to trade and exchange comes from recent understandings of the life cycle of the green turtle (*Chelonia midas*) which was (and is) the most commonly hunted species in the Cape York-Torres Strait region. Although turtle breeding areas for a number of species occur locally in Torres Strait, a major breeding areas for the green turtle centers on Raine Island in eastern Cape York and the turtles that hatch here later migrate to their feeding grounds to and through Torres Strait (see Miller and Limpus 1991). Within a world where resources were controlled by the enactment of ritual performances, the presence of an important supply of an important commodity must have signaled significant control. To Torres Strait people, the proof was no doubt in the pudding: the effectiveness of mainland increase magic was illustrated in the productivity of the eastern Cape York turtle rookeries.

We suggest that, at least in the recent past, Cape York contributions to the regional exchange network (their 'mainland magic') may have been in ritual 'increase' performances, undertaken by Aboriginal ritual specialists at *specific* mainland increase sites. It has been suggested that this 'ritual insurance' was apparently unavailable in Torres Strait and could not be procured from their immediate Papuan neighbours. Whether this is the case or not, the specialization of Cape York peoples in increase magic, and their reputation for strong magic, may have inspired their northern neighbours to seek their assistance, particularly when there were issues with stocks of these 'resources'. It is the object of future research to determine the degree to which these arguments can be extended into the distant past.

Conclusion

We have argued that the use of early ethnographic understanding in current interpretation of Torres Strait archaeology is problematic due to its inherent 'north-to-south' bias. We suggest that this was further confirmed by a subsequent focus on material culture that cannot present a full picture of relations/connections across Cape York, Torres Strait and Papua. We were first alerted to this by McConnel's challenge to Haddon and Thomson, based on her understanding of non-material evidence (such as myths and narratives). She suggested that connections between Cape York, Torres Strait and Papua were more complex than portrayed by them and her position was that myth should not be read as 'history' but rather as revealing relationships. We suggest that the participation of Cape York people in cycles of trade and exchange in this region was largely non-material. In

other words, while tangible 'goods' may have been the principal items moving from north-to-south, these were perhaps in exchange for the power of ritual specialists to control resources. We believe that the focus on material evidence has clouded interpretations of the recent past and deep prehistory.

Barham et al., (2004: 57-58) see the 'colonization' of Torres Strait in the mid to late Holocene as being significant beyond the immediate region:

> *The demonstration of a late Holocene 'opening' of Torres Strait as an emerging route for the cultural transmission of maritime technology southwards into coastal northeastern Australia has significant implications for previous interpretations of the apparent onset of intensive coastal exploitation on the eastern seaboard of Australia.*

David et al. (2004) similarly viewed settlement at this time in terms of a 'colonization' of people from the north or northeast while the later interpretation in McNiven et al. (2006) has been refined in terms of an 'Australian' expansion around 3,800 years ago and a Papuan 'migration' around 2,600 years ago. We believe that while there may have been some effects from suggested continent-wide processes of intensification, 'Australians' or 'mainlanders' were in what became the bottom western islands of Torres Strait well before 3,800 BP. We do not reject the idea that 'Papuans' or 'northerners' settled in the Strait as indicated above, but suggest that existing resident populations and settlers were more 'entangled' than is currently suggested. We further suggest that this entanglement might have had its roots 6-8,000 years ago when sea levels began to rise and people in the region were seeking ritual solutions to consequent environmental and social disturbances.

It is more than possible that any networks of exchange that developed at this time would have been intensified and amplified by further events that demanded ritual control.

We applaud the work, undertaken over the last decade or so in Torres Strait that has resulted in the writing of an important page in Australia's history/prehistory. It is our intent in this paper to insert recognition of important mainland contributions to this history – their 'mainland magic'.

