

# **Transactions and Transformations: artefacts of the wet tropics, North Queensland**

Edited by Shelley Greer, Rosita Henry, Russell McGregor and Michael Wood



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## Transactions and Transformations: artefacts of the wet tropics, North Queensland

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#### COVER

Cover image: Rainforest Shield. Queensland Museum Collection QE246, collected from Cairns 1914.  
Traditional Owners, Yidinji People

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The ARC Discovery project 'Objects of Possession: Artefacts Transactions in the Wet Tropics of North Queensland 1870-2013' research team standing next to some *Bagu* in the Cairns institute.  
Left to Right: Bard Aaberge (PhD candidate on the ARC project), Shelley Greer, Russell McGregor, Maureen Fuary, Trish Barnard, Mike Wood, Corinna Erkenbrecht, Rosita Henry.

# Aboriginal Artefacts, Collectors and the Wet Tropics: an introduction

Shelley GREER, Rosita HENRY, Russell McGREGOR and Michael WOOD

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This introduction raises issues concerning transactions involving Aboriginal artefacts of the North Queensland Wet Tropics. We highlight relationships between artefacts, persons and place, as well as the importance of understanding the nature of exchange and concepts of ownership in the creation and collection of artefacts.

❏ Aboriginal artefacts, artefact collectors, North Queensland, Wet Tropics, Museums

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Went to the Lagoon to see the Blacks fight & there were several good set tos & 'Warrior' got a spear in his groin & another in his back. He was using my second shield, broke the former & got some 10 spears broken in shield. (Boyd, 1882-1897)

On Sunday 21 January 1883 at about 11am, John Archibald Boyd, ethnographic collector and manager of Ripple Creek sugarcane plantation near Ingham in North Queensland, went hunting, as he did almost every Sunday. He was not too happy that day as he only managed to pick up one goose out of the six he shot at. Moreover, he tore his pants and got his knees badly cut while searching for two of the geese, which had fallen into the rushes, and also lost a wallaby. He decided to head home around 3pm and for some entertainment went to a nearby lagoon to see the 'Blacks fight'. It is likely that this fight was a dispute resolution battle of the type described by Carl Lumholtz who witnessed one nearby (at Herbert Vale) during the same year (1883). Lumholtz (1889: 119) describes such battles as 'a meeting for contest, where the blacks assemble from many "lands" in order to decide their disputes by combat'. He notes that the participants are 'exceedingly skilful in parrying, so that they are seldom wounded' but that 'the spears easily penetrate the shields, and sometimes injure the bearer, who is then regarded as disqualified and must declare himself beaten' (1889: 124).

Clearly, Warrior, one of the protagonists at the event Boyd witnessed, was well known to him as he was using a shield that Boyd had previously obtained and considered his own. Boyd may have given the shield to Warrior to use for the fight because he had actually purchased it from him and was aware that this was on the understanding that Warrior could take it back whenever he needed to use it. There are indications here of a complex transactional relationship between Boyd and Warrior. Boyd's diary reveals that he purchased a shield on 5 October 1882 for some tobacco and money, only a few weeks after arriving at Ripple Creek. If it was Warrior from whom Boyd obtained this particular shield, had Warrior understood the transaction as commodity

exchange? Or did Warrior think of the shield as inalienable and that the exchange would initiate a continuing relationship with Boyd? It appears that Boyd was somewhat sympathetic to the latter understanding because he seems to have had no problem lending Warrior the shield to use in battle and he did not express dismay at the shield being damaged in the process.

This collection of papers concerns transactions, such as the above, involving artefacts of the North Queensland Wet Tropics. We focus on the collection, exchange and curatorship of particular artefacts, and on the transformation of ideas concerning the peoples who originally made them. Our focus on transactions arises from our interest in exchange relationships through time both among Aboriginal peoples in the rainforest region and between them and early artefact collectors. Our concern is with the specific nature of the social interactions between individuals in the context of the transference of things between them, and how both things and relations become transformed in the process of the interaction. Marilyn Strathern and Eric Hirsch (2004: 8) define transactions as

...a general human facility or inclination, here the ability to compute ratios of values, that is, render something exchangeable by expressing one set of values in terms of another. But that is only half of it. If we talk of transactions we are also talking of specific social interactions, of events at which such conversions have taken place, and thus of a deal or negotiation which has fixed the values on that occasion.

Such a definition informs the papers in this volume, which derive from research conducted for an ARC Discovery project entitled 'Objects of Possession: Artefacts Transactions in the Wet Tropics of North Queensland 1870-2013'. Our research for the larger project examines how artefact collectors, Indigenous producers and their descendants, museums and the state have helped create and transform various rights and interests in the objects transacted and collected (Penny, 2002: 196; Peterson et al., 2008; McDougall & Davidson, 2008). Building on the work

of scholars such as Reynolds (1987), Khan (1993, 1996, 2008), McDougall and Davidson (2008), Peterson et al. (2008) and Ferrier (2006) we examine various collectors such as Hermann Klaatsch, Eric Mjöberg, Walter Roth, Norman Tindale, Archibald Meston, J.A. Boyd and others, to reveal their understandings of the nature of their transactions with Aboriginal people and with museums.

Our work explores the ways in which artefacts, persons, and the specific cultural contexts associated with artefacts are attached, and detached, from each other to create forms of identity linked to property claims. These forms of identity may generate tensions between individual autonomy and ideas of communal property in relation to artefacts. For example, Aboriginal artists who are publically recognised for their personal skills and talents are, nevertheless, culturally expected to navigate communal intellectual property issues and group-rights to the objects and images they use to inspire their creative works.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it was necessary for collectors, museums and Aboriginal producers operating in a new North Queensland market to ensure comparability amongst artefacts from this region. The work of collectors on provenance and representativeness often significantly contributed to the creation of different, if contested, identities for Aboriginal people living in the Wet Tropics (Tindale, 1959). Collectors recognised that, to varying degrees, the objects they collected were embedded in social and spatial relations relevant to the Aboriginal people associated with the collected artefacts. This recognition took a range of forms, but in all cases it involved adjudication by the collectors on the definition and location of Aboriginal interests in the artefacts.

Crucial to our project is uncovering the collectors' claims, evident in their notebooks, diaries, artefact documentation and published material, to have legitimately acquired rights in artefacts. Collectors created these forms of 'ownership' to persuade themselves, the state and the museums that they did indeed have rights in the property they sent to

museums and other institutions. But they also often recorded details of transactions involving variations of deceit, theft, under-pricing and other forms of inadequate reciprocity.

Collectors often strongly identified with their collections through the process of documenting, analysing and displaying them. In addition to being reflections of market demand, collections are also understood to reflect the 'personality' and 'interests' of the collector. The collectors were regarded as the authors of their collections and were able to stamp their own identities on these artefacts so that now the collections are typically identified with the collector (as in 'the Roth Collection').

The identification of artefacts predominantly with those who collected them as opposed to those who originally created them operates to efface any continuing rights that the creators might claim in the artefacts. Our research reveals that many Aboriginal people have resisted such alienating practices, asserting their enduring relationships to collected artefacts by emphasising idioms of both property and personhood. For example, an object might be valued because it is infused with ancestral spirit and/or revered as embodying actual social relationships, such as links to a particular person who created it.

Our research combines the history of collectors' and Aboriginal claims over artefacts with a history of official conceptions of state and museum property rights in artefacts collected from the region. For example, Roth's sale of his artefact collection from North Queensland to the Australian Museum in 1905 was raised in an inquiry into his activities (Khan, 2008). This suggests that even a hundred years ago the property rights of collectors in artefacts were ambiguous and could be contested. While museums have only recently been subject to moral and legal pressure about the way artefacts were initially collected, the Roth case indicates that this kind of pressure has a long history. Neither museums nor collectors secured property rights in artefacts unencumbered by the circumstances of the initial transactions with Aboriginal people.

Our approach is grounded in current debates in anthropology about relationships between objects and people (Bell & Gleisner, 2009; Busse, 2008; Chua & Salmond, 2012; Gell, 1996; Herle, 2008; Hoskins, 2006; Strathern, 2004). Some kinds of identification with artefacts imply an intrinsic or inalienable link between person and object (Weiner, 1992; Pannell, 1994). This raises three key questions. Firstly, how do the different agents involved in artefact transactions, including the creators, collectors, curators and museums represent an artefact as being strongly, or weakly, imbued with the attributes of any person involved in the production, circulation and display of the artefact. In other words, in what sense is an artefact itself represented as constitutive of the agent's self and sense of identity, rather than as something external to that self or person (Munn, 1984; Morphy, 1991). A second question is how artefacts retain an intrinsic connection with a culture, cosmology and sense of place. Thirdly, there is the question of how tensions between individual and group identities are negotiated in relation to objects. These three questions thread through the papers in this collection.

Given our focus on rainforest artefacts and people, we begin the volume with a paper by Russell McGregor, that traces the historical development of the concept of 'rainforest Aboriginal people'. The paper challenges some of the taken-for-granted assumptions that surround this construct. McGregor focuses on the studies of Norman Tindale and J.B. Birdsell who identified Aboriginal people living in the North Queensland rainforest as a distinct race: descendants of the original inhabitants of the continent who sought the rainforest as a refuge from subsequent human migrations. He shows that the concept of 'rainforest Aboriginal people' was created by these two anthropologists to advance their (now discredited) theory on the ancient process by which the Australian continent was peopled. McGregor's paper reveals that while Tindale and Birdsell's racialised construct has been discredited, it has been replaced by a new, environmentally-driven concept of 'rainforest Aboriginal people' which shares some crucial attributes with Tindale and Birdsell's original categorisation. In tracing this transformation, McGregor's paper contextualises subsequent papers in this volume.

In the second paper, archaeologists Alice Buhrich, Felise Goldfinch and Shelley Greer provide another conceptual discussion, this time focused on the rainforest as a region and issues of boundary definition. While McGregor examined the changing conceptions of 'rainforest Aboriginal people', this paper uses similarities and differences in the Aboriginal rock art within and beyond the rainforest region as evidence of a wide range of connections and transactions between Aboriginal groups in the past. Buhrich, Goldfinch and Greer show that while there are general similarities in much of the rainforest rock art, there are also clear differences that suggest connections with Aboriginal people in southeast Cape York Peninsula to the north and the Dry Tropics to the south. They propose that the rock art is suggestive of the ceremonial exchange that was a vibrant and recurrent aspect of Aboriginal life in the past. They further propose that particular areas that exhibit marked differences in rock-art style could be conceived as 'zones of engagement': places where people gathered specifically for the purpose of ceremonial exchange. This paper reminds us that Aboriginal people in the past were frequently engaged in transactions of various kinds, a point that is particularly pertinent when considering the transactions that later ensued between them and collectors, and the transactions that are taking place in the contemporary world among Aboriginal artists, objects and the museums in which they are held. Such transactions are the focus of the next five papers.

Maureen Fuery and Russell McGregor's paper explores the collecting activities and ethnographic writings of Walter Roth around the turn of the twentieth century, linking these with his role as a senior Protector of Aboriginals in Queensland. At its most basic, his work in each domain facilitated his activities in the other, but the interconnections were often more complicated and sometimes conflictive. Fuery and McGregor provide detail on Roth's collection, his controversial career as Protector and his resignation following a very public scandal over the sale of his collection to the Australian Museum. They position his ethnographic work within the history of early twentieth-century

Australian anthropology, noting in particular how Roth's studies differed from those of his eminent contemporaries, Spencer and Gillen. Although Roth, like other anthropologists at the time, accepted evolutionary explanations for human cultural diversity, he did not obtrude the evolutionary framework in his ethnographic studies. Instead, he focused on meticulously describing the manufacture and use of Aboriginal tools, weapons, utensils and other items of material culture, a focus that now lends special significance to the huge volume of ethnographic material he collected. This paper offers a window onto one of the most important collections of rainforest artefacts and elucidates the frequently-fraught character of transactions between collectors, Aboriginal people and the state.

In the next paper, Rosita Henry traces the transformations of a particular type of anthropomorphic fire-maker found in a part of the North Queensland rainforest, and the transactions in these objects over more than a century. Most recently, these fire-makers have inspired the production of colourful sculptures, known as *bagu* and *jiman*, by artists from the Girringun Aboriginal Corporation in the heart of the North Queensland rainforest country. Henry's interest lies in the movement of these fire-makers from their original context of manufacture and use to their production for the global art market. She describes how the functional and the cosmological were entangled for the makers and users of these tools in the past, when the power of ancestral beings had to be harnessed for the business of making fire, perhaps made more difficult in the wet environment of tropical rainforest. Henry highlights the transformations between ancestral beings and material objects in the stories that are associated with the fire-makers, and the ways in which they were associated with specific places. She delves into a little-known ethnographic collection (that includes fire-makers) made by John Archibald Boyd during his residence on the Ripple Creek sugarcane plantation in the 1880s. Tracing the passage of these fire-makers over the past 120 years or so, from North Queensland to the south coast of New South Wales and finally to the

north shore in Sydney, Henry shows how the many transactions in these objects have culminated in their contemporary manifestation in the form of sculptures created by the Girringun artists.

The paper by anthropologist Mike Wood explores how Dudley Bulmer, an Aboriginal man originally from Cape York Peninsula, inscribed his life story into a range of artefacts, art works and performances collected and recorded by the anthropologist Norman Tindale. By the time Tindale met him in 1938, Bulmer was living at Yarrabah near Cairns, having worked in various capacities around North Queensland. His artworks and artefacts record his travels over the land, at the same time recording the parallels between his movements and those of ancestral beings. Some of Bulmer's artefacts seem entirely secular in purpose, a point Wood exemplifies by scrutinising a 'message stick' he made. But regardless of how prominently the Dreaming appears in his productions, Bulmer's artefacts and artworks were (and are) interpersonal and intergenerational transactions in his own sense of self as an Aboriginal man away from his home country and under the power of the state. Extending this line of argument, Wood links Bulmer's artefactual and artistic self-revelations to the autobiographical genre of Aboriginal writing that emerged some decades later.

Dresden-based museum anthropologist Corinna Erckenbrecht examines the transactions over time of a large body of ethnographic artefacts originally collected in the North Queensland rainforests by the German anthropologist Hermann Klaatsch at the beginning of the twentieth century and now housed in several museums in Germany and Poland. She recounts how and why Klaatsch turned from his initial interest in reconstructing the physical evolution of the human species to focus instead on collecting the material culture of Aboriginal people. She then traces the trajectory of the objects he collected, the inscriptions by which he asserted his ownership of these objects, and the ever-ramifying layers of inscription which were added as the objects moved between museums in Germany. Not only did the artefacts move; the



borders of European countries moved too, resulting in the ownership of one large collection of Klaatsch's artefacts being transferred to Poland. Deftly weaving her narrative about the artefacts into the political and social history of Europe, Erckenbrecht illuminates the manifold transformations of the ethnographic objects through multiple changes and claims of ownership.

Trish Barnard's paper focuses on objects from a collection in the Queensland Museum that was donated by Glenn Cooke. The collection was made after 1980 and comprises mostly ceramic homeware and tourist souvenirs made by non-Indigenous artists since the 1930s but inspired by images of traditional Aboriginal art reproduced in ethnographic texts and museum catalogues. Some of the designs on these objects were based on motifs taken from artefacts collected in the rainforest areas of North Queensland. Barnard traces the transactional history of some of these motifs and how they were transformed in the process. She suggests that as many non-Indigenous Australians' knowledge of Aboriginal art (and people) was drawn from objects such as these, Cooke's collection provides an important vehicle for accessing the ways in which Aboriginal people were perceived and portrayed within this time frame. Barnard's theme is that the collection represents misappropriation of Aboriginal art and culture, and she draws on literature concerning Margaret Preston to advance her case. Of interest, Barnard identifies that some of those involved in producing the ceramics were eastern European migrants who settled in Australia in the 1950s. In such instances, the adoption of Aboriginal art could be seen as naïve attempts to incorporate designs that were truly 'Australian'.

Otto and Hardys paper concludes our collection by addressing the colonial legacy of artefact collection outlined in earlier chapters. It does so by aligning digitalisation of cultural heritage with current attempts to repatriate artefacts and heritage to the descendants of the original producers. Highlighting Hardy's work with the Gugu Badhun people of North Queensland, Otto and Hardy show how researchers working in various parts of Australia have helped create interactive digital databases for communities. These databases, and their associated protocols of

use and access, can ensure that the recording, storage and display of cultural heritage is under Aboriginal control. Otto and Hardy argue that digitalisation transforms artefacts by creating possibilities for culture heritage items to enter into new social relations and generate new forms of knowledge.

Taken together, the papers in this volume provide an ethnographically-based history of property interests and transactions in artefacts combined with an account of the transformations over time of the ways in which the producers of those artefacts have been understood. Our exploration of the manner in which museums, governments, artefact producers and collectors have asserted claims in artefacts, and attempted to regulate artefact transactions, offers an innovative means of analysing artefact collections from this region. Bringing together and scrutinising the activities of a suite of collectors generates fresh insights into the dynamics of property relations. In addition, documenting the activities of collectors in this region extends the knowledge available to Indigenous people about the history and current location of artefacts of heritage interest to them.

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# Making the Rainforest Aboriginal: Tindale and Birdsell's foray into deep time

Russell McGREGOR

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In the late 1930s Norman Tindale and Joseph Birdsell identified the inhabitants of the North Queensland rainforests as a distinct race of Indigenous Australians. This classification was a keystone of their attempted reconstruction of the deep past of Australia. According to their narrative, the Aboriginal inhabitants of the rainforests were relicts of the first human occupants of Australia, refugees from later waves of Aboriginal invaders who seized all but the most inhospitable parts of the continent. From the outset, Tindale and Birdsell's argument was burdened with serious problems, both in the qualities they attributed to rainforest people and in their representation of the rainforest environment as a 'refuge'. While Tindale and Birdsell's racial theorising and historical speculations drew some supporters, they failed to win general academic acclamation and by the 1970s were quite thoroughly discredited. Yet the category 'rainforest Aboriginal' survived, disengaged from the reconstruction of Australia's past that had inspired it and anchored instead to the distinctive economy of rainforest subsistence, instantiated in a unique material culture. This paper takes Tindale and Birdsell's relict-race representation of rainforest Aboriginal people as the starting point in an exploration of how European people represented the Aboriginal inhabitants of the North Queensland rainforests over roughly a hundred years, from the 1870s to the 1970s.

□ Tindale, Birdsell, racial classification, North Queensland, rainforest Aboriginal people, artefacts, Australian anthropology

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## A RELICT RACE

In the late 1930s, the Adelaide-based ethnologist Norman Tindale and Harvard physical anthropologist Joseph Birdsell created the category 'rainforest Aboriginal people'.<sup>1</sup> They identified the inhabitants of the North Queensland rainforests as a discrete race of Indigenous Australians, akin to the Tasmanians but separate from all other mainland Aboriginal peoples. The most immediately striking characteristic of the rainforest people, Tindale and Birdsell claimed, was their diminutive – 'pygmoid' or 'pygmy'<sup>2</sup> – stature, although their distinctiveness was also apparent in their cultural, social, artefactual and linguistic attributes as well as in other physical features such as hair texture, physiognomy, skin colour and blood group (Tindale & Birdsell, 1941: 5).

My intention here is not to give the pygmies-in-the-North-Queensland-rainforest narrative yet another run. Keith Windschuttle did that in 2002, with the predictable result of provoking a chorus of critics who pointed out that Tindale and Birdsell's pygmy characterisation had been subjected to close scientific scrutiny and long since discredited (Westaway & Hiscock, 2005; Windschuttle & Gillen, 2002). Rather, my intention is to explore the history of representations of rainforest Aboriginal people, taking Tindale and Birdsell's racial theorising as a starting point. I have no interest in adjudicating on the validity of their theories, or on the extent to which they may have misrepresented the subjects of their investigations. Such adjudications are inevitably subject to the vagaries of time and intellectual fashion. Already in recent years, some archaeologists and other scientists have attempted to revive elements of Tindale and Birdsell's theories of Aboriginal origins which had not long before lost credibility (see for example Thorne, 2005; Webb, 2006). Rather than attempting the impossible task of assessing the correctness of Tindale and Birdsell's theories and representations, my aim here is to trace the antecedents of those intellectual constructs and their trajectories across later years. A comprehensive mapping of all those trajectories is beyond the scope of this (or any other) article, so I devote special attention to the residue of Tindale and Birdsell's representations that persists most strongly today: the continued currency of the category 'rainforest Aboriginal people'.

