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Book Review: *An English Girl in New Guinea: Kathleen Haddon's Journal and Photographs from New Guinea, September 16–November 18, 1914*

Abstract

Book review: Kathleen Haddon, author, and Virginia-Lee Webb and Jonathan Fogel, editors, An English Girl in New Guinea: Kathleen Haddon's Journal and Photographs from New Guinea, September 16–November 18, 1914. San Francisco, California: J. M. Fogel Media, Inc. and Premier Arts Editions, 2023. ISBN 13: 9781733007856. 192 pages, color illustrations, maps, portraits. Hardcover \$89.

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An English Girl in New Guinea: Kathleen Haddon's Journal and Photographs from New Guinea, September 16–November 18, 1914 invokes a series of spatial and temporal returns to a particular moment in the history of British anthropology,¹ and, more importantly, of the communities that Kathleen Haddon (later Mrs. O. H. T. Rishbeth, 1888–1961) and her father, Alfred Cort (A. C.) Haddon (1855–1940), visited in Papua New Guinea over two and half months in 1914. Co-edited by Virginia-Lee Webb, a former research curator of African and Oceanic art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and now independent scholar, and Jonathan Fogel, *Tribal Art* magazine's editor in chief, the book is a production of Premier Arts Editions, "a boutique book publisher founded in 2023 to present rare images and previously unpublished accounts of the arts and cultures of traditional peoples around the world."² This volume is the first in a series entitled "Photographic Journeys," which promises to explore other notable unpublished photographic collections of communities in Papua New Guinea. The book will be of interest to a broad set of readers.

An English Girl in New Guinea is a visual and textual account of the Haddons' little-known but anthropologically significant trip through the southeastern coast of the island of New Guinea (known as the Territory of Papua), which was at the time under Australian colonial governance. The trip has been overshadowed by A. C. Haddon's earlier pioneering work in the Torres Strait (1888 and 1898).³ Building upon C. G. Seligman's 1904 survey and his student Gunner Landtman's intensive work among the Kiwai (1910–12),⁴ Haddon's 1914 journey informed a series of publications through which he synthesized his theories about the region's material culture and culture areas.⁵

As noted by Anita Herle in her essay in this volume, the Haddons' trip marked a critical juncture in the "Oceanic phase" of British anthropology (1898–1930). A. C. Haddon planned it to coincide with the 1914 convening of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in several Australian cities. This meeting brought together pillars of the discipline—Haddon, Seligman, W. H. R. Rivers, Baldwin Spencer, Henry Balfour, R. R. Marrett, and others—as well as its future architects, including A. R. Brown and Bronisław Malinowski.⁶ Though Haddon was subsequently displaced through a later reframing of the discipline by Malinowski and others,⁷ his 1914 trip's legacy for the regional understanding of Papua is complicated; while hinting at the region's dynamic nature, Haddon's work also laid the foundation for misunderstandings about the region's art and cultures. Recent scholarship has picked up his glimpses of cultural synergies and has helped clarify otherwise overlooked aspects of communities' dynamic materiality.⁸

Kathleen Haddon's hitherto unpublished journal of their trip, which constitutes the bulk of the volume in question, is preceded by a foreword and four short contextual essays. Interspersed throughout the text are 178 of Kathleen's approximately 300 photographs from the journey.⁹ Equipped with a portable vest pocket Kodak (VPK) camera and a quarter-plate stand camera, twenty-six-year-old Kathleen served as the trip's official photographer. Alongside her remarkable photographic skills, Kathleen had a degree in zoology from Newnham College at Cambridge (though not officially conferred until 1948) and had worked as a demonstrator of zoology at the university for three years.

Although it was her first time in New Guinea, Kathleen was already a published author and possessed a keen interest in string figures (see Herle's and Rishbeth's chapters). Her relentless pursuit of string figures matched her father's push to document everything related to canoes and the art forms they encountered. Throughout the trip, Kathleen used string figures to break through the awkwardness of their cross-cultural colonial encounters and actively engage with

people. This provided her with opportunities to take close portraits, which are unusual for the time. In one image (Fig. 5.123) she sits among several Papuan constabularies in Port Moresby, and in another (Fig. 5.99) a young man, who had waded out into the water to meet the Haddons' launch while its engine was being fixed, shows Kathleen a string figure.

