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## **Introduction**

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# The Ethnographic Experiment in Island Melanesia



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### **Anthropology in the Making: To the Solomon Islands, 1908**

In 1908, three British scholars travelled, each in his own way, to the south-western Pacific in order to embark on pioneering anthropological fieldwork in the Solomon Islands. They were William Halse Rivers, Arthur Maurice Hocart and Gerald Camden Wheeler. Rivers (1864–1922), a physician, psychologist and self-taught anthropologist, was already a veteran fieldworker, having been a member of the Cambridge Torres Strait Expedition for seven months in 1898 (Herle and Rouse 1998), after which he had also carried out five months of fieldwork among the tribal Toda people of South India in 1901–2 (see Rivers 1906).

The Torres Strait Expedition was a large-scale, multi-disciplinary effort with major funding, and had helped change a largely embryonic, descriptive anthropology into a modern discipline – reflective of the non-anthropological training of expedition leader Alfred Cort Haddon and his team, among whom Rivers and C.G. Seligman were to develop anthropological careers. During the expedition, Rivers not only engaged in a wide range of observations based on his existing training in psychology and physiology, but also increasingly collected materials on the social organisation of the Torres Strait peoples, work that ultimately resulted in him devising the ‘genealogical method’ for use by the growing discipline of anthropology, with which he increasingly identified.

The 1908 fieldwork in Island Melanesia which is the focus of this book was on a much smaller scale than the Torres Strait Expedition, but it had a more sharply defined anthropological agenda.<sup>1</sup> Building on his development of the genealogical method, and no doubt on epistemological innovations brought forth by his encounters with the Torres Strait Islanders (and subsequently the Toda), Rivers had secured funds from the Percy Sladen Trust in London for ‘a journey to the Solomon Islands for the purpose of making investigations in anthropology.’<sup>2</sup> His main research agenda was the scientific investigation, through substantial ethnographic fieldwork, of the wealth of ‘kinship systems’ of the Pacific islands, and as such it represented the cutting edge of the budding discipline of social anthropology.

A look at the background for this scholarly initiative is instructive. Being an important foundation of the fieldwork that commenced in 1908, the 1898 expedition to investigate the Melanesian islanders of the Torres Strait has also in general terms been considered a landmark in the development of a new anthropology. In her social history of the development of British anthropology, Kuklick (1991: 133–34) notes that ‘[t]he intellectual pedigree of modern British social anthropologists conventionally – and with considerable justification – begins with the members [of the Torres Strait Expedition]’. Fredrik Barth goes a step further by arguing that the Torres Strait Expedition in fact had some important consequences for the development of anthropology that were not really recognised by its leader, the zoologist Haddon, who kept insisting that the expedition’s major achievement was that of bringing ‘trained scientists to make their observations in situ’:

Rivers and Seligman and, for that matter, Haddon himself were not scientists trained in anthropology with any expert skills in identifying phenomenal forms and accumulating systematic observations in the discipline. They were, on the contrary, amateurs in anthropology with some scientific training in *other* disciplines. What had happened was that the little island communities in the Torres Straits had *imposed* on them the new organisation of primary data by locality and the realisation of the complexity and internal connections of each local form of life. Rivers and Seligman were exposed to an intensive training experience in these respects and thereby became ethnographers of a new kind. (Barth 2005: 13–14, original emphasis)

In Rivers’s own description of the genealogical method he states that this anthropological tool was initially devised for the practical purpose of ‘studying as exactly as possible the relationship to one another of the individuals on whom we were making psychological tests’ (Rivers 1900: 74). However, he soon found that the systematic collection of genealogies allowed for the deeper study of ‘many sociological problems’. It appears that

he was side-tracked from his more narrow original intentions of studying colour perception among Torres Strait Islanders, becoming fascinated with what he called 'social and vital statistics', and the broader value of such material for deducing patterns in totemism, ritual and social organisation. Rivers's 'discovery' of what he believed was a more accurate method for obtaining information through ethnographic fieldwork was to have profound implications on the emerging anthropology of the time, and could not be overlooked, even by its critics (see Berg, this volume).

Clearly, the research agenda Rivers devised for the new expedition to the islands of Melanesia in 1908 amounted to an ethnographic experiment, whereby emerging anthropological theory and method would be brought to bear on, and tested through, encounters with so far undocumented examples of social life under circumstances of what we call today 'alterity'. In the early-twentieth-century Solomon Islands, British imperial influence was still modest, and the archipelago could be approached by an anthropological fieldworker as a scene where resilient, so far autonomous local societies faced accelerating, unpredictable intervention from the forces of Empire, Christianity and money. In a two-page letter of application to the Percy Sladen Trust, Rivers expressed particular interest in what he believed – in the mind-set of an earlier, evolutionist anthropology – must be locally existing, surviving examples of ancient 'maternal' systems, to be found on the ground in the Solomons:

I should endeavour while in the Solomons to obtain as complete an account as possible of the sociology and religion of the natives of two districts, one in which there is still a definite maternal system of society, and one in which this has been replaced by a system of father-right, my chief objective being to study the mode of transition between these two states of social organisation. In addition I should hope to study the psychology of the natives, and especially their senses, by experimental methods.

The shorter periods in the Polynesian islands would be devoted to obtaining the systems of kinship, on which subject I could obtain the information I need in a few weeks.

I may mention that in the subjects to which I should pay especial attention, the works of<sup>3</sup> Codrington and others on the people of Melanesia give very little information.

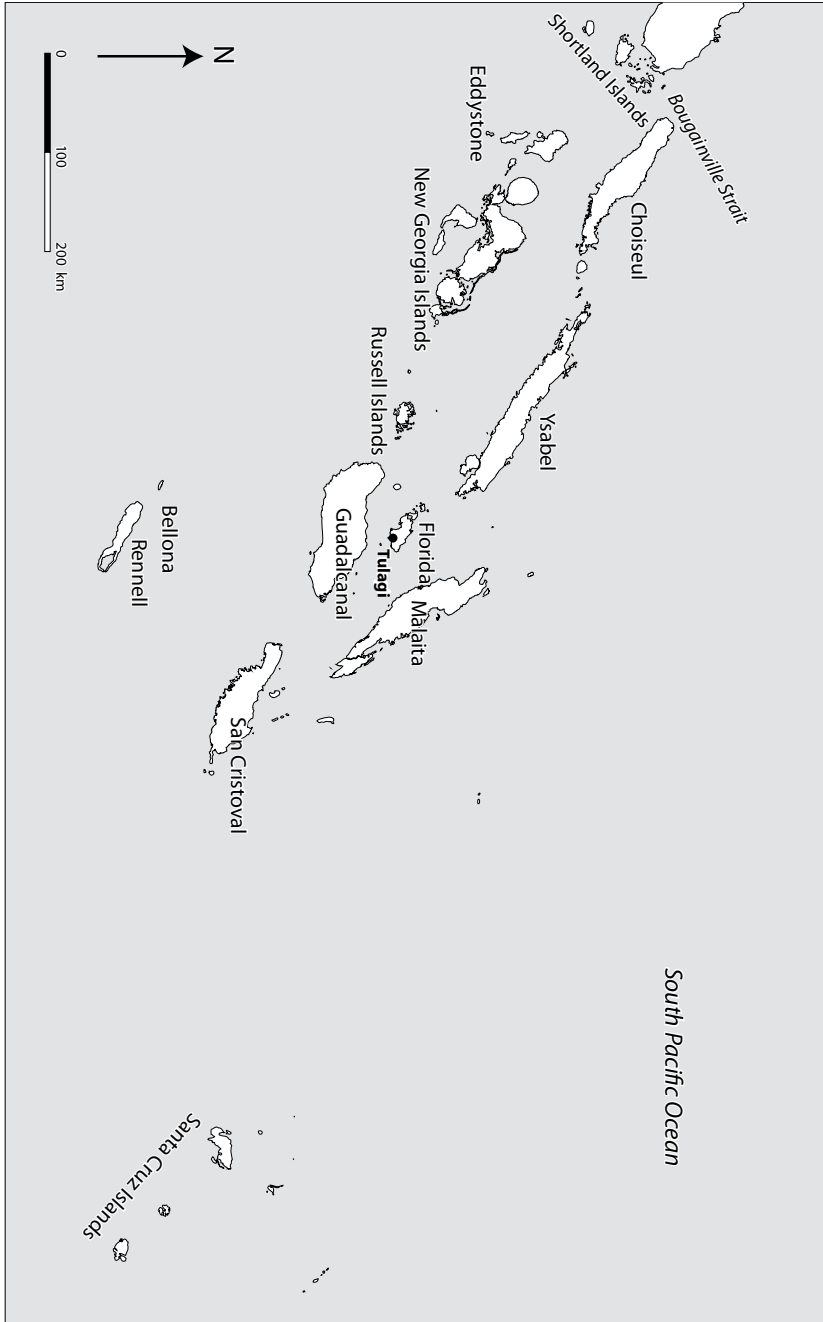
Obviously cast in the evolutionary mode still characteristic of the anthropology of the day – 'maternal' societies being inevitably replaced by ones of 'father-right' – the fieldwork Rivers envisaged was also to be both comparative and experimental. His reference to Anglican missionary cum ethnographer R.H. Codrington is of significance, as Rivers may indeed have relied more on this source than he would admit (see Kolshus, this

volume). Author of an early classic study, *The Melanesians: Studies in their Anthropology and Folk-Lore* (Codrington 1891), this pioneer had decades of experience from the islands, but Rivers evidently aimed to explore dimensions of Melanesian social life so far not covered by such early descriptive efforts, and, moreover, to do so using a strong theoretical platform, through a combination of brief visits to many field locations and longer-term residence in a few.

Evidently, Rivers wanted to make the most out of his Pacific expedition, and he took the longest possible journey to the Solomons. He travelled westwards across the Pacific Ocean and in the course of about four months visited Hawaii, Fiji, Tonga and Samoa. On board the Anglican Melanesian Mission's ship the *Southern Cross*, he visited a number of islands in Vanuatu (then the New Hebrides) and the eastern Solomons. Meanwhile, his two junior expedition partners made their way to Australia, from where they caught a steamer out to the Solomons. Hocart (1883–1939) was the youngest of the three, having recently studied Greek, Latin, philosophy and ancient history at Oxford, and subsequently psychology in Berlin. Wheeler (1872–1943) had a science doctorate from the University of London, and had engaged in the emerging social anthropology of the time through studies with the Finnish anthropologist Edvard Westermarck (who later also taught Bronislaw Malinowski) and had authored *The Tribes and Intertribal Relations in Australia* (Wheeler 1910).

Aspects of the biographies and intellectual trajectories of the three scholars, and the nature and circumstances of the fieldwork they carried out in 1908, are examined later on in this chapter. At this stage, let it be noted that it was both anthropology and anthropologists that were in the making during the Percy Sladen Trust Expedition to the Solomon Islands.<sup>4</sup> An expedition it was, but no simple empirical quest for the discovery of something unknown. It was to be a sustained effort of ethnographic, cross-cultural experiment, through direct encounter, involving residence and long-term interaction with Pacific islanders whose existence was undergoing rapid transformation. It was also another prominent example of how, to follow Barth's observation, local realities imposed radically different understandings on the ethnographers. As encounter, the fieldwork was to be a mutual experiment in which initiative was simultaneously ethnographic and indigenous.