Tindale and Birdsell claimed the inhabitants of the North Queensland rainforests to be the remnant of a Negrito race that had once peopled the entirety of Australia. Elsewhere on the mainland, the diminutive Negritos had been pushed aside by two later waves of physically larger Aboriginal invaders, surviving into historical times only in Tasmania and in their rainforest fastnesses. Hence their designation of rainforest Aborigines as 'Tasmanoid', though they later applied the label 'Barrinean', after Lake Barrine on the Atherton Tableland (Tindale & Lindsay, 1963: 30). For Tindale and Birdsell, the primary importance of rainforest people's distinctiveness was as evidence for their theory that the Aboriginal population was made up of three successive, racially-distinctive waves of colonisers, against the scientific orthodoxy of the day which asserted the racial homogeneity of the Aboriginal people (see Anderson, 2002: 232-34; McGregor, 1996: 17-18; Prentis, 1995). Their rainforest discovery of the living relicts of the first inhabitants of Australia provided crucial support for the theory.

Tindale and Birdsell acknowledged that over the millennia the rainforest Negritos had intermixed to some degree, physically and culturally, with the surrounding non-Negrito peoples. Nonetheless, they identified twelve tribes inhabiting the 'refuge area' of wet-tropical North Queensland who exhibited strongly Tasmanoid traits. These were (using Tindale and Birdsell's orthography) the Ngatjan, Mamu, Wanjuru, Tjapukai, Barbaram, Idindji, Kongkandji, Buluwai, Djiru, Djirubal, Gulngai and Keramai tribes. Surrounding these were seven tribes (Bandjin, Newegi, Agwamin, Wakaman, Muluridji, Djankun and Irukandji) which constituted 'a transitional type between the nucleus of Tasmanoid tribes and the more normal Australian ones' (Tindale & Birdsell, 1941: 2-3).

Tindale and Birdsell's discovery of the diminutive Negritos of the rainforest was just one element in their reconstruction of the prehistoric past of Australia, but a very important element. Through scrutiny of the living reality of Aboriginal people, as well as the archaeological record, they considered

it possible to recover the story of the human occupation of the Australian land-mass. They sought to look back into deep time, and to do so in North Queensland they singled out the inhabitants of the rainforests as survivors of an age that elsewhere in Australia had passed away.

Tindale and Birdsell drew analogies with other parts of the world. They noted that in Southeast Asia, the ostensible point of origin of the Tasmanoid people, Negrito enclaves still survived in mountainous, jungle-clad 'refuge areas' into which they had been pushed by bigger and better-armed Asian peoples (Tindale & Birdsell, 1941: 4; Tindale & Lindsay, 1963: 23-24). In Western anthropology and in Western representations of otherness more generally, there is a long tradition of locating pygmy Negrito races in mountainous, heavily-forested fastnesses (Roque, 2012). Tindale and Birdsell explicitly linked their racial theorising with this tradition. Moreover, the successive waves of invaders model of territorial occupation was one with which European people were familiar. They knew it applied to the past of Europe itself, as well as Asia and Africa; and since the nineteenth century, Europeans had typically conceived the waves of invaders in racialised terms (Coon, 1939; Etherington, 2011; Poliakov, 1974). Why should Australia be different in this regard? Here, there was no documentary record of the kind that attested to the great invasions and migrations of the Eurasian landmass, so the scholar had to read the past through the available record of racial traits, languages, customs, fossilised bones and a detritus of material culture.

The notion that pre-colonial Australia had witnessed successive waves of invasion appealed to the imaginations of some Australians. On the opening page of the first volume of his *History of Australia* Manning Clark (1962: 3) recounted the three waves of invasion narrative as unquestioned fact. Perhaps it resonated with his career-long yearning to find drama in Australian history.

However, the claim that most captured the public imagination was that pygmies dwelt in Australia. Stories about pygmies in the North Queensland

jungles were recounted in numerous newspapers and magazines between the 1940s and 1970s, usually emphasising the exoticness of the pygmy although occasionally referring to the racial theorising that rendered small stature scientifically significant in Tindale and Birdsell's argument (see for example Lindsay, 1954). Among enthusiasts for the pygmy thesis, Dr R.A. Douglas of Townsville went further than most. At a medical conference at the Townsville General Hospital in 1962 Dr Douglas not only presented a paper entitled 'Pygmies in Australia'; he also presented to delegates a real 'pygmy' man or woman (gender is not clear from newspaper reports) from the Atherton Tablelands. In Douglas's rendition, the rainforest pygmies were even shorter and more racially distinctive than Tindale and Birdsell had claimed, 'about as much like our so-called Aborigine as a dachshund is like a greyhound'.<sup>3</sup> However, newspaper reports reveal that several of Douglas's colleagues at the medical conference 'debunked the claims of the speaker saying that the pygmy type found on the Atherton Tableland had been developed through normal type aborigines living in the rainforest area and not being able to find sufficient food on which to develop normally' (Anon, 1962b).

Tall tales about short people in North Queensland reached their zenith (or nadir) in 1982 when the eccentric museum curator and searcher for 'lost civilisations', Rex Gilroy, announced that he was mounting an expedition to locate the spear-wielding pygmy tribesmen who, he maintained, still lived in the jungles near Tully (Anon, 1982a, 1982b, 1982c). While most newspapers recounted Gilroy's claims in a tone of open-mouthed credulity, at least two took the trouble to publish rebuttals by experts, anthropologist David Trigger and geographer Terry Birtles. In the most comprehensive of these, published in the *North Queensland Register*, Birtles accepted that the rainforest dwellers were exceptionally short. In fact he exaggerated their shortness, claiming that they 'rarely exceeded four feet six inches'.<sup>4</sup> However, Birtles' main contention was that diminutive size did not indicate racial distinctness but was 'the result of generations of

adaptation to the rainforest environment, with its comparative shortage of protein-rich foods' (Anon, 1982d). Birtles had made the same claims – including the exaggeration of their shortness – at a conference of the Australian Institute of Geographers in 1978 (Birtles, 1978: 9-11).

In view of the excitement aroused by the supposed presence of pygmies in North Queensland, it is worth pausing to consider its historical antecedents. Tindale and Birdsell themselves made occasional references to the historical record to buttress their claims, citing in particular the Norwegian zoological collector Carl Lumholtz, who lived among Aboriginal people on the upper Herbert River for fourteen months in the early 1880s. Their citation of Lumholtz on the alleged exceptional shortness of rainforest people is misleading. In fact, Lumholtz merely remarked in his 1889 book *Among Cannibals* that 'Most of [the inhabitants of the upper Herbert River] were slender and tolerably well built, though on the average small. Their height varied greatly' (Lumholtz, 1889a: 77, 129-130). In a contemporaneous journal article, he stated that 'while some were tall and well shaped there were others of a smaller and weaker stature' (Lumholtz, 1889b: 532). Tindale and Birdsell (1941: 2) tried to account for the variability Lumholtz observed by claiming that he conducted his research among 'transitional' tribes, beyond 'the relatively unmixed pygmoid group'. However, Lumholtz's writings and maps show that he conducted his investigations squarely within the territory Tindale designated Keramai, one of the supposed 'nuclear' Tasmanoid tribes.

Some other nineteenth and early twentieth-century observers mentioned a degree of shortness among rainforest Aboriginal people – but it was never more than a mention. Self-appointed expert on the Aborigines, Archibald Meston, described 'the coast range blacks from Cardwell to Cooktown' as generally 'short and wiry, with good chest development, thin legs, often slightly curved, and surprisingly small hands and feet' (Meston, 1889: 18). This was a mere incidental observation, and neither in Meston's writings nor in the numerous photographs he took on expeditions, did he represent rainforest people's

shortness as exceptional. And Meston was a man obsessed with masculine physicality, who could be expected to remark upon exceptional smallness of stature if he saw it. Visiting Swedish entomologist Eric Mjöberg (1918: 143, 167) described the rainforest Aboriginal people of the Atherton Tableland as 'slightly smaller' or 'as a rule, somewhat smaller than those living on the plains'. None of these commentators said more than that rainforest people showed some tendency to shortness – a long way from claiming they were pygmies.

Many colonial-era observers made no comment at all on the stature of rainforest Aboriginal people, suggesting that they found nothing exceptional about it. Others claimed them to be big people. One of the first Europeans to comment on the stature of rainforest people was the explorer George Elphinstone Dalrymple, who in 1865 characterised the people of the ranges behind Rockingham Bay (Tindale's Keramai tribe) as 'large muscular men' who were 'ferocious, cunning' and formidable enough to threaten the survival of the new settlement of Cardwell (Dalrymple, 1865: 202). He used similar words eight years later to describe a group near the Macalister Range (Tindale's Buluwai or possibly Irukandji tribe): 'large and powerful men' possessing a 'most ferocious expression of countenance' (Dalrymple, 1874: 19). At nearby Trinity Harbour (Tindale's Idindji people) Dalrymple (1874: 17) found that the 'blacks are big hulking fellows, of a lighter copper-colour than we are accustomed to see to the southward'. There is no trace of pygmies, or even small Aboriginal people, in Dalrymple's accounts of his jungle adventures. Nor is there in Christie Palmerston's. Although Palmerston's explorations in the 1880s took him through at least six of Tindale's twelve nuclear Tasmanoid tribes, he nowhere suggested that the people he encountered were small. The only comments he made on their stature were to occasionally note exceptionally tall individuals, and to state generally of rainforest people that the 'old men are of good stature. The young men are lithe muscular fellows' (Palmerston, 1887: 240). Perhaps the most notable feature of pre-Tindale-and-Birdsell commentary on rainforest

Aboriginal peoples' stature is inconsistency. In any case, no European observer in the first couple of generations of contact with rainforest Aboriginal people described them as even approximating pygmy stature.

Nonetheless, in mid-twentieth century Australia pygmy tales exerted an irresistible appeal, and it was easy to find a photograph of an exceptionally short individual from the rainforest to embellish a story in the popular press (see for example Anon, 1982b). However, in scholarly circles Tindale and Birdsell's relict race characterisation of rainforest people did not fare so well, never gaining general acquiescence among anthropologists and related disciplinary experts. Some, such as F.D. McCarthy (1942: 35-36), lent their support. More were forthrightly hostile, including Professor A.P. Elkin (1964: 19), who as an anthropologist and public intellectual was arguably the most influential shaper of popular attitudes toward Aboriginal people in the mid-twentieth century (McGregor, 2011). Elkin's friend N.W.G. Macintosh, Challis Professor of Anatomy at the University of Sydney, in collaboration with Stan Larnach, published several craniological studies which showed no evidence of Negrito characteristics in rainforest Aboriginal skulls, and no significant variation between those and the skulls of other Queensland Aboriginal people (Larnach & Macintosh, 1969; Macintosh & Larnach, 1973). Macintosh did not confine his criticisms to scholarly monographs. In a November 1963 ABC radio broadcast, Macintosh described Birdsell's explanation of Aboriginal origins as 'a romantic and stimulating theory, but it is at the same time highly speculative. In support of it at the moment we have absolutely no positive archaeological evidence' (Macintosh, 1963).

Tindale and Birdsell's claims about the cultural cohesiveness of the rainforest tribes, and their socio-cultural distinctiveness from their neighbours, also failed to square with social anthropological studies. At the very time Tindale and Birdsell conducted their investigations, R. Lauriston Sharp published a study which grouped the Aboriginal tribes of North Queensland into nine clusters on the basis of their 'common features of totemic

organization'. Sharp's totemic classification cut straight through Tindale and Birdsell's rainforest category, with the Yirkandji, Kungandji and Yidindji tribes adhering to what Sharp called the 'Yir Yiront totemic system', while the (Um)Barbarem, Mutju, Tjirbal, Mamu and Ngatjan tribes conformed to the 'Olkol' type. Sharp made it clear that these differences in totemic systems correlated with major differences in culture and social organisation (Sharp, 1939). Very little ethnographic fieldwork was conducted in the North Queensland rainforests between Tindale and Birdsell's late 1930s expedition and Christopher Anderson's investigations in the 1980s; and the latter was in Kuku Yalandji territory, slightly to the north of Tindale and Birdsell's Negrito zone. However, a linguist, R.M.W. Dixon, was active in the relevant area in the 1960s and 1970s.

Dixon's investigations undercut the linguistic unity of the rainforest tribes postulated by Tindale and Birdsell. Contradicting the latter's claims about the uniqueness of rainforest Aboriginal languages, Dixon found that 'all the languages but Mbabaram fit perfectly well into the pattern of Australian linguistics' and even Mbabaram was only 'a little eccentric phonetically and phonologically'. Tindale and Birdsell had specified Mbabaram as the prototype rainforest language; Dixon found its closest relatives to be not the languages of the other eleven 'nuclear' rainforest tribes but rather those spoken by tribes further to the west (Dixon, 1966: 114-115, 1972: 347-352). Moreover, he found that a 'major linguistic boundary – between the Yidinj and Dyirbal languages – runs right through the middle of the Tindale-Birdsell "Barrinean" area' (Dixon, 1976: 231). The discreteness of the rainforest tribes, essential to Tindale and Birdsell's reconstruction of Australian prehistory, failed to withstand the scrutiny of linguists, social anthropologists and anatomists.

Yet the category 'rainforest Aboriginal people', first delineated by Tindale and Birdsell, survived. It still survives today. Perhaps 'rainforest' is just a handy label for aggregating several Aboriginal groups for certain purposes. But more seems to be involved. The map of Aboriginal Australia

issued by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies includes, on the North Queensland coast, a tribal cluster designated 'rainforest'. The Wet Tropics Management Authority published a journal entitled *Rainforest Aboriginal News*. Indigenous-owned enterprises such as the Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park and the Girringun Aboriginal Corporation proudly promote their rainforest credentials to tourists and art-buyers, both Australian and international. In these and numerous similar instances, 'rainforest' refers to a quite specific patch of rainforest that roughly coincides with Tindale and Birdsell's Negrito area. In fact, there were, and are, tracts of rainforest all along the east coast of the continent, sometimes covering vast areas as on the Lamington Plateau in southern Queensland and the Big Scrub in northern New South Wales. The combination of the words 'rainforest' and 'Aboriginal' refers particularly to a specific place and people: those identified by Tindale and Birdsell in the late 1930s. Before enquiring further into why this should be so, another aspect of Tindale and Birdsell's rainforest writings warrants scrutiny.

## THE HOSTILE JUNGLE

Tindale and Birdsell represented the rainforest as an extraordinarily inhospitable environment, so ill-suited to human life that no-one would live there unless compelled by the direst of need. It was this that made the rainforest a 'refuge area' for small, weak people fleeing more robust newcomers, and a human museum for modern-day anthropologists seeking to peer back into the past. In Tindale and Birdsell's account, the rainforest environment was so forbidding as to block the invasion of those who took the entirety of the rest of the continent. Tasmania, they claimed, had become a refuge for the Negritos when it was cut off by rising sea levels at the end of the Ice Age. The North Queensland rainforests, by contrast, are easily accessible from adjacent open forests and coasts, so if later waves of Aboriginal invaders did not invade there, it must have been because they considered rainforests not worth the taking. Tindale and Birdsell explicitly said

so, attributing the survival of the North Queensland Negritos to their 'isolation, in a relatively inaccessible and uninviting environment, not sought by the usual Australian tribes' (Tindale & Birdsell, 1941: 8; Tindale, 1959: 41). Tindale (1940: 149) stated that 'Dense wet forests become refuge areas, only to be sought by those less fortunate tribes whose physical and mental inferiorities condemn them to the least desirable parts of primitive man's environment'. It was an interpretation to which he remained committed throughout his long career, Tindale repeating the above sentence verbatim in his 1974 classic, *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia* (Tindale, 1974: 56). This, perhaps, constitutes the nadir in European representations of the rainforests.

Where did such a negative assessment come from? European commentators, including those from colonial North Queensland, had long remarked on the fact that rainforests are uncomfortable places to live in, eternally damp, gloomy and infested with leeches, ticks, mites and other pests. But Tindale and Birdsell's representation was of an entirely different order, claiming the rainforest to be not merely uncomfortable but so inhospitable as to repel invaders.

Colonial-era commentators on North Queensland rainforest people generally claimed that they had good access to the necessities of life. Many claimed food was abundant. R.A. Johnstone, a Native Police Sub-Inspector who participated in Dalrymple's 1873 expedition, stated that it was 'a sure indication of good country when the aboriginals are numerous, as they depend entirely on Nature to provide them with the necessities of life, and there in the valley of the Barron the jungle supplied them with fruits, roots and game in abundance' (Johnstone, 1903). Mjöberg (1918: 180-193) noted that the rainforest tribes 'have at their free disposal, the rich and lush rainforest with all that it contains in the way of buds and tender shoots, maturing fruits and all its wildlife', which provided a generous larder. Some colonial commentators remarked on specific deficiencies in rainforest Aboriginal diets, noting particularly the paucity of flesh foods and corresponding reliance on plants such as nuts, tubers and fruits. They



noted, too, that many food plants had to be processed by prolonged pounding and leaching to remove toxic chemicals. Lumholtz, who seems to have eaten these processed plant foods only when driven by necessity, stated that they were 'wellnigh tasteless', almost 'indigestible', and 'very unwholesome' (Lumholtz, 1889a: 230-231). On the other hand, Christie Palmerston, who lived off the resources of the rainforest for months at a time, remarked on 'the abundance and variety of good food these jungles contain', significantly adding: 'flesh excepted' (Palmerston, 1882: 146-147). On this point – the scarcity of game in the rainforests – there was near consensus. Yet the nutritional consequences of that fact were uncertain, for as Lumholtz (1889a) pointed out, his Girramay hosts did not live permanently in the rainforest but moved seasonally into adjacent open forest and grassland to hunt game such as wallabies.

According to some colonial commentators, an over-reliance on vegetable food sharpened the rainforest peoples' cannibal appetites. Christie Palmerston (1887: 238, 1882: 147) explained that the 'scrub blacks ... don't get much meat food, and their cannibalistic propensities would appear to have become developed in answer to Nature's call for a meat diet'. In similar vein, Meston noted that the Aboriginal inhabitants of the Bellenden-Ker range were 'cannibals of a particularly bad type'. He claimed that 'all Australian tribes' indulged in cannibalism at times, but cannibal feasting was exceptionally prevalent among the rainforest people, probably due to 'an irrestrainable craving for flesh food, in a violent reaction against prolonged vegetarianism' (Meston, 1889: 18-19, 1924). However, shortage of meat aside, Meston believed rainforest people had access to abundant food. Of course, nineteenth-century commentators believed all Aboriginal people lived a hand-to-mouth existence, but those who observed rainforest Aboriginal people made no suggestion that they eked out a harder or more meagre subsistence than Aborigines elsewhere. Like Tindale and Birdsell's comments on rainforest Aboriginal stature, their assessment of the rainforest as a place to live does not match the assessments of European observers in the earliest generations of contact.

Later commentators, too, made very different assessments of the rainforest environment to those of Tindale and Birdsell. Dixon not only undermined Tindale and Birdsell's linguistic speculations; he also contradicted their claim that the rainforest was an inhospitable environment. In Dixon's account the rainforest was a bountiful place, 'so rich in flesh and vegetable food [that] these tribes were able to occupy territories much smaller than those of most interior tribes'. He added that most tribal territories encompassed 'a number of quite different types of habitat and vegetation', not just rainforest, so these tribes, far from being impoverished, had access to an unusually wide diversity of resources (Dixon, 1976: 207-208, 1972: 347).

On the basis of his linguistic researches (combined with the recent discovery that the Atherton Tablelands rainforests were comparatively recent, probably dating from no more than 7,600 years ago) Dixon proposed his own hypotheses on early tribal movements in the region. He suggested that 'proto-Dyirbal' speakers were once confined to the coastal rainforests in the southern parts of the Wet Tropics, with Yidin-speakers to their north and Mbabaram-speakers to their north-west, in the then-sclerophyll forests of the Atherton Tablelands. Vegetation patterns changed and at the same time the Dyirbal population grew, expanding territorially at the expense of the Mbabaram who were pushed 'out of the pleasant tableland environment into a small, arid and rather undesirable territory on top of the dividing range' (Dixon, 1972: 351). This is a much smaller-scale speculation than Tindale and Birdsell's continent-wide projections, but one point stands out. In Dixon's model, the rainforest, far from being a refuge for the weak, was in possession by the strong, who pushed their weaker neighbours into less desirable, drier and more open country.

