

Magic and Memory: Paul Denys Montague's collection from New Caledonia

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In the archives at the University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology are the field notes, journal and handwritten catalogue that accompany a collection of 200 ethnographic artefacts made in New Caledonia in 1914. This essay considers the context of the collection's formation as well as its significance and salience in the present. In particular, it explores how this collection, hardly explored in the 100 years since the death of the collector, offers a valuable opportunity to think afresh about complex issues of loss, memory and remembrance when a little-known past is curated for new, present purposes.

Magic and Memory: Paul Denys Montague in New Caledonia

In the early summer of 1914, a group of distinguished scholars set sail from Britain, bound for Australia to attend a meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS). Among them was a contingent of anthropologists that included Alfred Cort Haddon, Henry Balfour, W. H. R. Rivers, John Layard, Charles Seligman and Bronislaw Malinowski. Several of the group had made plans to carry out fieldwork in the region after the conference was concluded. These plans, however, were thrown into turmoil before many of the delegation had even reached Australia, as on Tuesday 4th August, just after some of the party had departed Cape Town aboard the S.S. *Euripides*, Britain declared war on Germany. John Layard, whose fieldwork in New Guinea with Haddon had to be abandoned, captured something of the mood of the group upon hearing the news: ‘nobody on board really believed that war had broken out... Europe was then so far away’.¹

Even if the group had been able to believe what was happening, it is unlikely they could have foreseen how the events of the next four years would impact upon their personal and professional lives. Layard, whose brother was killed fighting in France, would undertake his most significant research on the island of Malakula (in present-day Vanuatu), as a result of the enforced changes to his travel plans; W.H.R. Rivers’ work with victims of shellshock would take him away from the discipline of anthropology and into the field of psychology; while Malinowski’s internment in Australia was, famously, the catalyst for his extended fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands.

For Alfred Cort Haddon, who had spent the years preceding 1914 working to establish anthropology as a discipline in Cambridge, the war was a major setback to his plans. Haddon’s experiences during the renowned Torres Strait expeditions had convinced him of the urgent need for research to be carried out amongst Oceanic cultures, to document indigenous ways of life that he believed were rapidly disappearing due to the impact of European colonization and the influence of Christian missionizing. If anthropologists saw loss as a defining condition of Pacific peoples at the time, then they saw their own role as the urgently required archivists of loss. For Haddon and his fellow anthropologists, the impending destruction facing

Europe would have seemed a far more distant prospect than the threats facing Pacific cultures.

In this essay, I consider the collection of one fledgling anthropologist – a protégé of Haddon’s – Paul Denys Montague (Fig. 1). In 1914, as Haddon and his fellow anthropologists were sailing to the BAAS meeting and war was being declared, Montague was in the midst of fieldwork, two thousand miles off Australia’s east coast, in New Caledonia. During the twelve months he spent in the islands, Montague amassed a rich array of material including extensive collections of natural history specimens, which are today housed in London’s Natural History Museum, and the American Museum of Natural History, New York; a collection of over 200 ethnographic artefacts, now in the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge, along with a collection of photographs, written notes, sketches and journals; and a collection of sound recordings – of traditional Kanak songs and chants – made using wax cylinders, which are now in the British Library.

Montague returned to Cambridge in early 1915 and set about ordering his ethnographic collections, producing a handwritten catalogue to accompany them which detailed the artefacts’ indigenous names, the location of their collection and in some cases the names of the families from whom he had acquired the objects. Under the guidance of Haddon, he also compiled his notes into a draft of a book to be titled *Ethnographical Notes from the Houailou Valley, New Caledonia* and produced several illustrations that would inform the text. How Montague would eventually have framed his views and experiences of Kanak culture and his collecting exploits is an open question, however, as his work was interrupted by the war. Following the death of his younger brother in France, at the battle of Neuve Chapelle, Montague enlisted and was commissioned in the Territorial Force Reserve in November 1915. Transferring to the recently formed Royal Flying Corps, he learned to fly in Egypt before being posted to Salonika in January 1917. On October 29th that year, his plane was attacked and was last seen by his comrades spinning out of control. Three months later, Bulgarian airmen dropped a photograph over a British-held aerodrome with a note explaining that the pilot (shown on a stretcher in the image) had been shot down and killed and had been buried with military honours in an unmarked grave. The number of the aircraft matched that of Montague’s plane.

Almost a century later, as part of a major European Research Council-funded project based at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge, work

began to study Montague's collection and uncover the wealth of associated archival information that survives.² One of the outcomes was an exhibition staged at the Museum in the centenary year of the start of the First World War. Researching this material has led me on a curatorial journey that has explored the personal memories of Montague's remaining family members and the public record of his life and loss, including the search for his burial site in a mountainous region of Macedonia. In seeking to conceptualize the re-discovery of this collection, a hundred years after its arrival in Cambridge, I show how traces of memory, remembrance and loss are materially manifest in the collections made by Montague, and ask to what extent they reflect the imperatives of loss that provided the impetus for much of the anthropological research of the time and were soon to engulf Europe itself. I also ask what is remembered, and forgotten, when we engage with a collection such as this. And what relevance does it have in the present and for whom?