How were the expedition's participants prepared for such experimentation? Regarding their academic qualifications, Wheeler's desk-based anthropological study of Australian materials (Wheeler 1910) was overshadowed by the fact that Rivers had published a massive monograph from substantial fieldwork in India (Rivers 1906). Rivers had made a name for himself as an ethnographic practitioner and – largely through



**Figure 0.1:** The British Solomon Islands Protectorate in 1908, with colonial-era island names (map by K.H. Sjøstrøm, University of Bergen).

the genealogical method – a theorist in a rapidly growing discipline. However, in terms of academic training, none of the three were, strictly speaking, anthropologists. Yet the work they were to carry out in the Solomon Islands would contribute not only to a further reorientation of their careers, but also to the foundations and long-term development of modern social anthropology.

On 11 May 1908, Hocart, Rivers and Wheeler met in Tulagi, a small island in the central Solomons that was the location of the administrative headquarters of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate. Tulagi's wide, sheltered harbour was the main port of call for steamers from Australia. They were not to spend much time in Tulagi's compact colonial atmosphere, however. Having obtained advice from Charles Morris Woodford, the British resident commissioner who had more than twenty years of experience in the Solomons, the fieldworkers were soon outbound for the Western Solomons. Although resident missionaries and commodity traders had much local expertise, Woodford had travelled widely across the entire Solomons archipelago, and few Europeans at the time, if any, knew more about the diversity of the islands and islanders (see Woodford 1888, 1890a, 1890b). Certainly, none was more qualified to advise the recently arrived ethnographers on suitable field locations (see also Appendix 3.3).

Woodford's long horizon of continuous engagement with the islands and their inhabitants also made for particular insights into the colonial situation at hand and the predicaments of the islanders, as seen from his contribution to the volume edited by Rivers on depopulation in Melanesia (Woodford 1922). In 1908, however, it is likely that he had a number of quite practical reasons for recommending the Western Solomons to Rivers and his associates.<sup>5</sup> At the time the western islands of the Protectorate constituted a border zone between expanding British and diminishing German imperial control. The huge, mountainous island of Bougainville to the north-west remained German territory, while the smaller islands in the Bougainville Strait, as well as the larger islands of Choiseul and Isabel, had been German until as late as 1899 (Bennett 2000). Thus around the turn of the century the western and northern islands of the Solomons were contested scenes of colonial expansion and retreat.

Interestingly, it appears that Woodford had first requested Anglican missionary Henry Welchman, resident on the island of Isabel, to look after Rivers and his men, but Welchman had refused (see Appendix 3). Except for Welchman's refusal to welcome the ethnographers to Isabel, there is a lack of relevant correspondence or other evidence for the interaction between Woodford and the three ethnographers. However, it is safe to assume that Woodford saw some usefulness in a substantial British scholarly presence in the imperial border zone of New Georgia. He and Rivers would also both

have been aware of the fact that the major scholarly ethnographic effort in the British Solomon Islands Protectorate so far had focused on the eastern islands, where Codrington had already set the stage for what would be a continuous sequence of anthropologically interested Anglican missionaries. In short, from Woodford's perspective the New Georgia islands would have been seen as both imperially remote and anthropologically undocumented, in general need of more British attention, and therefore in more than one sense a good location for Rivers and his co-researchers.

Rivers, Hocart and Wheeler obtained local transport from among the plethora of mission boats and traders' vessels that plied the archipelago and passed through Tulagi's busy port. They embarked on a westwards sea journey of approximately 400 kilometres to the most remote parts of the New Georgia group, a dense cluster of large and small islands, some high and volcanic, others low and coralline, an ecologically and culturally complex archipelago where some of the world's largest coral lagoons allow for sheltered travel and a strongly maritime way of life. The progression of the expedition was rapid. By 14 May the three were already settled on the small island of Simbo, referred to then by some islanders as Narovo or Madegusu, and by European navigators as Eddystone. That rocky island, an outlying part of the New Georgia archipelago with thermal springs and volcanic fissures emitting sulphurous steam, had been a favourite port of call for early European traders and American whalers from the late eighteenth century. On the highly competitive scene of inter-island relationships in New Georgia, where warfare, enmity, alliances and exchange were in continuous flux, the Simbo people had long maintained a regionally powerful role far surpassing the relative size of their island and its population. Right up until the time of the Percy Sladen Trust Expedition, Simbo people had retained a double-sided reputation as welcoming to Europeans, yet ferocious and successful inter-island warriors and headhunters. While the practices of overseas raiding and headhunting were characteristic of all of New Georgia, Simbo had long stood out as a particularly agreeable place for Europeans to trade, local warlike practices notwithstanding. The log of the Scottish trader Andrew Cheyne gives a particularly vivid glimpse of encounters and interactions, both tense and productive, between islanders and European visitors (Cheyne 1971: 303–7).

Just a few years prior to the arrival on Simbo of Rivers and his associates, a measure of 'pacification' had been established across the Western Solomons. Ocean-going war canoes had been destroyed by colonial police, and punitive actions by gunboats of the Royal Navy combined with local agency had caused quite a rapid cessation of warfare, headhunting and attacks on European traders. By 1908, only a very few renegade warriors were left in the Western Solomons. Missionaries (mainly Methodists, who

arrived in Roviana Lagoon in 1902) were establishing footholds in an increasing number of islands and localities, and islanders were drifting into a copra-based colonial economy. The local perception of changing times was acute. It was into this atmosphere of rapid and radical socio-political transformation in the islanders' lives that the three British fieldworkers stepped. At Simbo they must surely have been welcomed by Fred Green, a resident European trader, who would have brokered contacts with local men of influence. The anthropologists' equipment was landed, tents were pitched, informants were identified and approached, and scholarly investigations were launched among the people of Simbo. Fieldwork was under way.

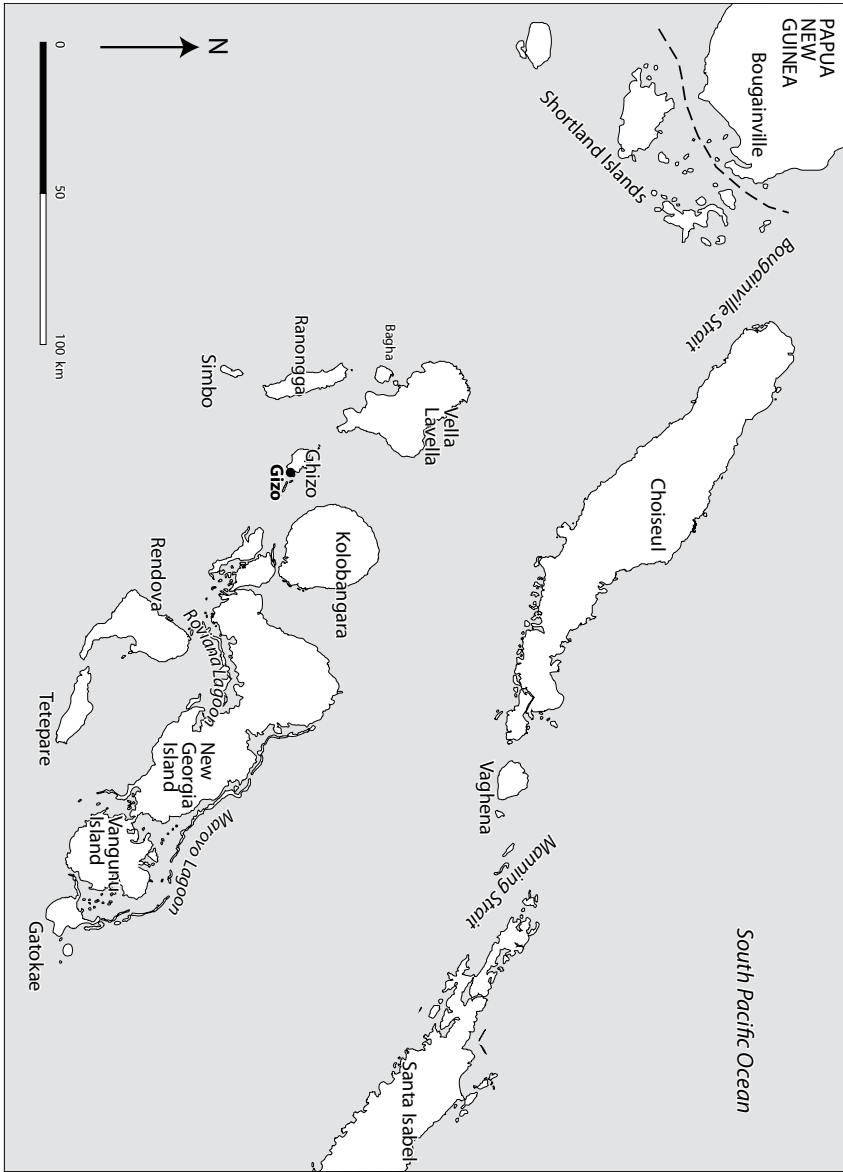
Rivers and his two junior associates had few professional predecessors in the area. In the New Georgia islands, only sketchy ethnographic work had been carried out, by missionaries, wealthy adventurers, Royal Navy officers and other navigators, resulting alternately in quite sensational descriptions of local customs or in arid inventories of such customs based on the Royal Anthropological Institute's field manual *Notes and Queries on Anthropology*.<sup>6</sup> Further to the north-west, however, in and around the Bougainville Strait, scholars from other European intellectual traditions had been at work for some time. In 1903, German entomologist and collector Carl Ribbe had published a book documenting his 'two years among the cannibals of the Solomon Islands', with meticulous descriptions of local customs and ethnographic objects (as well as an appendix of physical measurements of islanders) from the Bougainville Strait, with some attention also given to Vella Lavella and Roviana in New Georgia (Ribbe 1903). While Ribbe was no professional ethnologist, the German presence to the north-west of New Georgia was decidedly professional at the time of the arrival of Rivers, Hocart and Wheeler, in that R.C. Thurnwald, who had studied anthropology and sociology in Berlin and Vienna, was already carrying out fieldwork in the Bougainville Strait and on Bougainville itself. Wheeler would later team up with Thurnwald. After a month's residence and work on the little island of Simbo, Rivers wrote in a report to the Percy Sladen Trust that 'circumstances [had] not been very favourable so far':

[T]he south-east season has been very late in setting in and in consequence we have had a great deal of rain; the people are very reticent and were at first very suspicious; the whole district is very unsettled, and all three members of the expedition have already had fever, but in spite of this we have done very well. The social organisation has been worked out to a great extent, though there is still much detail to fill in; we have collected a large amount of physical, technological and linguistic material and during the last week, we have begun to make a good deal of progress in the investigation of magic and religion, and the prospects for future work here now look very hopeful.<sup>7</sup>



Whereas Wheeler was to leave after about two months and travel north for independent fieldwork in the Shortland Islands, Rivers and Hocart spent almost four months of intensive fieldwork as residents on Simbo. They then travelled on a vessel owned by Fred Green for a month's 'survey work' in a number of villages on the nearby island of Vella Lavella, before Rivers left the Western Solomons altogether at the end of September. He returned to the Anglican Melanesian Mission's ship the *Southern Cross* and retraced his route of investigations on the outbound journey, in the central and eastern Solomons and the New Hebrides. Meanwhile, Hocart continued fieldwork in the Western Solomons on his own for the rest of the year. After Vella Lavella, he worked in Roviana Lagoon for six weeks; there he made the most out of already established relationships with Roviana men he had met on Simbo. He interacted with the powerful groups of Nusa Roviana and the adjacent mainland around Munda, but adopted a remarkably broad geographical scope for his ethnographic research, following vernacular definitions of 'Roviana' as 'the south west coast of New Georgia from Konggu Mbairoko ... to the island of Mbaraulu'.<sup>8</sup> Hocart then returned to Simbo for a couple of weeks to 'follow up clues picked up elsewhere' (Hocart 1922: 71). Finally, in December Hocart spent two weeks on the island of Kolombangara (also referred to as Duke, or in Hocart's spelling, Nduke), before returning to Simbo for the last time, leaving on 1 January 1909.