As noted above, by the time Dixon published these speculations, the rainforest itself was being historicised. Ecological studies, particularly by CSIRO scientists Len Webb and Geoff Tracey from the 1960s onward, revealed the northern rainforests to be more diversified and dynamic environments than previously imagined. Webb



(1973) also wrote on Aboriginal plant-uses and environmental impacts in areas including the North Queensland rainforests. Palaeoecological and palynological studies conducted in the 1970s showed that the rainforests had been massively transformed over the millennia, expanding and contracting according to climatic shifts and the changes wrought by humans. Peter Kershaw, who conducted palynological studies at Lynch's Crater and Bromfield Swamp on the Atherton Tablelands, suggested that a gradual replacement of rainforest by sclerophyll vegetation in this area between 38,000 and 27,000 years BP was 'partly a result of ... decrease in effective rainfall and partly a result of burning by aboriginal man' (Kershaw, 1978: 160; see also Kershaw, 1975, 1976). By the 1980s Kershaw was asserting with increasing assurance that Aboriginal burning practices had been a major, though not the sole, factor in determining the extent and distribution of rainforest on the Atherton Tableland on a time-scale going back 40,000 years (Kershaw, 1983: 678, 1986). The rainforest was not a stable environment, and one of the causes of instability was the presence of humans.

Ironically, Tindale was a pioneer scholar of Indigenous environmental agency, particularly through the use of fire and sometimes with specific reference to the North Queensland rainforests. In their 'Tasmanoid Tribes' article Tindale and Birdsell (1941: 4) alluded to the likelihood that the open country adjacent to North Queensland rainforests had been created 'by the fires of past generations of the native inhabitants'. This theme was much more prominent in Tindale's later work. In 1959 – a decade before Rhys Jones (1969) coined the evocative term 'fire-stick farming' – Tindale argued that Aboriginal firing practices had significantly shaped the biological configuration of this continent, even in the relatively fire-resistant environment of the tropical rainforests. Drawing on research he and Birdsell had conducted twenty years earlier, Tindale stated that:

In the rainforests of the Atherton Plateau there are often to be met such enclaves of grassland as well as curious patches of wet sclerophyll forest. According to the views of local negrito aborigines, as expressed to me in 1938, such areas arise from their occasionally successful practice of setting fire to rainforest patches during the dry spells which periodically occur and cause the usually wet forest floor to become a giant tinder box.

Since the burning of the rainforest is regarded as a useful hunting expedient, fires are likely to have been lit by many past generations of men, and the cumulative effects of the practice on the forest cover may have been very great. Perhaps it is correct to assume that man has had such a profound effect on the distributions of forest and grassland that true primaeval forest may be far less common in Australia than is generally realized, as indeed it is relatively rare in all lands where man has intruded for lengthy periods of time. (Tindale, 1959: 42-43)

Tindale continued to argue this line in later works (Tindale, 1976: 21-23).

There were, then, two narrative lines running through Tindale's writings on the rainforest environment. One, the narrative of refuge, represented the rainforest as more or less constant over immense periods of time. The other represented the rainforests as malleable, shaped particularly by their Aboriginal inhabitants' use of fire. These two narratives are not contradictory, but nor do they sit comfortably together. The former narrative emphasised environmental stability, an essential quality if the rainforests were to offer refuge for a people who elsewhere on the continent had disappeared thousands of years ago. The latter narrative emphasised environmental instability, an inescapable consequence of the ecological agency Tindale wanted to show they exercised.

## A RESIDUE OF ARTEFACTS

Tindale and Birdsell devoted a section of their 1941 'Tasmanoid Tribes' article to material culture. In it they referred to the 'large decorated fighting shields', the 'single-handed, flat-bladed and long, wooden, fighting sword', 'beaten bark blankets' and the 'highly characteristic' woven cane baskets that were more or less distinctive to the inhabitants of the North Queensland rainforests. They also referred to the 'specialized techniques of food gathering such as would develop in a dense rainforest environment', including the extended washing, leaching, roasting and fermentation of seeds and nuts with high alkaloid content and the use of climbing-canes to ascend into the forest canopy where much of the scant food resources could be found (Tindale & Birdsell, 1941: 7-8). The distinctiveness of rainforest material culture was adduced to buttress Tindale and Birdsell's central contention of the racial discreteness of the people who made and used those artefacts. Material culture was not particularly prominent in their argument, but in putting it forward Tindale and Birdsell were on firmer historical ground than in their claims about either rainforest people's stature or the status of their environment as a refuge.

It was the distinctiveness of rainforest people's material culture that had elicited most interest from Europeans since the moment of first contact. Within days of setting out on the first European intrusion into the North Queensland rainforests in 1848, Edmund Kennedy's party 'came into a native encampment, consisting of eighteen or twenty gunyahs', all of which were 'neatly and strongly built', and one of which was huge, 'eighteen feet long, seven feet wide and fourteen feet high'. Inside this hut they found a large, brightly-painted wooden shield and several long, hardwood swords (Carron, 1849: 15-16). It was items such as these that excited early European observers. Travelling over the ranges west of Cardwell in 1865, Dalrymple found numerous clearings where Aborigines had built 'clusters of small, round-topped huts', interconnected by 'broad, hard-beaten path[s]'. In his characteristically

romantic style, Dalrymple (1865: 205) compared the scene with 'the beautiful mountain villages of Ceylon or of the islands of the Pacific'. Prospector James Venture Mulligan, travelling northward across the Atherton Tableland in 1877, encountered what he called 'townships, which consist of well thatched gunyahs, big enough to hold five or six darkies. We counted eleven townships since we came to the edge of the scrub, and we have only travelled four miles along it' (quoted in Henry, 2012: 31). The implication was that rainforest people led comparatively sedentary lives, a point Mjöberg made explicit in his statement that 'the natives in this dense rainforest region live a more sedentary lifestyle than the typical nomadic tribes of the west' (quoted in Ferrier, 2006: 13).

The distinctive weapons of rainforest people drew particular comment. Dalrymple provided one of the earliest, reasonably detailed descriptions of rainforest weaponry in 1865. Exploring the ranges inland from Cardwell, he found Aboriginal people bearing large softwood shields, 'painted in blue, black, red, and yellow bands, in a quaint zigzag pattern, found on all shields in this part of the colony' and wielding hardwood swords, 'about 5 feet long and 6 inches broad, and shaped with a curve, and point like an infantry sword' (Dalrymple, 1865: 205). However, it seems that he did not witness how the sword and shield were actually wielded in battle. The first published descriptions of that were by Lumholtz and Palmerston in the 1880s, who noted the semi-ritualised nature of such battles. Alluding to the possible totemic or spiritual significance of shield designs, Palmerston (1884: 172) stated that 'Each tribe has a different design on the face of its shields', the designs being painted partly with human blood extracted by the artist poking sharp objects up his nose. Mjöberg (1918: 178) offered a more refined image, attributing rainforest Aboriginal people with aesthetic sensibilities congruent with the modernist movement then sweeping through Europe. He observed that on rainforest shields, the 'colours are applied in the most fantastic patterns. Some of the large wooden shields that I brought back from the Mulgrave Valley, where the

Aborigines were particularly fond of beautiful and brilliant colours, show actual cubistic and futuristic tendencies, quite comparable to Grünewald's most extraordinary works'.<sup>5</sup>

Implements used for food processing elicited almost equal interest. These included large, multi-pitted nut-cracking stones, grooved slate grating stones (or *morah*), beaten bark cloths (used for collecting ground and grated plant foods as well as for a body covering) and bicornual baskets made of split lawyer cane. The last of these attracted special interest for a distinctive feature of their manufacture. As Lumholtz (1889a: 193) explained: 'Only the men plait baskets – the women never'. Walter Roth (1904: 28) added that though bicornual baskets were 'certainly manufactured by men only', they were 'utilised by both sexes'. For European men of the Victorian and Edwardian eras, the fact that basket-weaving was an exclusively male preserve seemed odd indeed. Meston, who was exceptionally preoccupied with masculinity even by contemporary standards, expressed particular surprise, noting that elsewhere in Australia Aboriginal men considered bag- and basket-making 'beneath their dignity' (Meston, 1904: 6). On why rainforest men indulged in this erstwhile female practice, Meston offered no explanation, but like other contemporary commentators he singled out male basket-weaving as a practice unique to the rainforest.

Mjöberg (1918: 173) specified four categories of rainforest artefact 'which distinguish their makers from all others ... These are their water bags and their cane baskets ... the large battle sword and the colourful and bright giant wooden shields ... Each of these four artefacts are exclusive and specific to the inhabitants of the rainforests in question'. This was part of Mjöberg's larger argument that those 'tribes that inhabit the immense rainforests in north Queensland, have adapted themselves very well to the dense jungle vegetation', where they 'exist in harmony with all other creatures and elements in the huge and multifarious realm of nature' (Mjöberg, 1918: 180). Mjöberg understood rainforest Aboriginal peoples' adaptations to their environment as conscious and deliberate strategies for wresting a living from their damp jungle lands,

which resulted in their possessing a material culture distinct from that of Aboriginal groups inhabiting drier, more open country. Before Tindale and Birdsell in the late 1930s, this was as close as anyone came to distinguishing a distinctive rainforest cultural configuration. But unlike Tindale and Birdsell, Mjöberg did not claim the rainforest inhabitants to be racially or in any other essential way distinct from other Aboriginal people. He contended that Aborigines across Australia were 'a very uniform and homogeneous people', the observable differences among them being due to environmental factors. It was adaptation to environment, Mjöberg argued, that accounted for the extent to which rainforest tribes differed, in their mode of subsistence and material culture, from other Aboriginal groups (Mjöberg, 1918: 143).

Later studies of rainforest material culture continued the emphasis on environmental adaptation. In the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, Queensland Museum associates Stan Colliver and Frank Woolston drew attention to the sophistication and efficacy of rainforest Aboriginal technologies (see for example Woolston & Colliver, 1973; Woolston, [1983]). They expressed endorsement of Tindale and Birdsell's Tasmanoid theory, but this was inconsequential to the central thrust of their investigations into Aboriginal adaptations to the rainforest environment. Writing in the 1970s, the geographer David Harris (1978) argued that the distinctive material culture of rainforest Aboriginals, and to some extent their social organisation and customs as well, were outcomes of their adaptation to their unique environment. 'Far from being "simple hunter-gatherers"', he declared, 'they were ecological sophisticates who exploited the resources of the rain forests extensively and selectively' (Harris, 1974). As the image of 'ecological sophisticates' was increasingly fastened on Aboriginal people from the 1970s onward, the inhabitants of the rainforests came to be seen as stewards of an extraordinarily rich and diverse environment. From this perspective, Tindale and Birdsell's racial theorising held dwindling interest, but their categorisation of Aboriginal groups on environmental criteria retained its pertinence.

## CONCLUSION

Tindale and Birdsell created the category 'rainforest Aboriginal' as a crucial component of their attempted reconstruction of the deep human past of Australia. In this narrative, the Aboriginal inhabitants of the North Queensland rainforests stood as the living relicts of the first human occupants of this continent. From the outset, this characterisation of the Aboriginal people of the wet tropics was burdened with serious problems, both in the qualities (physical, cultural and linguistic) it attributed to the people and in its representation of their environment as a 'refuge'. While the rainforest-people-as-relicts characterisation drew some supporters, it failed to win general academic acclamation, and by the 1970s was quite thoroughly discredited. Yet the category 'rainforest Aboriginal' survived, disengaged from the historical reconstruction that had inspired it and anchored instead to the distinctive economy of rainforest subsistence, instantiated in a distinctive technology and culture.

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## ❏ ENDNOTES

- 1 Tindale first referred to the distinctiveness of 'the inhabitants of the rain scrub areas around Cairns' in a letter to his mentor, J.B. Cleland, on 23 October 1938; J.B. Cleland Papers, University of Adelaide Archives, box 1, folder 1.
- 2 In scientific publications Tindale and Birdsell designated these people 'pygmoid', but in writings aimed at a popular audience simplified the terminology to 'pygmy'; see for example Tindale, 1962a, 1962b.
- 3 R.A. Douglas, unpublished typescript lecture notes attached to letter, Douglas to F.S. Colliver, 2 August 1962, Queensland Museum Archives, F.S. Colliver Collection, box 9. See also Anon 1962a.
- 4 According to Westaway & Hiscock (2005: 143) Birdsell's original data gave an average height for Kuranda Aboriginal men of five feet two and a half inches.
- 5 Mjöberg was evidently referring to the contemporary Swedish modernist artist, Isaac Grünewald, not the better-known Renaissance German painter, Matthias Grünewald.





# Connections, Transactions and Rock Art within and beyond the Wet Tropics of North Queensland

Alice BUHRICH, Felise GOLDFINCH and Shelley GREER

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This paper explores past connections of Aboriginal people within what is now known as the Wet Tropics, a coastal strip of tropical rainforest in northeast Australia. As a result of historical and ethnographic descriptions the rainforest is often defined as a 'cultural zone'. The proclamation of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, based on environmental parameters, has exaggerated the idea of the rainforest as a cultural boundary. We propose that in the past, Aboriginal connections were multifaceted, multifunctional and multidirectional, extending beyond the Wet Tropics boundaries. We use rock art to illustrate connections within and beyond the rainforest. For example, decorated shields, an iconic item of rainforest material culture, are depicted in rock art assemblages south of the rainforest boundary. Are the shield paintings out-of-place or do they illustrate networks of connection? We examine rock art motifs found in rainforest areas and compare them with those found in other rock art regions in North Queensland. We identify, for example, that sites located in the eastern rainforest are dominated by painted anthropomorphs (people) and zoomorphs (animals) in the silhouette style similar to figurative rock art of southeast Cape York Peninsula. We suggest that, like other areas, there were connections between cultural groups within the rainforest but that these same groups had links that went beyond this environmental zone. We further propose that the proclamation of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area has particularly influenced non-Aboriginal understandings of the past within this region.

□ Identity, rock art, shields, boundaries, Aboriginal heritage, Wet Tropics World Heritage Area

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This paper is concerned with the idea of 'boundaries' and their effects on our understanding and interpretation of the Aboriginal world of North Queensland. The idea that in the past Aboriginal social groups were primarily defined within specific two-dimensional geographic areas is perhaps subconscious (or unstated) in Australian archaeology. For example, within rock art studies, there has been a focus on identifying rock art 'regions' or 'provinces' which is suggestive of the latter. Recently, Taçon (2013), Brady and Bradley (2014) and Cole (2016) have drawn attention to some of the limitations inherent in the idea of provinces based on rock art style. This paper continues this line of thinking, suggesting that the creation of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area (WHA) in North Queensland, in conjunction with formal recognition of rights in land, has caused a much sharper line to be drawn around 'Rainforest Aboriginal People' than perhaps previously existed. This is not to say that proclamation of the WHA has not been beneficial; certainly the protected area provides opportunities for Aboriginal people to participate in management. However, this paper suggests that some consideration of different conceptualizations of boundaries should be considered. It draws on evidence primarily from rock art, but also linguistics, material culture and governance to examine the 'boundary issue' and attempts to provide some time depth to this discussion.

We begin by establishing the relevance of rock art and regional identity, then provide a history of descriptions of rainforest people, and illustrate how these depictions of Aboriginal identity changed in relation to the development of the environmental movement. Like McGregor (this volume), we propose that, much like 'regional style zones' in rock art, the idea of a rainforest 'cultural bloc' is a social construct influenced by ethnographic notions of Aboriginal people as part of the natural environment. We build on McGregor's description of how ethnographic representations defined 'rainforest Aboriginal people' and illustrate the role of the environmental movement and world heritage listing in the development of contemporary rainforest Aboriginal

identities. We present case studies that demonstrate connections between rainforest rock art and rock art to the south, north and west. For example, the depiction of rainforest shields in rock art to the south of the rainforest zone suggests significant exchange beyond 'environmental boundaries' (Goldfinch, 2014). Investigations suggest that in some respects, eastern rainforest rock art resonates with the rock art found in southeast Cape York Peninsula, while western rainforest rock art has closer ties to the west. These case studies suggest multifaceted, multifunctional and multidirectional connections that extend beyond the environmental boundary of rainforest. Our third case study investigates the implications of aligning environment with culture where previously such boundaries may not have existed. Placement of the Eastern Kuku Yalanji estate within the Wet Tropics WHA and Western Yalanji within Cape York Peninsula illustrates the conflict between environmental, administrative and cultural boundaries.

We are particularly concerned with presenting a picture of complexity; that is, that past and present Aboriginal people had strong and binding relationships that operated on many levels. These relationships also operated across considerable areas, beyond the arbitrary boundaries imposed by contemporary, western-oriented notions and institutions. For the most part, Aboriginal people probably operated as small local groups connected through kinship, but with cross-cutting ties forged by marriage and ceremonial relationships cemented by exchange. These relationships were not determined by environmental zones; rather, cultural similarities were (and continue to be) most likely based on relationships. This is evident in Williams' (1982) discussion of Yolgnu boundaries and permissions. Williams suggests that boundaries exist for managerial purposes, but that they do not indicate exclusive rights. She shows the complex nature of Yolgnu boundaries and that while they may be (loosely) based on environmental or ecological zones, it is the relationships of individuals and groups, based on certain principles of land allocation that influences the way that people might be found

across the landscape. These principles are based on kinship, religious affiliation, spirit origins (e.g. foetal animation), affinal links and those claimed through the female line as well as other circumstances such as requests based on needs. As a result, estates may be made up of 'non-contiguous lands' (Williams, 1982: 138-141). These arrangements are forged by negotiation (in some cases in ritual contexts) and thus may change. In terms of geographic boundaries, Williams (1982: 146) states that:

Boundaries are, in general, only as precise as they need to be, and they may be precise or imprecise for a number of reasons... Reticence to locate precise boundaries may even reflect concern about the consequences of doing so.

This paper explores evidence for such relationships between Aboriginal people living in (what is now) the Wet Tropics and their neighbours, primarily through rock art. Our aim is to bring relationships rather than boundaries into focus in relation to archaeological interpretation but perhaps also for those managing aboriginal cultural heritage within protected areas within the Wet Tropics.

## ROCK ART AND REGIONAL IDENTITY

Information Exchange theory has been applied to stylistic analyses of rock art to identify chronological, environmental and social boundaries in Aboriginal Australia by a number of researchers. The Information Exchange theory, described by Wobst (1977, 1999) and extended by Sackett (1982, 1985, 1990) and Wiessner (2008), is based on the structuralist philosophy that symbols, such as rock art, are a type of 'language', which to some extent can be deciphered independent of ethnography (Conkey, 1990). Maynard (1976) developed a model for cultural change over time based on differences in rock art which she proposed developed from a homogeneous Panaramittee style, found across Australia, to Simple Figurative and then more heterogeneous Complex Figurative styles. Stylistic analyses of rock art have since demonstrated that

Maynard's model is overly simplistic and distinct stylistic art traditions existed in the Pleistocene (Mulvaney, 2013), however Maynard's pioneering work suggested that style in rock art could be used to model cultural change across time (and perhaps space) in Aboriginal Australian archaeology.

Rock art style models have also been integrated with models of environmental change and resource availability. Smith (1992) proposed that resource rich areas have more heterogeneous rock art, while areas with fewer resources have more homogeneous symbolism, reflecting the need for cooperation and shared resources. In North Queensland, Smith's model was used to explain Late Holocene differences in rock art style across the Mitchell-Palmer drainage boundary. To the north, highly stylised 'Quinkan' figurative motifs feature in the resource rich sandstone plateaus while non-figurative forms dominate in the savannah environment to the south (David & Chant, 1995; Morwood & Hobbs, 1995). David and Lourandos (1998) argued that regional rock art boundaries in North Queensland developed as a result of social change in the mid-Late Holocene as people used rock art symbols to convey social identity. However McDonald and Veth's (2014) analysis of Pilbara rock art found little relationship between rock art style and language and instead proposed symbolic differences reflect environmental boundaries between the Pilbara and the Western Desert regions and possibly developed in the earliest phase of occupation.