Paul Denys Montague

It is likely that Haddon was influential in Montague's selection of New Caledonia as the destination for his research. Having established anthropology as a discipline in Cambridge with the creation of a diploma in the subject from 1908, Haddon set about recruiting graduates in disciplines such as zoology and botany, encouraging them to collect anthropological data during the expeditions they made. Indeed, Montague had exactly the sort of skills that Haddon had identified as being required to become a 'proper anthropologist', which included musical and artistic abilities alongside scientific rigour.³

Montague was born in Devon in 1890. His father, Leopold, was a renowned archaeologist whose collections of coins and Greek and Roman antiquities are today displayed in the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter. Penton, the house where Montague grew up, was part family home and part museum. He attended the progressive boarding school Bedales, which encouraged simple living and an appreciation of the great outdoors through a regime of camping trips, cold baths and plain food. Boys and girls were encouraged to associate freely and boys took classes in cooking, needlework and handicrafts. Montague developed a love of nature, was a talented artist and played a variety of musical instruments. In 1909, he entered Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, to study zoology and became known for his musical abilities, regularly appearing in concerts and recitals. His social circle

included James and Lytton Strachey, John Maynard Keynes, Virginia Stephen [later Woolf], and the poet Rupert Brooke, whose poem ‘Dining Room Tea’ was written at Montague’s family home, when Brooke and a group of companions called in and had afternoon tea with Montague’s family while camping in the area in 1911.

New Caledonia: collecting magic stones

In 1912, Montague undertook his first zoological expedition to the Montebello Islands, off the coast of Western Australia, and upon his return to Cambridge immediately began to plan a second expedition to the Pacific. Towards the end of 1913, he set sail for Noumea, via Sydney, along with Robert Harold Compton – a fellow Cambridge graduate and botanist – and from there they boarded the *Caledonian*, arriving in New Caledonia in time for New Year’s Eve. They spent a frustrating first few weeks attempting to obtain official permissions from the islands’ French Governor to carry guns and acquire a boat, and eventually departed for the Houailou Valley in the centre of the main island, having been advised that this region had been less affected by French settlers.

Although the purpose of the expedition was to collect specimens of the islands’ flora and fauna, over time Montague’s journal reveals his growing interest in the Kanak people and their culture. Compton and Montague engaged two young Kanak men, from the Loyalty Islands, to assist them in their work collecting botanical and zoological specimens (Fig. 2). Although Montague referred to them initially as ‘the boys’, after a few days he begins to call them by their names – Upiko and Nanine – and record their exploits, and his admiration for their skills, in his journal. Several entries in June evidence the development of their relationship:

Today, Upiko shot two kingfishers and an osprey. I gave him a lesson in bird skinning and sent Nanine out collecting... Upiko dealt with the specimens very competently and has shot and skinned about 10 birds, including 3 new doves he found in the forest at the foot of the mountain and a small black bird with orange eyes.⁴

It was through conversations with Upiko and Nanine that Montague was able to begin to engage with Kanak culture and soon drawings of Kanak artefacts, translations of Kanak words and notations for Kanak songs begin to fill his journal (Fig. 3). In

particular, Montague became interested in the so-called ‘magic stones’ that pervaded Kanak life and he collected many examples, carefully labelling each one to indicate his understanding of its particular significance.⁵

Magic stones are stones that, either in their natural form, or through having been worked by hand, embody some of the power of the natural world. Kanak used these stones to manipulate their environment to affect particular outcomes. For example, some stones were dedicated to agriculture, some to hunting or fishing and some were used in war. Each clan had its own stones and these were used in conjunction with the particular responsibility that the clan held; thus, a clan whose responsibility was for agriculture would bury a yam stone in the field with the crops to bring about a successful harvest. Similarly, clans who had responsibilities for the sea would use stones to ensure a good catch of fish. Stones were often rubbed with a mixture of special herbs to make them more efficacious or, in the case of war stones, might be fortified using the hair or nails of an enemy. A war stone would then be placed into contact with the spear or weapon, making the one who wielded it more powerful. The ubiquity of magic stones usage is evidenced by those collected by Emma Hadfield, a missionary’s wife who was based in the Loyalty Islands in the late nineteenth century. Hadfield wrote labels that recorded their function and stuck them to the stones; examples include everything from ‘to give strength to the legs when climbing a mountain’, ‘to produce rain’ and ‘to make someone fall in love’. These labels survive with the stones and are today in the collections of the British Museum.⁶