Although Wheeler's fieldwork was to be by far the most extensive, it was Rivers and Hocart who were to become the more famous scholars, though this was in their later incarnations and not as a result of any reputation garnered from their fieldwork in the remote Solomons in 1908. However, as noted in the chapters in this volume by Bayliss-Smith and Hviding, it is likely that neither Rivers – the famous psychiatrist (who pioneered the treatment of shell-shocked soldiers during the First World War) and founder of modern social anthropology – nor Hocart – the prolific anthropological writer, comparativist and largely unrecognised 'intransigent genius' (Needham 1970: xvii) who influenced Lévi-Strauss and Dumont – would have managed such achievements without their experiences in Melanesia in 1908. Against this background, and because the published and unpublished materials left by Hocart and Rivers give unique opportunities for examining how the fieldwork was carried out and how anthropological knowledge was built, this book focuses on those two and not Wheeler. It must be remembered, though, that Wheeler undoubtedly has the honour of having carried out one of the first long and remotely located periods of fieldwork in the history of modern social anthropology, under what must have been very challenging circumstances.



**Figure 0.2:** The western and northern parts of the Solomon Islands, including locations at which Hocart, Rivers and Wheeler carried out fieldwork in 1908 (map by K.H. Sjøstrøm, University of Bergen).

## Centennial Reappraisals

In this introductory chapter, the work of the Percy Sladen Trust Expedition to the Solomon Islands is approached with regard to what we see as its prominent, but neglected, place in the history of anthropology and related disciplines. We outline the historical and ethnographic contexts for the fieldwork and provide an account of the institutional circumstances of the expedition. Attention is given to the local conditions the pioneer ethnographers faced in 1908: a situation of intense change with social upheaval, new economic arenas, disease, depopulation and colonial subjugation.

The contributors to this volume approach the 1908 fieldwork as representing, in one way or another, a profound cross-cultural encounter. Although not widely known, and barely discussed even in biographies of Rivers and Hocart, the fieldwork carried out during the expedition stands out as an early example of modern ethnographic research involving residence among and continuous interaction with the people studied, hallmarks of advanced anthropological method later claimed by Malinowski in his famous treatise on fieldwork in the opening chapter of *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (Malinowski 1922: 1–25). However, except for the initiative that has resulted in this book, the centennial of the Percy Sladen Trust Expedition of 1908 went by quite unnoticed. Its path-breaking achievements have long since faded into obscurity, quite unlike the first expedition in which Rivers played an important part, that to the Torres Strait in 1898, the centennial of which was elaborately marked (see Herle and Rouse 1998).

The reasons why biographers, as well as historians of anthropology, have not given much weight to the 1908 fieldwork are not entirely clear, but some suggestions can be given. Compared to Malinowski's extraordinarily long fieldwork in the Trobriands, and the degree to which he relied on the acquired ability to speak the vernacular language, the work in the Western Solomons by Rivers and Hocart was destined to be seen as inferior in terms of both its duration and the level of linguistic competence achieved. Quite simply, while Malinowski (and his students and successors) explicitly aimed at very long periods of fieldwork and at learning local languages, a strategy that became a standard for modern fieldwork in social anthropology, Rivers and Hocart spent only six months in the Western Solomons, and relied largely on the Melanesian Pidgin of the day, with some vernacular competence in the collection of myths, magical formulae and other texts. As the scope of anthropological methodology developed very rapidly in the early twentieth century, pioneering early work like that of Rivers and Hocart fell by the wayside as

more spectacular performances were achieved, and duly reported, from the time of Malinowski onwards.

Furthermore, since no well-organised publication plan arose from the Western Solomons fieldwork (see below), the significance and originality of the work that was carried out in 1908 all but faded from view. Rivers's two-volume magnum opus *The History of Melanesian Society* (Rivers 1914a) was itself so densely packed with ethnographic materials gathered through survey work on brief visits to many other Melanesian island localities (see Kolshus, this volume) that the major 'intensive' research effort at Simbo and elsewhere in New Georgia hardly stood out. While in his post-fieldwork report to the Percy Sladen Trust, Rivers presented the ambition of publishing '[a] book by Mr Hocart and myself on 'The Western Solomon Islands', probably in two volumes,'<sup>9</sup> this never eventuated, and the ways of the two fieldworkers parted after Simbo.

On leaving the Solomons, Hocart took a post as a schoolmaster in Fiji, and while thus employed received a fieldwork scholarship from Oxford University. He remained in the Pacific until 1914, and in between work 'as head-master of a native school' (Hocart 1929: 3) at Lakeba in the Lau islands he carried out ethnographic fieldwork in Fiji, Samoa, Tonga and several small islands including Rotuma and Wallis – a scholarly achievement that would support his broadening comparativist agenda. Rivers returned to England after his slow journey back through the islands of Melanesia, and took up research and teaching at Cambridge. The First World War saw Hocart on active service in France, while Rivers (who had briefly revisited Melanesia in 1914/15) developed his pioneering psychiatric approach to treating shell shock. Wheeler, meanwhile, did not embark on a career in academia after his year of fieldwork in the Solomons. In 1926 he published a monograph on Mono-Alu folklore, a massive descriptive account of myths, stories and songs from the Shortland Islands and southern Bougainville (Wheeler 1926), but his definitive monograph on Mono-Alu society was never published. Concurrent with the untimely death of Rivers in 1922, Hocart launched a series of long, descriptive ethnographic articles in the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (Hocart 1922, 1925, 1929, 1931b, 1935, 1937; see Hviding, this volume). The definitive book on the Western Solomons from the Percy Sladen Trust Expedition was never to eventuate.

This volume is grounded in long-term research experiences from exactly those areas of Island Melanesia where Rivers and Hocart worked in 1908. It has emerged from many years of collaborative work by the contributors, who have between them carried out fieldwork in almost every corner of the New Georgia group where Rivers and Hocart did their work, and in parts of Vanuatu where Rivers worked on his own. The authors have also carried out extensive archival studies on the materials from the 1908 expedition,

including the examination of fieldnotes, correspondence and other documents left by Rivers and Hocart, and of objects and photographs. Combining perspectives from anthropology, archaeology, history and human geography, and benefiting from several contributors' command of vernacular languages, the book examines from multiple perspectives the cross-cultural, many-stranded interactions that developed in the course of the expedition between the specific historical situations of the scholars and of the people and places under study.

There are significant general implications of this multidisciplinary study of a particularly interesting instance of early-twentieth-century anthropological fieldwork. In terms of the history of ideas, understandings can be developed of the Western historical, political and cultural circumstances of the time concerning the study of other worlds, other people and the exotic. Together, the following chapters aim to achieve such understanding through a perspective that combines an awareness of the prevailing early-twentieth-century views that informed this particular ethnographic experiment with an ethnographically grounded understanding of the local circumstances at hand in 1908. It is here that fieldwork by the volume's contributors carried out in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries becomes particularly valuable. In cases where Rivers and Hocart interviewed named Solomon Islanders, the actual situation more than a hundred years ago can in some cases be traced to a high level of detail – from the philosophical, moral, ideological presuppositions informing the ethnographers' questions, to the social and political positions and practical motivation of the responding 'informants'.

If, as Herle and Rouse (1998: 1–7) and others have argued, modern British social anthropology was invented during the Cambridge Torres Strait Expedition in 1898, the discipline truly gained strength through the scholarly venture that unfolded in Island Melanesia in 1908. Hocart, in particular, developed methods of participant observation on Simbo, and both ethnographers accounted for this methodological innovation, albeit indirectly. In a wider, not strictly anthropological perspective, their deep cross-cultural experiences in the Solomon Islands influence later work: the original contributions made by Rivers to the treatment of shell-shock victims during the First World War; the politically radical position taken, also by Rivers, on the fate of colonised peoples regarding the depopulation of Melanesia, which he saw as caused in part by excessive colonial intervention; and the sweeping comparative approaches developed in Hocart's studies of kingship and caste, acknowledged by Dumont (1980) as a vantage point for his theoretical writings on hierarchy.

Some of the methodological innovations seen in the Solomons were founded in the fieldwork Rivers had already carried out in the Torres Strait.

Lessons and approaches from that fieldwork were refined by Rivers in 1901/2 during his field study of kinship and ritual among the Toda of southern India. But the dedicated and massively productive ethnographic quest of the two scholars on Simbo, based, as it must have been, on the creative interplay between the established scholar and his younger counterpart – and on the fact that neither of them had a specific training in nineteenth-century evolutionary anthropology but could draw on wide intellectual backgrounds – must be seen as an independent cornerstone in the history of anthropology. Of particular significance is their shared research strategy of following local beliefs, practices and organisational forms along comparative dimensions from Simbo outwards through survey work elsewhere in the Western Solomons, and their capacity (particularly notable in Hocart's case) for situating informants' statements socially in terms of local structures of knowledge and power – thus foretelling in a significant way the tenets of post-structuralist and postmodern social theory (Hviding, this volume).

### **Separate Worlds, Connected Careers: Influences of the Fieldwork**

The influences of the everyday circumstances of the 1908 fieldwork on the intellectual lives and personal outlook of Rivers and Hocart must have been profound, and as such had potential ramifications for the way in which anthropology and related disciplines developed. As Langham (1981) notes, the history of the social sciences in the early twentieth century could have been quite different if the massive amount of ethnographic material from New Georgia had been published, particularly in monograph form, and if the careers of Rivers and Hocart had followed the conventional path of academics at the time (see also Dureau, this volume).

At stake for Rivers and Hocart during their fieldwork were central early-twentieth-century questions about magic, rationality, metaphysics and the person. Two gentlemen of the late Victorian era were thrown into a still vital and powerful mixture of Melanesian sorcery, witchcraft and spiritual agency and intervention. They lived among everyday practitioners of ancestor worship, who became so accommodating that they actively drew their European residents into those domains by eagerly interpreting for them the strange experiences they might have, to the extent of opening a channel through a spirit medium for conversations between Simbo ancestors and the ethnographers, albeit after 'ten sticks of tobacco as an inducement':

At last there was a whistling: it was Onda's ghost; the way they knew who it was, was by calling out the names of deceased persons till the ghost whistled 'yes'. After the first whistling there was a long interval and a discussion about the White Men

from England. Onda said, 'Why do the White Men want to come? I can't see (? recognise) them; I have never seen a White Man'. 'The White Men want to hear the spirits speak', said [the medium] Kundahite. (Hocart 1922: 94, original parentheses)

Some of these challenging insights into altogether different life-worlds clearly influenced another largely forgotten strand of Rivers's intellectual record: his lively and exploratory lecture series to the Royal College of Physicians of London, later published as *Medicine, Magic and Religion* (Rivers 1924).

This intellectually fertile, and mentally challenging, aspect of the Simbo fieldwork has been explored through fiction in Pat Barker's best-selling Regeneration trilogy (Barker 1991, 1993, 1995), in which Rivers the wartime psychiatrist is a central character. In the final volume, *The Ghost Road* (Barker 1995), these explorations take the form of conjectural but evocative accounts of what the fieldwork experiences on Simbo may have been like, and how for Rivers they may have influenced his everyday medical work. Several chapters in *The Ghost Road* are devoted to a dramatisation of the fieldwork (grounded, as it were, mostly in Hocart's published materials). Barker connects narratives of mental and medical challenges faced by Rivers as an army captain developing ways to deal with shell-shocked patients at Craiglockhart War Hospital in Scotland to glimpses of the field experiences from Simbo.

