

## Moving Images

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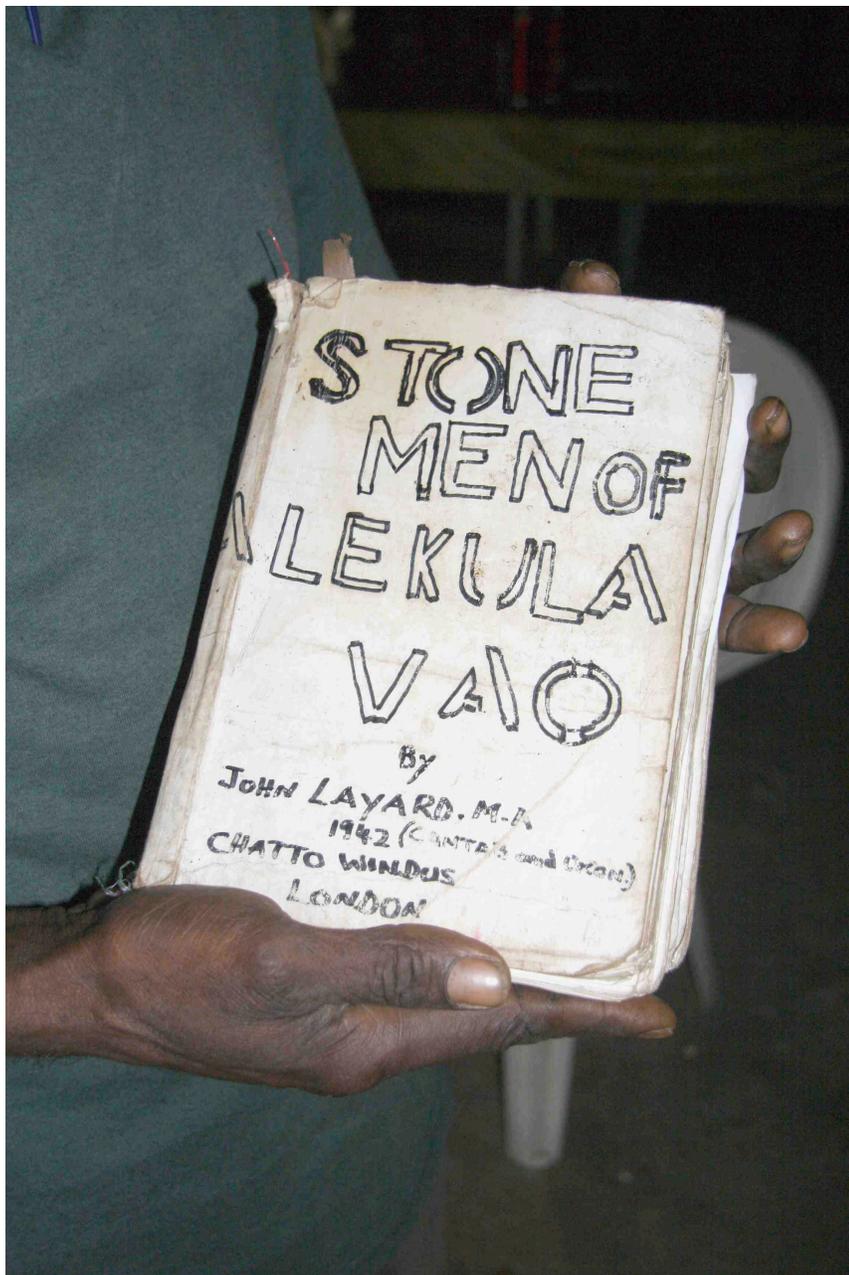
Haidy Geismar, NYU

This posting is the "official book launch" of my co-authored (with Dr. Anita Herle) book, *Moving Images: John Layard, Fieldwork and Photography on Malakula since 1914*, just out with Crawford House Publishing (in Australia and New Zealand) and Hawaii University Press (rest of world).

To celebrate the launch of the book, University of Hawaii Press has generously allowed me to make a voucher available to Material World Readers. You can download the order form here.

[Download file](#)

When I first went to Vanuatu in 2000 to do research at the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, I took with me a whole bunch of historic photographs, and photographs of object, collected by Cambridge anthropologists for the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. During this time, I spent a couple of months on the small island of Vao, in North East Malakula, working on traditional copyright issues with local carvers, and quickly found that there was a local obsession with the hefty anthropological monograph *Stone Men of Malakula*, by John Layard.