In Montague’s collection of 200 ethnographic objects, thirty-eight are magic stones (Fig. 4). These include seventeen yam or taro stones, six eel stones, two stones to increase fertility, a war stone, a stone to invoke thunder and two heart-shaped stones connected by a coconut fibre cord that, Montague records, induced terror in anyone who saw them. These stones had been collected from a cave where Kanak placed their dead, and Montague was told that the spirit of the owner of these stones could leave its body at night and invisibly inflict a mortal wound upon an enemy without ever being discovered.⁷ Chapter Six of Montague’s unpublished manuscript is titled ‘Religion and Magic of the Natives of the Houailou Valley’ and deals almost exclusively with the magic stones he collected, witnessed in use or learned the histories of from his informants in the Houailou Valley. Although the stones were still in use at the time of Montague’s expedition, they were being systematically targeted and removed through the process of missionization. Both Catholic and Protestant

missionaries condemned the use of magic stones, and, recognizing their pervasive power, encouraged people to either destroy them or give them up as a material sign of conversion. It was in this context that Montague was able to collect so many. The fundamental role the stones played in the complex social and ritual processes that linked Kanak people to their environment 'made them an obvious target for missionaries hoping to break the connection between Kanak people, their land and their traditional way of life'.⁸

The stakes in these encounters between European missionaries, Kanak clans, and their material artefacts could not have been higher. Maurice Leenhardt, a French Protestant pastor and ethnologist, who founded a mission in the Houailou Valley and met Montague during his fieldwork, recorded in his journal an example of the fraught nature of the conversion process. Leenhardt describes a particular case where a chief he calls 'M' has a child who is dying from a stomach complaint. The chief seeks answers from a Kanak healer who tells him that the sickness is a result of the chief's indecision: on the one hand he has said he accepts Christianity but on the other he is secretly refusing to give up his traditional beliefs in the form of magic stones. The chief decides to abandon the stones in his possession as a visible gesture of his newly acquired faith in a Christian God and sells them to Montague.⁹

The period of Montague's fieldwork coincided with one of tremendous social upheaval in New Caledonia, with Kanak people having to make difficult choices about whether to abandon their beliefs and put their faith in a new god or continue with traditional practices. Despite enduring almost 150 years of contact with Europeans, during the early decades of the twentieth century there was a dramatic transition in the fortunes of Kanak culture. Population numbers reached their lowest in the years up to 1920, whilst the strategy of missionaries to target Kanak chiefs, as a means of securing large-scale conversions, compounded the loss of traditional ways of life. Tribes were forced to relocate to reservations and to work for the colonial authorities. One French colonial administrator declared that 'nothing could raise the Kanak people from their abject state, they were resigned to die'.¹⁰

Roger Boulay has characterized this era as the period when the 'last of the large collections' of Kanak artefacts were made.¹¹ The Swiss naturalist Fritz Sarasin visited the Houailou Valley, two years before Montague's arrival and, in a little over twelve months, was able to procure a collection of more than 750 artefacts. Sarasin recorded his astonishment when, upon learning of his presence, members of a local

tribe gathered together a large quantity of ancient artefacts that they wanted to sell to him, including major architectural carvings and sacred stones as well as other valuable pieces. Sarasin compared the scene to that of an ‘open-air ethnographic museum’.¹² Reflecting on the possible motivations for this seemingly large-scale abandonment of traditional objects, Sarasin suggested that significant social disaffection had acted as a catalyst bringing about a fundamental shift in the status of such objects. They had become, he concludes, ‘vestiges of an epoch now passed that no longer have value for the current generation’.¹³

Kanak archaeologist, François Wadra, who has worked with me researching Montague’s collection, has described the historical circumstances surrounding the surrendering of significant artefacts among his own clan on Maré Island, explaining how the local chief was under enormous pressure from the missionaries to persuade his people to give them up or destroy them as a material sign of their conversion. He writes that the chief of his clan called his most powerful priest and, in front of the whole village, said to him ‘if you are so powerful, use your skills to strike down and kill these missionaries and destroy their new religion’.¹⁴ The priest failed and the chief felt compelled to convert. The next day the chief and the missionaries together called on everyone to bring their powerful, spiritual objects to the centre of the village and they were piled up and burned. During his fieldwork, Montague witnessed a similar scene in the Houailou Valley and described how formerly important artefacts had ‘owing to missionary influence, been lumped together in the centre of the tribe ... where they stand now rotting away in a circle of absolutely untrodden ground’.¹⁵ Like Sarasin, Montague noted that important artefacts, including major architectural pieces were being made available to him. In a letter to Alfred Cort Haddon in Cambridge, dated 10 August 1914, he wrote that he had ‘more or less at my disposal all the old carvings, “taboos”, door posts etc. of a traditional house of a Caledonian tribe in the Houailou Valley’. He proceeded to ask Haddon to cover the shipping costs if he considered them to be ‘worth the trouble and expense of getting to England’.¹⁶ However their absence from the Cambridge collection suggests that this transaction did not happen.