For example, Rivers, while experimentally treating a patient whose paralysis of the legs is caused by psychological trauma, is described as pondering over the relationships between medical treatment and 'magical solutions', responding to the well-educated patient's queries about witch-doctors, seventeenth-century witch-finders and the designation of 'shell shock' as 'hysterical symptoms ... paralysis, deafness, blindness, muteness'. The psychiatrist's mind wanders off to recollections of a particular category of debilitating illness on Simbo. The condition of *nggasin*, 'caused by an octopus that had taken up residence in the lower intestine', was intentionally attributed by Rivers to himself, with the aim of experiencing the treatment – a true ethnographically experimental situation. The Simbo healer set to work on Rivers, who claimed *nggasin*-like symptoms, but after examination concluded to the ethnographer: 'You no got *nggasin*'. Back in Scotland, finalising the day's treatment of his paralysed patient, Rivers thinks of him: 'But *you* have' (Barker 1995: 47–52). Intense experiences from participant observation in which even the ethnographer's body is offered for use by local practitioners of medicine and magic are brought to bear on First World War patients whose symptoms defy rationality and the medical mainstream.

Furthermore, in Barker's narrative the horrors of trench warfare as conveyed by patients to Rivers are played off against surreal nightmarish

invocations of Melanesia. In one passage, Rivers is portrayed reading disturbing news in the morning paper about a particularly dreadful battle in France, and as his mind drifts off to the Solomons, juxtaposition is immediate in Barker's narrative:

He took his glasses off, put them on the bedside table and pushed the tray away. He meant only to rest a while before starting again, but his fingers slackened and twitched on the counterpane and, after a few minutes, the newspaper with its headlines shrieking about distant battles slipped sighing to the floor.

Ngea's skull, jammed into the *v* of a cleft stick, bleached in the sun. A solitary bluebottle buzzed in and out of the eye sockets and, finding nothing there of interest, sailed away into the blue sky.

On his way down to the beach to bathe, Rivers paused to look at the skull. Only a month ago he'd spoken to this man, had even held his hand briefly on parting. No wonder the islanders wore necklaces of *pepeu* leaves to guard themselves against *tomate gani yambo*: the Corpse-Eating Spirit. (Barker 1995: 203–4)

In this volume, the cross-cultural intellectual and practical dimensions of the fieldwork experience on Simbo in 1908 are analysed for the very first time in the concrete sense of how they may have raised prominent mental challenges for the two scholars, grounded as they were in late-nineteenth-century Western thought. The impact of the fieldwork on Rivers's career (and psyche) explored in Barker's *Regeneration* novels has been further examined by Bayliss-Smith (this volume). For Hocart, we know that after the 1908 expedition he continued to engage with a wide range of anthropological themes, first over many years in Fiji with visits to other Pacific archipelagos, later in Ceylon, and increasingly in engagement with non-fieldwork materials which he tended to read in the applicable languages, for example Sanskrit. The fact that Hocart did not obtain a tenured position in a university until shortly before his death (he was appointed to a professorship in sociology in Cairo as late as 1934) only seems to have spurred him on to creativity and greater comparative diversity, and to publish widely on different topics within evolutionary anthropology, history, archaeology and political philosophy. Hviding (this volume) proposes some alternative paths of influence for Hocart in mainstream anthropology had his career been different.

### **In the Field: Trajectories of the Percy Sladen Trust Expedition**

We have already argued that the Percy Sladen Trust Expedition was one of the very first modern anthropological field projects whereby European scholars carried out intensive investigations through long-term residence among a non-European people, largely unsupported by an extensive colonial apparatus. It is also significant that on the island of Simbo, where most



of the fieldwork was carried out, there had been regular interaction with Europeans, but there was not yet a missionary presence. As the initiator and leader of the expedition, Rivers brought his own eclectic and imaginative scholarly diversity to an encounter with islanders not yet significantly affected by colonialism and Christianity, influences that had already been strong in the Torres Strait. In 1908, Rivers was a well-established scholar of multiple vocations, holding a lectureship in experimental psychology at Cambridge, and since 1902 a fellowship at St John's College. Qualified first as a medical doctor, he had practised as a ship's surgeon and then taken special training as both a physician and a psychologist, before moving into anthropology in the Torres Strait and among the Toda. Hocart was obviously recruited to carry out much of the mainstream ethnographic documentation. Circumstances relating to the participation of Wheeler in the expedition are less clear, but correspondence between Rivers and the trustees of the Percy Sladen Memorial Fund (discussed below) indicates that Hocart was funded by the grant to Rivers from the Fund, whereas Wheeler joined at a later stage, with support from the University of London, the Royal Geographical Society and a Royal Society Government grant. The following account of the expedition's beginnings is based on the original correspondence between Rivers and the Percy Sladen Memorial Trust Fund.<sup>10</sup>

On 30 May 1907, Rivers sent a letter of grant application (supported by a letter of recommendation from A.C. Haddon) to the Percy Sladen Memorial Trust Fund. This small institution was set up by the widow of marine biologist Percy Sladen (1849–1900) in his memory, intended to support research in 'the earth and life sciences', in particular fieldwork in remote locations. We have previously quoted from the application letter from Rivers, in which he outlined in concise terms an innovative experimental approach to a somewhat dated evolutionary agenda.

In his subsequent application form, dated 13 June 1907, Rivers's handwritten text presented the research agenda even more succinctly: 'the chief aim [in the Solomon Islands] being to study the nature of social organisation based on maternal descent and the mode of its transition to paternal descent'. The application makes clear the envisioned budget for the fieldwork: '£300 which would be devoted to defray travelling expenses, photography, payments to natives as guides, interpreters, etc. and any exceptional personal expenses such as camping outfit. It is expected that the total expenditure (including personal expenses) would be between £500 and £600, the additional amounts coming from my income as Fellow of St John's College, Cambridge'.

In another hand, the note '£400 granted' was added to the form. A letter of gratitude followed immediately, Rivers stating that he 'will be glad to call it the Percy Sladen Trust Expedition'. From his previous research,

Rivers already had a strong record of fieldwork in remote places. In the above-mentioned letter of recommendation, Haddon expressed that he had 'no hesitation in stating that [Rivers] is an ideal observer – patient, sympathetic, and absolutely efficient and honest'. Haddon went so far as to conclude that '[Rivers's] recent memoir on the Todas is, in my opinion and in that of others, the very best socio-religious study of a native tribe that has yet been made by any field observer', and that '[t]he Trustees [of the Percy Sladen Fund had] the opportunity of sending into the field the best qualified Englishman' (Appendix 3).

As preparations for the expedition proceeded, Rivers informed the trustees of the Percy Sladen Memorial Fund in October 1907 that A.M. Hocart ('of Exeter College, Oxford') was 'very anxious' to go with Rivers to the Solomon Islands. Hocart had been strongly recommended by W. McDougall (who was part of the Torres Strait Expedition with Rivers) and R.R. Marett (an early Oxford anthropologist). Rivers suggested that Hocart be incorporated into the expedition, and that he should stay behind in Melanesia after Rivers returned to England to continue work 'either in the Solomons or in Woodlark Island'. Rivers applied to the Fund for a supplementary grant of £300 for Hocart's participation; the trustees awarded £100. In December, Rivers boarded the trans-Atlantic steamer R.M.S. *Adriatic*, and while at sea wrote to one of the trustees explaining that Hocart's doctor had given him a health report that 'made it very doubtful whether he ought to go to the Solomons'. Having looked for a replacement, Rivers had 'found a Mr. G.C. Wheeler, a pupil of Westermann [Westermarck] ... who is a very capable man who is very anxious to go', but he added that 'Mr Hocart after a more favourable report from his doctor is also very anxious to go so I have arranged to take them both'. Rivers saw this as a fine opportunity for expanding the geographical scope: 'If both are able to come, the amount of work done by the expedition ought to be very much increased, and I hope after a preliminary time together that we may separate and work out different districts.'

As described above, Rivers, Hocart and Wheeler met in Tulagi in May 1908, and were soon on their way to the New Georgia Islands, then a little-known western corner of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate, whose inhabitants still retained some of their infamous reputation for large-scale inter-island warfare, mass killings, slavery and head-hunting. The intention had been from the start to do collaborative fieldwork, dividing tasks among the three. The original list of this division of labour can still be found in the Haddon Papers in Cambridge, a collection that includes the remains of Rivers's materials and correspondence.<sup>11</sup>

After about two-and-a-half months on Eddystone (Simbo), Wheeler took River's challenge to 'separate and work out different districts'. He departed and travelled north-west to the Shortland Islands and the

Bougainville Strait, working there by himself for nine more months. Wheeler was known as a master of many languages, a facility evident in his knowledge of the Mono-Alu language as used in his monograph, and still appreciated by modern-day Mono-Alu speakers, some of whom have read the book. Wheeler's work is itself worthy of follow-up study. His long fieldwork in the Bougainville Strait was unique for its time. His monograph on Mono-Alu folklore (Wheeler 1926) and his massive unpublished volume on the 'sociology' of the area constitute a remarkable ethnographic corpus (see below). French anthropologist Denis Monnerie (1995, 1996, 1998, 2002) has carried out a major re-study based on Wheeler's materials, and his assessment of Wheeler's monograph is worthy of note:

In his introduction to this classic work, Wheeler laid the foundations of analyses concerning the distribution, the combinations and the transformations of mythical and folk literature themes in Oceania. On this last point, i.e. the transformations of mythical themes, he defined a very modern approach which foreshadowed that of Claude Lévi-Strauss in *Les Mythologiques*. (Monnerie 2007)

Wheeler's publication record shows a spate of short descriptive pieces not long after the fieldwork, mainly in German journals (Wheeler 1911, 1912a, 1912b, 1912c, 1912d, 1913a, 1913b, 1913c, 1914a, 1914b), reflecting the relationship he developed in the field with R.C. Thurnwald, followed by a long absence of publications until *Mono-Alu Folklore* (Wheeler 1926), and nothing afterwards. After Wheeler's death in 1943, his wife typed up most of the 'sociology' manuscript, amounting to approximately 1,275 pages, the section on religion alone amounting to over 400 pages. With the support of Wheeler's wife and son in 1953, G.P. Milner of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) sought to persuade the Royal Anthropological Institute to publish the manuscript, but to no avail. It is clear that Wheeler's fieldwork was more detailed and extensive by far than the work in the Solomons of either Hocart or Rivers. Had it been published soon after the research was completed, Wheeler may well have been considered today as one of the founders of anthropology in Melanesia, but his impressive research results still remain largely unknown and unread.<sup>12</sup>

While Wheeler independently developed his own long-term research agenda in the Bougainville Strait and was not to return to his one-time research partners, Rivers and Hocart divided the work in Simbo between them, as seen from the introduction the first part of Hocart's first article stemming from the fieldwork on Simbo:

Our joint work was apportioned according to subjects, Dr. Rivers taking kinship, social organisation, ghosts, gods, and other subjects, while I took death, fishing,

warfare; a few subjects, such as the house, were joint. When working alone I took over the whole. Of course, these divisions were rather artificial and we constantly overlapped, and either was constantly gathering material that belonged to the other. We constantly kept one another informed. It follows that the material of either of us published separately must be incomplete, but publication has already been so long delayed that it is better to publish only a fragment than withhold valuable material any longer. I am therefore publishing as a first instalment my own information on 'the Cult of the Dead' as practiced in Eddystone; it is sufficiently full to be of use, and indeed gives the essentials. The subject of chieftainship was not properly mine, but my later visits cleared up a certain number of obscurities, so that it can be used at least as an introduction; the chapters on Death and on Skull-houses can be considered as complete, barring, perhaps, a few details. Ghosts were more thoroughly investigated by Dr. Rivers, but the fragments I have collected can usefully be included here to complete the subject. The gods also come within Dr. Rivers's province, but the essential part, the ritual, did not come out till my second visit, so that the bulk of the information will be found here ... The reader, however, should bear these facts in mind if he is inclined to criticise the incompleteness of the material. (Hocart 1922: 71)

This exemplifies a general pattern for Hocart's sparse accounts of the fieldwork: in all respects he remains purely descriptive, simply communicating what actually happened and how it was organised by Rivers and himself. Nowhere does he elevate accounts of the fieldwork to a Malinowskian level of methodological reflection and generalisation. In a related vein, the few remarks Rivers made about the fieldwork are limited to comments on the 'intensive' and 'survey' genres, and provide little if any general methodological argument beyond contrasting the potentials of the two genres. The lack of such reflection by both Hocart and Rivers on the potential contribution to the development of anthropological method of their fieldwork, even years after it took place, indicated that they did not see themselves as the experimental ethnographic pioneers we argue that they in fact were.

