

Oxford's Cook-voyage collection in historiographical perspective, 1772–2019

The Cook-voyage collection at the University of Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum has a complex history, yet it has not been subjected to systematic research; Jeremy Coote aims to study the collection and its 250-year history and publish a comprehensive scholarly account that will include both a catalogue raisonné and a historiographically informed account of how it has been used, presented, and interpreted by scholars, curators, and artists

The University of Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum cares for one of the world's great collections of Pacific art and material culture. Comprising more than 200 objects acquired on James Cook's famous voyages to the South Seas in the second half of the eighteenth century, the collection has two parts. The first, consisting of some 30 objects from Tahiti and New Zealand, was acquired by the famous naturalist Joseph Banks on the first of Cook's three voyages and presented in 1772 to Christ Church, the college he had attended while an undergraduate at Oxford. The second – consisting of some 180 objects, from Tahiti and New Zealand, but also from Tonga, Rapa Nui (Easter Island), the Marquesas Islands, New Caledonia, and Vanuatu – was collected by the natural philosophers Johann Reinhold Forster and his son Johann George Forster on the second of Cook's voyages and presented to the Ashmolean Museum in 1776. Since the 1880s both parts of the collection have been housed at the Pitt Rivers Museum.

Despite its importance, the collection has not previously been comprehensively researched and published. It has received varying degrees of attention – and of benign neglect – over the years, with particular pieces being well-known to



Knife, maripi in Maori; of wood, shark teeth, and ochre; from New Zealand. Part of the collection made by J. R. and J. G. Forster on Captain Cook's Second Pacific Voyage (1772–1775). From a photograph taken for the Museum by Malcolm Osman © Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford (1886.1.1161).

specialists and others unattended to for more than two hundred years. Some individual objects have been studied in detail by scholars and students of Pacific art and culture, conserved by specialists, and loaned to exhibitions around the world, as well as inspiring new works by contemporary Pacific artists. Others await proper scholarly and public attention.

The Fellowship will enable all the work that has been carried out to date to be brought together, for gaps in the records to be filled in, and for a comprehensive scholarly account to be prepared for publication. This will include both a detailed catalogue raisonné and a historiographically informed account of how the collection as a whole – and each

object in it – has been used, presented, and interpreted by scholars, curators, and artists. Though focussed on one particular collection, the work will throw light on changing attitudes to and perceptions of the material products of the Pacific over the past 250 years and on the development of Pacific history, anthropology, and art history.

Looking to the future, the forthcoming decade-long commemorations of the 250th anniversary of the voyages (1768–1780) and of Cook's death in Hawai'i in 1779 will refocus attention on the Cook-voyage collections around the world and stimulate even greater interest – amongst academics, researchers, artists, source communities, and publishers. This is thus the perfect moment to research and publish one of the world's great Cook-voyage collections.

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Major Research Fellowship*



LEFT Pacific artist Michel Tuffery and Leverhulme Major Research Fellow Jeremy Coote discussing a canoe baler, tiharu in Maori, from the collection made by Joseph Banks on Captain Cook's First Pacific Voyage (1768–1771) at the Pitt Rivers Museum in 2011. From a photograph taken by David Paul © Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.