Archivists of loss

Montague’s Bedales education along with his Cambridge training had taught him to be open-minded about the beliefs of other cultures whilst being suspicious of the

actions of European missionaries. He saw loss, and the negative impact of Europeans everywhere he looked. It was this that motivated him to gather as much valuable ethnographic information as possible, about a people whose culture he perceived as in demise. In the introduction to his unpublished book, he described the fate of the Kanak people of the Houailou Valley as a consequence of introduced diseases and cites as a regular occurrence coming across villages where entire groups had either died out or been forcibly resettled on reservations:

The inhabitants of these villages have been turned onto the reserves and their houses, including many magnificent examples of native architecture and wood-carving burned to the ground, while their irrigation terraces, costing hundreds of years of patient work, have been turned over to a few lean and half-wild cattle.¹⁷

In his journal, he is savagely critical of the influence of missionaries on the morale of the people, blaming them for teaching the younger generation of Kanak to disregard their cultural traditions. In his journal entry for 4 August 1914 (the day Britain declared war on Germany), Montague recorded a conversation with an informant in which the activities of missionaries are discussed:

They teach them to desecrate the bones and despise all the customs and handywork [sic] of their forefathers... they make them pray all day long instead of working; forbid dancing and singing other than hymns, and make them pay their money, nominally to support the mission. They make a huge profit over ethnological specimens, telling the natives they are the works of the devil and must be given up for nothing.¹⁸

Montague, however, was not simply a passive witness to loss, or an archivist of loss (as his Cambridge training had prepared him to be), he was also an agent of loss through his deliberate removal of objects from their original context. In the same letter to Haddon that offered him the architectural pieces from a Kanak house, Montague also mentioned that he had in his possession a group of ancestral skulls from a particular, named, family 'if Haddon would like them'.¹⁹ Montague briefly described the circumstances relating to his acquisition of these skulls, claiming that he was able to procure them as the family were fearful that missionaries were about to

confiscate them and bury them or destroy them. Traditionally, Kanak families placed the bones of their dead high up in caves and, faced with the prospect of having to inter them in the ground, this particular family decided to offer them to Montague 'on the assurance that they would be duly preserved and respected'.²⁰ Although the family's understanding of the potential fate of these skulls is unclear, Montague did acquire them and boxed them up to be shipped back to Cambridge where they are now held in the University's Duckworth Laboratory. His awareness of the significance of his actions, and his consciousness of the contradictions inherent in his 'preservation' of Kanak human remains and artefacts through a process of removal, are suggested by a short journal entry written three days after this transaction took place, where he recorded the following scene:

Packed and cleared up generally this morning ... an old woman brought a rose, as a tribute to one of the skulls, and when she found the case nailed up, wept bitterly, and squashed it in through the cracks.²¹

The events of August 1914, as they appear in Montague's journal entries and letters, are revelatory and pivotal moments in his story. On August 7th, he wrote that he was busy packing up his 'ethnological collection', using the word 'collection' for the first time to describe the artefacts he had amassed and suggesting that he had begun to conceive of them as having some kind of holistic significance. His correspondence with Haddon indicates that the Museum in Cambridge was the place he saw as becoming the logical home for this collection and where he envisaged its value would be appreciated. The letter to Haddon also illustrated Montague's transition from a zoologist to an anthropologist, as he was keen to stress that, in relation to the artefacts he was acquiring, he was also 'collecting full details as to the names, significance etc. of the various parts',²² something that Haddon would have considered an essential component of field collecting. But if these activities opened up a new avenue for Montague as anthropologist, the news from Europe heralded the opening of another future that ultimately transformed him from an archivist of loss to an analogue of loss. On Wednesday August 5th, he wrote in his journal: 'First news of the war'.²³

Following Montague's return to England and his subsequent death in 1917, his mother, Amy, took responsibility for overseeing the fate of her son's collections, liaising with various institutions to try to ensure his work would have a legacy. In

May 1918, replying to a letter of condolence from Professor Harmer, then Keeper of Zoology at the Natural History Museum in London, she described the scale of her loss, stating: 'In losing him I feel I have lost all I ever hoped for or set my heart upon ... I hope that all he was able to achieve in his short scientific career will not be lost'.²⁴ In Cambridge, for his mentor Alfred Cort Haddon, the loss of a student like Montague was also a blow to what he had hoped for. In April 1918, Haddon also wrote to Professor Harmer, at the Natural History Museum, asking: 'Did you know Paul Montague? He was a most charming and talented boy. I anticipated a distinguished career for him'.²⁵ Amy Montague struggled to recover from the death of her eldest son and spent years searching, unsuccessfully, to locate his grave. Before she died, she instructed her family to burn all of her son's letters believing them to be her own private mementos of loss.