Critics of Information Exchange theory question whether information contained in rock art can be 'read' by outsiders such as archaeologists. Classifying attributes of rock art is an inherently subjective process and as 'outsiders' we can never know which attributes were significant to the culture in which they were created, and therefore which attributes to measure (Bednarik, 2007: 11). Officer's (1992: 10) study of regional attributes of rock art styles in southeast New South Wales found multiple boundaries of style which varied according to the attributes chosen and the scale analysed. He found the rock art assemblage reflected complex patterns of social relationships, cultural affiliations

and ceremonial networks that did not necessarily coincide and therefore was not particularly useful in identifying distinct cultural regions. Ethnographic data also provides a different perspective on archaeological observations of rock art style in the Gulf of Carpentaria where the distribution of specific motifs reflects social networks such as kinship and ceremonial ties (Brady & Bradley, 2014). Brady and Bradley's (2014) research reflects a movement towards fine grained analysis of rock art within Indigenous frameworks (see also Hampson, 2015; Sanz et al., 2009; Taçon & Chippendale, 1998).

The literature demonstrates that analysis of rock art style can provide information about past relationships although there is some debate over whether environmental (David & Chant, 1995; McDonald & Veth, 2014; Smith, 1992) or ethnographic (Brady & Bradley, 2014; Hampson, 2015) information are more significant in identifying rock art style. The rainforests of northeast Queensland offer a number of opportunities to explore the relationship between rock art style and identity. The rainforests are thought to have been settled permanently in the Late Holocene, by which time regional styles of rock art were already firmly entrenched in surrounding areas (Cosgrove et al., 2007; David & Lourandos, 1998). Thus, a specific style or styles of rock art were likely part of the cultural repertoire of the first permanent rainforest inhabitants. Applying Smith's (1992) approach, rock art style in areas of relatively abundant resources should be heterogeneous, reflecting 'closed' or bounded social networks and more intensive communication. In the rainforest, the nuts and seeds that formed a high proportion of people's diets provided a high carbohydrate source that allowed intensive occupation of the rainforest environment (Tuechler et al., 2014). Following Smith (1992), rock art style in the rainforest should be heterogeneous; and given the effect of high humidity on preservation it is likely to be relatively recent (Ward et al., 1999). In addition, previous research on ethnographic rainforest shields has demonstrated the use of visual culture to convey social identity through highly stylised designs (Abernethy, 1984; Hale, 1989). The question is, did rock art have the same function?

## **NORTH, SOUTH, CENTRAL: DIVISIONS WITHIN THE RAINFOREST**

It is important at this stage to clarify what is meant, in the contemporary context, by the term 'rainforest people'. Divisions of north, south and central rainforest areas have changed in the context of historical and political considerations and there are variations in the way that rainforest boundaries are defined. Although tropical rainforest environments extend from Lockerbie Scrub at the tip of Cape York to Eungella National Park near Mackay, the Wet Tropics WHA boundary was drawn around a coastal strip from Helenvale, south of Cooktown, to Paluma, north of Townsville, and west to Ravenshoe (figure 1). As the World Heritage Area was declared on the basis of natural values, the boundaries were defined on the basis of natural parameters. Today, this is largely the area within which Aboriginal people define themselves as 'rainforest people', though in the past, Aboriginal estates crossed environmental zones and few were confined only to rainforest environments.

In the nineteenth century, ethnographers such as Lumholtz (1889), Meston et al. (1889) and Mjöberg (2015 [1918]) identified a rainforest material culture from south of the Russell River to Cardwell, and west to the Atherton and Evelyn Tablelands. This was considered the core rainforest area (e.g. Mjöberg, 2015 [1918]). In research just prior to the World Heritage declaration, Abernethy (1984) distinguished three stylistic zones in relation to designs on ethnographic rainforest shields: northern, central and southern zones, centred respectively on Cairns, Innisfail and Cardwell. Some recent archaeological work in rainforest areas has used these zones (e.g. Cosgrove et al., 2007: 151) while others use the Wet Tropics WHA boundary to define a rainforest cultural zone which includes Bloomfield in the north (e.g. Best, 2003). This suggests that the World Heritage boundaries have influenced the way rainforest culture is identified in some academic work.

Today the Rainforest Aboriginal People's Alliance identifies Aboriginal groups within the three Wet

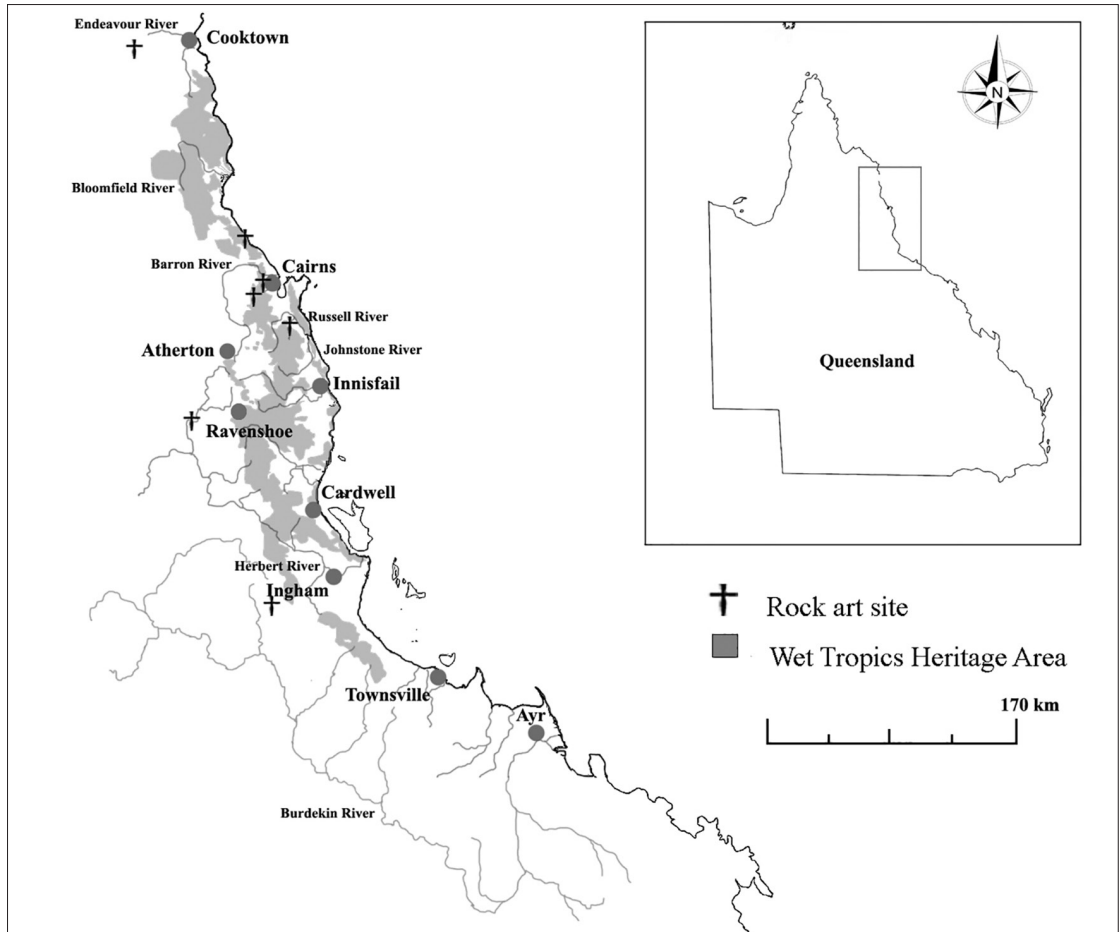


FIG. 1. Map of Wet Tropics World Heritage Area and rock art complexes recorded by A. Buhrich.

Tropics WHA zones based on administrative and political affiliation. Thus the Eastern Kuku Yalanji estate, from Mossman to Cooktown, is in the northern zone, represented by Jabalbina Prescribed Body Corporate. The central zone extends from Mossman to Innisfail and includes part of the Atherton Tablelands. The southern zone incorporates the estates of six Aboriginal groups from Tully south to Paluma and is represented by Giringun Aboriginal Corporation. By aligning themselves in this way Aboriginal people have maximised their ability to utilise resources, manage funding, negotiate with government bodies and advocate equitable involvement in land.

### **‘WILD AS THE FORESTS’: CONCEPTS OF RAINFOREST IDENTITY**

Explorer Christie Palmerston’s description of rainforest people ‘as wild and uncultured as the forests they occupy’ reflects the notion of Aboriginal people as a component of the natural environment (Pannell, 2008). According to nineteenth century ethnographers, if Aboriginal people were a natural part of the ecology, then it followed that an environment that harboured strange and unusual plants and animals would also harbour a unique Aboriginal culture and their observations of unusual artefacts, people’s apparent short stature

and their nut based diet seemed to confirm this. Although people living in the rainforest did not consider themselves a unified society, nineteenth century European ethnographers identified distinct characteristics that contributed to the concept of 'rainforest Aboriginal people'.

In the description of an expedition to the Bellenden Ker Range, Meston et al. (1889: 18) described Aboriginal peoples' short and wiry appearance and 'unsurpassed' tree-climbing agility. Lumholtz (1889) noted differences between 'rainforest' and other Aboriginal groups, although he attributed large noses, wiry hair and small stature to 'mixture with the Papuans'. The idea of a 'rainforest people' appears in the account of Mjöberg's 1913 expedition to Queensland's tropical rainforests, where his objective was, in part, to document the rapidly disappearing 'Stone Age' people (Mjöberg, 2015 [1918]). For Mjöberg, the tropical rainforest started at Mount Tambourine, near Brisbane, but the genuine rainforest area was around Cairns with the Atherton Tableland as its heart. Mjöberg believed the differences he observed in rainforest people's physical appearance and material culture to be the result of their adaptation to the unique environment. In the 1930s Tindale and Birdsell (1941) suggested that people in the rainforest were remnants of a 'pygmy' race, based on blood samples, cranial measurements and photographic images, pushed into rainforest environments by more recent 'waves' of migrants. They argued that rainforest people were a unique 'genetic class' of people that they called the 'Barrineans', 'Negritos' or 'Pygmies' to reflect their 'un-Aboriginality' (Birdsell, 1993: 35-6; Tindale & Birdsell, 1941; Tindale, 1959). However, this notion of the rainforest as a distinct cultural zone with unique material culture and people was not universally accepted.

Material culture collected from the area we now associate with rainforest Aboriginal people was never homogeneous. Roth (in Khan, 1993, 1996) identifies differences in material culture, particularly between the Eastern Kuku Yalanji at Bloomfield River and the central rainforest Dyirbal and Yidin speakers. For example Eastern Kuku Yalanji used rainforest shields and swords, but Yalanji shields were more

rectangular and larger than those found further south. Anderson (1996: 79) found that Eastern Yalanji's language, technology and trading links were closely tied to southeast Cape York Peninsula, and reported 'it may be misleading to speak of "rainforest culture", in the sense of a wholly common material culture among the Aboriginal groups who lived in the North Queensland rainforest'. Linguistic studies further highlight the differences, rather than homogeneity, in rainforest cultures.

Today, language is synonymous with identity in Aboriginal Australia. In the 1960s, when Dixon began recording Aboriginal languages in the rainforest, he found vast differences between four major language families based on grammar, vocabulary, loan words and mutual intelligibility (Dixon, 1983; see also Dixon, 1991, 2008, 2015). In central, northern, southern, and western rainforest areas, Dixon (2008) identified language families that were as different from each other as English and Welsh, but also described language alliances that might not have been recognised previously. Using linguistic evidence, Dixon (2008) hypothesised that rainforest people had moved into the rainforest from the north (Yidin speakers), south (Dyirbal speakers) and west (Mbarbarrum speakers) (figure 2). Dixon identified a new model of rainforest identity. Speaking at a Rainforest Aboriginal Network meeting in 1993, Ngatjon Elder Ernie Raymont described the implications of Dixon's work in forming new alliances based on linguistic research. Raymont explained that Dixon's work, which identified seven Dyirbal-speaking dialects, encouraged a new way of thinking about rainforest tribal relationships:

All that time we were thinking we were all strangers and we were all enemies and that's the attitude I was brought up with when I was a kid in the camp at Malanda from the old people...So it's only in the last 10 years as Prof Dixon went amongst our people and wrote books about it, that we have come together and start talking to one another and all those years we thought we all enemies talking different tribal dialects. (Raymont, cited in Pannell, 2008: 64)

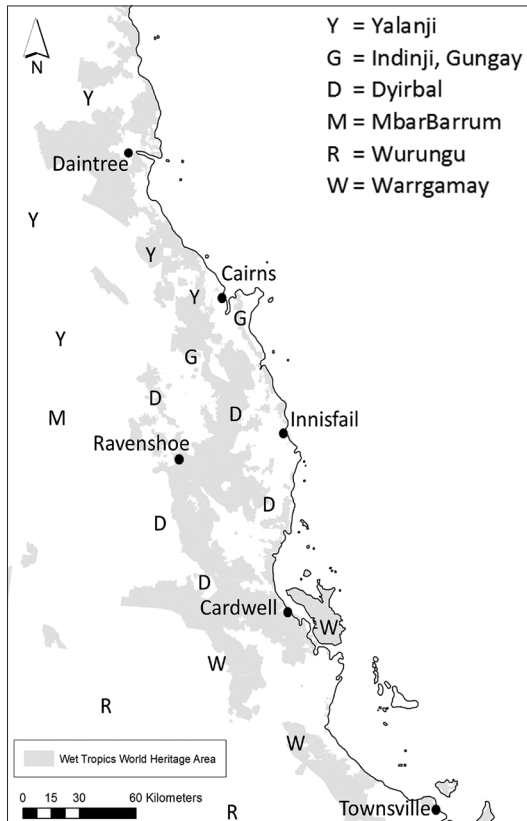


FIG. 2. Language map of the rainforest area after Dixon 1983: Map 1.

Concepts of Aboriginal rainforest identity have changed in response to ethnographic descriptions, academic theory and linguistic evidence. The interest in rainforest identity in many ways reflects the fascination with the distinct plants and animals found in the rainforest environment. The primary aim of ethnographers such as Lumholtz (1889), Mjöberg (2015[1918]) and Meston et al. (1889) was the collection of scientific samples and museum specimens, which extended to observations of Aboriginal customs and collecting Aboriginal material culture. Political and social attitudes also influence the way rainforest culture is defined, exemplified by the drawing of the Wet Tropics world heritage boundary. Although the movements of people in the past are hard to confirm, the complex linguistic situation suggests that the rainforest zone, like other areas of Aboriginal Australia, has a dynamic history.

## ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, ENVIRONMENTALISTS & THE WET TROPICS WORLD HERITAGE AREA

The (academic) discrediting of the theories of Tindale and Birdsell and others occurred just prior to the emergence of the environmental movement which coalesced around the campaign to have the Wet Tropics listed as a WHA. The conservation campaign continued for a decade until listing in 1988. From the 1970s to the 1990s there was a heightened activism by Aboriginal people in Australia: land rights legislation was enacted, the Mabo case was fought and won, and native title legislation was introduced. Thus, as the idea of a racially-driven 'rainforest' group evaporated, a new 'environment-focused' group emerged. 'Rainforest' was 'old', distinctive and popular, allowing the original concept (also old, distinctive and popular) to slip easily into the new mould.

Henry (2012: 229) has commented on the way that Indigenous people have provided '...inspiration and guidance on how to formulate an alternative human environmental relationship'. Henry's study of the relationship between Aboriginal people and environmentalists was set within the North Queensland rainforest, focusing particularly on the construction of the Skyrail rainforest cable car that now transports tourists from Cairns to Kuranda above the rainforest canopy (see also Greer & Henry, 1996; Henry, 1998). She comments on the evangelical nature of environmentalism, the focus on universals and the romanticized view that environmentalists often have of Indigenous cultures. On the other hand, Aboriginal people were fighting for some measure of control over their traditional lands and to assert their identities as Aboriginal people at both local and national levels. Thus, the idea of a 'rainforest Aboriginal people' addressed both environmentalist and Aboriginal aspirations.

World heritage listing of the rainforest forced Aboriginal people whose traditional lands were within the protected area to come together as a single entity in negotiations with government, land owners and conservationists. Native title also provided a framework for community and individual identity.



When native title was first introduced, a pan-rainforest claim was considered, but abandoned and today there are 18 native title determinations based on language as well as tribal, clan and even family boundaries (Pannell, 2008; Pert et al., 2015). The composition of Aboriginal rainforest groups is constantly evolving as clans splinter from tribal groups in an effort to have an individual voice in negotiations with government, landholders and land managers.

In 2005, 18 Rainforest Aboriginal tribal groups became signatory to the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area Regional Agreement with national and state departments. The agreement outlined cooperative management of the World Heritage listed rainforest environment between government and Traditional Owners. The rainforest shield design was used by Aboriginal organisations in artwork to ‘symbolise Rainforest Aboriginal people coming together as one voice... to work with government agencies’ (Wet Tropics Management Authority, 2005). The use of this iconic rainforest artefact to represent these organisations suggests that today these Aboriginal people draw on notions of ‘rainforest culture’ for their contemporary cultural identity. However, rainforest shield motifs appear in rock shelters *outside* the rainforest zone. The use of rainforest shields to communicate clan identity, depiction in rock art and use in contemporary artwork such as the logo of the Aboriginal Rainforest Council, Girringun Aboriginal Corporation and Rainforest Aboriginal People Alliance demonstrates that the use of the rainforest shield as a symbol is significant for both past and present Aboriginal people in this region.

### **‘RAINFOREST SHIELDS’ IN THE TOWNSVILLE AREA**

The Townsville area is 30 km south of the rainforests of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, within the Dry Tropics which incorporates part of the Burdekin River watershed. The immense watershed of the Burdekin and Herbert Rivers extends from north of the Tully

River to Mackay in the south. Brayshaw (1990: 1) describes it thus:

The north eastern corner of this area abuts the rugged southern perimeter of the once more extensive north Queensland rainforest. Patches of rainforest occur down the coast to Mackay and beyond, while open woodlands clothe the lower gently undulating hills and footslopes to the west and south west.

Ethnographic, material culture and archaeological evidence were incorporated into Brayshaw’s study. She did not take the ‘rainforest’ as the frame for the investigation but rather the Herbert and Burdekin River systems, which include both Wet and Dry tropics. This was Brayshaw’s doctoral study, begun in 1973, completed in 1977 and published in 1990. Thus, Brayshaw’s investigation was undertaken in the window of time that followed the discrediting of Tindale and Birdsell ideas but largely before the campaign for the Wet Tropics WHA. Importantly, Brayshaw (1990) describes intense interactions between people of the rainforest and the Dry Tropics.

Brayshaw provides details on material culture from her study region in 11 museums, mostly in Australia, but also overseas. She notes that these museums hold collections of rainforest shields as well as the club shield, thought to originate in the southern part of the region from Townsville to Mackay. These shield types are significantly different to rainforest shields in terms of size, shape and decoration. Rainforest shields are larger (up to one metre in length), have distinctive ‘banana’ or ‘kidney’ shapes and are highly decorated with various patterning (figure 3). Rainforest shields were typically only produced in the Wet Tropics as they were made from the buttress roots of various fig trees (*Ficus spp.*). However, Brayshaw reports that two rainforest shields were collected in Townsville, an area technically beyond the Wet Tropics. The provenance for one of the shields was given as ‘Townsville’ while provenance for the second is unknown. Contrastingly, there were also other shield types collected in the Wet Tropics area. A distinct club shield was collected in the Rockingham Bay (Cardwell) area, well within the

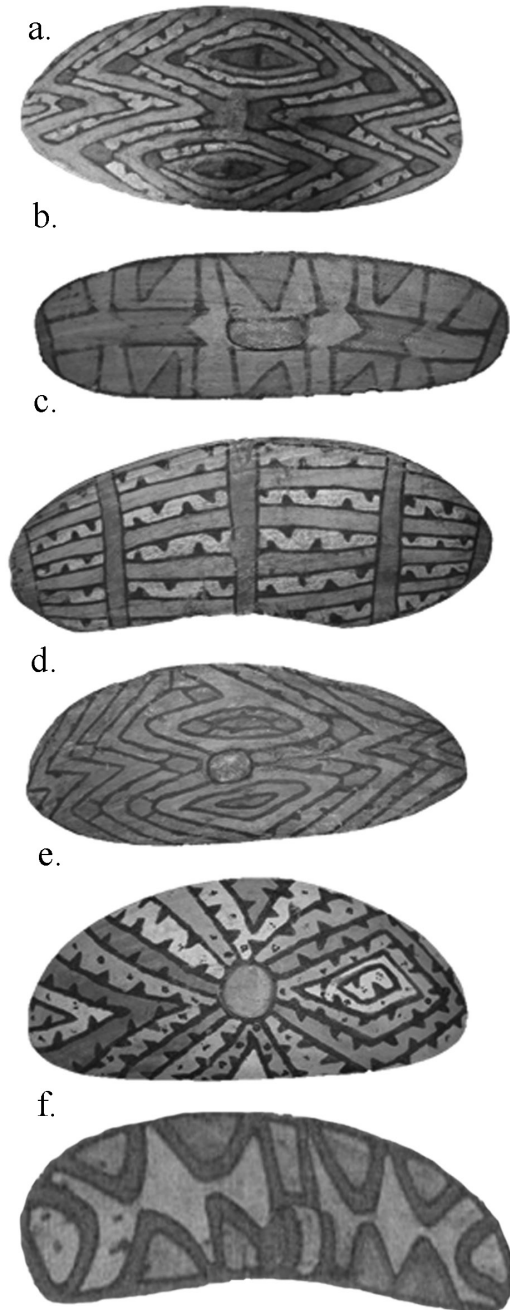


FIG. 3a-e. Rainforest shields held in the Material Culture Collection, James Cook University (Photographs: Rosita Henry); 3f. Rainforest shield held in the Queensland Museum.

rainforest area. The point here is not quantitative – many more rainforest shields were collected in rainforest areas and similarly more club shields were collected in the south. Our interest here is why these shields were apparently ‘out-of-place’.