Returning now to the 'division of labour', it seems that Hocart actually did a lot of the kinship research himself, since the genealogies to be found in archives are largely written in his hand.<sup>13</sup> On close examination there are annotations that link genealogies recorded by Hocart and the materials Rivers produced, such as 'see Rivers 123'. Of the genealogical materials that remain, only those from Vella Lavella are entirely in Rivers's own hand. We may speculate as to why Hocart ended up doing a lot of the work that was supposed to be Rivers's own speciality. Obviously, we cannot know whether there may have been duplicates that were lost after Rivers's death. It could be that Rivers recognised Hocart's skill with genealogical work, and left this time-consuming task to him as part of his training as

an ethnographer and as the junior partner in the fieldwork. We may also speculate that Rivers left the actual recording of genealogies to Hocart while he himself got busy with what he saw as the main analytical ambition for that type of work, namely the unravelling of ‘meanings’ in the relationship systems. Rivers’s preoccupation with physical anthropology may also have been time-consuming, and might be yet another reason for him to have left genealogical work to Hocart in Simbo. In Vella Lavella, Rivers seems to have done both of these tasks by himself (see Berg, this volume).

The Percy Sladen Trust Expedition resulted in a diverse corpus of published and unpublished works, whose ethnographic richness has been of considerable significance to generations of anthropologists working in the region and elsewhere. Although of uneven theoretical significance, the results of the expedition have shaped a range of lasting theoretical themes and research questions concerning the history and anthropology of Island Melanesia, and more generally concerning human social organisation. The following chapters bring to light original materials not been previously analysed, such as Rivers’s original genealogies, photographs taken and objects collected during the expedition (Berg; Thomas, this volume), and informants’ drawings of contemporary scenes in New Georgia (Hviding; Thomas, this volume).

At this stage we wish to examine the long and somewhat idiosyncratic post-expedition publication record. Wheeler’s publications between 1911 and 1926 have been discussed above; here we deal with the publishing strategies of, first, Rivers and then, Hocart.<sup>14</sup> A modest file of correspondence between the two and the Percy Sladen Memorial Trust between 1909 and 1920 shows that there was no strong agenda of collaborative work. We have noted that while Rivers was at work in Cambridge and then during the First World War as an army psychiatrist in England and Scotland, Hocart worked as a schoolmaster in Fiji (with intermittent fieldwork) and then saw wartime service in France. Already in 1909, Rivers wrote to the Trust and outlined an ambitious agenda involving several ‘books on the Western Solomons and on kinship.’<sup>15</sup> In March 1912 he wrote to the Trust noting that a 750–page book – ‘the first part of the work of the Expedition to the Solomon Islands’ – that is, *The History of Melanesian Society* (Rivers 1914a) – had been accepted by Cambridge University Press, and that he had ‘made a good deal of progress with the second book on the Solomon Islands which [he was] doing in conjunction with Mr Hocart.’<sup>16</sup> Later that year he gave an update, apologising for the delay but notifying the Trust that the first volume of the ‘full account’ was finally being submitted to the Press, and that ‘the bulk of the second volume’ would be taken up by ‘theoretical discussion’ of the ‘nature of Melanesian society.’<sup>17</sup> In that letter there is no reference to any collaboration with Hocart, and it seems that

the envisaged co-authorship of a book on the Western Solomons was no longer part of Rivers's plans. Was communication with Hocart, then still in Fiji, too difficult? Did Rivers deem Hocart's research interests incompatible with his own grand theoretical agenda? We do not know. In any event, war intervened. In 1920, it was Hocart who wrote to the Trust, explaining how, in 1908 he 'accompanied Dr Rivers to the Solomons on the Percy Sladen Trust Expedition. The publication of the reports [has] been delayed by my appointment to a post out there, then by the war. Now that I have a considerable part ready for publication it is difficult to get it published'.<sup>18</sup> Noting that he planned a first publication through the '[M]emoirs of the Anthropological Association of America' of 150 pages, and that in the somewhat longer run he would also bring to publication visual materials of 'about one hundred plates, two maps, and ten to twenty drawings', he applied for the cost of printing those materials. This was rejected by the Trust, whose representative W.A. Herdman added a handwritten note to Hocart's letter asking 'why should we subsidise the U.S.?' It was probably Rivers who came to Hocart's rescue following his election to the presidency of the Royal Anthropological Institute (RAI), enabling Hocart to launch in 1922 on his long series of descriptive papers in the RAI's own journal.

To summarise, the joint fieldwork by Rivers and Hocart did provide the foundations for Rivers's monumental opus *The History of Melanesian Society* (Rivers 1914a). Although the two volumes of that work have later been judged as inadequate in terms of theory and come to be seen as characterised by piecemeal, scant ethnography, it is hard to argue against the overall quality of the project as the first-ever comparative work on central Melanesian concepts of social organisation, leadership and cosmology. Hocart's later career in historical anthropology and cultural history included monographs on such diverse topics as kingship in comparative perspective (1927), the history and ethnography of the Lau group of Fiji (1929), and the archaeology of the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy, Ceylon (1931a). It is unlikely that these diverse works, widely read by scholars of comparative religion and the human sciences, would have seen the light of day without their author's foundational experiences from early anthropological fieldwork in the Western Solomons.

### Fieldwork as Conjuncture

In the opening paragraph of *The History of Melanesian Society*, Rivers outlined his established perspective on ethnographic method, which in the present context is worth quoting at some length, despite its persistent turn-of-the-century evolutionist distinction between 'low' and 'civilised' forms of culture:

There are two chief kinds of ethnographical work; one, intensive, in which the whole of the culture of the people, their physical characters and environment are examined as minutely as possible; the other, survey-work in which a number of peoples are studied sufficiently to obtain a general idea of their affinities in physique and culture both with each other and with peoples elsewhere. There is one feature of low forms of culture which makes these two kinds of work essentially different. In civilised culture we are accustomed to distinguish certain definite departments of social life which can to a large extent be kept apart, but among those people we usually speak of as primitive, these departments are inextricably interwoven and interdependent so that it is hopeless to expect to obtain a complete account of any one department without covering the whole field. In consequence, however deeply one may attempt to go in survey-work, the information gained must inevitably be incomplete and can never possess the accuracy which an intensive study would have given. Another feature of survey-work which has the same effect is that the proper valuation of the evidence of witnesses is impossible. (Rivers 1914a, i: 1)

Next, Rivers goes on to specify how this methodological distinction relates to the fieldwork carried out in 1908 by Rivers and his two associates:

The work of the Percy Sladen Trust Expedition to the Solomon Islands falls into two distinct parts; intensive work done by Mr. A.M. Hocart and myself in the western Solomon Islands and by Mr. G.C. Wheeler in the islands of Bougainville Straits, to be recorded in other volumes; and survey-work, done by myself during the journey to and from the Solomon Islands, which is the subject of the present book. (Rivers 1914a, i: 1)

By 1908, 'ethnography' as such had for quite some time been a part of colonial agendas, in terms of the need to know more about colonial subjects. The Royal Anthropological Institute's *Notes and Queries* 'manual' was still handed out to colonial administrators, missionaries bound for exotic places and travellers in general, the results being analysed afterwards in British universities. Conventional ethnographic fieldwork was not yet established as essential to obtaining information, a fact which makes Rivers's and Hocart's efforts something of a novelty at the time. Malinowski's extensive field research in the Trobriands between 1914 and 1918 is conventionally regarded as marking the beginning of modern (British) social anthropology as a discipline founded in the ethnographic authority provided by long-term fieldwork, based on the method of participant observation. But six years before Malinowski's arrival in the Trobriands, Rivers and Hocart lived independently on Simbo, pitching their tent away from the house of the resident European trader, and pursuing a broad range of investigations through interviews and interactions, and by the carefully

planned observation of many ceremonial events. Not unexpectedly, there is evidence that Rivers, as a veteran of fieldwork under challenging circumstances in Melanesia, influenced Malinowski in the latter's decision to embark on fieldwork in the region.<sup>19</sup>

We have noted that in 1908 the islanders of New Georgia still retained elements of their fierce reputation among travellers, missionaries and colonial officials. Inter-island raiding, headhunting and the taking of slaves had in fact seen intense escalation as late as the latter half of the nineteenth century, as the availability of steel tools had made the construction of war canoes much simpler and faster, and as access to firearms had become regular (McKinnon 1975; Hviding 2014). At the time of Rivers's and Hocart's fieldwork, the inhabitants of Simbo had not been exposed to direct missionary activity, but significant parts of New Georgia were already under the influence of the Methodist Mission, which was established in Roviana Lagoon in 1902. The Simbo people of the time had relatives and friends who were already attending church, and Hocart and Rivers would have been acquainted with some members of the Methodist clergy, notably Revd R.C. Nicholson, who was the resident head of the mission station at Bilua on Vella Lavella.<sup>20</sup>

But the history of inter-island warfare, alliance and enmity was not so distant in 1908, the year when the last heads – of both white men and Melanesians – were taken in New Georgia, by renegade warriors who had refused to adapt to the new regime of the *Pax Britannica*. Be that as it may, the two pioneer ethnographers appear to have found no difficulties in staying with people who had only a few years before been recurrent targets of British naval 'gunboat diplomacy' dedicated to end the endemic warfare and headhunting of the Western Solomons.

There is a general point to be made here about anthropological fieldwork as being by necessity a conjuncture between the ways in which ethnographer and informant are situated, in their own specific contexts of history, culture and power. Hocart's introductory remarks to his first publication arising from the 1908 expedition may help us visualise fieldwork as event, and methodology as social interaction, and the relevant parts are therefore quoted at some length:

#### *Methods.*

Our work was done through interpreters. Their pidgin was of the most rudimentary description, but as our knowledge of the language improved, their scanty English was richly supplemented with native words. We were frequently able to understand what was said before it was interpreted. Prayers and some stories were taken down word for word and constitute an effective check on interpreted material.



Working through interpreters is certainly not ideal, and it is to be hoped that field-workers will in the future undergo a linguistic training and seek to work in the vernacular; but this is not given to all, and it is a great mistake to imagine that because interpreted work is not the best, it therefore is not good.

Our interpreters were mostly poor; but one of them, Njiruviri ... turned out in the end to be not only the best interpreter, but head and shoulders the best informant. It is a pity that, being in possession of much secret lore, he carefully disguised his knowledge and was therefore long wasted as a mere channel of communication, when he could have been used as an original scholar and thinker. The eldest son of the chief who controlled the most important cults in the island, debarred by being a hunch-back from great physical activity, he had devoted himself to thought and learning. His knowledge was not only vast, but most accurate: reluctant to give away the secret formulae, he was mercilessly conscientious in repeating them once he had been induced to do so. He knew exactly how much he knew, and always distinguished his theories from facts. Had he been a European he would have ranked high among the learned, and an account of the island based on his evidence alone would still be invaluable.