Layers of loss and remembrance

Researching the Kanak collections made by Montague has revealed what I conceive of as a palimpsest of loss and remembrance. The clubs, spears, carvings, masks and stones that make up the collection have survived; collectively they materialize the various layers that define their acquisition within the contexts of war, anthropology and Kanak dispossession. The layers of loss and memory accrued by the artefacts fuse the attempts of colonizing powers and missionizing forces to disrupt the traditional ways of life of the Kanak people and the part that anthropology played in this process. But they also bear the traces of the systematic removal of Kanak artefacts that colonial agents and missionaries engendered: collectors and collections that have resulted in what Emmanuel Kasarhérou describes as the 'scattered heritage' of the Kanak people.²⁶ The collection connects the suffering of individual families, like the Montagues who lost both sons in World War One, and symbolizes the much wider occurrence of loss experienced by millions of families in Europe and across the Empire. The cutting short of Montague's career also suggests the intellectual impoverishment suffered within the fledgling academic discipline of anthropology. In this context, Montague takes his place among the War's 'Lost Generation'. A further layer of loss can be perceived in the location of his death: Salonika. While the Western Front and the battlefields of Ypres, the Somme and Passchendaele live on in the cultural memory, those who died in the Salonika Campaign have tended to be forgotten, relegated to what is often described by historians as a military sideshow.²⁷

Finally, the physical absence or ‘loss’ of Montague himself, due to the failure to retrieve his body or locate his grave, compounds this sense of palimpsestic loss. Alongside hundreds of others, Montague’s name is remembered only on the Memorial to the Missing at Doiran, on the border of Greece and Macedonia (Fig. 5). Viewed as a lens through which layers of loss and remembrance are discerned, the salience of Montague’s collection in the present is made manifold. It provides a series of intersections between the private and public realms of grief, loss, memorialization and remembrance and it offers insights into the idea of collective memory and how it relates to individual experience.

Multidirectional Memory

In his book *Multidirectional Memory*, Michael Rothberg rejects the notion that memory is a finite resource within which different historical events must compete for exclusive attention.²⁸ Rather, he argues that memory can function multidirectionally, where the remembering of one set of historical events can increase and sharpen our attentiveness to another, even if each seems at first sight to be only remotely related. Thus, Rothberg suggests, the confrontation of different histories in the public sphere need not lead to a scenario of competitive remembrance, where one discourse inevitably ends up diverting focus from the other. Instead, for Rothberg, the interaction of different historical memories has the potential to create a ‘productive, intercultural dynamic’, a dynamic that allows connections to be made ‘between diverse places and times during the act of remembrance’.²⁹ Implementing Rothberg’s ideas and thinking about Montague multidirectionally allows us to consider connections between New Caledonia’s colonial history and the events of World War One, rather than seeing them as distinct, unrelated, narratives of loss. For example, a poignant correspondence might be drawn between the tears of the elderly Kanak woman Montague encounters when she brings a flower to leave as an offering to the skulls of her ancestors, and Amy Montague’s grief-stricken state at the death of her two young sons in the war. The bringing together of these two events through our remembering of Montague is not to engage in a simplistic comparison or to suggest that the suffering of one group negates or lessens that of another. Rather, it might allow us to connect the frameworks within which two different cultures dealt with loss and remembrance individually and collectively in the early twentieth century. Shaped as it was by the seemingly disparate and discrete histories of colonialism in

New Caledonia and the outbreak of World War One, Montague's collection requires a multidirectional curation of the various provenances of its pasts in the present.

The intersecting of these two histories also reveals the potential for memory to contest received narratives of Kanak dispossession. Although the convictions of Haddon and his contemporaries that Pacific cultures were under threat of extinction undoubtedly shaped Montague's thinking and thus his collecting activity, the interactions with Kanak people that Montague writes about in his journal, the photographs he takes, the objects he collects and the related ethnographic information he records, all suggest a more complicated picture than was permitted by the disciplinary framework in which he had been trained. Indeed, contradictions are explicitly visible in his writings. Having described at length the loss of what he considers to be traditional Kanak life, he writes that 'when a certain degree of familiarity and good relations with local people has been established it is surprising how much more of the old culture will be found to remain than is generally imagined'.³⁰ Montague's experiences reveal the complex, strategic, decisions being made by Kanak people at that time, in relation to the giving up of cultural artefacts, and reveal his attempts to begin to make sense of how cultural behaviours might survive the loss of material possessions.