Kathleen's manuscript and photographs provide intimate glimpses of the Haddons' journey, the communities with whom they interacted, and the emergent infrastructures of colonialism. As Webb and Haraha note in their essays, her images, when juxtaposed with both earlier and later photographs by other European travelers to the region, provide an historical benchmark by which to understand regional continuity and change. While not the first foreign female photographer in Papua, Kathleen's images are one of the most significant extant bodies of systematic work made by a woman in this period.¹⁰ In this regard, *An English Girl in New Guinea* is an important addition to a series of monographs detailing the image worlds created by outsiders to document Oceanic communities.¹¹

The book's shorter essays help frame the intellectual project and contemporary significance of the 1914 trip, while also delving into Kathleen Haddon's biography and her photographic legacy. The foreword by Nicholas Thomas, director of University of Cambridge's Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA), and the introduction by Anita Herle, former professor of museum anthropology and senior curator at the MAA, provide some intellectual history around the Haddons' expedition and the subsequent movement of Kathleen's photographs to the MAA. Sebastian Haraha, from luku village in Oroko and former staff member at the Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery, provides a celebratory perspective on Kathleen's photography as one way to help presence the region's "missing history and [connect] this with the present" (19). In my 2000 trip with Haraha through the Papuan Gulf, communities found Kathleen's images very striking.¹²

The volume also republishes excerpts of a biography of Kathleen written by her son, Henry Rishbeth.¹³ In addition to her accomplishments in zoology and documenting string figures, Kathleen traveled with her father to North America in 1909 and, following their trip to Papua, served as a nursing auxiliary. While a nurse, she met Oswald Rishbeth; they married in 1917 and had three children. Until she retired in 1953, Kathleen worked as a librarian in the Haddon Library at the MAA. While in that position, she wrote two books about string figures and participated in several television and radio shows. In *An English Girl in New*

Guinea, Kathleen Haddon rightfully emerges as an unacknowledged pioneer of documenting the Indigenous art form of string figures in Oceania.¹⁴

Webb's essay explores Kathleen Haddon's significance as a photographer, detailing how she obtained images (e.g., alternating between two cameras and taking both posed and covert images) and the difficult environmental conditions she had to work under (e.g., poor lighting and issues with water temperature while trying to develop her images). Drawing on her previous work, Webb places Kathleen into conversation with other visitors to the region who took photographs, namely Rev. William George Lawes (1881–1891), A. B. Lewis (1912), Ernest Sterne Usher (1914), and Frank Hurley (1923).¹⁵ There is a larger project to be done here—one exploring the various gendered dimensions of these visual economies, how these images fed into the anthropological imagination and understanding of the region, and their contemporary significance for communities in Papua New Guinea.

The book shines through Kathleen's photographs, some of which have been reproduced as full pages. Others in smaller formats, presented alongside relevant portions of her manuscript, provide a useful approximation of what Kathleen may have envisaged when writing her narrative. Her account shows her father collecting information (see Figs. 5.15, 5.57), missionaries and government officials with whom they worked (see Figs. 5.19, 5.33, 5.55, 5.68, 5.115, 5.120), and the Papuan Constabulary and workers who assisted them (Figs. 5.56, 5.98, 5.106, 5.113, 5.114, 5.123). Most of the images are of Papuans they encountered, the environment, and the many material forms that defined these communities (architecture, art, canoes, etc.). The editors have done a good job giving the reader a wide breadth of images by which to judge Kathleen's work and her focus. I did find a few errors in locality attribution—for example, Figure 5.72 is attributed to Kairu. On close inspection, the image on the opposite page (Fig. 5.73) is of the shrine behind the first but is attributed to Kairu or Ukiaravi. Added to this, the carvings in this image are identified as *gope*, which is the term used by cultural groups found in the western Papuan Gulf. Among the Purari they are known as *koi*. While these are minor details, it would have been useful if the editors had consistently used the terminology of the cultural areas that the Haddons visited.

Kathleen's unpublished manuscript is written in a straightforward and unassuming style. I suspect that she modeled her writing on her father's popular 1901 account of the 1898 Torres Strait Expedition.¹⁶ As with that book, Kathleen's manuscript provides another means by which to understand the sociality of colo-

nialism as it was emerging in Papua at the time. By 1914, rubber and coconut plantations had been established with varying success along the coast,¹⁷ the recently pacified Papuan Gulf was becoming a source for labor, and the central Gulf was transforming as a result of the opening of the Vailala Oilfields in 1912.¹⁸ Meanwhile, Anglicans, Catholics, the London Missionary Society (LMS), and the Australian colonial government were solidifying their network of stations along the coast.¹⁹ The Haddons relied on these networks—using the LMS, government, and private-labor recruiting vessels to move about—yet these contexts are noticeably absent in the essays, and would have helped provide a more critical framing of the volume.