Rainforest shields have been identified in rock art images in the Townsville area (Brayshaw, 1977, 1990; Hatte, 1992). Again, these motifs appear to be ‘out-of-place’ in the Dry Tropics environment of Townsville, beyond the rainforest where these shields were produced (Abernethy, 1984; Barnard, 2003; Best, 2003; Brayshaw, 1977, 1990; Hale, 1989; Hatte, 1992). Brayshaw (1977, 1990) recorded eight sites that contained shield motifs while Hatte (1992) identified new sites and re-recorded Brayshaw’s sites, finding additional motifs. Hatte suggested that there could be in excess of 50 shield motifs at some Townsville sites, among other motifs (figure 4).

Goldfinch (2014) addressed the apparent anomaly of rainforest shield motifs in rock art outside the rainforest zone, posing a number of questions. These included what is the geographic distribution of these motifs? Are they really depictions of rainforest shields? And why were some Aboriginal groups painting motifs of artefacts produced by their neighbours? To resolve whether the rock art motifs were shields, Goldfinch (2014) examined published recordings of the rock art from the sites of Turtle Rock, Crystal Creek B, Hervey’s Range B and C, Mount Elliot East and West, Burrumbush and Many Peaks recorded by Brayshaw (1977, 1990) and Hatte (1992). She analysed these motifs in relation to attributes identified by Abernethy (1984) and Hale (1989) for rainforest shields from museum collections. In particular, she compared length to breadth ratios, shape, design organization and decorative elements found on the rock art motifs with those identified for the museum shields.

Two studies have investigated the relationship of shield shape and decorative designs to geographic zones within the rainforest. Abernethy (1984) argued that oblong-shaped shields were predominantly found from the Russell River



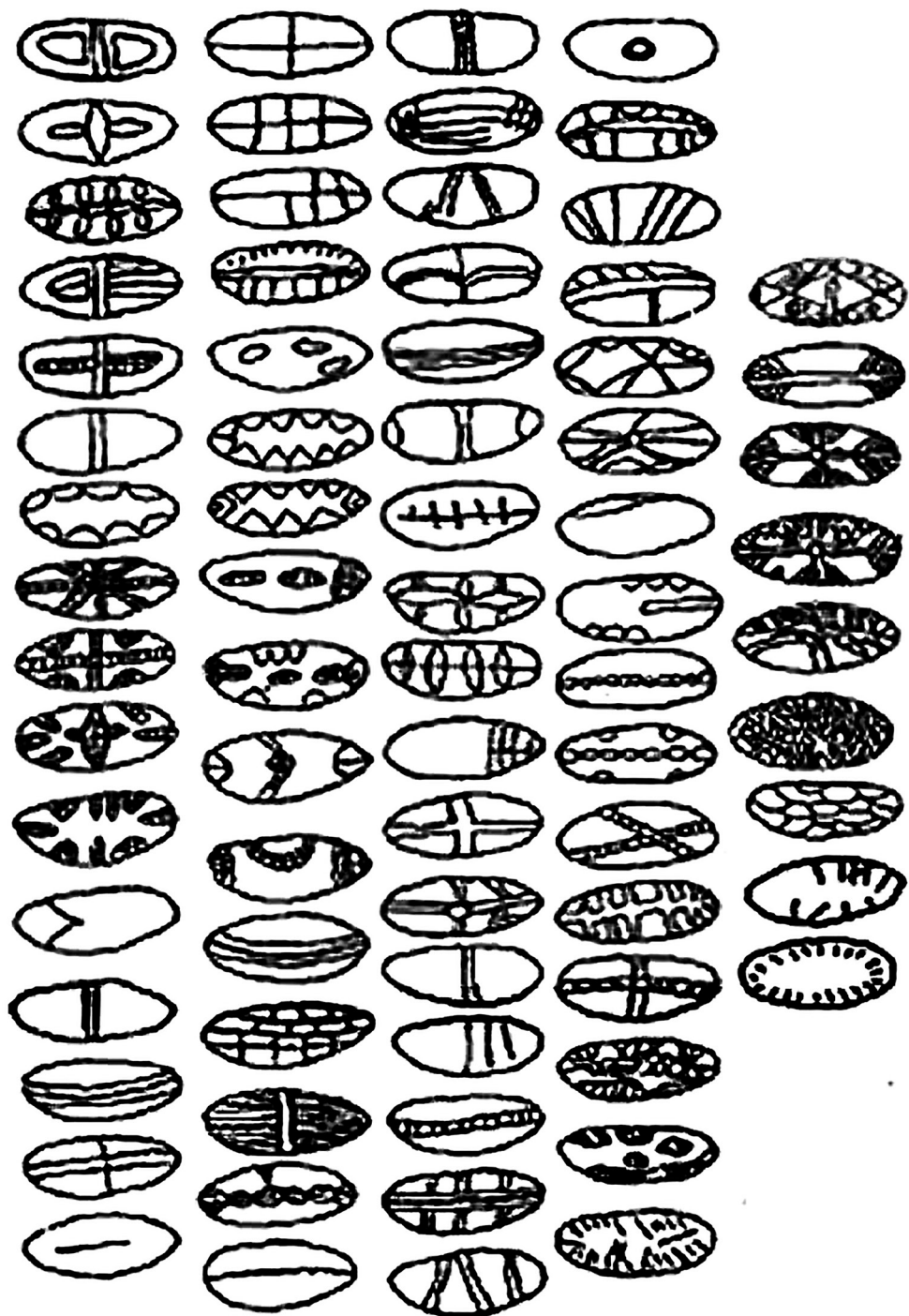


FIG. 4. Rainforest shield motifs in rock art of the Townsville district (after Hatte, 1992: 75).

(Babinda) to north of Cairns, which she called the northern zone. Oval-shaped shields were commonly found in the southern zone south of Russell River to Ingham. Hale (1989) built upon Abernethy's work and produced a detailed analysis of design organization, decorative elements, shield shapes and the relationship between these and language groups identified by Dixon (1983). She observed six shield shape categories, noting that some categories were more likely to be found in Abernethy's northern distribution zone, the Yidiny language group, while others were associated with the southern distribution zone, the Warrgamay language group (Hale, 1989: 91). In addition, both Brayshaw (1977, 1990) and Hale (1989) observed an area of overlap (a central zone) between these two zones within the Dyirbal language group that had shields from all categories. Goldfinch (2014) applied classifications produced by Abernethy and Hale to shield shape and design in rock art motifs to investigate whether the same categories could be identified.

Determining if the rock art motifs depicted in the Townsville sites were rainforest shields was the first step in Goldfinch's (2014) study, after which the 'out-of-place' paintings could be further analysed. Abernethy (1984) had measured maximum length and breadth of museum shields within her study, producing length-breadth ratios for each. Goldfinch similarly measured maximum length and breadth for the shield motifs and found that length to breadth ratios for shield motifs fell within Abernethy's range for museum shields. Similarly, the shapes of the rainforest shield motifs closely resembled those identified by both Abernethy (1984) and Hale (1989). In fact, specific shield shape categories could be discerned in the motifs and interestingly, these most resembled the categories observed in museum shields from Abernethy's northern distribution zone. Similarly, Goldfinch distinguished different categories of design organization, symmetry in design and specific decorative elements that had been identified by Hale (1989) and Abernethy (1984). Again she found that the rock art motifs displayed attributes observed on museum shields.

Goldfinch's (2014) analysis provides convincing evidence that the shield motifs truly represent rainforest shields and suggested that they may resemble museum-held shields produced in the northern zone. The study also revealed that the shield motifs dominate Townsville rock art assemblages and that sites with a higher frequency of shield motifs are located in the south and west of the area. Thus, the shield motifs are found furthest from the areas where similar museum-held shields were produced. Goldfinch (2014) stated that this occurrence provided a persuasive argument that the painters of the shield motifs were acting with agency and suggested active decision making rather than just 'copying' from their neighbours. In an attempt to explain this phenomenon, Goldfinch turned to ethnographic evidence for the region.

Rainforest shields were made at Yarrabah mission in the 1930s for the tourist and museum markets. McConnel (1935) observed their production and design and identified the designs on shields as totemic in nature. Ethnographic research described in Brayshaw (1990) states that rainforest shields were also associated with ceremonial gatherings, male initiation and exchange (figure 5). Such gatherings were undertaken regularly and involved large numbers of people who travelled great distances to attend. James Morrill, a shipwreck survivor who lived with Aboriginal people just south of Townsville for 17 years, reported that large ceremonial gatherings took place at Cape Cleveland, just south of Townsville, in close proximity to the sites of Mt Elliot East and West where many rock art shield motifs were found. At Turtle Rock, the presence of the shield motifs, stone arrangements, human remains and clear quartz (possibly sourced from Hinchinbrook Island to the north) suggests both ceremonial activity and exchange (Campbell, 1978).

There are a number of explanations for the depiction of rainforest shields in rock art near Townsville. Goldfinch (2014) suggested that the rock art motifs could represent ceremonial exchange of shields, especially as was previously noted, two of the museum rainforest shields were collected in



FIG. 5. Photograph of Aboriginal men with shields, Cairns region, taken by Alfred Atkinson circa 1890s (Source: Cairns Historical Society).

the Townsville area. However Goldfinch (2014) suggested they could also be seen as evidence of communication between the painters and those whose designs were represented. Alternatively, northern visitors may have made the paintings during gatherings for ceremony and exchange which might have included exchange of ceremonial performances and ideas, marriage arrangements and tangible objects (such as the shields). While the presence of the shield motifs found outside the rainforest could be explained in a number of ways, it strongly suggests that exchange relations occurred across the Wet and Dry tropics. Taçon (2013) observes intersecting style zones have high value for rock art research and the shield motif art found in the Townsville region has potential to further our understanding about engagement between groups.

## ROCK ART WITHIN THE RAINFOREST

As part of her doctoral studies, Buhrich recorded twenty-two rock art sites with seven groups of Aboriginal custodians in and around the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area between 2013-4. This sample comprises over a third of the rock art sites known through published and unpublished records (e.g. Brayshaw, 1975, 1990; Clegg, 1978; Cole & David, 1992; Cosgrove & Raymont, 2002; Cosgrove et al., 2007; David, 1989; Dixon, 1983; Edwards, 2007; Gunn & Thorn, 1994; Horsfall, 1987; Layton, 1992; Trezise & Wright, 1966; Walsh 1986; Woolston & Colliver, 1975). The aim of the research was to identify whether a rainforest rock art style could be identified and how rock art within the rainforest relates to surrounding rock art styles. This research stems from an interest in the relationship between regional art provinces of North Queensland, particularly southeast Cape York Peninsula, Chillagoe and the Einasleigh Uplands.

Ochre has been a presence in the material culture of the earliest rainforest occupants. Ochre is found in all levels of excavated rainforest rock shelters, from 7000 years to the present, although it occurs in greater quantities from 2000 years ago when permanent settlement of the rainforest probably began (Cosgrove et al., 2007; Horsfall, 1987). Although ochre is not exclusively used for rock art, this suggests that visual expression has been an important component of the cultural toolkit since initial occupation.

Similarities have previously been noted between the silhouette style of anthropomorphs found in southeast Cape York Peninsula and rock art sites in the rainforest or its margins. Clegg (1978) compared depictions of people at the site of Bare Hill, in the rainforest near Cairns with the 'Quinkan' figures of the Laura rock art. Horsfall (1987) also noted that the 'frog like' designs from the Johnstone River near Innisfail are also similar to the 'Quinkan' depictions of Laura. Brayshaw (1990) identified that the 'Kennedy characters' found in the Herbert River catchment were also similar. In particular, there is a strong resemblance between the Kennedy character recorded by Brayshaw and the male anthropomorph recorded at Bare Hill, one hundred and fifty kilometres to the north (figure 6). Anthropomorphs at these sites are consistent with Layton's (1992) description of silhouette figures typical of north-eastern Australia.

Rock art in the rainforest zone are primarily found on granite boulders although sandstone, limestone

and basalt were also painted. The dominance of granite rock art shelters reflects the predominance of granite substrate. Sandstone and limestone is limited to the western margins of the study area, defined as within 20km from the current rainforest boundary. Paintings are found on granite boulders on slopes and creek lines and sandstone shelters on escarpments and outliers. A small number of paintings are found on shallow overhangs formed in basalt intrusions and four rock art sites have been recorded in one limestone outcrop in overhangs and caves including dark zone paintings (Winn & Buhrich, 2014). Although most sites are on granite there are a disproportionate number of motifs painted in sandstone shelters. The large numbers of motifs found on sandstone could reflect the better preservation of motifs on this geological substrate and/or the fact that it was a more attractive surface for painting. Rainforest sites tend to be found in clusters with one main site and two to three satellite sites. Primary sites have the largest variety of colour and motif form while satellite sites have a smaller number of motifs often only painted in red.

There is a relatively low density of rock art sites in the rainforest. Using a combination of Buhrich's records, and published and unpublished data, only five sites are recorded per 100 kms<sup>2</sup>. It is likely there are more sites that are not formally reported but nevertheless the total number of sites is nowhere near the density found in the limestone outcrops of Chillagoe, the sandstone escarpments of Laura or the Einasleigh Uplands. Motif counts are relatively low per site. As Table 1 illustrates,

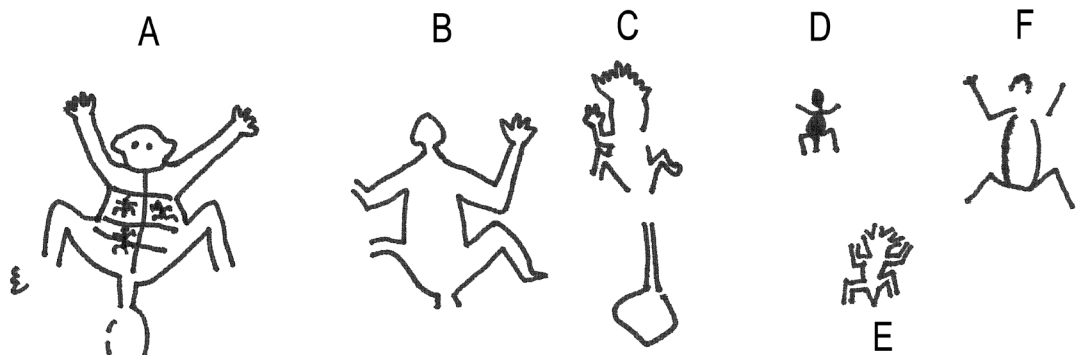


FIG. 6. Anthropomorphs from (A) Laura (Trezise, 1993: 130-131), (B, C) Bare Hill and (D, E, F) Herbert River catchment (after Brayshaw 1990: 128, 142) (not to scale).



**Table 1. Maximum, minimum and mean number of individual motifs at rock art sites within each site cluster.**

Site Cluster	Maximum	Minimum	Mean
Cairns Coastal	3	2	2.5
Davies Creek	31	5	12.5
Bare Hill	50	2	31
Silver Valley	46	5	19
Mount Claro	119	9	50
Melody Rocks	48	9	22
Mulgrave	11	11	11
Average	44	6	21

the maximum number of motifs at any one site is 119 (Mt Claro 2 site) and the minimum two (Cairns Coastal and Bare Hill sites). Overall the mean maximum of motifs per site is 44 (although this drops to 16 if Mt Claro 2 is excluded) and the minimum mean is six. On average there are 21 motifs per site. This is a relatively small number of motifs per site if compared to sandstone areas such as Laura, where Maynard (1976) counted 941 motifs at just 5 sites and Cole reported an average of 44 motifs per site at Jowalbinna Station (Cole & David, 1992). For the Einasleigh Uplands, Lovell-Pollock (1997) recorded 3049 motifs at 118 rock art sites within 1 km of escarpment along the Robertson River. The extremely low density of sites is one of the challenges for recording rainforest rock art as sites often have to be relocated using sparse information in extreme environments. There is an additional layer of complexity as virtually each cluster of rock art requires consultation and approval from separate Aboriginal groups.

Painting dominates the rainforest rock art corpus although different patterns were observed on the eastern and western sites. Eastern sites, most of which are found on the coast or along rainforest rivers, are all painted. Motifs found at western sites, within 20kms of the current rainforest boundary, show greater diversity of technique with stencils at Mount Claro 2 in the southwest and at Melody Rocks in the northwest. A panel of weathered cupules was also recorded at Melody Rocks (Winn & Buhrich, 2014).

The numbers of figurative and non-figurative motifs are sharply contrasted between east and west sites within this rainforest region. Eastern sites feature anthropomorphs and zoomorphs with a small number of abstract and geometric designs

while western sites have abstract and geometric motifs with a small number of anthropomorphs and zoomorphs (see figures 7, 8 & 9). In terms of the

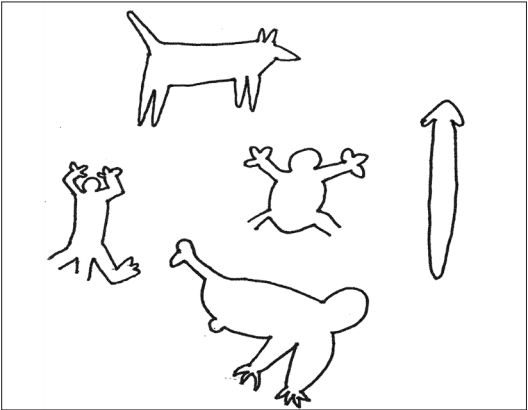


FIG. 7. Sample of figurative motifs from eastern rainforest sites (not to scale).

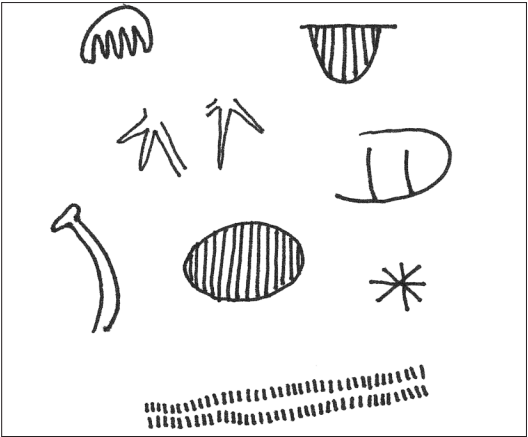


FIG. 8. Sample of non-figurative motifs from western rainforest sites (not to scale).