Rather than reading Montague's writings as offering a familiar story of Kanak loss in the face of European ascendancy, other layers can be discerned which concern Kanak agency and endurance. To illustrate this point, let us return to the magic stones. Despite his exhortations of cultural decline and the loss of traditional ways of life, Montague witnesses these stones in regular use in the Houailou Valley and elsewhere during his research. Further, he is able to collect their particular names in local languages, the specifics of how they are used and the myths and narratives that form the framework of Kanak life of which they are an integral part. All this he records, not just in his journal, in his manuscript and in the notes for his catalogue but also on the stones themselves; each stone is labelled with its Kanak name, an English translation, the location it was collected, and the date it was collected, alongside Montague's name and his Cambridge college affiliation (Fig. 6). The entangled nature of encounters between Kanak and European cultures are made materially manifest in the now inseparable nature of the stones themselves and Montague's labels. They bear the traces of Montague's Cambridge training but when viewed in the context of the

historical events unfolding around him, they tell other stories too. In this sense, I would argue, the stones represent a concrete conduit of multidirectional memory.

In an essay for the British Museum's book *Melanesia: Art and Encounter*, François Wadra demonstrates, from a contemporary Kanak perspective, a way of reconciling some of the conflicting narratives of loss and endurance that Montague witnessed but struggled to articulate in his fieldwork. In a discussion relating to the confiscation of magic stones by missionaries, Wadra challenges the notion that their absence from the social landscape resulted in a rupture in the traditional way of life of the Kanak people. When magic stones, or other artefacts were taken, he writes:

It is only the material object which has been removed, not the spiritual one. To illustrate this, we can imagine a football which is taken from a child because he is playing in an inappropriate place. It is only the ball which has been confiscated, not 'football' itself ... The idea that Kanak are disconnected from their culture, or that there has been a break with tradition because they no longer know how to make an object or engage in certain activities is an illusion.³¹

Wadra's analogy makes an important distinction between a material object and its cultural provenance; the loss of the former does not necessarily beckon the disappearance of the latter. The loss of the stones marks European incursion but not cultural disappearance. Indeed, and as I will now consider in commenting on the curation of Montague's collection as a multidirectional phenomenon, the magic stones index the persistence of Kanak cultural values amidst the exhibition's marking of the losses which gather around Montague's life, work and untimely death.

Exhibiting Magic & Memory

A fundamental feature of Rothberg's hypothesis about memory is that it is always a contemporary phenomenon – an active, dynamic process that while concerned with the past, happens in the present. Given my sense of Montague's collection as a conduit of myriad histories, its recent curation sought both to witness and broker its enduring multidirectional possibilities. In September 2014, a small exhibition went on display in the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology's Micro-Gallery, a space that was created during the 2012 re-design of the ground floor galleries and is used to showcase recent research into the Museum's collections. Its two display cases and

wall space were the setting for the exhibition *Magic & Memory: Paul Montague in New Caledonia*.³² One of the display cases was entirely taken up with a spectacular Kanak mask, which had been especially conserved, and its various fragile feather and human hair elements secured to allow it to be exhibited (Fig. 7). Despite it being the most visually impressive item that Montague collected, it is one that he wrote very little about in his journal, noting simply that he paid an old man from the Hienghène region twenty francs for it on 27 September 1914, and that he was unable to gain much insight into its use or particular significance other than that it was used in ceremonies.³³ The majority of the second case in the exhibition was taken up with an arrangement of some of the magic stones.

As part of the research for the exhibition, the *Pacific Presences* project was able to support visits to Cambridge by two Kanak scholars and several scholars of Kanak culture to engage with the Montague material. Working with the artefacts themselves, but also with his catalogue, journal and manuscript brought about some insightful encounters (Fig. 8). At the heart of these, just as they had been for Montague during his fieldwork, were the magic stones. During one visit a Kanak researcher commented that one of the stones (a petroglyph collected by Montague from Hienghène on 22 September 1914) appeared to be damp to the touch. On closer examination the stone did indeed seem to be moist on one side and the colour of the stone seemed darker, as it would when wet. Having discussed various scenarios and possible explanations, the researcher concluded that the stone had taken the opportunity of being in the presence of a Kanak visitor to shed tears as a means of demonstrating a desire to be removed from its contemporary museum setting and returned to New Caledonia (Fig. 9). The researcher was far from advocating that it should be repatriated, but rather stating a simple fact, as he saw it: the potency of the stone had endured in the present and was attempting to effect an outcome, exactly as it would have done in the past.