A Photocopy of Stone Men of Malekula on Vao, made by Vianney Atpatun of Vao island. One of the things I was asked to do during this trip was translate the 1000 page book into Bislama - a process that made it significantly longer, and was very frustrating for all of us. This piqued my interest and sparked a research project that was to continue for the next 6 years. I'm not alone, most of my colleagues working in Vanuatu have engaged in depth with Layard's work and he, along with Speiser, Deacon and Codrington, is part of the corpus of ethnography we, and the people we work with, return to over and over again. John Layard has recently been rediscovered as a kind of dysfunctional founding father of modern

British social anthropology. A student of W.H.R Rivers at Cambridge, he travelled with Rivers to the New Hebrides in 1914. Enthralled by his charismatic supervisor, Layard was folorn when Rivers left him alone on the Small Island of Atchin and went off to do survey work around the archipelago. In many ways Layard was forced into undertaking one of the earliest forms of participatory, long-term fieldwork (he corresponded from the field with Malinowski who was just beginning his work in New Guinea, and who recounted how excited he was about using River's genealogical method). Layard was not however completely unprepared (and had obviously been given some training in methods at Cambridge, and we discuss early photographic methods and early visual anthropology in the book). Alongside developing Rivers' genealogical method, Layard took over 400 photographs, learnt the language of Atchin and Vao, made an object collection for the Cambridge Museum. He stayed on Atchin for nearly ten months (excluding an interlude in Sydney where he tried, and failed, to enlist in the Great War, and a brief period recovering from Malaria on Norfolk Island where he met up with Rivers who was on his way back to Cambridge). His fieldnotes, now held in the Mandeville Library at UCSD (link to the collection [here](#)), are an inspiration to any burgeoning fieldworker. Despite his own self-deprecating account (in his unpublished autobiography entitled "History of a Failure") Layard developed an amazing system of recording and crossreferencing his notes in the field. *Stone Men of Malakula* is truly encyclopedic (hence its interest to Small Islanders in the present day, more of which in a minute).

Layard made friends and was pretty involved in local life - but found fieldwork psychologically taxing (and unlike many others, was candid about this in his accounts). Layard came back to Cambridge in 1915 and promptly had a rather dramatic nervous breakdown (complete with a final rupture from Rivers in a bed and breakfast in scotland, near the Craiglockhart sanitorium where Rivers was treating WW1 Soldiers such as Siegfried Sassoon for shellshock). After several years bedridden, and doing very little, Layard had a dramatic encounter with psychoanalysis that led him to study in Europe (for more colourful stories about his time in Berlin and Zurich, his friendship with Auden and Isherwood, and his relationship with his analyst Jung, email me, read some of my other publications, go to the source in San Diego, or get *Moving Images*).

To cut to the chase, Layard abandoned anthropology for psychoanalysis, although he always maintained an interest in the discipline and until he fell out with Evans Pritchard was peripherally on the scene of Oxford anthropology when he lived in Oxford as a practising psychoanalyst. *Stone Men of Malekula* was eventually published in 1942, earning him his long awaited doctorate.

Back to Vanuatu where Layard's fieldnotes and photographs continued to circulate, brought into the country by various generations of anthropologists who used them as trigger points for research, and as tools for cultural revitalization. I returned three times, in 2003, 2006, and 2009 to the Small Islands with the entire corpus of layard's images, and eventually with their captions and fieldnotes which I discovered in the San Diego archives, and then with my book manuscript. I was able to work with the images in conjunction of a wide variety of contextual information, the references points of kastom, christianity and development; the textual authority of labels and captions in Layard's own hand, and my own analytic frame. All of which became points of discussion during fieldwork with the images. I also took an extensive set of my own images, co-authored by my friends in the Small Islands (and discuss this extensively in my chapter). For contemporary ni-Vanuatu these images are not only ethnographic documents, they are crucial forms of evidence of

ancestral presence, tools in legal disputes about land rights, sources of inspiration for the revitalization of contemporary ritual and artistic practice. They are contentiously used in local competition for access to resources and by dance groups recreating ritual practices long discouraged by the Catholic and Seventh Day Adventist missionaries that based themselves in the island communities of Vao, Atchin. They are also highly reflexive, providing people for a way to negotiate with the practice of fieldwork and with anthropologists themselves...to make sense of, and negotiate with, what we do.