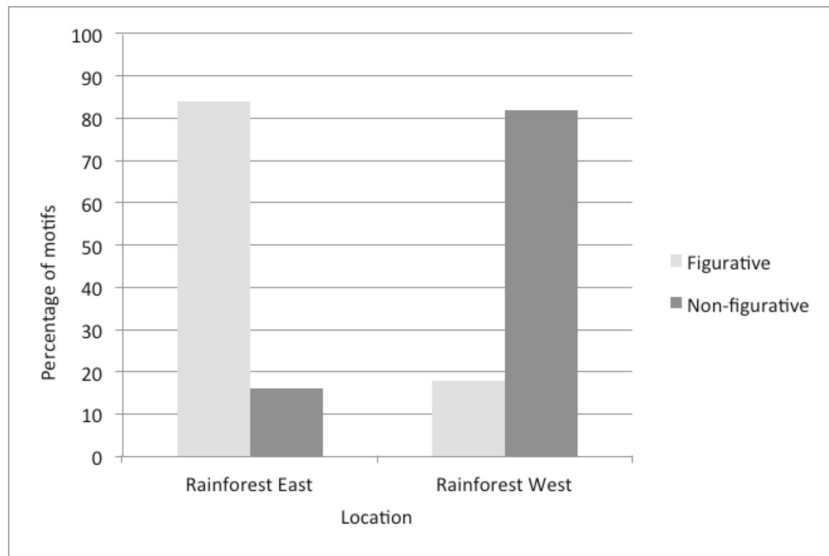


FIG. 9. Percentage of figurative and non-figurative motifs at eastern and western rainforest sites.

ratio of figurative to non-figurative motifs, sites in the eastern section of the rainforest appear to be more like a coastal Cape York Peninsula style that includes Laura, Normanby and Princess Charlotte Bay while western rainforest rock art appears to have more in common with Chillagoe and Ngarrabullgin (Cole, 2016; David, 2002), although not the Einasleigh Uplands which features stencils and engravings (Lovell-Pollock 1997). Although language groups extend from west to east, patterning in the rock art appears to be different, reflecting further cultural complexity.

In his reflections of the role of rock art and regional identity, Hampson (2015) stressed the importance of individual motifs which contain specific meaning. Further work is needed to identify the relevance of individual motifs in rainforest rock art but it is noted that the star motif, identified by Ellwood et al. (2013) as significant motifs at sites around Chillagoe are found at each of the western rainforest sites. Stencils are rare in rainforest rock art, only found at the margins at Mount Claro 2 and Melody Rocks but not at eastern rainforest sites nor Burdekin River art sites to the south, in the Dry Tropics (Brayshaw, 1990). Stencils are common to the west at Laura, Chillagoe and the Einasleigh Uplands and thus their

presence at Mt Claro 2 could indicate engagement or interaction amongst these groups. The dominance of simple figurative silhouette style in the eastern rainforest sites resonates with southeast Cape York Peninsula rock art, particularly from Laura to Endeavour River (Cole, 2016). However the eastern rainforest sites lack some of the distinctive features of southeast Cape York Peninsula rock art such as tracks, sorcery figures and female anthropomorphs.

Rock art in the rainforest and its surrounds does not easily fit into rock art style provinces previously identified for North Queensland. Eastern sites, dominated by paintings of anthropomorphs and zoomorphs, could be considered part of the southeast Cape York Peninsula style province. The dominance of abstract and geometric motifs in western sites suggests similarity with the Ngarrabullgan / Chillagoe style province identified by David (2002). Little similarity has been found between rock art of the rainforest and stenciled rock art and engravings of the Einasleigh Uplands. Trends in rock art style could suggest engagement between coastal rainforest and southeast Cape York Peninsula and western rainforest and Ngarrabullgan/Chillagoe. Today these areas are identified as discrete regions

based on classification of the natural environment. The Wet Tropics, Cape York and Einasleigh Uplands represent three distinct bioregions which form useful administrative boundaries for natural resource management. But Aboriginal cultural boundaries between these regions are not so clear, as the following example demonstrates.

## **TRADITIONAL BOUNDARIES VERSUS ADMINISTRATIVE BOUNDARIES**

The Yalanji estate illustrates the disjunction between traditional cultural boundaries and those of contemporary administrative units. Yalanji is spoken over a large area, which incorporates wet tropical coasts, a rainforest tableland and dry, open woodland of southeast Cape York Peninsula. Yalanji people identify themselves as either Eastern (Kuku/Sunrise) or Western (Gugu/Sunset) Yalanji, which are further divided into clan groups who speak different dialects.

Today the Eastern and Western Yalanji estates are managed through different administrative systems. Cape York Land Council represents Eastern Kuku Yalanji, while North Queensland Land Council represents Western Yalanji. Eastern and Western Yalanji estates also have different legislation for protection of heritage sites. As for the rest of Queensland, cultural heritage across the Yalanji estate is protected by the (Queensland) *Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003*. Western Yalanji heritage is also included in the provisions of the (Queensland) *Cape York Heritage Act 2007* while Eastern Kuku Yalanji, whose estate is primarily within national park, has additional protection through the (Commonwealth) *Nature Conservation Act 1992*. The world heritage nomination proposed for Cape York Peninsula in 2011 could have seen the Yalanji estate divided into two separately nominated world heritage areas, each with different identified values and assessments of cultural significance.

Part of the reason that the Yalanji estate is divided into different administrative areas is that the Mount Windsor Tableland divides the Eastern and Western Yalanji estates. This vast area of forest reserve holds the headwaters of the Daintree, Bloomfield

and Mitchell-Palmer Rivers. It was once crossed by multiple Aboriginal walking tracks, in use until the 1920s, which linked tribes, hunting grounds, resources, campsites, story places and rock art sites (McCracken, 1989). Forestry resources were logged heavily on Mount Windsor until World Heritage declaration in 1988. In fact, protection of Mount Windsor's forestry and mineral resources was an important focus of the environmental movement that led to the World Heritage declaration of the Wet Tropics and the road to Mount Windsor was the site of the first environmental blockade in North Queensland in 1981 (Hill, 2008). It is now managed as a national park, the Mount Windsor Management Statement declaring the intention of maintaining 'the remote wilderness value and significant plant and animal species' with no reference to Aboriginal cultural values (DNPRSR, 2013). Forestry tracks in use prior to world heritage gazettal have not been maintained and access to the area is restricted through a locked gate. Yalanji people have little access to this area, and the traditional walking tracks which presumably once provided access to cultural sites and facilitated ceremonial and social networks are not currently used and are not a focus of current management planning. Despite the conflict between administrative regimes, Eastern and Western Yalanji identify re-establishing cultural links across the two estates as a higher priority now that both groups have gained recognition of native title.

The disjunction between traditional and administrative boundaries has implications for how cultural values are identified, understood and communicated as a result of the availability of resources for cultural heritage management and research. For example, rainforest groups have obtained funding for a series of successful cultural mapping projects which has resulted in training, site recording and defining Aboriginal values within the World Heritage Area. Typical activities on these projects include elders and younger Aboriginal people visiting the sites together, following traditional protocol, documenting histories through film and identifying bush tucker and other cultural elements. Aboriginal groups whose traditional lands lie both within and beyond the World Heritage



Area can only obtain funding for places that fall within it. For coastal groups, if parts of their estate include offshore islands (which are part of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area) projects could be funded through the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. Thus, the rainforest area comprises a complex web of protected areas with differential funding arrangements coupled with areas that do not have such status (or funding). In theory, this suggests that Aboriginal places within the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area could be considered more significant simply because more time and resources have been spent on documenting, understanding and communicating values from within the World Heritage Area.

## CONCLUSION

This paper argues that Aboriginal connections, past and present, go beyond contemporary administrative or ecological boundaries. It suggests that while there may be reasons for Aboriginal people to embrace the idea of 'rainforest people', it could also be problematic. Aboriginal groups within the rainforest (past and present) have similarities but also differences. Aboriginal people in the region are well aware of the complexities of their relationships and find their own way through such difficulties. Our point here is that non-Aboriginal people are inclined, particularly where there are distinctive ecological zones such as 'rainforest', to draw sharp boundaries that align with environmental parameters. This is probably even more evident in relation to the World Heritage Area where there is a focus on 'universal' values for which World Heritage Areas are protected. As Greer et al. (2002) point out, the *local* values of places and areas, that is their significance and importance to small localized groups, are often neglected, overwhelmed or subsumed within those of stakeholders at the state or global levels.

In the past, such connections were probably reinforced by exchange, particularly ceremonial exchange. Greer et al. (2011, 2015) have highlighted the importance of exchange in Cape York and for areas along the east coast. These papers emphasize

the importance of ceremonial exchange in the development of archaeological interpretation (see for example Lourandos, 1983; McBryde, 1984, 1987; Tibbett 2002). We believe that rock art on both the northern and southern edges of the rainforest point to exchange relations that may have existed in the past. We suggest that these relationships were likely just as important as those within the rainforest.

The challenge for researchers and policy makers is to understand and account for the effect of contemporary boundaries on understandings of the Aboriginal past. We suggest that archaeological investigations and material culture studies that focus on the provenance of artefacts may prove useful in teasing out some of the details of these connections. We are particularly keen to promote the idea that rather than focusing on 'boundaries', we could emphasize networks of engagement that likely existed across ecological zones.

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# Walter Edmund Roth: Ethnographic collector and Aboriginal Protector

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Walter Roth ranks among the most prolific collectors of Aboriginal artefacts from North Queensland, including the Wet Tropics, as well as being one of the leading ethnographers in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Australia. He was also one of Queensland's first official Protectors of Aboriginals, appointed immediately after that colony introduced its now-infamous *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act, 1897*. This paper explores Roth's twin careers as ethnographic collector and Aboriginal Protector, teasing out the connections and commonalities between the two. It was for his achievements in ethnography and collecting, as well as his medical expertise, that he was appointed to the Protectorship. He carried out both his anthropological work and his administrative duties with determination and dedication. Yet his continuing activities as an ethnographer and collector contributed substantially to his downfall as a senior figure in Aboriginal administration. The paper also positions Roth in the historical context of an evolving Australian anthropology, with particular pertinence to North Queensland.

❏ Walter Roth, ethnographic collecting, Aboriginal protection, North Queensland, Aboriginal artefacts, Australian anthropology

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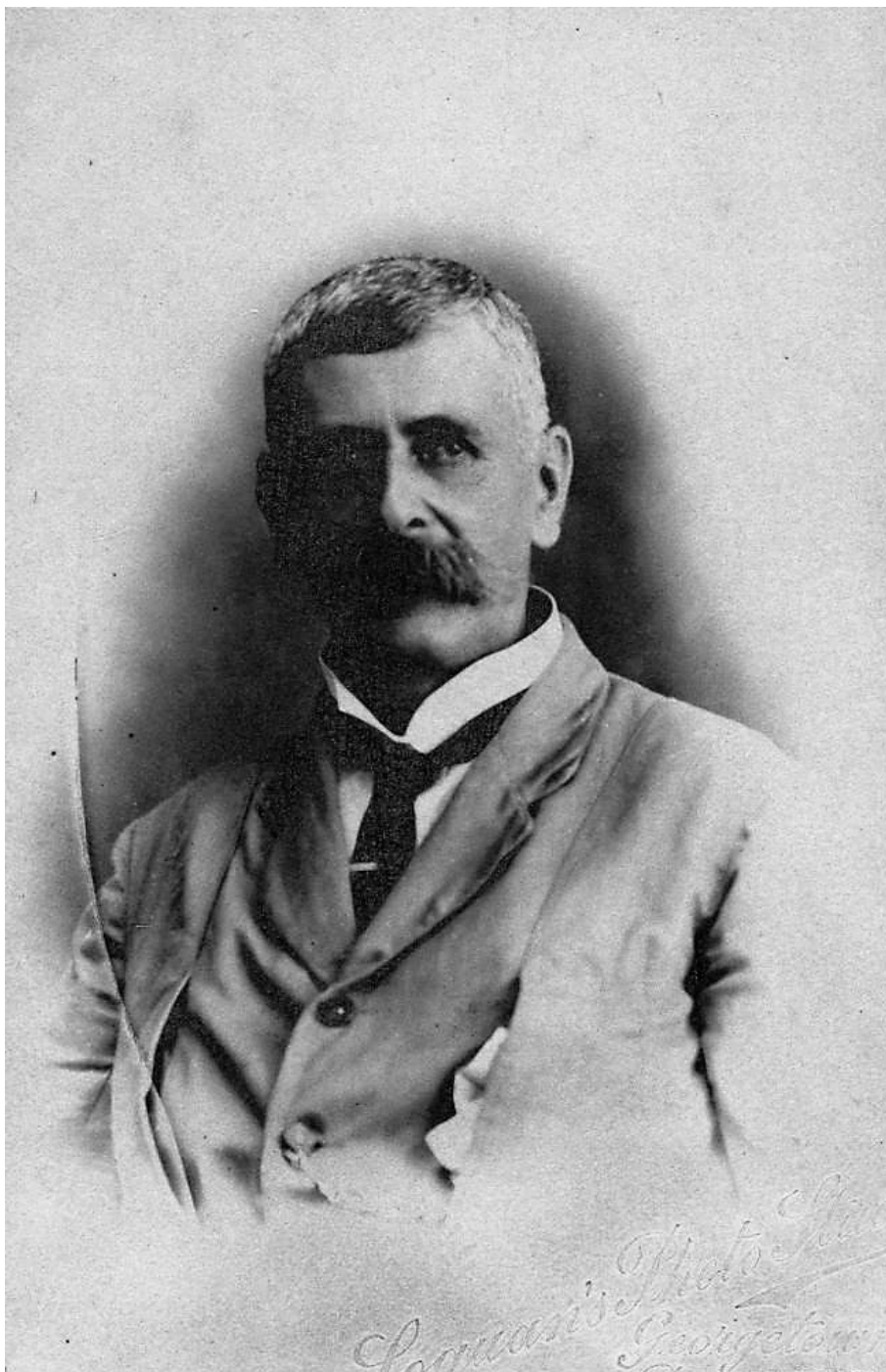


FIG. 1. Walter E. Roth. Loquan's Photo Studio, Georgetown, Guyana, 1918. Source: John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland. Neg: 158695.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Walter Edmund Roth (1861-1933) was the pre-eminent collector of North Queensland Aboriginal material culture (figure 1). Most of the over 2,500 artefacts he collected in Australia came from North Queensland, and a substantial proportion of these, probably around 500, were from the region now known as the Wet Tropics, particularly from the Atherton Tableland, Bloomfield River, Cairns, Cape Grafton and the Tully River. Items collected from this region include signature artefacts such as bicornual baskets, brightly painted shields, single-handed hardwood swords and bark blankets, as well as more unusual items such as snail-shell knives from Dunk Island, children's toys from Cairns and Cape Grafton, and wooden 'trumpets' from the Bloomfield River (Khan, 1993, 1996). Roth was, as Kate Khan (2008a) characterised him, 'the man who collected everything', and the 'everything' encompassed a remarkably diverse array of artefacts from the Wet Tropics.

Roth was not just a collector; he was also an ethnographer who described in meticulous detail the manufacture and use of the artefacts he collected (and of others he did not collect). Although he published works on Aboriginal languages, rituals, beliefs and social organisation, his most substantial output was in material culture studies and it is primarily in that domain that his reputation as an anthropologist rests. His major anthropological works in Australia are a series of eighteen bulletins on North Queensland ethnography published between 1901 and 1910, and an earlier work of 1897, *Ethnological Studies Among the North-West-Central Queensland Aborigines*. He also wrote five ethnographic reports on the Aboriginal people of specific regions of North Queensland: Princess Charlotte Bay, the Pennefather River, the Middle Palmer, Cooktown and the lower Tully River. Although he does not have the academic stature of his contemporary, Walter Baldwin Spencer, with whom he studied biology at Oxford University in the 1880s, Roth has an assured place among Australia's anthropological pioneers. His ethnographic studies were highly

regarded in his own times, Roth being appointed President of the Anthropology Section of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science in 1902; elected to membership of the anthropological societies of Berlin and Florence in the same year; and appointed Queensland correspondent to the Royal Anthropological Society of Great Britain and Ireland in 1904 (Khan, 2008a: 185; Reynolds, 1988). By the time of his death, he had earned a reputation sufficiently substantial to warrant a lengthy obituary by Melville Herskovits in *American Anthropologist* (Herskovits, 1934).

In addition to his roles as collector and ethnographer, Roth was a senior administrator of Queensland Aboriginal affairs, as the first Northern Protector from 1898 to 1904 and the second Chief Protector (succeeding Police Commissioner William Parry-Okeden) from 1904 to 1906. His performance of these roles has been examined by several historians (Ganter & Kidd, 1993; Kidd, 1997: 50-59; Whitehall, 2002) so need not be recounted in detail here. Several aspects, however, are particularly pertinent. Roth had been appointed Northern Protector for his experience and expertise in Aboriginal affairs: his *Ethnological Studies Among the North-West-Central Queensland Aborigines* had convinced the relevant colonial officials that he possessed an appropriate understanding of Aboriginal people, and his work as a medical practitioner among the Aboriginal people of north-western Queensland had convinced the same officials of his dedication to their welfare (Khan, 1993: 12). He carried out his duties as Protector with diligence and determination, enforcing the provisions of the Act with particular rigour in the northern maritime industries where the exploitation of Aboriginal workers and the sexual abuse of Aboriginal women were prevalent. Indeed, he seems to have relished the exercise of authority, regardless of whether it was upon Indigenous or non-Indigenous people, although his authoritarian tendencies coexisted with a sincere commitment to advancing (as he saw it) Aboriginal well-being.



This paper recounts Roth's careers as ethnographic collector and Aboriginal administrator, teasing out the connections between the two. While we are attentive to his role as a leading collector of rainforest Aboriginal material culture, the paper essays a broader assessment of his contribution to, and place in, North Queensland anthropology. This broader picture is essential, we believe, if Roth's contribution to rainforest Aboriginal ethnography is to be properly appreciated. Indeed, the very concept of 'rainforest Aboriginal material culture' is an anachronism, projected back from the vantage point of the early twenty-first century to a turn-of-the-twentieth-century ethnographer who never invoked it. That does not render the concept useless, but it does reinforce the point that historical understanding of Roth's rainforest work demands its contextualisation in his encompassing careers as both collector and Protector.

## ETHNOGRAPHER AND COLLECTOR

It was during his tenure as Northern Protector that Roth collected most of his ethnographic specimens, although he began collecting before then. In a letter to Baldwin Spencer dated 10 May 1898 (four months after his appointment as Northern Protector) he stated that he had been collecting in North Queensland for the previous four years and had by then amassed 'about 600 separate objects'.<sup>1</sup> In his 1899 official report as Northern Protector, he noted that his collection now comprised 'upwards of 800 articles' (quoted in Khan, 2008b: 187). By the beginning of 1905 his collection had grown considerably, for in February that year (that is, several months after his promotion from Northern to Chief Protector) he sold 2,000 artefacts and 240 photographic plates to the Australian Museum in Sydney (figures 2 and 3).<sup>2</sup> Before then, between 1900 and 1903, he had made three donations totalling



FIG. 2. Rainforest shield, collected by Roth at Cardwell in 1902. Photo by Rebecca Fisher. Source: Australian Museum, Roth Collection: iE03431-001+03.

around 230 artefacts from North Queensland to the Queensland Museum and also gave or sold ethnographic items to the British Museum and other overseas institutions.<sup>3</sup>

Roth welcomed the opportunities for ethnographic collection and observation offered by the Northern Protectorship. He also appreciated the extent to which the power he exercised as Protector would facilitate his collecting activities. Only weeks after his appointment, he wrote to Baldwin Spencer:

I am indeed a lucky fellow: the Protectorate of the whole Northern and Central Districts is in my hands. The main, and the only drawback is that, travelling about so much and over so large an area, I shall be prevented learning any language thoroughly.<sup>4</sup>

Anthropological research and collecting were specified among his duties, Chief Protector Parry-Okeden directing Roth to make 'from time to time such

local collection of ethnological and anthropological interest as possible' (quoted in Khan, 2008b: 183). However, travelling may have proved more onerous than he had anticipated. His official reports indicate that he maintained a punishing schedule of travel, and while this may have facilitated the collection of a broad sweep of artefacts from around the north, the limited time he could spend in any one place surely limited the kind of ethnographic work he could conduct. Perhaps it was partly for this reason that he focussed on material culture rather than on social structure, descent systems and non-material aspects of culture as the other leading Australian anthropologists of the day – the Baldwin Spencer and Frank Gillen duo and R.H. Mathews – did.

As a collector, Roth was meticulous, precisely following the scientific protocols of the time. The prescriptions set out in the 1892 edition of the British Association for the Advancement of Science's *Notes and Queries on Anthropology* might have served as a template for his collecting practices:

It is of importance to obtain from natives any portable specimens of their handiwork, tools, weapons, dress, ornaments, fetishes, &c., and where possible, the native descriptions of the objects, whether the tools, for instance, are for any special work, &c. Models should be secured where the originals cannot be obtained or are too large for transport, e.g., canoes, houses, &c. Not only are the finished objects worth collecting, but also the raw material used in their manufacture, where this has any special character ... The commonest things in use are generally the most valuable from an ethnological point of view, though masterpieces of native art are of artistic value, and therefore should not be despised. At the first moment of leisure the objects should be labeled with the locality where they were obtained, and their use, and any other particulars. (quoted in Petch, 2007: 21)

In line with this advice, Roth collected not only completed artefacts but also samples of the raw material from which they were made and examples of items in a part-finished state. For example,



FIG. 3. Bicornual basket, collected by Roth at Atherton in 1898. Photo by Rebecca Fisher. Source: Australian Museum, Roth Collection: iE014913+02s.

the Roth Collection at the Australian Museum includes a partially completed bicornual basket from Atherton, collected in 1898 (figure 4). He also collected implements and utensils that incorporated materials of European provenance such as iron and cotton cloth. Although these constituted only a small proportion of his collections (Rowlands, 2011), Roth gave no indication that he considered such items inauthentic or lacking in worth (Khan, 2008a: 181-183).