A second Kanak researcher, who comes from the region where Montague worked, also expressed his conviction of the stones' on-going potency. When confronted with the stones in the Museum's storeroom he delegated responsibility for examining them to a non-Kanak colleague, stating that he did not want to handle them. He warned his colleague to handle them carefully and respectfully otherwise he would 'be sick by the end of the week'. He also cautioned against a plan by the *Pacific Presences* project to mount an exhibition of the stones in New Caledonia to

mark the centenary of Montague's death in 2017. He explained that the stones were still too powerful, and that if the exhibition went ahead any accident or illness that occurred while it was being staged would be blamed upon the stones and therefore, by association, the Museum, its staff and any Kanak advisors who had been involved. It was simply too dangerous for the stones to return to New Caledonia. What was of particular interest to this Kanak scholar, however, were Montague's written notes about the stones, their function and usage and their association with particular families, some of whom have descendants living in the area today.

The challenge in mounting the exhibition in Cambridge, therefore, was how to convey the significance of the stones and their enduring potency. The first decision was to dedicate a large part of the display case to the stones. It was hoped that their physical presence would challenge visitors to consider what might appear to be natural, unmodified, stones as highly significant cultural artefacts. To try and demonstrate the stones' prevalence in Kanak life, we selected numerous examples of the same type of stone; thus we displayed a group of eel stones, which were all more or less identical. Similarly, we also displayed a wide range of types of stone to convey the ubiquity of their usage; the display included yam stones, eel stones, taro stones, a stone for making thunder, a war stone and the petroglyph that had been damp in the stores. In the exhibition's information panel we included a photograph of a Kanak colleague researching the collection in 2013, to illustrate the on-going relevance of the collection. Finally, as a result of our experiences working with the stones alongside Kanak colleagues and, also, inspired by the way that Montague had approached his own research during his time in New Caledonia, we presented the stones as exactly what they are: magic stones. Taking their potency seriously, each stone was presented with a description of its particular power accompanied by a short paragraph that noted their usage in all areas of Kanak life and the context of colonial and missionary influence that enabled Montague to collect so many.

A further element displayed in the same case as the stones was a lute, made by Montague, which is now in the care of one of his nieces, who kindly agreed to lend it to the Museum for the exhibition.³⁴ The inclusion of the lute was an attempt to encourage visitors to remember Montague as an individual, and to try and bring an intimate perspective to the scale of the loss of life in World War One. Montague made the lute from parts of broken planes in Salonika, shortly before his own BE12 was shot down in October 1917. Perhaps imagining some future role for the lute, as part of

the legacy she was desperate to achieve for her son, Amy Montague handwrote a museum-style label and tied it to the instrument's handle. The label reads:

Lute made out of broken aeroplanes by Paul Montague while on active service in Macedonia in 1917. He sang to this the night before he was killed.

The final element of the exhibition was a specially commissioned artwork created by Rebecca Jewell, an artist who has spent time in the Pacific and whose work focuses on two main themes: museum collections and the natural world, in particular birds. Jewell visited Cambridge and examined Montague's ethnographic collections, as well as some of the natural history specimens he had collected while in the Montebello Islands in 1912, which are now housed in the Cambridge University Museum of Zoology. Using a technique she has developed that allows her to print on to feathers, she created *The Birdman of Salonika*, an archival giclée print of a BE12 plane, collaged with feathers upon which are printed images of the artefacts and specimens that Montague collected (Fig. 10). The feathers also include images of Montague himself, as a child, a schoolboy and an adult, as well as an image of the lute, his New Caledonian journal and other elements of his life.

Conclusion

The process of researching Montague's written archive, and the collection of Kanak artefacts he acquired in 1914, has clearly demonstrated the salience of the collection in the present as well as opening up new ways for us to engage with the past. Specifically, I have argued that by reinterpreting Montague multidirectionally, through the creative, dynamic bringing together of the intersecting historical narratives that surround the making of his collection, we illuminate potential points of connection between European and Pacific cultures that can inflect our understandings of the past in the present.

Jewell's artwork staged the palimpsestic and multidirectional nature of the Montague collection now housed in Cambridge but indebted to so many overlapping contexts: Montague's progressive education, the emergence of anthropology, colonial and missionizing endeavours, the First World War, new aviation technologies, Kanak dispossession, the loss of loved ones. Montague's collection engages multidirectionally with each of these but is not contained by any single one discretely.

To curate it, we need to realize that the battles of Salonika had something to do with Houailou; that the conditions that led a Kanak woman to push petals through the cracks of a crate are not merely coincident with those that necessitated a Cambridge-trained anthropologist to build a lute from airplane parts. To remember Montague, as I discovered, is to confront a range of multidirectional connections and points of contact that involved all visitors to the exhibition – regardless of standpoint – in an act of cross-cultural engagement where the limits of near and far, past and present, collector and dispossessed, culture and object, are untidy and mutually engaged.

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¹ Cited in H. Geismar and A. Herle, *Moving Images: John Layard, fieldwork and photography and Malakula since 1914* (Adelaide, 2009), p. 6.