Kundakolo ... was discovered early and was a great contributor. His knowledge was vast, but his memory was not as good as it had been; he was also a dreamer with a peculiar imagination, as could be seen by his drawings. He also was conscientious and never claimed to know what he did not. He owned all the great lore of his village and we were constantly referred to him.

Leoki ... was the best narrator and expositor of any; in fact he was the only one who seemed able to tell a story, though he fell far below the Rovianese. He contributed chiefly tales and a few legends, until, running short, he decided to unfold one of the most important rituals of the island, the cult of the gods. He was thoroughly accurate and aware of his limitations. In fact it may be said that an informant who romances is very rare indeed, when a careful check is kept and they know it, for they are very mindful of their reputation.

All these belonged to the same village of Narovo. Keana, my interpreter during my last visit, belonged to Simbo and thus put me in touch with some Simbo material. He was intelligent and not afraid to correct misconceptions under which the other allowed us to labour for months. It was he who threw most light on chieftainship. He was good at explaining such matters, but he was anything but conscientious, and when it came to long formulae his chief thought was boiling everything down.

Rinambesi was the oldest man in the island, was noble in Karivara, and the father of one of the chiefs of Ove. His knowledge was not proportionate to his age or station, and his memory was not good, but with his son and grandson he made some interesting contributions.

Such were our chief informants. Scarcely a native who came to see us but contributed something, for not one but possessed at least a remedy. (Hocart 1922: 71-73)

This account is noteworthy for the way in which Hocart details the diversity of informants, the varied distribution of knowledge among them, and the cumulative contributions each main informant made to the ethnographic experiment of the two fieldworkers. The final sentence, although somewhat contrived in expression, conveys a very significant dimension of this ground-breaking fieldwork: an impressive muster of interpreters and key informants, headed by the hunchback whose name is correctly spelled Ziruviri (a man who in many cases is reported by Hocart to have had well-grounded 'theories' on topics of ethnographic interest), provided solid foundations for the gathering of ethnographic knowledge. But there was also a fairly wide engagement in the anthropological work by the Simbo people in general. This foreshadows Malinowski's tenets regarding the fieldworker's ideal immersion in the local community, and also explains the consistent endeavour, particularly by Hocart (see Hviding, this volume), to position the information volunteered according to who provided it, from what social position and with what degree of cultural specificity.

On the other hand, Hocart's retrospective methodological statement notwithstanding, there is little to be learned from the published and unpublished materials left by Rivers and Hocart about the actual, practical aspects of their fieldwork. Little if anything is communicated by either of the two on how they organised the practicalities of their everyday life. The iconic tent is briefly mentioned, there is passing reference to food (canned and local), a low reliance on resident Europeans is implied, and a careful examination of fieldnotes, typescripts and publications provides clues to mobility during the fieldwork. But candidness about what actually took place and what practical challenges had to be met is absent from the materials of the two fieldworkers, and it seems to remain in the realm of the dramatist and novelist – as in Pat Barker's case – to visualise any trials and tribulations faced during this founding exercise in long-term fieldwork. What we know more about, is the fate of the expedition's analytical ambitions as formulated by Rivers.

### **Struggles with Social Organisation in New Georgia**

The 'New Georgia[n] Group' as encountered by Rivers and Hocart constituted – as it still does – a great interactional field of peoples, languages, traditions, objects and ideas extending over a north-west/south-east axis over some 200 kilometres, encompassing twelve major islands from tiny Simbo to the 'mainland' of New Georgia, and three great lagoons of which two are enclosed by raised barrier reefs – all of which is connected through a maze of waterways, channels and stretches of open sea. In an

even wider inter-island sense, the everyday horizons of New Georgians also included major overseas locations on the large islands of Choiseul, Isabel and Guadalcanal. While such geographical scale is evident from the repertoire of tales collected and published by Hocart, in theoretical and methodological terms it would be the complexities of inter-island kinship that posed the greatest challenges (as well as inspiration) for the pioneer ethnographers, who arrived on the scene with the genealogical method and the aim of finding 'mother right', yet quite unprepared to handle the nature of kinship throughout most of New Georgia.

Their initial confusion when confronted by the pre-eminently bilateral kinship systems of New Georgia (or perhaps rather the confusion faced by Rivers in his capacity as the recognised kinship theorist) came from the pre-planned research programme of excavating 'original' mother-right societies in 'districts in which there is still a definite maternal system of society'.<sup>21</sup> Theoretically as well as empirically, this plan was founded in the evolutionary approach of kinship studies at the time, as derived more or less directly from L.H. Morgan (1877). Kinship theory at the time had a strong evolutionary cast, seeing the original state of humankind in terms of 'mother-right societies', bound to be replaced by 'father-right' systems at a later stage.<sup>22</sup> The search by Rivers for mother-right societies was a rather conventional one in terms of the intellectual mode of the era, although his choice of Melanesia is less clear. Rivers perhaps wanted to explore a part of the world that at the time was still deemed 'archaic' and that had not been covered under Morgan's original comparative kinship programme. What was clearly remarkable for the era, however, was that Rivers ventured into one of these 'archaic' societies himself. The methodological problems and analytical confusion that arose during fieldwork among New Georgians, who mostly organised their lives through bilateral kinship (Hviding 2003), may also have resulted in a certain reduction of the systems to their absolute core, generating a search for uniqueness of kin terms rather than a quest for inter-island compatibility. While Rivers had, through the genealogical method, established what became (and still is) a predominant mode of methodology in kinship studies, he still lacked a more sophisticated theoretical programme that could handle unexpected outcomes of the ethnographic experiment that unfolded in 1908.

While the genealogical method had been explained by Rivers (1900), the initial article on that method did not have the same impact as a later contribution he made to the fourth edition of *Notes and Queries on Anthropology* (Rivers 1912). Also influential in this regard is his volume *Kinship and Social Organisation* (Rivers 1914b). Whereas the article from 1900 gave a condensed outline of the method developed and used in the Torres Strait, the description Rivers gave in *Notes and Queries* was richer

and more programmatic, amounting to a full methodological outline for a prospective anthropology of kinship. In 1912 Rivers had the benefit of several fieldwork periods and localities to draw upon.

During the months he spent with Hocart in the Western Solomons, Rivers collected kinship materials from most parts of New Georgia, and he was able to build up massive data sheets concerning social relations extending far beyond the island of Simbo. It is important to note that the fieldwork, based in a practical sense on Simbo, was not confined to a 'single island' approach – partly because Simbo people's sociality was inter-island in scope and not at all restricted to their own island (Bayliss-Smith; Dureau; Hviding, this volume). Whereas Hocart did on his own accumulate considerable kinship materials in Roviana and Nduke (Kolobangara) while Rivers was travelling elsewhere, Rivers confined his collecting of genealogies to the islands of Simbo and Vella Lavella.

As for the analytical deployment of these large data sets, most of them were used, together with additional ones from Vanuatu, to generate the comparative models used in *The History of Melanesian Society*. In addition, the genealogies Rivers collected in Vella Lavella were used later to substantiate the depopulation hypothesis he proposed for Melanesia (Rivers 1922; Bayliss-Smith 2006; Bennett, this volume). But his grasp of the Vella Lavella materials at the level of social organisation is relatively poor, which is remarkable as that island is actually one of the few possible 'mother right societies' Rivers and Hocart could have encountered in the Solomons (Berg, this volume). It is curious that Rivers never pondered the importance of the relationship between mother's brother and sister's son in Vella Lavella. Although he did describe it terminologically, he never attempted to deduce anything at a structural level about this potentially very significant observation. Probably, the massive work of completing the vast comparative two-volume work dominated his intellectual capacity at the time, even more so owing to his having abandoned the original theoretical framework for the volumes. As Berg (this volume) also argues on the basis of the vast comparative material Rivers and Hocart collected, perhaps the people of Vella Lavella did not really stand out that much at the time from their New Georgia neighbours. People of Vella Lavella do not differ physically from them, and their material culture and general way of living must have seemed for both Hocart and Rivers fairly similar to that found in other parts of New Georgia where they worked. Rivers in fact gave no weight to the regional linguistic anomaly, whereby a non-Austronesian language is spoken in Vella Lavella, only commenting that the kinship system of the island seemed to be a further simplification of the general New Georgia model. We may also speculate here as to the influence of interpreters and of the trader Fred Green in colouring perceptions of Vella

Lavella as simply a variant of the general New Georgia type. No matter what the reason was, Rivers concluded from faulty premises, and missed out altogether on this particular 'mother right' society.

As for later critiques of Rivers's original kinship programme, it is important to note that the flaws in his analyses were largely connected to a lack of understanding of the most basic systemic levels. Examining the theoretical agendas and empirical findings of Rivers regarding Simbo, Scheffler (1962) and Hviding (2003) have discussed the ways in which both he and Hocart confounded the two concepts of *taviti* (relation through bilateral kinship) and *butubutu* (cognatic descent group). This, and the failure to find the regionally singular matrilineal clans of Vella Lavella, had severe ramifications for the understanding developed during the 1908 fieldwork more generally, as seen from the provisional assessment made by Rivers on the social organisation of the New Georgia islands in a report to the Percy Sladen Trust soon after the fieldwork:

The people of the Western Solomons were found to have a very high type of social organisation, and all the institutions usually regarded as characteristic of Melanesia, such as female descent, the dual organisation and the secret societies were found to be absent. There was no trace of a clan organisation nor of totemism. The system of kinship was of a simple kind, almost as simple as that of Polynesia, and marriage was regulated entirely by kinship. Descent was entirely in the male line and there was a singular absence of any customs which might be regarded as survivals of mother-right.<sup>23</sup>

In Berg's chapter, the concept of *toutou* (matrilineal clan) in Vella Lavella is examined, and it is noted how reciprocal terminological relationships are still remarkably consistent with most everyday kinship practice on the island today, which lends credibility to the persistent accuracy of Rivers's genealogical method. In the chapter by Rio and Eriksen, the wider entanglements of method and fieldwork are addressed with reference to the brief work by Rivers on kinship in the island of Ambrym, Vanuatu, a soon-to-be famous location in the development of kinship theory.

At the end of the day, it seems almost uncanny how the methodologies Rivers and Hocart applied in the fieldwork in New Georgia appear not to have enabled them to come to grips with the (admittedly) complex and oftentimes unpredictable processes of group formation in the islands. With the benefit of hindsight, it seems today that it would be near impossible to make ethnographic inquiries in New Georgia without discovering the enduring significance of the largely cognatic *butubutu* concept (Hviding 2003). It is, then, as if the kinship-related research by Rivers and Hocart represented an anthropological era prior to the structural-functionalism of

British social anthropology and its firm focus on corporate groups. Perhaps ironically, the approach of Rivers and Hocart also seems to connect more closely to recent post-structuralist tenets in which 'kinship' and 'descent' are replaced by open-ended notions of 'relatedness' (e.g. Carsten 2000), with politico-jural groups less in focus compared to the central concerns of British social anthropology from later in the 1920s and well into the 1950s.

## The Chapters

The eight chapters that follow examine the successes and failures of the Percy Sladen Trust Expedition. There are many levels and cross-cutting connections in such a collective examination. The history of anthropology and related fields carries with it the implication that early scholarship is, inevitably, heavy on shortcomings, and the scholarly legacy of Rivers, in particular, has been subject to its share of such judgements. In contrast, Hocart's intellectual legacy in terms of the Solomon Islands fieldwork is one more of neglect than of outright dismissal. The realities discussed in this book are complex and equivocal as the contributors examine the expedition's enduring contributions, unrecognised successes, and more or less resounding failures.