As with many travelogues, Kathleen's account can be alternatively self-reflective and damning by today's ethics. For example, at Wadodo on the Bamu River, she notes, "We bought a few articles, but they were reluctant to sell and we did not like to press them, for we ourselves would not relish the advent of strangers desirous of buying our most cherished possessions and heirlooms" (74). Later though, while accompanied by Patrol Officer Cardew along with several members of the Papuan Constabulary in the Purari Delta, the reluctance to part with cultural object fades. Kathleen notes that on their later stop in Ukiaravi they encountered "villages willing to sell specimens" and they "amassed quite a collection" (105). Kathleen also notes, while in Maipua, "The fact . . . that we were under the care of the mysterious and all-powerful 'Government' kept the natives from being too extortionate" (105). The Haddons collected 297 objects through exchanging trade goods and receiving gifts that are now at the MAA (e.g., accession no. 1916.143). The Haddons' collection, and indeed the photographs, point to the centrality of exchange in cross-cultural encounters, and document the transformation of local material culture for foreign consumption. A photograph of Bam and Waddy, two Papuan Constabulary who accompanied them, is, sadly, not included in the volume.²⁰ The absence of the discussion of these dynamics by the book's contributors is a missed opportunity.

The volume ends with a short appendix titled "Object Photo and Rubbings," detailing Kathleen Haddon's documentation of objects that were part of the Papuan Official Collection in Daru and Port Moresby, as well as images of the MAA collection taken by the museum's staff in Cambridge. These are juxtaposed with contemporary photographs of the objects now in various museums. This appendix builds on Webb's work for the 2007 exhibition *Coaxing the Spirits to Dance*,²¹ and hints at the broader intellectual project of conducting documentary

surveys that interested A. C. Haddon and will appeal to scholars interested in object provenance.

My criticisms aside, this book is a welcome addition to the literature on and about Papua during a time of transition and on the region's visual economy now held in museums and archives around the world. It sheds light on a particular moment in the Oceanic phase of British anthropology and brings into view the remarkable images of an otherwise neglected photographer. Reviewing this book has involved a set of personal returns to my own work with these materials and is a reminder of photography's power to connect the "here-now" to multiple "there-then[s]." ²² To close this review, I want to share an encounter, which reiterates a point made by Haraha in his contribution, regarding the contemporary value of these images for communities in Papua New Guinea. In the village of Goari in 2000, while looking at photograph P.1637.ACH (reproduced in the volume as Fig. 5.56), which was captioned by the museum "Policeman, wife and baby, Kikori," people identified the man as Sivaga Nawara. Originally from the Kerewa village of Dubumba, Sivaga worked as an interpreter for the government's police detachment in Kikori. They also identified the woman as his wife, Gaigi, and their baby as their son, Maida Sivaga. Maida became a preacher for the LMS, worked in the Urama and Era River areas of the Papuan Gulf, and died in 1992. Later, while visiting Kikori, I met Maida's children and grandchildren and was able to give them a copy of the image.

My brief encounter speaks volumes to the re-inscription that needs to happen with museum collections by returning communities' visual heritage to them under their terms. This book is a reminder of the productive possibilities that ethnographic inscriptions possess through many forms of engagement, and of the ongoing importance of archival materials for communities in Oceania. ²³ The volume's contributors and editors and the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology are to be commended for providing these materials with another means through which to circulate. I look forward to the other histories that will emerge through the wider engagement with Kathleen Haddon's photographs.

Cultural anthropologist Joshua A. Bell is curator of globalization and chair of the Anthropology Department of the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH), Smithsonian Institution. He combines ethnographic fieldwork with museum and archival research to examine the shifting local and global network of relationships between persons, artifacts, and environments. He has conducted fieldwork with communities in the Purari Delta of Papua New Guinea and on cellphone use in

Washington, D.C. Dr. Bell is the steward for the NMNH's Oceanic, African, and South American collections and for the National Anthropological Archive's holdings. His recent publications include "Object-Based Teaching and Learning in the University with Anthropological Museum Collections" (co-authored, 2025), "Unseen Connections: Exhibiting the Global Stories of Cellular Telephony at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History" (2024), and the co-edited volume *Naturalist Histories: Making Nature, Knowledge, and People in Oceania* (2024).

Notes

¹ Marilyn Strathern, *Property, Substance, and Effect: Anthropological Essays on Persons and Things* (Athlon Press, 1999), 5–11.

² "About," Premier Arts Editions, accessed August 30, 2025, <https://premier-artseditions.com/about>.