Exactly how he acquired the items in his collection is unclear, though probably most were obtained by barter, a standard item of exchange at the time being tobacco. In April 1900 he informed C.W. de Vis, curator of the Queensland Museum, that he was given an annual allocation of tobacco 'in order to purchase curios from the blacks for your museum'.<sup>5</sup> Tobacco seems to have been Roth's main medium of exchange, although he also paid for artefacts with items such as cloth and beads (Robins, 2008: 176). Whether he also paid for his informants' time – an

essential component of his ethnography since Roth sought not merely to collect things but to explain their manufacture and use – is unknown. In any case, the extraordinary powers with which he was vested as Protector undoubtedly enhanced his capacity to collect both objects and information from the Aboriginal subjects of the Act. Roth also built up his collections by exchanges with other collectors and institutions. In September 1897 he advised the curator of the Queensland Museum that a 'complete aboriginal male skeleton has come into my possession: I shall be glad to offer it to the Museum in exchange for some aboriginal things of which I am in want to complete my own collection'. A letter from Roth a few days later indicates that the museum had accepted his offer.<sup>6</sup>

Apart from the very real advantages conferred by his official position, Roth's techniques of ethnographic collecting were unexceptional for his times. Trade, barter and exchange were the standard means of acquiring Aboriginal artefacts (Erckenbrecht et al., 2010; Henry, 2015; Robins, 2008). It was his omnivorous approach to collecting, combined with the precision and exactitude of his observations on the production of material goods, that set Roth apart from the majority of his fellow ethnographers in Australia. Generally shying clear of overt theorising, his ethnographies were devoted to the specific and the concrete: to material culture as a domain worthy of scientific study in and of itself rather than merely as an adjunct to sociological speculation or as a commentary on curios.

Roth's capacity for keen observation and his attentiveness to detail are strikingly evident in his ethnographic bulletins. Occasionally he seems to have been guessing on the basis of limited or fragmentary knowledge, but usually the data are dense. For Roth (1901), the primary purpose of his ethnographic bulletins was to document 'the rapidly-increasing quantity of scientific material which, in accordance with the Home Secretary's instructions, has been collected since my appointment as Northern Protector of Aborigines'. These bulletins are essentially printed databases and the knowledge contained therein is arranged in encyclopaedic

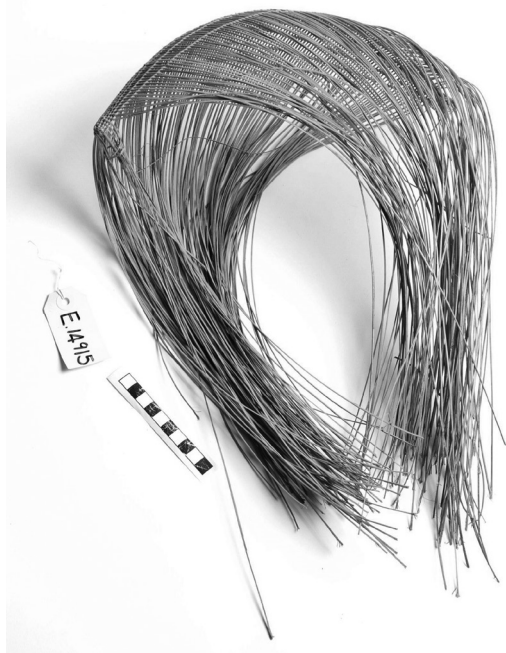


FIG. 4. Bicornual basket in process of manufacture; collected by Roth at Atherton in 1898. Photo by Rebecca Fisher. Source: Australian Museum, Roth Collection: iE014915+01.

fashion (Fuery 2004a). Emphasis is firmly on the specific rather than on any generalisations that may be drawn from the data, and each bulletin is organised around a central topic in which ‘types’ of implements, weapons, games, activities and so forth are explored in detail across North Queensland. The arrangement seems to have been designed to facilitate scientific comparisons across Queensland, Australia and other parts of the world, and may have been influenced by Roth’s familiarity with the Pitt-Rivers’ system of museum display from his years at Oxford in the 1880s.

Roth conducted an essentially comparative and interdisciplinary anthropology of a kind that was side-lined, and even disparaged, after the watershed years of the 1920s when long-term fieldwork in a single society became the methodological and theoretical norm in British anthropology. It was from this point that anthropology began sequestering itself as a discipline in its own right. Roth, however, ‘did ethnography’ as it was done at the turn of the twentieth century, before the disciplinary shutters were put up; and as Fuery (2004a) has discussed elsewhere, he was a member of what Morphy (1997: 27) characterised as a ‘dispersed community of scholars who saw themselves as having complementary and overlapping roles in pioneering a new science rather than as people occupying different positions of sub and super-ordination in some global academic hierarchy’.

While Roth’s anthropology was similar to, and congruent with, that of his contemporaries, it was also distinctive in crucial respects. He did not carry out field-based studies of single societies like those of Spencer and Gillen in Central Australia and the Gulf of Carpentaria (Austin-Broos, 1999; Fuery, 2004a; Mulvaney, 2008; Mulvaney et al., 1997, 2000) or of Haddon, Rivers and other members of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to the Torres Strait (Fuery, 1998, 2004a, 2004b; Herle & Rouse, 1998). Yet while the Spencer and Gillen and Haddon and Rivers studies differ from Roth’s in the specificity of their ethnographic focus, they show similar surveying, collecting, classifying and comparative dimensions to those in Roth’s ethnographic bulletins.

Indeed, they all exhibit the characteristic of the seeing-eye of the anthropologist: the observer of, rather than participant in, the society in question. Of this approach, Johannes Fabian (2001: 54) writes:

Above the ground, the seeing eye became the root metaphor of knowledge. The observing gaze [of the anthropologist] *delivered the material; visible order created by classification provided its meaning.* (our emphasis)

As the scientific ‘seeing eye’, Roth neither saw nor tried to see ‘societies’ in the way Spencer and Gillen or Haddon and Rivers did. Rather, he saw technologies, techniques, material means of winning a livelihood, as well as, to a lesser extent, languages, rituals and other discrete elements of Aboriginal cultures (figures 5 and 6). He neither purveyed a holistic vision of an Aboriginal society nor pretended to do so.



FIG. 5. Nautilus shell forehead band, collected by Roth at Butchers Hill in 1898. Photo by Rebecca Fisher. Source: Australian Museum, Roth Collection: iE014556+01.



FIG. 6. Model canoe, made at Yarrabah; collected by Roth at Cape Grafton in 1897. Photo by Rebecca Fisher. Source: Australian Museum, Roth Collection: iE013451+03.



One consequence of Roth's ethnographic mode is that although the Roth Collection at the Australian Museum includes possibly the most comprehensive collection of rainforest Aboriginal artefacts in the world, Roth's own commentaries on these artefacts convey very little sense of the rainforest environment or of how the objects related to that environment. His ethnographic bulletins describe in painstaking detail the manufacture and use of implements and weapons which have come to be regarded as exemplary of rainforest people, including large painted shields, hardwood swords, woven cane bicornual baskets and beaten bark blankets. Verbal descriptions are supplemented with carefully executed line drawings and in some instances photographs. However, the artefacts are decontextualised from the environment in which they had been manufactured and used. Certainly, no concept of rainforest Aboriginal people, as a sub-set of the larger category of 'the Aboriginal race', emerges from Roth's writings. His practice of publishing his findings as vast catalogues, organised in terms of categories of material objects or activities, militates against any such concept of distinctive Aboriginal types. Roth did categorise Aboriginal people in various ways: in terms of broad geographical area (for example 'North-West-Central Queensland blacks'); more specific geographic locators (for example 'Bloomfield Blacks' or 'natives of Dunk Island'); and by using peoples' own terms for themselves, often in combination with place-names (for example 'Kuongganji-Cape Grafton blacks' and 'Koko Yellanji-Bloomfield natives'). He was meticulous in specifying the area and/or group from which artefacts were collected and activities described, since this information was crucial to his systematic documentation of Indigenous material culture. However, he made very few, if any, attempts to explicitly relate a group's physical environment, rainforest or otherwise, to its culture, material or intangible.

Even when Roth focussed on a specific Aboriginal group, his discussion decontextualised people from their physical environment. His one-hundred-page 'Scientific Report ... on the Natives of the (Lower) Tully River' gives copious information on the weapons and implements of the group he called the 'mallan-para blacks'. He described how they painted

their wooden shields and woven-cane baskets, adding that the designs were purely decorative and had 'no meaning'. He explained that bicornual baskets were 'made by men only, but used more by the women' and that cannibalism was rife, although people were seldom killed with the intention of eating them (Roth, 1900: 17, 70, 87). Yet, apart from his identification of the area as the lower Tully River valley and occasional mentions of distinctive fauna such as cassowaries, he gave no indication that the people he described lived in a predominantly rainforest environment. Roth clearly expressed an appreciation of the fact that different Aboriginal groups had different material cultures, different practices, rituals and so forth; yet he shied away from linking these differences to the environments in which they lived.

Unlike an ethnography today, in which the focus is on a people first and foremost, on socio-cultural context, a group's social organization, culture, cosmology and their human 'being' (Austin-Broos, 1999), Roth's ethnographic bulletins focus on 'types' of objects, implements, practices and so forth. From his descriptions emerge very piecemeal, one-dimensional delineations of Aboriginal people as social beings. They give only staccato glimpses of parts of the life of a people, not rounded depictions of them as living, breathing human beings with motivations, desires and interests. The lacunae are in no small measure related to what Roth was trying to achieve as collector-anthropologist while engaged in a demanding, full-time job as Protector. They also relate to the manner in which he interacted with Aboriginal people, the intermittent bursts of time spent in their company and the conventions and orientations of anthropology at the time. On the last of these, Austin-Broos (1999: 211) has remarked on the contemporary tendency to sequester data from theory, noting that 'ironically, it is possible that one of the reasons that Gillen's and Spencer's data have often proved so useful to others (including Durkheim) is that they lack the interpretation that would make them an integrated portrait of a way of being'. When we consider the piecemeal yet useful data collected and catalogued by Roth, we can see that this is an

even more remote possibility for him. As Fuary (2004a) has argued, Aboriginal people cannot emerge from his bulletins as anything other than producers of material objects and discrete practices. They are, in effect, produced by him as producers, and as products themselves of their cultures.

Roth's ethnographies are remarkably lacking in overt theorising. Even the narrative of evolutionary progress, which informed Spencer and Gillen's and most other contemporary ethnographies as well as material culture studies, most famously in the case of Augustus Pitt-Rivers, is seldom apparent in Roth's studies. Only occasionally it peeks through. In Bulletin No. 16: Huts and Shelters, Roth made occasional remarks suggesting a progressive sequence of building structures, with the 'breakwind' at the primitive (in the sense of temporally prior as well as structurally more basic) extreme and the ridge-pole hut at the 'most advanced' end (Roth, 1910: 55, 58). Even here, however, the imputations of progressive sequence are mere casual remarks and the bulletin as a whole is consumed with Roth's characteristic preoccupations with what Aboriginal people made, how they made it and what they did with it. Throughout the bulletins, the paramount organising principle is the type of material object, with discussion and illustration deployed so as to maximise description and minimise theoretical or interpretative commentary.

Among anthropologists at the time, theoretical nescience could be positively valued. Perhaps the best-known instance is Baldwin Spencer's statement that he sent Gillen 'endless questions and things to find out, and by mutual agreement he reads no one else's work so as to keep him unprejudiced in the way of theories' (quoted in Mulvaney & Calaby, 1985: 172). Regardless of the empirical accuracy of the claim, Spencer's assumption was that information collected by his Central Australian collaborator was of superior quality because it was theoretically untainted. Roth lacked the luxury of a (supposedly theoretically naive) collaborator, but he acted as his own theoretical censor in his ethnographic studies, perhaps in the belief that this would enhance the value and veracity of his observations. The theoretical innocence of his studies cannot be attributed to ignorance of theory.

He studied evolutionary biology at Oxford, and in correspondence with Spencer he sometimes referred to theoretical issues in anthropology and to Pitt-Rivers' principles of museum display.<sup>7</sup> In publications, however, he adopted a rigorously objective-scientific stance, minimising speculation and generalisation while maximising detachment and description. He took those qualities to an extreme, much further than Spencer.

In his major books, Spencer kept theory at arm's length, generally sequestering overt theorising into prefaces and introductions while the main body of the texts recounted in detail the observed mode of living of Aboriginal people.<sup>8</sup> Roth did not allow theory to intrude even this far. Sometimes he used the prefaces to his ethnographic bulletins to indicate how the data therein may relate to the work of others, but such explanations did not engage with the theoretical issues of the day such as evolutionism or diffusionism. More usually, he used his prefaces to explain why the data were organised around that bulletin's theme, a topic on which he could become defensive, as in the preface to Bulletin No. 7: Domestic Implements, Arts, and Manufactures, where he wrote:

Fault will probably be found with the inclusion in the present Bulletin of certain implements used for fighting and hunting purposes: similarity of origin and workmanship are my excuses in the former case, while omission from a previous Bulletin (no. 3 – Food, its Search, Capture, and Preparation) is all that I can plead in the latter.

I regret the irregular sequence in which the separate branches of the subject have been treated: workers in the Field of Primitive Culture will, however, appreciate the difficulties attendant upon any attempts at obtaining logical order. (Roth, 1904)

The final words were crucial, for Roth saw it as his responsibility to impose logic and order, as best he could, on a cache of disorderly and slippery material culture. That is what drove his typological imperative to collect, collate and categorise.

## ROTH THE PROTECTOR

The imposition of order was also the imperative behind Roth's actions as Northern Protector and Chief Protector of Aboriginals. These positions had been created to administer the 1897 *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act*, which was a governmental response to revelations of shocking levels of exploitation and abuse of Aboriginal people, especially in the north of the colony. Consequently, Roth was a key figure in Queensland's governance of its Aboriginal people at the crucial time when the colony made the transition from older, more *laissez faire* methods toward more modern and intrusive modes of regulating inter-ethnic relations. In the protective regime thus established, the hand of the state fell heaviest on Aboriginal people, who were reduced to the status of wards and treated as incompetents, but the government also restricted and regulated, to a far greater extent than ever before, the actions of non-Indigenous people who had dealings with Aboriginal people. The subsequent history of the *Aboriginals Protection Act* as a tool for the oppression of Aboriginal people has tended to obscure the fact that in its early years it was experienced very much as an imposition upon white and other non-Indigenous people, who could no longer deal with Aboriginal people as they pleased (Ganter & Kidd, 1993; Kidd, 1997: 36-79; Whitehall 2002). Those impositions upon white men in the hitherto largely unregulated frontier regions of North Queensland inspired the resentment that led to Roth's undoing.

While Roth sought to impose order on both black and white, he treated the two parties quite differently, depicting the faults of Aboriginal people as due primarily to incompetence whereas the failings of non-Indigenous people were represented more as the outcomes of immorality. Dealing first with the former, his attribution of incompetence to Aboriginal people – particularly their supposed inability to adapt to the European presence – was certainly not unusual at the time. It was a standard, almost universal, assumption among turn-of-the-

twentieth-century Europeans (McGregor, 2011: xvii-xxv). However, Roth's adherence to this assumption warrants comment since in his ethnographic work he was at pains to demonstrate the ingenuity of Aboriginal people, their devising of intricate technologies and possession of complex languages. As Kate Khan (2008a: 171) has observed, Roth's ethnographic writings were, among other things, attempts to foster among settler Australians a more positive image of Aboriginal people. Yet when it came to the governance of Aboriginal people he emphasised their ineptitudes. In a letter to Baldwin Spencer in 1903 he wrote:

I quite agree with you in your views about teaching the aboriginals too much:- views endorsed by the northern missionaries themselves; indeed glancing at my reports you will see that they are really reformatory and industrial schools. I quite agree with you as to the pauperising, pampering and over-'education' to which the blacks have been subjected in other states.<sup>9</sup>

His statement accords with Ganter's and Kidd's assessments that the 1897 Act, as originally implemented and administered, was not so much a radical new attempt at social engineering as an extension, into the Aboriginal domain, of existing welfare measures for the care of those deemed unable to look after themselves (Ganter & Kidd, 1993; Kidd, 1997: 36-79).

In line with the presumption of Aboriginal ineptitude, Roth endorsed the then-prevalent assumption that the Aboriginal race was doomed to extinction. He informed Baldwin Spencer that he based his administrative practice on the following four points:

- (a) in the struggle for existence, the black cannot compete with the white
- (b) it is not desirable that he should mix with the white
- (c) with advancing civilisation, the black will die out
- (d) while he lives, the black should be protected from the abuses to which he is subjected by the white.<sup>10</sup>



By his own account, then, Roth's severe and exacting administration of the 1897 Act was a gigantic exercise in smoothing the pillow of a dying race. The same could be said of a great deal of protectionist administration and legislation. Roth, however, was unusual, not in believing that the Aboriginal race would soon die out but in seldom saying so. Perhaps this was another instance of his reluctance to speculate or generalise. The statement quoted above is from his private correspondence, and we have been unable to find a single published statement by Roth unequivocally endorsing the doomed race idea (although there are few gesturing vaguely in that direction). Other scientists and administrators at the time showed no such reticence (McGregor, 1993, 1997).

While Roth was reticent about projecting an Aboriginal future, his official reports reveal him as a man confident in the exercise of authority and in the rightness of his own judgements. He wrote with absolute assurance on his own decisions to grant or refuse Aboriginal women permission to marry, to send Aboriginal and 'half-caste' children to missions and reformatories, and on the numerous other interferences his position obliged him to carry out. Unlike his counterpart, Archibald Meston, Southern Protector of Aborigines from 1898 to 1903, Roth was a consummate bureaucrat and apparently valued by Queensland political figures for that fact. Indeed Roth and Meston, the first two senior protectors of Aborigines in Queensland,<sup>11</sup> were extraordinarily ill-matched, the former being an urbane scientist-bureaucrat, the latter a largely self-educated journalist and raconteur who showed neither aptitude for, nor interest in, official paperwork (Ganter & Kidd, 1993; Holland, 2013: 35-53). They frequently clashed, which may have been a factor behind the end of both men's careers as Protectors. For Roth, however, the major factor behind his leaving the position was the antagonism he stirred up among powerful interest groups in North Queensland.

When Roth first took the position of Northern Protector in 1898, he had widespread support from the North Queensland settler community. That did not last long. Within two years his rigorous

enforcement of the protective aspects of the 1897 Act had antagonised numerous pastoralists, pearlers and other employers of Aboriginal labour as well as many others who were accustomed to the colonial convention of having 'a free hand with the blacks' (Loos, 1982). Their attempts to evade the new controls over their interactions with Aboriginal people inspired Roth to intensify governmental powers, one outcome of which was an *Amendment Act* of 1901 which tightened government regulations over employment and sexual relations (Kidd, 1997: 51-53; Roth, 1902: 1149). So the antagonisms escalated, and his opponents sought opportunities to undermine the Protector. They had some highly placed allies, including the member for Cooktown in the Legislative Assembly, John Hamilton.

Roth's growing band of enemies did not have to search hard to find the Protector's points of vulnerability. One was his ill-advised foray into what he had termed, with spectacular insensitivity, 'ethno-pornography': essentially an anthropological inquiry into 'primitive' sexuality (Roth, 1897: 169-184). Among other things, it involved photographs of an Aboriginal couple engaged in sexual intercourse, which Roth took to prove a point about the procreative potency of the subincised penis. In 1904 John Hamilton publicised the fact that Roth had taken these photographs, insinuating that they were the product of a depraved and lascivious mind. Roth's own correspondence on the matter suggests that he was astounded that anyone could misinterpret his purely scientific inquiries as prurient indulgences in sexual sensationalism and perplexed by the furore that erupted once the existence of the photographs was made public (Richards, 2010: 168-176). But he had gifted his enemies with a deadly weapon. An article in the *New Endeavour Beacon*, a Cooktown newspaper hostile to Roth, fulminated:

The bawdy photographs ... taken 'in the interests of science' [would] disgrace a common Port Said exhibition – and Port Said photos are ... the dirtiest filth on earth. There is not much Aboriginal protection in depicting filthy and degrading as well as unnatural scenes. (quoted in Richards, 2010: 175)

Those whom Roth had accused of exploiting the 'flesh and blood' of Aboriginal people could point to his flagrant exploitation of their bodies, and to Roth's own defilement of Aboriginal sexuality into filthy pictures more degrading than any act of lustful frontiersmen (McGrath, 2008).