One crucial point is a degree of inherent dissonance in the collective reappraisal we make of Hocart's and Rivers's work, which brings forward both the strengths and limitations of the fieldwork and its lasting impact on the history of anthropology. It certainly also fleshes out current debates among scholars as to the lasting value of early fieldwork. At a general level, and as the chapters proceed and weave their interconnected arguments, the reader will note that reappraisals of Hocart's work are generally more positive than those of Rivers's. The collective argument of the book is, however, more complex. As argued here, and by Dureau, the factual contribution of our anthropological ancestors can now be appreciated in more generous ways than twenty years ago, when postmodern approaches ruled the ground and early anthropology had faded in value, not least owing to what was seen as its entrenchment in colonialism and its grounding in now unfashionable theories.

For instance, chapters by Dureau, Hviding, Berg, Rio and Eriksen, and Kolshus approach the materials from the expedition in an almost forensic manner. Reappraisals of the ethnographic materials reveal both analytical strengths and direct misrepresentations, and provide glimpses of the social organisation and practices they sought to understand but grasped insufficiently. We also gain important insights into the fieldwork personae of Hocart and Rivers through the chapters by Dureau, Hviding, Bayliss-Smith

and Thomas. This goes beyond standard biographical work, as we catch glimpses of how the two evolved as persons and scholars through their immersion in fieldwork. The importance of the fieldwork experience on these two late-Victorian gentlemen scholars can hardly be exaggerated. This was a particular moment in colonial history where Hocart and Rivers had the opportunity to record materials on pre-Christian religion while also supplementing this by taking photographs and collecting objects – an opportunity lost to later ethnographers owing to the rapidly changing world of many Pacific islanders. This quality of the moment is what the chapters engage: particular encounters between ethnographers and islanders, and the concerted outcomes of such events.

Although the failures of the grand theoretical schemes developed by both Rivers and Hocart are there to be seen and can hardly be contested, the chapters also put forward a collective argument about the enduring value of the fieldwork materials. If there is no such enduring value, how may we account for the imminently recognisable value of the materials from 1908 for present-day scholars active in Island Melanesia? The shortcomings of the expedition are, of course, also obvious, but after all this was fieldwork, ethnographic description and anthropological analysis in an early incarnation, and it may be suggested that many of the field methodologies now so well known to anthropology by necessity had to be invented on the spot in 1908, as seen in Hviding's analysis of Hocart's structured comparison of inter-island materials. Chapters by Berg and Thomas also compare little known materials such as genealogical notes, photographs and objects in order to illuminate important methodological aspects of Rivers's work, while chapters by Rio and Eriksen and Kolshus point to what went wrong for Rivers in terms of research methodology and generalisation. It may be strange that Rivers in particular is more remembered for where he went wrong than what he did right. In that regard, the chapters by Bayliss-Smith and Bennett provide a strong middle ground where Rivers's scholarly, medical, philosophical and political contributions are analysed both in terms of their enduring significance and shorter-lived success.

In Chapter 1, Christine Dureau discusses how anthropologists draw upon the fieldnotes, manuscripts and publications of earlier ethnographers as part of conceptualising socio-cultural change and continuity. She provides a context for a combined appraisal of Rivers's and Hocart's contributions in the history of anthropology. From her unique position as an anthropologist who has carried out long-term fieldwork on the very island that was the locality of Rivers's and Hocart's fieldwork, Dureau is appreciative of their research, but critical of the many shortcomings in their materials and analysis. She notes the tendency to consider the cultural and political placement of such earlier anthropologists in ways that

make the analysis of the work of such anthropological ‘ancestors’ highly critical, focusing on matters of representation, colonial power and imperial emplacement. Although important in its own right, such critique tends to be moralistic, ‘othering’ the ‘ancestral figures’ who have preceded present anthropologists in their field sites, so the latter may present themselves as their antitheses: neither colonial nor imperial. Dureau’s chapter explores how we can represent earlier fieldworkers without recuperating old progressivist histories of the discipline, and she critically reconsiders and qualifies her own earlier treatment of Hocart and Rivers in this light. Dureau’s questions go beyond earlier fieldworkers to include those agents, such as missionaries, who are ‘awkward’ subjects of historical anthropological analysis when our goal is to understand them as cultural beings without losing sight of their political placement and activity. Thus, Dureau’s chapter discusses the early ethnographers as situated subjects, both in the field and in their texts. This is a particularly important exercise since Dureau pursues this in a ‘post-postmodern time’. As the field of social anthropology has changed, so it has become easier to look with more sympathetic eyes on the collected works of Rivers and Hocart without losing sight of their shortcomings.

In Chapter 2, Edvard Hviding discusses how, as an ethnographer of quite another part of the Western Solomons (Marovo Lagoon, to the east), he came to Hocart’s fieldnotes and published corpus after having carried out his own first long-term fieldwork, and gradually realised that these accounts, considered by conventional criteria to be manically descriptive and more than a little chaotic, constitute a remarkable background for analysing inter-island relations in the history of Island Melanesia. Connecting his own work in Marovo Lagoon with the work by Hocart in 1908, Hviding develops an examination of continuities and discontinuities in the Western Solomons in a regional sense, and shows how comparative interpretations of pan-New Georgian patterns of core cultural concepts and social phenomena can be made from the twin vantage points of Simbo in the far west and Marovo in the far east. Hviding argues for an appreciation of Hocart’s sophisticated approach to the fundamentally inter-island nature of apparently ‘local’ phenomena in New Georgia, and shows how materials from Simbo in 1908 connect in surprising ways to oral history from Marovo. Discussing aspects of Hocart’s methodology and epistemology, and the opportunities his materials give for comparison in time and space from the 1908 ‘snapshot’ they contain of New Georgians situated between the pre-colonial and the colonial, Hviding seeks to reconstruct the ethnographic moment of 1908 in terms of how the New Georgians interacted with and educated their two British visitors. This chapter truly brings out the ethnographic encounter between Hocart and the islanders.



Hocart's remarkable fieldwork, which today would be aptly titled multi-sited methodology, spanned several islands in New Georgia. He consistently compared islands and customs, and recorded disparate versions of myths and ritual. Hviding rightly argues that this approach may actually reflect a world view Hocart himself derived from working among islanders whose cosmology was (and is) inter-island in nature.

In Chapter 3, Cato Berg traces how the 'genealogical method' as developed by Rivers was applied in his collection of genealogical material in Vella Lavella. This kinship methodology provided one of the first theoretical and methodological frameworks for dealing comparatively with kinship and descent since Morgan (Fortes 1969). However, the genealogical method has also been targeted by critical voices, even from Rivers's own students and friends, although, as Berg notes, some recent commentators have been more generous towards Rivers. In this chapter, a background is provided for Rivers's mode of kinship inquiry, and his use of the method in one village in the Solomons in 1908 is analysed extensively. It is shown how Rivers's work on demography and death rates on Vella Lavella relied on an application of complex kinship data, not merely statistics, collected along the coast of the island. Berg retraces parts of Rivers's recording of genealogical material through using his own fieldwork materials from Vella Lavella's north-western corner and his extensive analysis of remaining original materials by Rivers held in the Haddon Papers, housed in the Rare Manuscripts Collection of Cambridge University Library. Although Rivers received funds from the Percy Sladen Trust to search for what he believed were ancient 'mother right' societies to be found in this part of Melanesia, he never actually realised that Vella Lavella was one of the few matrilineal societies in New Georgia, thus a prime example of just the type of social organisation he was looking for. Despite this significant lapse by Rivers, Berg's reanalysis allows for a new appraisal of the scientific value of Rivers's fieldwork in terms of Melanesian history, as a source of cultural heritage in the Western Solomons, and as a remarkable window onto a certain village on Vella Lavella in 1908.

Chapter 4 extends the geographical scope beyond the Solomons to look into a particular excursion made by Rivers into another locality in Island Melanesia. Knut Rio and Annelin Eriksen explore the journey Rivers made after leaving the Western Solomons, travelling on the mission ship *Southern Cross* from island to island in the eastern Solomons and the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu) – what Rio and Eriksen refer to as 'a journey through evolutionary time'. Working mostly on the ship, interviewing informants who came on board at ports of call and using missionary interpreters, Rivers broke the ground for *The History of Melanesian Society*. Rio and Eriksen then examine the return of Rivers to the New Hebrides in 1914, focusing on his

particular interest in kinship on the island of Ambrym, a form of kinship that Rivers placed in an evolutionary scheme as a fossil of earlier forms of Melanesian social organisation. Based on their own long-term fieldwork on Ambrym, Rio and Eriksen revisit Rivers to assess his very early ethnographic contribution to debates about Ambrym social organisation, later made famous through long-lasting debates involving an extraordinary succession of distinguished participants, including A.B. Deacon, C.G. Seligman, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, C. Lévi-Strauss, P. Josselin de Jong, H. Scheffler and R. Needham. As several contributors to this book point out, the Percy Sladen Trust Expedition was notable for its participant's failure to understand connections between observed social 'rights' and actual group formation. Rivers never cracked the code of Ambrym kinship, although the clues are to be found even in his own material. Unlike previous discussions that to some extent only identify the failures of Rivers's analysis, this chapter also discusses the possible reasons behind Rivers's mistakes in the context of his survey work in that part of the Pacific.

In Chapter 5, Thorgeir Kolshus further broadens the context of this book by discussing Rivers's wide-ranging 'extensive survey work' in Mota and Tikopia. Kolshus gives a close analysis of Rivers's two key informants who provided much of the material on these and other islands in the south-east Solomons and Vanuatu. Rivers the ethnographer developed a close working relationship with his two important informants; a collaboration that also skewed the outcome of the fieldwork and the reporting by Rivers on social organisation and religion. Although being sympathetic to the 'survey' project developed by Rivers, Kolshus also reveals some of the inadequacy of Rivers's methodology, developing views expressed by Raymond Firth on Rivers's analysis of social organisation on Tikopia. In fact, Firth did not find Rivers's material of much use for his own long-term fieldwork on Tikopia from 1928 onwards. Kolshus examines the close relationship between Rivers and the Melanesian Mission, not least in terms of how he was dependent on the mission for assistance throughout his travels. Kolshus also shows how the inadequacies and inconsistencies of 'survey work' resulted in much speculative research. Unlike the assessments in earlier chapters of the research carried out in the Western Solomons, this chapter demonstrates that Rivers stretched his rather thin data too far, a tendency that Kolshus argues comes from inherent flaws of Rivers's survey work.

In Chapter 6, Tim Bayliss-Smith notes how Rivers was one of the first scholars to draw attention to the ongoing depopulation of the Melanesian islands, and to question the still-dominant 'extinction discourse' of the time that saw 'vanishing races' as a regrettable but inevitable consequence of Western imperialism and geo-political domination. Bayliss-Smith explores how Rivers's imaginative use of the genealogical data he and

Hocart collected in the Western Solomons constitutes a pioneer study in historical demography, providing insights that are still unmatched anywhere in Melanesia in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, apart from Fiji. However, shortfalls are also identified in the demographic study. Explanations given by Rivers for the phenomena that he documented are less impressive, and Bayliss-Smith argues that Rivers's achievement in applying the genealogical method to historical demography should not blind us to flaws in his interpretation of social processes. His suggestion that Simbo women were too apathetic to conceive, to give birth or to nurture healthy infants lacks any ethnographic foundation, and Rivers's dismissal of disease factors is a curious blind-spot in view of his own medical background. By the time of his death in 1922, Rivers had developed a new theory of society from his reading of Freudian psychology and from his own experiences as a wartime psychotherapist treating cases of 'shell shock' among soldiers and airmen. He believed that following the pressures of war and from the power of suggestion, post-war Europe was experiencing a state of what he called 'universal psycho-neurosis.' Bayliss-Smith argues that when seeing the psychological impact of colonialism as a form of shell shock, Rivers could entertain speculations about Solomon Islands demography and a rationale for the depopulation of the islands that was ongoing in 1908. This chapter brings out the effect that intensive fieldwork had on the personality of Rivers, and how it changed him in the years to come. Rivers continued to revisit his experiences – particularly in Simbo – for the rest of his life.

