On the Australian-Melanesian frontier: Archaeology results from Mabuyag, Western Torres Strait

SEMINAR PRESENTED BY THE CENTRE FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL SCIENCE (CAS)

DATE: FRIDAY 28 OCTOBER
TIME: 1.30PM-2.30PM
VENUE: 41.G03A, UOW
PRESENTER: DR DUNCAN WRIGHT

Dr. Duncan Wright is a Lecturer at the Australian National University specialising in Australian Indigenous archaeology. Previously he held research fellowships at Griffith and Monash Universities. Since beginning his studies at Lampeter University (Wales) in 1998, Duncan has participated in a wide variety of projects including excavations of rock shelters and open sites in Western Australia, highland Papua New Guinea, Palau, Torres Strait and Czech Republic. Dr. Wrights’ PhD examined the archaeology of community emergence and development on Mabuyag Island in western Torres Strait, the start of a decade long collaboration with Islanders. Current archaeological research examines the spread of a mortuary cult from western to eastern Torres Strait, also the long-term history of human activity in the Wellington Range region, Arnhem Land.

SEMINAR OVERVIEW: ON THE AUSTRALIAN-MELANESIAN FRONTIER

In 1971 a seminal symposium addressed the role of Torres Strait as “bridge or barrier” between communities in Papua New Guinea and mainland Australia. Variation between predominately horticultural and pottery using Melanesians and hunter-gatherer Australians was observed to be “starker and more perplexing than anywhere else in the world” (Walker 1972: 405). The subsequent 45 years witnessed escalation in archaeological research in Torres Strait, providing new information about mid-late Holocene connections between Australia, Island Melanesia and the wider Pacific. This includes the author’s work (between 2005-present) at villages and ceremony sites on Mabuyag in Western Torres Strait. This seminar collates archaeological, linguistic and genetic information from Torres Strait and reassesses past human movements on the Australian-Melanesian frontier.