² *Pacific Presences: Oceanic Art and European Museums* (2013-2018) is a European Research Council Advanced Investigator Grant awarded to Professor Nicholas Thomas at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge.

³ A.H. Quiggin, *Haddon The Head Hunter: A Short Sketch of the life of A.C. Haddon* (Cambridge, 1942), p. 89.

⁴ P. D. Montague, *New Caledonia Journal*, entries for June 1914.

⁵ Each Kanak tribe had its own words and terms to describe these stones. In French they are generally referred to as ‘pierres magique’ or ‘pierres sacrées’. In English they are referred to as ‘magic stones’ or ‘god stones’. Montague referred to them as ‘magic stones’ and I follow his usage here.

⁶ The British Museum’s Hadfield collection contains sixteen magic stones, all with labels handwritten by Emma Hadfield describing her understanding of their use.

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- ⁷ P.D. Montague, 'Part 6: Religion and Magic of the Natives of the Houailou Valley' in *Ethnological Notes from the Houailou Valley, New Caledonia*, unpublished manuscript (n.d.), p. 36.
- ⁸ F. Wadra, 'Magic Stones in Traditional Kanak Society' in L. Bolton *et al.* (eds.), *Melanesia: Art and Encounter* (London, 2013), p. 310.
- ⁹ M. Naepels, *Conjurer la Guerre: Violence et Pouvoir à Houailou (Nouvelle-Caledonie)* (Paris, 2013), p. 102.
- ¹⁰ '... rien ne relèvera[it] plus [ceux-ci] de leur abjection, ils [étaient] résignés à mourir' cited in E. Kasarhérou & Roger Boulay (eds.), *Kanak: L'art est une parole* (Paris, 2013), p.286.
- ¹¹ R. Boulay, *Kanak: L'art est une parole* (Paris, 2013), p.286.
- ¹² F. Sarasin, *La Nouvelle-Caldonie et les îles Loyalty, souvenirs de voyage d'un naturaliste* (Paris, 1913) pp. 200-201.
- ¹³ See Sarasin, *op. cit.*, p. 194.
- ¹⁴ F. Wadra and J. Adams, 'Interview' in K. Jacobs *et al.* (eds.), *Trophies, Relics and Curios? Missionary Heritage from Africa and the Pacific* (Leiden, 2015), p. 89.
- ¹⁵ Letter from P.D. Montague to A.C. Haddon dated 10 August 1914.
- ¹⁶ See letter from P.D. Montague to A.C. Haddon *op. cit.*
- ¹⁷ P.D. Montague, 'Introduction' in *Ethnological Notes from the Houailou Valley, New Caledonia*, unpublished manuscript (n.d.), p. 2.
- ¹⁸ P.D. Montague, *New Caledonia Journal*, entry for 4 August 1914.
- ¹⁹ See Montague *op. cit.*, entry for 4 August 1914.
- ²⁰ See Montague *op. cit.*, entry for 4 August 1914.
- ²¹ P.D. Montague, *New Caledonia Journal*, entry for 6 August 1914.
- ²² Letter from P.D. Montague to A.C. Haddon dated 10 August 1914.
- ²³ P.D. Montague, *New Caledonia Journal*, entry for 5 August 1914.
- ²⁴ Letter from Amy Montague to Professor Harmer dated May 31 1918, Natural History Museum Archives, Index, 1919, DP 205/66.
- ²⁵ Letter from A.C. Haddon to Professor Harmer dated 24 April 1918, Natural History Museum Archives, Index, 1919, DP 205/66.
- ²⁶ E. Kasarhérou, 'The Inventory of Kanak Collections in Europe: Stolen Heritage or Common Heritage to Revive?' in S. Ferracuti *et al.* (eds.), *Beyond Modernity: Do Ethnography Museums Need Ethnography?* (Rome, 2013), p. 105.
- ²⁷ See A. Wakefield and S. Moody *Under the Devil's Eye: The British Military Experience in Macedonia 1915-1918* (Barnsley, 2011), for an overview of the Salonika campaign.
- ²⁸ M. Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, 2009).
- ²⁹ See Rothberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 3; 11.
- ³⁰ P.D. Montague, 'Introduction' in *Ethnological Notes from the Houailou Valley, New Caledonia*, unpublished manuscript (n.d.), p. 2.
- ³¹ See Wadra, *op. cit.*, p. 312.
- ³² The exhibition ran from 27 September 2014 – 9 March 2015.
- ³³ P.D. Montague, 'Catalogue compiled by the collector', (n.d.), pp. 19-20.
- ³⁴ Jennifer Estcourt, the youngest of three surviving daughters born to Montague's sister, Ruth, lent the lute to the Museum. I am grateful to Jennifer and her sisters June and Susan for their support in researching Montague's collections.