In Chapter 7, Judy Bennett extends the context of the 1908 fieldwork into pan-Pacific, even global, scenes of colonial history. She examines Rivers's claim for the 'psychological factor' as a major cause of depopulation in Melanesia and the Pacific more generally, observing how his ideas were taken up in colonial circles and beyond. As depopulation had been almost synchronous with the advent of Europeans in the Pacific, a strong causal association was suggested with the social, economic and political impact of Europeans on indigenous people. Bennett shows, however, that almost simultaneously with the publication of Rivers's influential collection *Essays on Depopulation in Melanesia* (Rivers 1922), practitioners of Western biomedicine and the newly constituted League of Nations increasingly focused attention on the links between depopulation and introduced diseases. Soon the medical model was triumphant over Rivers's 'psychological factor', but a range of agents including literary critics, administrators, planters, anthropologists and medical doctors still used Rivers's position to defend their positions or to advance their disciplines and causes.

In Chapter 8, Tim Thomas throws light upon perhaps the most neglected outcome of the Percy Sladen Trust Expedition, namely the artefacts and

photographs that Rivers and Hocart collected and took in the Western Solomons. These now form part of the collections of the Cambridge University Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology. Previously thought to be a mere afterthought of the expedition, the objects and photographs were, Thomas convincingly argues, an integral part of Rivers's scientific programme. However, as Thomas demonstrates, the fate of the collection of objects and photographs is directly connected to Rivers's theoretical change of position from evolutionism to diffusionism, as demonstrated in his 1911 address to the British Association for the Advancement of Science. Rivers lost faith in his material culture data and abandoned any plans to utilise them in any scientific manner. Thomas notes how Rivers was convinced that material culture was the first aspect of change in colonial circumstances, and as such the least valuable in any scientific description of social change. The chapter also contains a valuable Appendix listing the various categories of objects that Rivers and Hocart collected, and provides also novel information on the photographs taken during the expedition.

## The Ethnographic Experiment

To offer some concluding remarks, let us revisit the title of this book. To what extent did the Percy Sladen Trust Expedition to Island Melanesia constitute an 'ethnographic experiment'? The concept of 'experiment' does not necessarily ring that well within the social sciences today, but for this book it is a word carefully chosen for all its implications about the ethnographic work that Hocart and Rivers undertook in 1908. We argue that the Percy Sladen Trust Expedition was an experiment in the true meaning of the word, in terms of its original methodology, the complexity of the research and its successes and failures, and the personal implications of the fieldwork for the fieldworkers.

The two fieldworkers had a rather loose program of research, at least when we consider the original aim of unearthing 'mother-right societies' in a state of 'survival'. Although Rivers had honed his skills as an ethnographer of kinship systems in the Torres Strait, and had successfully published the first methodological programme for that specific line of research, he had to revise his methods in the Solomon Islands when faced with realities that were probably quite different from those he had expected. A recently developed methodology was brought along for the fieldwork; empirical realities intervened; and the methodology had to be adjusted in order for the emerging ethnographic materials to make sense. This experimental approach to field ethnography also had a lasting effect on the personal life

of Rivers. It is very interesting that he almost never revisited the Torres Strait or the Toda in his later writings, but instead tended to emphasise his experiences in the Solomon Islands, and Simbo in particular. This attests to the strong affect the months of 'intensive' fieldwork had on him, as also exemplified in several chapters of this book. To that extent, the example of Rivers predates postmodern anthropology and its strong emphasis on the subjective experience and cooperative nature of research.

The experimental aspects of the expedition also come out well in the constant revision of socially positioned ethnographic information seen in Hocart's published papers, unpublished manuscripts and fieldnotes.<sup>24</sup> As discussed in several of the following chapters, Hocart became deeply submerged in the societies of the Western Solomons at the time, and through dedicated, ethnographically productive practice he devised a method of multi-sited ethnography, eighty years before the term became anthropologically fashionable. Hocart's constant quest for comparative data is demonstrated by his solitary travels when Rivers worked elsewhere. In that sense, the ethnographic experiment was even more fundamental for Hocart, untrained as he initially was in anthropology and without any previous field experience. The quality of his ethnographic materials, outstanding even by today's standards, is a worthy memorial to him in the records of the social sciences.

The following chapters will make clear that the expedition of 1908 was an 'experiment' that had its measure of success, but one that could also have yielded much more than it did. As it happened, Rivers and Hocart had stumbled upon two very different islands – Simbo and Vella Lavella – whose ethnographic characteristics could have provided them with laboratory-like circumstances for experimentation, had the research effort only been further developed. Although well connected socially, Simbo and Vella Lavella in fact were (and are) island societies with utterly different languages and highly contrasting systems of social organisation. This, coupled with many shared characteristics of culture and ecology, should have made the two islands ideal case studies in an 'experimental' sense. If Rivers and (particularly) Hocart had been able to carry out much longer fieldwork and taken into account archaeology and linguistics (neither of which was available at the time), the expedition's repertoire of ethnographic 'experiments' might have yielded extremely interesting results. For example, some simple insights into the difference between Austronesian and non-Austronesian languages could have provided an important comparative orientation for the study of social organisation. In 1908, this potential was not fully realised. As true pioneers of fieldwork, Rivers and Hocart had the privilege of creating modern methodology on the spot, but also the misfortune of implementing an ethnographic experiment before its time.

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## Notes

1. Non-specialist readers may perhaps wonder why the term ‘Island Melanesia’ has such prominence in the book, given that the part of the world called Melanesia is geographically characterised above all as consisting of islands, large and small. However, Island Melanesia has a long and continuing currency as a distinct term for the groups of islands ‘to the east and southeast of New Guinea, [today referred to as] the Bismarck archipelago, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and New Caledonia’, whose inhabitants, ‘now and in the past, have always been ... island dwellers’ (Spriggs 1997: 1). At the same time, the cultural diversity of this region was something that was becoming apparent even at the time of the 1908 expedition. As Spriggs (1997: 2) puts it, ‘Island Melanesians are simply the people who happen to live there’.
2. Letter from Rivers to the Trustees, Percy Sladen Memorial Fund, 30 May 1907, Linnean Society Archives, London (hereafter LSA).
3. Rivers to the Trustees, Percy Sladen Memorial Fund, 30 May 1907, LSA.
4. In this book we follow Rivers in his designation of the research as the Percy Sladen Trust Expedition, a label suggested by him in a letter of gratitude to the Trustees of the Percy Sladen Memorial Trust Fund after he had been granted £400 for the expedition (Rivers to the Trustees, Percy Sladen Memorial Trust, 13 June 1907, LSA).
5. Letter from Welchman to Woodford, Mara Na Tabu, 30 March 1908, ‘[R]e local matters; refusal to act as the Bishop’s “Commissary”; refusal to look after Rivers’, C.M. Woodford, ‘Papers on the Solomon Islands and other Pacific Islands, 1879–1927’, Pacific Manuscripts Bureau, Australian National University, Canberra, PMB 1290, ref. 2/59, 2/60. See also Appendix 3.
6. For contrasting examples of naval and missionary reports on New Georgia, see Somerville (1897) and Goldie (1908).
7. Letter from Rivers to A.W. Kappel, secretary to the trustees, Percy Sladen Memorial Trust, from Simbo, 14 June 1908, LSA. Reproduced as Appendix 1.1 (this volume).
8. Hocart, ‘Roviana – Topography, Districts, Chiefs’, unpublished manuscript, Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, Wellington.

9. Rivers, 'The Western Solomons', typewritten report sent from St John's College, Cambridge, to A.W. Kappel, 'Clerk to the Trustees' of the Percy Sladen Memorial Trust, 4 May 1909, LSA. Reproduced as Appendix 1.3 (this volume).
10. See Rivers to the Trustees, Percy Sladen Memorial Fund, various dates, 1907, LSA, and Appendix 3.
11. See Haddon Papers, Cambridge University Library, Cambridge, envelopes 12009, 12046, 12084.
12. Wheeler, G.C. n.d. Untitled MS, approximately 1200 pp., referred to in Wheeler (1926) under the title 'Sociology'. School of Oriental and African Studies Library, London. Microfilm.
13. See Hocart, 'Genealogies Eddystone, Roviana, Kolombangara', unpublished manuscript, Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, Wellington.
14. See also Hviding (this volume) for the latter.
15. Rivers to the Percy Sladen Memorial Trust, 2 May 1909, LSA, 'W.H.R. Rivers' file.
16. Rivers to the Percy Sladen Memorial Trust, 29 March 1912, LSA, 'W.H.R. Rivers' file.
17. Rivers to the Percy Sladen Memorial Trust, 23 October 1912, LSA, 'W.H.R. Rivers' file.
18. Hocart to the Percy Sladen Memorial Trust, 19 May 1920, LSA, 'W.H.R. Rivers' file.
19. Michael Young notes in his intellectual biography of Malinowski how in late 1913 and early 1914 Rivers and three other prominent representatives of the developing discipline of British anthropology 'lobb[ie]d behind the scenes to find him funding for fieldwork' (Young 2004: 245). This was prior to the departure by most of them, along with more than three hundred other British scholars, to Australia for the eighty-fourth meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. According to Young, 'Haddon, Seligman and Marett each played a significant part and, together with Rivers, they seemed to have persuaded Malinowski that he should work in Melanesia. Rivers would have favoured the Solomons or the New Hebrides; Haddon and Seligman, New Guinea' (Young 2004: 245). The large group of British scholars departed for Australia in June 1914, and by the time they arrived in Australia in August war had been declared. As far as Malinowski is concerned, the rest is history (and anthropological folklore).
20. Nicholson (1922) later published a biography of one of his most promising converts, Danny Bula, in which some of the ethnographic remarks he made were clearly influenced by the later diffusionist programme of Rivers and employed by him in *The History of Melanesian Society* (Rivers 1914a) after his abandonment of evolutionist theory.

21. See Rivers to the Trustees, Percy Sladen Memorial Fund, 30 May 1907, LSA.
22. The assumption that in the Solomons archipelago ‘maternal’ systems were likely to co-exist with those of ‘father right’ would have been valid from a reading of the ethnographic materials available at the time, but it is not clear exactly on what evidence Rivers built his comparative proposal. Certainly, too little was known at the time about social organisation in New Georgia and other islands in the western Solomons to guide him to what became the expedition’s field locations. It was probably Woodford’s advice that steered the ethnographic newcomers in the Solomons to the western islands.
23. Rivers, ‘The Western Solomons’, typewritten report sent from St John’s College, Cambridge, to A.W. Kappel, ‘Clerk to the Trustees’ of the Percy Sladen Memorial Trust, 4 May 1909, LSA. Reproduced as Appendix 1.3 (this volume).
24. Christine Dureau, who has worked most closely with Hocart’s unpublished materials, estimates that he produced some 1,500 pages of original fieldnotes in 1908, totalling over 100,000 words. She notes, though, that Hocart’s fieldnotes are discontinuous, with many pages missing from the collection held at the Turnbull Library in Wellington. Some can be found in the collection of Rivers’s papers housed among the Haddon Papers in Cambridge, and others seem to have been discarded as Hocart wrote up his manuscripts.

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