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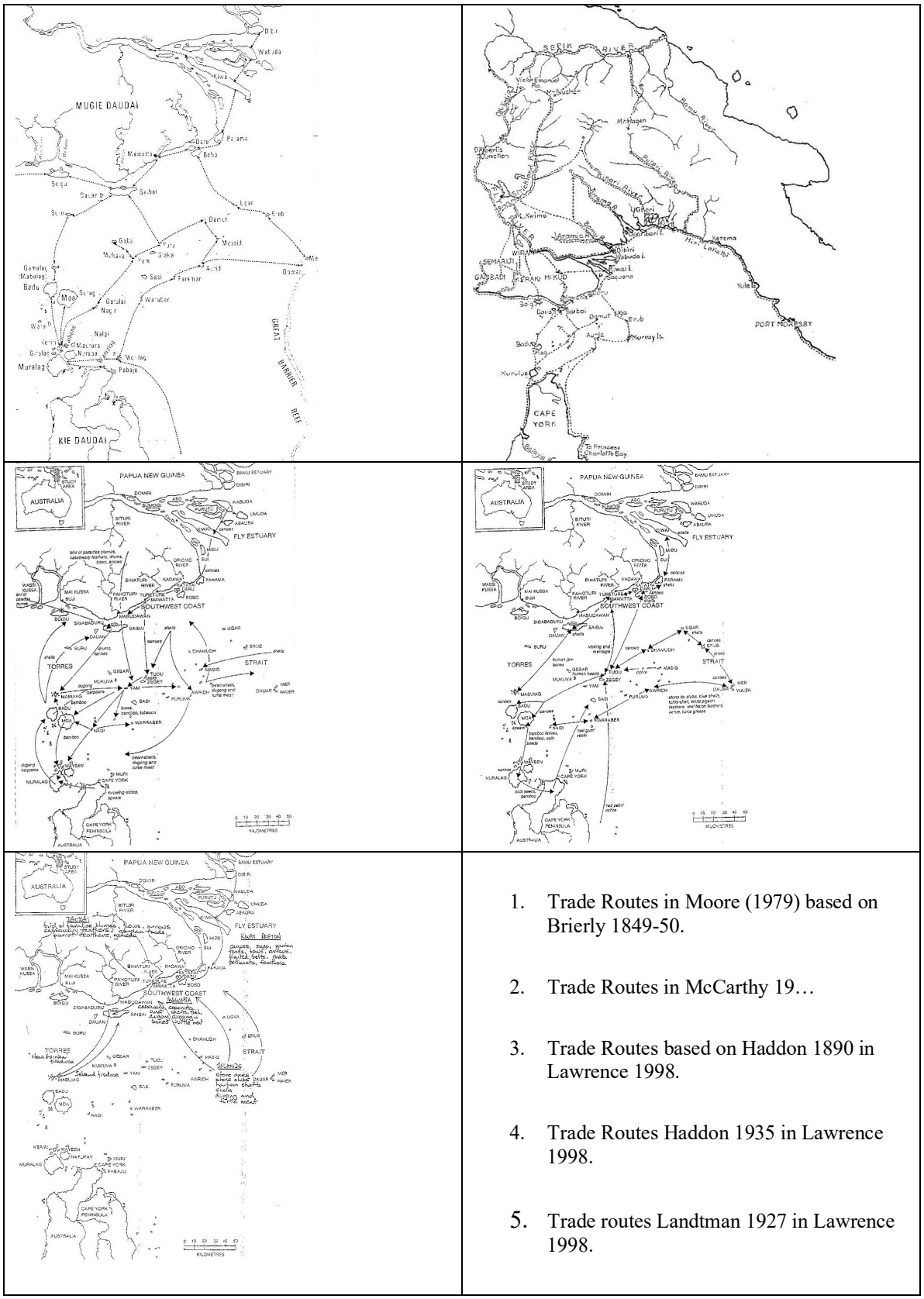

1. Trade Routes in Moore (1979) based on Brierly 1849-50.
2. Trade Routes in McCarthy 19…
3. Trade Routes based on Haddon 1890 in Lawrence 1998.
4. Trade Routes Haddon 1935 in Lawrence 1998.
5. Trade routes Landtman 1927 in Lawrence 1998.

Figure 1: Trade routes northern Cape York, Torres Straits to New Guinea.

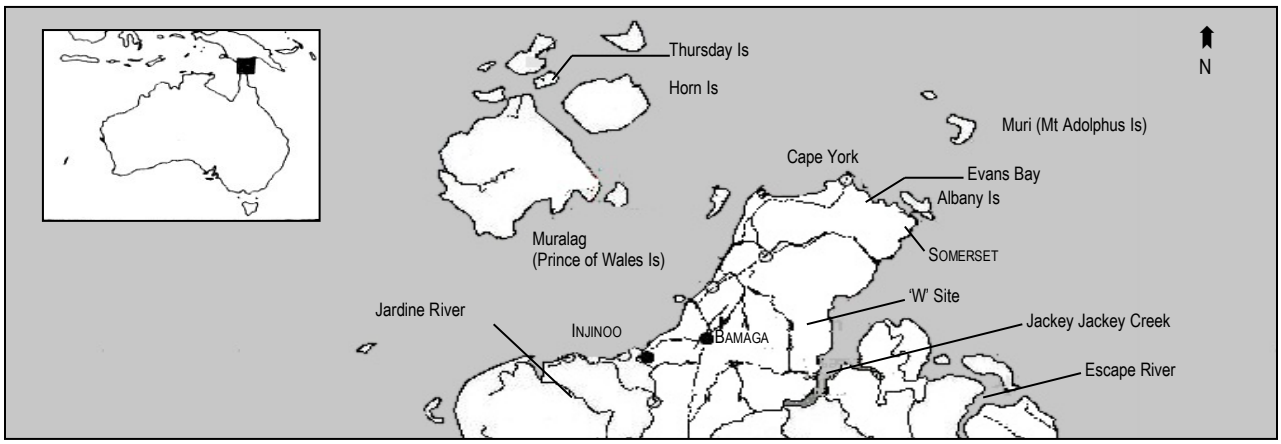

Figure 2: location of the study region- Cape York Connections Project.