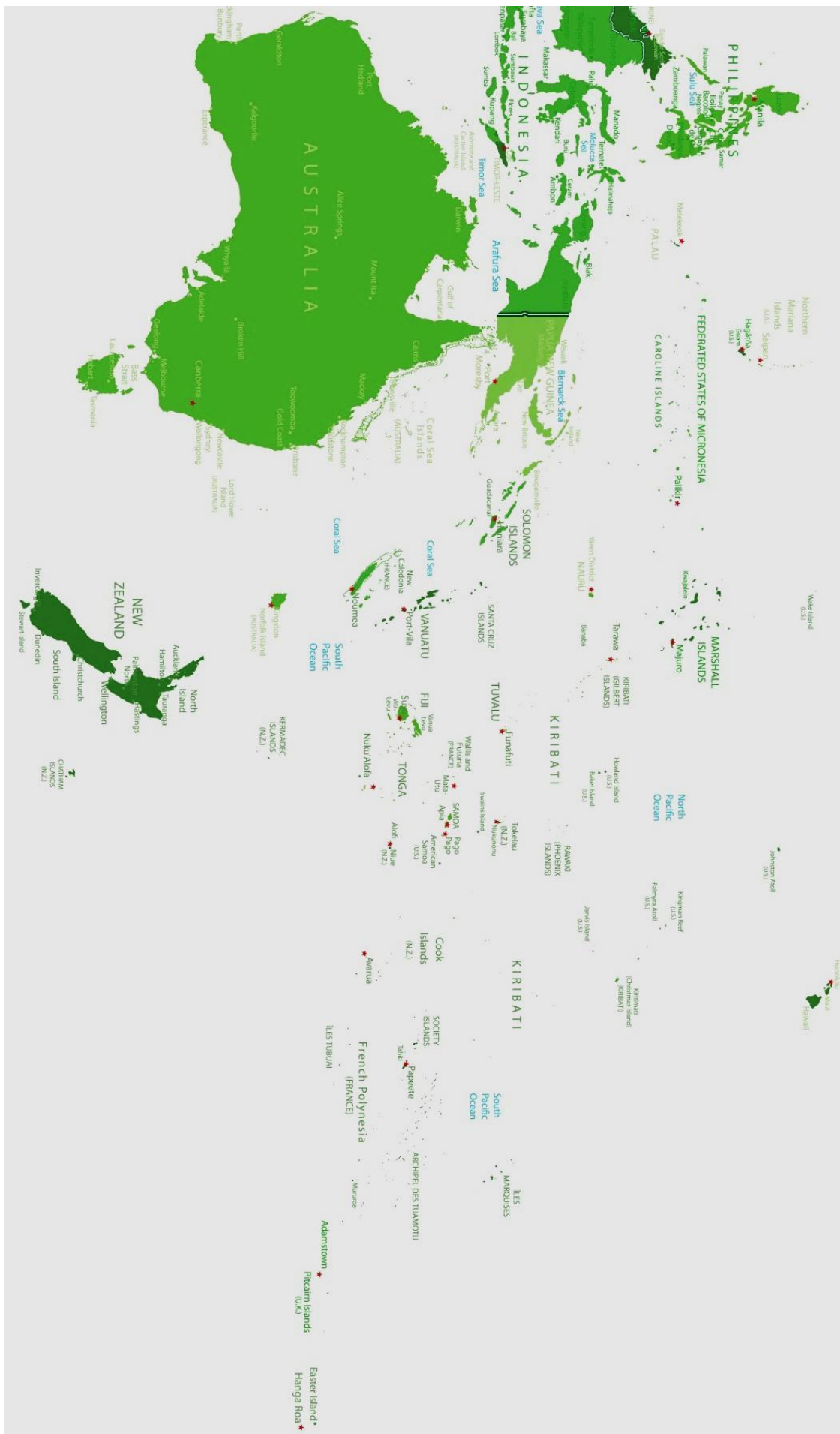




2 Introduction to Pacific Collections: The Pacific Region





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The Pacific Region

The Pacific Ocean is the largest of the world's oceans, covering about one third of the Earth. This vast expanse of water is scattered with more than 7,000 islands. These range from continental islands like New Guinea to tiny atolls found in places such as the Tuamotu group and mountainous and volcanic high islands like Hawai'i.

Geographically the Pacific is divided into three main regions: Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia. The cultures within these regions are as diverse as the landscapes themselves. Archaeological and linguistic evidence suggests New Guinea was colonised by people coming east from Indonesia around 45,000 years ago. The Solomon Islands were populated around 20 to 25,000 years ago. Considerable movement further east did not occur until about 3,000 years ago. Europeans began voyaging through the Pacific in the 16th century and it wasn't until the late 18th century with the voyages of Captain Cook that they began properly exploring the islands.

The *Pacific Collections in Scottish Museums: Unlocking their knowledge and potential* project focussed on the regions of Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia. Australia is not part of these cultural areas. Although politically part of Australia, the Torres Strait Islands have strong culture and trade links with Melanesia due to proximity to Papua New Guinea and so were included in this project. This leads to an important point to bear in mind when working with Pacific material: the ocean provides a place of connectedness and exchange for communities across the region. This means that place of manufacture, geographical style and place of collection can be difficult to disentangle. There are stylistic similarities that exist between artefacts from different places which have strong networks. There are also examples of people skilled in a particular artistic tradition settling elsewhere and maintaining their traditions or influencing the styles of others. Any museum documentation will help provide evidence of provenance but knowledge of particular styles will also help to identify those which may have been collected in a different location from that of original manufacture. Due to the potential research value in studying the movement of objects and people, it is useful for museums to keep a record of any changes in geographical identification and to note the reasons for such changes.