³ See Anita Herle and Sandra Rouse, eds., *Cambridge and the Torres Strait: Centenary Essays on the 1898 Anthropological Expedition* (Cambridge University Press, 1998); Jude Philp, "Embryonic Science: The 1888 Torres Strait Photographic Collection of A. C. Haddon," in *Woven Histories, Dancing Lives: Torres Strait Islander Identity, Culture and History*, ed. Richard Davis (Aboriginal Studies Press, 2004), 90–106; and Jude Philp and Anita Herle, eds., *Recording Kastom: Alfred Haddon's Journals from the Torres Strait and New Guinea, 1888 and 1898* (Sydney University Press, 2020).

⁴ See C. G. Seligman, *The Melanesians of British New Guinea* (Cambridge University Press, 1910); Gunnar Landtman, *The Kiwai Papuans of British New Guinea: A Nature-born Instance of Rousseau's Ideal Community* (Macmillan, 1927).

⁵ See A. C. Haddon, "The Migrations of Cultures in British New Guinea," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 50 (1920): 234–80; A. C. Haddon, "Smoking Tobacco Pipes in New Guinea," *Philosophical Transaction of the Royal Society of London* 232, no. 586 (1946), 1–278; and A. C. Haddon and James Hornell, *Canoes of Oceania*, Bernice P. Bishop Museum Special Publication nos. 27–29 (Bishop Museum Press, 1975).

⁶ See James Urry, "Making Sense of Diversity and Complexity: The Ethnological Context and Consequences of the Torres Strait Expedition and the Oceanic Phase in British Anthropology, 1890–1935," in *Cambridge and the Torres Strait: Centenary Essays on the 1898 Anthropological Expedition*, ed. Anita Herle and Sandra Rouse (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 201–34; and Michael W. Young, *Malinowski: Odyssey of an Anthropologist, 1884–1920* (Yale University Press, 2004), 289–307; 337–38). For a detailed discussion of this period, I recommend a volume (surprisingly not cited by Webb and Fogel) that details the parallel trip of Haddon's student John Layard. See Haidy Geismar and Anita Herle, *Moving Images: John*

Layard, Fieldwork and Photography on Malakula Since 1914 (University of Hawaii Press, 2011).

⁷ Bronisław Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea* (George Routledge & Sons, Ltd., 1922).

⁸ See Mark Busse, "Wandering Hero Stories in the Southern Lowlands of New Guinea: Culture Areas, Comparison, and History," *Cultural Anthropology* 20, no. 4 (2005), 443–73; Nalisa Neuendorf, "Bridewealth a Pardon: New Relationships and Restoration of *Good Daughters*," *Oceania* 90, no. 3 (2020), 194–213; Ian J. McNiven, "Beyond Bridge and Barrier: Reconceptualising Torres Strait as a Co-constructed Border Zone in Ethnographic Object Distributions between Queensland and New Guinea," *Queensland Archaeological Research* 25 (2022), 25–46; Chris Urwin et al., "Swamp and Delta Societies of the Papuan Gulf, Papua New Guinea," in *Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Indigenous Australia and New Guinea*, ed. Ian J. McNiven and Bruno David (University of Oxford Press, 2021), 803–30; and Chris Urwin et al., "Rethinking Agency in Hiri Exchange Relationships on Papua New Guinea's South Coast: Oral Traditions and Archaeology," *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 69 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaa.2022.101484>.

⁹ The original photographs and manuscript are in the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge.

¹⁰ Joshua A. Bell, "'For Scientific Purposes a Stand Camera is Essential': Salvaging Photographic Histories in Papua," in *Photography, Anthropology and History: Expanding the Frame*, ed. Christopher Morton and Elizabeth Edwards (Ashgate, 2009), 147. Other women photographers active during this period were Beatrice Grimshaw (1871–1953), a journalist and resident writer of Papua, and Alice Middleton Holmes (d. 1941), the wife of the LMS missionary Rev. J. H. Holmes (1866–1934). Though images made by these women do not survive in a coherent archival form, Grimshaw's photographs appear in her publications and Holmes's in her husband's work. See Beatrice Grimshaw, *The New New Guinea* (Hutchinson, 1911); Beatrice Grimshaw, *Isles of Adventure, From Java to New Caledonia but Principally Papua* (Houghton Mifflin, 1931); Max Quanchi, *Photographing Papua: Representation, Colonial Encounters and Imaging in the Public Domain* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007); and J. H. R. Holmes, *In Primitive New Guinea. An Account of a Quarter of a Century Spent Amongst the Primitive Ipi & Namau Groups of Tribes of the Gulf of Papua, With an Interesting Description of Living, Their Customs & Habits, Feasts & Festivals, Totems & Cults* (Seeley, Service & Co., 1924).