*Moving Images* traces the social life of these photographs. We start (in a chapter by Cambridge curator Anita Herle) with the entangled histories of photography and anthropology, outlining the context that sent Layard into the field, what happened to the images when copy prints were sent back to the Cambridge Museum, and how Layard himself was starkly aware of the way in which photographs can be embodiments of subjective experience as well as objects of scientific knowledge production. Anita Herle looks in depth at the culture of British social anthropology, and its nascent methodology and compares Layard's work to that of his contemporaries including Haddon, Malinowski and Landtmann.

We then present a previously unpublished essay by Layard himself musing on the effects of "the coming of the white man on Atchin", on the colonial moment that was so often excised from the accounts of early anthropologists. Layard himself never referred, in print, to the trader and missionaries that lived with him on Atchin during his stay.

A chapter by Kirk Huffman, a former doctoral student at Cambridge and the first curator of the newly independent Vanuatu Cultural Centre, recounts how Layard's photographs were drawn into the cultural activism and revivification of *kastom* in the run up to Vanuatu's independence in 1980. Huffman's own photographs from the early days of independence emphasise the crucial role of photography (and 1970s anthropology) in the constitution of a national traditional culture in Vanuatu. Huffman remains honorary curator of the VCC and has been influential in helping to construct a workable and viable model of culture, now being extended into projects such as traditional economic and development.

Finally, my own chapter recounts the resonance and significance of these "visual histories" in the present day context of Vanuatu. I talk about the excavation of information using photographs, the ways in which photographs are embedded into different structures of knowledge and in turn create those structures, and talk about the phenomenology of looking at, and using, photographs not only to do research but to talk about the past.

Interspersed throughout these chapters are photo essays which deal with different themes pertaining to fieldwork and photography: Layard's interlocutors, his interest in the megalithic culture of the small islands, the way in which ritual and temporality may be evoked in photographic series, the sensuous nature of photography and of the photographic process.

Speaking now from a personal vantage point - Alongside all of this analytic richness, archival research and fieldwork, I think that the best thing about this book is the way that the form mirrors the content. It's a book about the collaborative nature of photography and fieldwork, from a very early period in anthropology to the present day. The book itself was produced collaboratively, not only between its official authors, myself, Anita Herle, Layard and Kirk Huffman, but also was written in collaboration with people in Vanuatu from many communities. We published a second "edition"

of the book, with over 200 images, their captions translated into Bislama and an introduction in Bislama by Numa Fred Longga, curator of the MALakula Cultural Centre and my principle partner in research in Vanuatu. 1000 copies were printed and circulated for free throughout the Small Islands and to schools and libraries throughout Vanuatu. (Thanks to the British Museum Melanesia Project, the Bergen Pacific Studies Group, the ASAO Grant to return Indigenous Knowledge to Pacific Island Communities. the Cambridge Museum and NYU for supporting this community volume).

### *The cover of our community volume*

The process of fieldwork, of returning over and over to a community with this collection of images, and of continuing to take photographs during this process, enabled the Small Islanders I worked with to both author and edit the book - they commented on early drafts and made it very clear what they wanted out of the small volume - to the extent that many photographs are actually not included. Given the lengthy time of research we were able to accommodate their wishes, and demands. I've written several articles about the process of this research, and both the more problematic aspects of bringing important pieces of 'evidence' back to communities and the ethical

issues of accessibility and archival accountability (you can download some of these [here](#)).

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Thanks to the communities of Vao and Atchin - especially the Maltaus family, Chief Jean Mal Varu and his family, to Vianney Atpatun, Cesar Sami and George Rowsy, and especially to Numa Fred, Chief Terry. Thanks Kirk, Anita and Kathy Creely and the crew at the Mandeville Library. Thanks to Ryan Schram for compiling our bibliography of Layard's work. Thanks to Richard Layard to granting us access and copyrights to his father's work. Thanks to Elizabeth Edwards, Jeremy Macclancy, Chris Wright, Chris Pinney and Lissant Bolton for being great readers.