¹¹ See, for example, Michael W. Young, *Malinowski's Kiriwina: Fieldwork Photography, 1915–1918* (University of Chicago Press, 1998); Michael Young and Jennifer Clark, *An Anthropologist in Papua: The Photography of F. E. Williams, 1922–39* (Crawford House Publishing, 2001); Jane Lydon, *Eye Contact: Photographing Indigenous Australians* (Duke University Press, 2005); Quanchi, *Photographing Papua*; David Lawrence and Pirjo Varjola, *Gunnar Landtman in Papua: 1910 to 1912* (ANU Press, 2010); Geismar and Herle, *Moving Images*; and Lara

Lamb and Christopher Lee, *Repatriation, Exchange, and Colonial Legacies in the Gulf of Papua: Moving Pictures* (Springer International Publishing, 2023).

¹² See Joshua A. Bell, "Looking to See: Reflections on Visual Repatriation in the Purari Delta, Gulf Province, Papua New Guinea," in *Museums and Source Communities: A Routledge Reader*, ed. Laura Peers and Alison Brown (Routledge Press, 2003), 111–21.

¹³ Henry Rishbeth, "Kathleen Haddon (1888–1961)," *Bulletin of the International String Figure Association* 6 (1999), 1–16.

¹⁴ See also Robin Elizabeth McKenzie, "One Continuous Loop: Making and Meaning in the String Figures of Yirrkala," PhD diss., Australia National University, 2016.

¹⁵ Virginia-Lee Webb, "In Situ: Photographs of Art in the Papuan Gulf," in *Coaxing the Spirits to Dance: Art and Society in the Papuan Gulf of New Guinea* (Hood Museum of Art, 2006).

¹⁶ A. C. Haddon, *Head-hunters: Black, White, and Brown* (Methuen & Co., 1901).

¹⁷ David Charles Lewis, *The Plantation Dream: Developing British New Guinea and Papua, 1884–1942* (The Australian National University, 1996).

¹⁸ J. P. Hennelly, *Papua Annual Reports for the Year 1910–11* (State of Victoria: Government Printer, 1911), 70–1.

¹⁹ Diane Langmore, *Missionary Lives: Papua, 1874–1914*, Pacific Islands Monograph Series no. 6 (University of Hawaii Press, 1989) and J. H. P. Murray, *Papua or British New Guinea* (T. Fisher Unwin, 1912).

²⁰ See image CUMAA P.47833.ACH2 in the MAA Photographic Database (<https://collections.maa.cam.ac.uk/photographs/>).

²¹ Webb, "In Situ."

²² Roland Barthes, "The Rhetoric of the Image," in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (Hill and Wang, 1977), 44. I have been thinking with the photographs of Kathleen Haddon since 2000. Following archival work, I brought these photographs, along with others, to communities in the Purari Delta and surrounding areas of the Gulf between 2000 and 2002 as part of my dissertation research. In October 2000, I conducted a survey of the Papuan Gulf with Welsch, Haraha, and Rove that helped inform the exhibition *Coaxing the Spirits to Dance*, which was shown at Dartmouth College's Hood Museum of Art (2006) and the Metropolitan Museum of Art (2007). See *Coaxing the Spirits to Dance: Art and Society in the Papuan Gulf of New Guinea* (Hood Museum of Art, 2006). I received two Crowther-Beynon Grants from the MAA to support my research (2000 and 2001). Subsequently, I catalogued the photographs as part of a Getty-funded project at the MAA, and I was a Sylvan C. Coleman and Pamela Coleman Memorial Fund Art History Fellow supervised by Virginia-Lee Webb at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (2004). See Joshua A. Bell, "'A Gift of the First Importance': A Preliminary Report on the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology's Papuan Gulf Photographic Collection," *Journal of Museum Ethnography* 17 (2005): 176–90; and Bell, "For Scientific Purposes," 2009.

²³ For more on the productive possibilities of archival and museum collections, see Hulleah J. Tsinhanahjinne, “When Is a Photograph Worth a Thousand Words?” in *Photography's Other Histories*, ed. Christopher Pinney and Nicholas Peterson (Duke University Press, 2003): 40–52; Tina Campt, *Listening to Images* (Duke University Press, 2017); and Leah Lui-Chivizhe, *Masked Histories: Turtle Shell Masks and Torres Strait Islander People* (Melbourne University Publishing Limited, 2022).