Also giving ammunition to his enemies, in 1905 – that is, while he was Queensland's Chief Protector of Aboriginals and shortly after the 'ethno-pornography' controversy came to a crescendo – he sold a huge ethnographic collection to the Australian Museum in Sydney for £450. As indicated earlier in this paper, a large proportion – probably the majority – of this material must have been collected while Roth was Northern Protector and his legal right to dispose of it in this manner was extremely doubtful. In his annual reports he had referred to ethnographic collecting as part of his official duties, and in his report for 1899 he stated that his 'anthropological and ethnological collections ... are now to be considered the property of the nation' (quoted in Khan, 2008b: 187). For his many Queensland critics, the fact that Roth donated only about 300 items to the Queensland Museum, whereas he sold over 2,000 to a southern institution for private gain, was proof of his perfidy. Again, those who resented Roth's punctilious performance of his duties as Protector smelled blood.

The scandal-mongering *Truth* newspaper launched a series of attacks culminating in an article published on 8 April 1906, which stated:

When Dr. Roth was appointed Protector there was a clear understanding between himself and the Government that all curios, weapons, and aboriginal specimens, collected by him during his period of office, were to be the property of the State. That understanding was made secure by an agreement which is still in existence, and available when required. There was no ambiguity in the business, and it was referred to on, at least, two occasions by the Minister when passing the Estimates. It was also publicly acknowledged by Roth when being examined before the bar of the Legislative Council in 1901. (Anon, 1906a)

A week later, *Truth* published a three-page spread itemising each of the 2000 artefacts and 240 plates he sold to the Australian Museum, prefaced by a lengthy exposition of the shortcomings and moral lapses of Walter Roth. The Protector, according to *Truth*, was guilty of grossly unethical conduct by selling, for private gain, a collection that was rightfully the property of the state (Anon, 1906b).

It is unclear why Roth sold his collection to the Australian Museum (Henry et al., 2013: 33-34). That he chose to lodge his collection there rather than in Brisbane is not surprising. The Queensland Museum at the time was in a parlous state, with no director between 1905 and 1910, reduced staff and poor storage facilities, whereas the Australian Museum was well positioned to care for a major collection of artefacts. Roth enjoyed good relations with senior staff of the latter institution, including its curator, Robert Etheridge, who was about to set up a separate Department of Ethnology within the museum (Robins, 2008: 178). Yet while the superior scientific credentials of the Sydney institution might explain why Roth chose it over the Queensland Museum, it does not explain why he sold, rather than donated, the items. Roth's collecting and his associated ethnographic studies appear to have been motivated by dedication to science rather than desire for material gain. And, considering that he was already entangled in controversies over his allegedly 'filthy' pictures and his enforcement of the provisions of the Protection Act, he may be expected to have avoided acts that would inevitably add to the controversy. Perhaps he was naive about matters such as social reputation; some of his utterances on the 'ethno-pornography' controversy point in this direction. Perhaps he had already decided to leave the Chief Protectorship. In any case, he submitted his resignation (for the second time) in May 1906 and soon afterward sailed to British Guyana to take up a position as Magistrate and District Commissioner. There he resumed his career as an ethnographic collector and recorder.

## CONCLUSION

Roth's expertise as an ethnographer and collector helped secure his appointment as Northern Protector of Aboriginals in 1898. Eight years later, his ethnographic inquiries and collections furnished his many enemies with the weapons they needed to terminate his career in Aboriginal administration. His assumption of personal proprietorship over ethnographic artefacts collected in the course of his official duties, together with his incautious inquiries into Aboriginal sexuality, indicate serious misjudgement on Roth's part. Yet as an ethnographic observer and collector, his work was extraordinary for its level of detail and precision of empirical evidence. He carried out his ethnographic work with the same rigour and determination that is evident in his actions as an Aboriginal Protector, and with the same dedication to imposing order and regulation upon an unruly world.

While Roth's work alone cannot possibly allow us to adequately understand just who the Aboriginal people of North Queensland were or how their societies operated, it can, together with subsequent, more detailed and engaged ethnography, archival research, history and archaeology, allow us to fill in many of the blanks. Without Roth's anthropology, the gaps in our knowledge of North Queensland Aboriginal people, including those of the rainforests, would be far wider. As it stands, in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples from the rainforest regions, we can use this material fruitfully, drawing upon the knowledge of living descendants and related others, to flesh out or even correct Roth's reports and bulletins. In so doing, it is hoped that a fuller view of the traditional owners of the Wet Tropics of North Queensland and their societies will emerge.

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## ❏ ENDNOTES

1. Roth to Spencer, 10 May 1898, copy of letter held by Australian Museum, Sydney; original in Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.
2. S. Sinclair, Secretary, Australian Museum, to Roth, 13 March 1905, Australian Museum Archives, AMS 6, 204/1905.
3. Dr Roth's Monthly Progress Report, December 1903, Queensland Museum Correspondence Files; Queensland Museum, Old Donor and Purchase Registers: D10422, 1900; D11827, 1903; D12083, 1903.
4. Roth to Spencer, 19 January 1898, copy of letter held by Australian Museum, Sydney; original in Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.
5. Roth to de Vis, 15 April 1900, Queensland Museum Correspondence Folders, Anthropology Laboratory.
6. Roth to Curator, Queensland Museum, 30 September 1897, and Roth to Curator, Queensland Museum, 4 October 1897, both in Queensland Museum, Australian Anthropology Archive Series. As this exchange indicates, Roth collected skeletal material as well as artefacts. Here, however, we focus on his collection of artefactual objects, which comprise by far the largest proportion of his collections.
7. See for example Roth to Spencer, 10 May 1898, copy of letter held by Australian Museum, Sydney; original in Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.
8. See for example Spencer & Gillen, 1899, 1904; Spencer, 1914. Spencer tended to be more theoretically explicit in his journal articles and conference addresses.
9. Roth to Spencer, 8 February 1903, copy of letter held by Australian Museum, Sydney; original in Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.
10. Roth to Spencer, 6 October 1902, copy of letter held by Australian Museum, Sydney; original in Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.
11. From 1898 to 1904 William Parry-Okeden was their superior officer as Chief Protector, but this was an *ex officio* role consequent upon his position as Commissioner of Police. Parry-Okeden had very little involvement in administering Aboriginal affairs.

# From Flame to Fame: Transformation of firesticks to art in North Queensland

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Among the many different kinds of artefacts collected in the rainforest region of North Queensland by European collectors during the late 1800s and early 1900s is a uniquely shaped fire-making tool. This paper explores the significance of such fire-makers for the Aboriginal people who originally made them, the collectors who sought them, and Aboriginal artists today who reference them in contemporary works of art for a global art market. Tracing the history of transactions concerning this particular type of fire-maker provides a dynamic field for reflection on the concept of value.

📄 Firesticks, Rainforest Aboriginal, John Archibald Boyd, John Gaggin, Girringun Aboriginal Art Centre, Bagu, Jiman

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In early 2009 a collective of artists linked to the Girringun Aboriginal Art Centre in Cardwell, North Queensland, which represents rainforest Aboriginal artists from the Nyawaygi, Gugu Badhun, Warrgamay, Warungu, Bandjin, Girramay, Gulngay, Jirrbal and Djiru people, met to discuss ideas for the artworks they hoped to produce for exhibition at the Cairns Indigenous Arts Fair (CIAF)<sup>1</sup> later that year. The artists' discussion gave birth to a new form of sculptural art based on the traditional fire-making tool of their ancestors (figure 1). This paper explores the value of such fire-makers for the Aboriginal artists who today reference them in contemporary works of art sold on the global art market, for the settlers who collected them as artefacts, and for the Aboriginal people who originally made them. I focus specifically on two early collectors of these objects, John Archibald Boyd and John Gaggin. Both men were based at Ripple Creek cane plantation on the Herbert River near Ingham, North Queensland, during the latter part of the nineteenth century, J.A. Boyd arriving at Ripple Creek on 15 September 1882 and Gaggin joining him on 26 August 1883.

## ARTEFACT TO ARTWORK

The particular type of fire-maker in question has two parts: a flat base and drill sticks. The base (or body) was traditionally carved from the soft wood of the milky pine tree (*Alstonia scholaris*) while the sticks were made from the harder wood of the wild guava tree (*Eupomatia laurina*). The Aboriginal artists of the Girringun Art Centre, whose ancestors made this object, call the base *bagu* and the sticks *jiman* (the wild guava tree from which the sticks are made is also called *jiman*). The artists also refer to the *bagu* as the 'body'. For easy transport in the past, the *jiman* were usually fastened to the back of the *bagu* with string tied around the neck and base, so that they extended below the body like legs. The body was painted with distinctive designs using different coloured ochres and charcoal. It was carved in an anthropomorphic form with head and eye sockets into which the sticks were inserted to make fire. Fire was produced by rubbing the sticks

between the palms of the hand using a drill-like motion. Of the few examples of this object that were collected during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most were carved without appendages. However, there are two examples in the Queensland Museum, collected circa 1915, that were carved with what appear to be legs (figure 2). As with most artefacts collected during this period, the name of the Aboriginal maker was not recorded by the collector, but it may be that these two fire-makers were an innovation by a particular carver, in response to the artefact market.

For the 2009 Cairns Indigenous Arts Fair the Girringun artists decided to make the *bagu* out of clay rather than the traditional wood and were amazed with the result (figure 3). As Nicolas Rothwell (2013) puts it, 'The figures came out of the kiln transformed; the glaze had depth, the ochres glowed, the figures with their mask-like, sketchy features seemed alive'. Thus, the very things that were once used to create fire were now themselves transformed by fire.

While creating artworks based on this particular object was something new for the Girringun artists, the practice of turning for inspiration to the things their ancestors had made was, in fact, not novel. The artists already firmly believed that the source of creativity for most, if not all, their works is the 'old people', deceased ancestors who are believed to still be present in 'country', and ancestral 'Story Beings' who 'reside in and are coterminous with particular places' and who imbue places with creative energy (Langton, 2002: 260; Henry, 2012: 212). Even before the opening of the Girringun Aboriginal Arts Centre, Aboriginal people from this region and the rainforest country further north had been basing their art works on the things their 'old people' had made that are now held as artefacts in museums all over the world. Master weaver Abe Muriata (b. 1952), for example, had already revitalised the difficult skill of bicornual basket weaving by his Girramay ancestors, to create artworks. Others, like Michael Boiyool Anning (b. 1955), had produced the iconic rainforest shield of their forebears as a contemporary sculptural form (Aaberge et al., 2014). Anning began carving



FIG. 1. Fire-maker. Collected by J.A. Boyd in 1898 at Ripple Creek near Ingham, North Queensland. Photograph: Rosita Henry

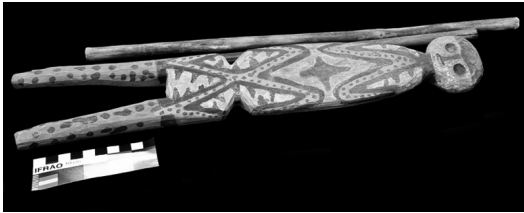


FIG. 2. Fire-maker. Collected by Constable Creedy in Cardwell, North Queensland c.1915. QE827. Source: Queensland Museum.

shields in 1990, working in wood. In 1998 he became the first Queenslanders to win a major prize at the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards in the Northern Territory. In 2009 Anning exhibited his artworks at the first Cairns Indigenous Arts Fair, including works that, like those of the artists from the Girringun collective, referenced the unique anthropomorphic fire-makers that are the subject of this paper.

The terracotta clay *bagu* with *jiman* created by artists from the Girringun Arts Centre were an instant hit at CIAF 2009. Since then, many more have been created for exhibition and sale each year at CIAF (figure 4) and also at other venues. For example, the Queensland Art Gallery exhibited a collection of the fire-makers purchased in 2010 with funds from Xstrata<sup>2</sup> Community Partnership Program Queensland through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation.<sup>3</sup>

In 2011, Girringun Aboriginal Art Centre artists were short-listed for the Indigenous Ceramic Art Award



FIG 3. Artists Emily Murray, John Murray, Ninney Murray, Sally Murray and Doris Kinjun with display of *Bagu* with *Jiman* at the inaugural Cairns Indigenous Arts Fair, 2009. Photograph: Valerie Keenan, Girringun Aboriginal Art Centre.

(ICAA), first held in 2007 to showcase Indigenous ceramic arts from all over Australia. Maureen Beeron, Sally Murray, Trish Beeron and Eileen Tep were short-listed for their work *Bagu with Jiman*, which included six different ceramic pieces, and Daniel Beeron was short-listed for two works, *Bunyaydinyu Bagu* and *State of Origin Bagu*. The latter was inspired by the State of Origin Rugby League Series and glazed half blue and half maroon to represent the different team colours.

Also in 2011, the Girringun artists exhibited an installation of sculptural fire-makers, *Bagu on the Strand*, at the Townsville City Council's Strand Ephemera Sculptural Festival and won the Artistic Excellence award donated by Xstrata Community Partnership Program. For this exhibition (2-12 September 2011), the artists expanded upon the *bagu* artwork they had developed for the Cairns Indigenous Arts Fair. Fifteen life-sized ceramic, timber and aluminium *bagu* were created for the installation by different artists, some of which were not only painted but also incorporated woven fibre and metal sculptural forms (figure 5).

The popular success of the *bagu* also led to an installation being commissioned for the

redevelopment of the Cardwell foreshore, which had been destroyed by Cyclone Yasi in February 2011 (figure 6). These permanent *bagu* sculptures, which are based on designs by Girringun Aboriginal Arts Centre artists Eileen Tep and Charlotte Beeron, are made of fibreglass and 'stand like sentinels against the backdrop of Rockingham Bay and Hinchinbrook Island' (Keenan, 2013).

While the *bagu* on the foreshore at Cardwell stand fixed in their place of origin, others are on the move. Not only have they been purchased by museums, art galleries in Australia and overseas and by art dealers for the global art market, but today they literally travel up and down the Queensland coast between Cairns and Brisbane by rail, featured as public art along the length of the Tilt Train (figure 7).

Thus, the fire-makers have been given new life, transformed and 'transvalued' in the twenty-first century (Dalsgaard & Otto, 2014). Yet, while they appear to have begun their journey from flame to fame relatively recently, as I reveal below, they have a much longer and more complex past that has played a part in fostering their enlivenment in the present.



FIG. 4. *Bagu* at CIAF 2012. Photograph: Valerie Keenan, Girringun Aboriginal Arts Centre.





FIG. 5. *Bagu on the Strand* installation, Strand Ephemera Sculptural Exhibition, Townsville, 2-12 September, 2011. Artistic Achievement Award. Project funded by Australia Council for the Arts. Photograph Rosita Henry.



FIG. 6. *Bagu on the Cardwell foreshore*. Photograph: Rosita Henry.



FIG. 7. *Bagu* travelling on Queensland Rail train as public art (launched September 2011). Funded by Arts Queensland Art + Place Program. Photograph: Valerie Keenan, Girringun Aboriginal Art Centre.

## ARTEFACT COLLECTION

Aboriginal people all around the continent traditionally made and used fire-makers of various sorts. Today such implements can be found widely dispersed and carefully preserved in museums across the globe. However, the anthropomorphic type of fire-maker that is the subject of this paper is relatively rare. The few existing examples of this object began to be collected by European collectors during the late nineteenth century, but they appear not to have entered the global trade in artefacts in the same way as other iconic rainforest objects, such as the large rainforest shields and swords and the uniquely shaped bicornual baskets (Erckenbrecht et al., 2010). I was not able to find any such fire-makers in the British Museum, the Pitt-Rivers Museum, the Musée du Quai Branly, or the Rautenstrauch Joest Museum in Cologne (and my search continues). However, there are eleven that were collected during the late 1800s and early 1900s in the Queensland Museum, including one collected by John Gaggin in 1895 (registration number QE559), one collected by Clement Wragge between 1887 and 1900 (QE2093) and three donated by Constable Creedy in 1915 (QE825, QE826, QE827). Museum Victoria also has several examples (Brayshaw 1990: 302-30), including one donated by John Gaggin (X983), and the Australian Museum in Sydney has one on display (EO11411) which was also possibly collected by Gaggin. I discuss these two fire-makers (X983 and EO11411) in detail below.

During the 1960s and 1970s there was a revitalisation of artefact production in the Cardwell region due to the efforts of local resident, Gladys Henry, who encouraged Jirrbal, Girramay and Gulngay people to make artefacts for sale at a small shop she established at Bellenden Plains homestead near Cardwell. She also purchased many of these artefacts herself. In 1979 Gladys Henry sold her collection of 588 artefacts for \$5,800 to the Aboriginal Arts Board of the Australia Council, which presented the collection to the Material Culture Unit at James Cook University in 1989. Among the objects were 83 fire-makers. These, and the bulk of the rest of the collection, have since been transferred to the Queensland Museum (Barnard, 2014).

It is clear that a large number of fire-makers were made and sold as artefacts during the 1960s and 1970s, and throughout the 1980s and 1990s, including through the Deeral Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation in Babinda, which sold at least one to Museum Victoria in 1990 (X92585). Yet, these implements were not as widely collected as other artefacts during the early collecting period of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is interesting to consider why this might be the case.

Firstly, the manufacture of this particular form of fire-maker appears to have been confined to specific rainforest peoples in a relatively confined local area, unlike the rainforest shield. While there were slight regional differences in shape, and they featured different painted designs, rainforest shields were produced right across the coastal rainforest region from the south of Ingham to the north of Cairns (Aaberge et al., 2014; Abernethy, 1984; Best, 2003; Goldfinch, 2014; Hale, 1989; see also Buhrich, Greer & Goldfinch, this volume). In contrast, the anthropomorphic fire-maker appears to have been a more localised product. Another reason that very few of these fire-makers found their way into the hands of early collectors might be that their Aboriginal owners were reluctant to part with them. I discuss this possibility below.

## COLLECTORS – JOHN ARCHIBALD BOYD AND JOHN GAGGIN

I first became fascinated with this form of fire-maker after I began to do research on the diaries of an artefact collector by the name of John Archibald Boyd. He began collecting Aboriginal artefacts in the Wet Tropics region in 1882, after he came to work on Ripple Creek cane plantation near Ingham, which was owned by his brother Mitchell Boyd in partnership with the brothers John and Joseph Wood (Vidonja Balanzategui, 2011: 34). J.A. Boyd had become an experienced collector during his earlier years in Fiji (1865-1882), collecting mainly natural specimens for the curator of the Australian Museum in Sydney, Edward Ramsay, the ornithologist Alfred John North, also of the Australian Museum, and

for Sir William John Macleay, Australian politician and naturalist, who donated his collection to the University of Sydney in 1890, forming the nucleus of what is today the Macleay Museum.

According to his diary, J.A. Boyd arrived at Ripple Creek Plantation on Friday 15 September 1882, accompanied by his 12 year old son Reggie, whose Fijian mother had remained behind in Fiji. Boyd's diaries from 1882 to 1898 provide evidence that he purchased artefacts on numerous occasions directly from Aboriginal people for cash and/or tobacco. His first purchase appears to have been on Thursday 5 October 1882: 'Bought for 1/2lb tobacco /2s/8d/ a shield & spear & got for 4 plugs some necklaces and a boomerang' (Boyd, 1882-1898).

Boyd's diaries reveal that he and his son Reggie enjoyed life at Ripple Creek immensely, spending much of their spare time on horseback, hunting and fishing. Almost every Sunday, Boyd would call in at 'the Blacks camp' on the plantation to collect Aboriginal people and their camp dogs to accompany him on hunting expeditions 'across the river'. For example, his diary entry for 11 September 1887 reads: 'Crossed river with a few Blacks & Armstrong. Self got 8 Wallaby. Went to Corroberree at Blacks camp tonight' (Boyd, 1882-1898). Boyd also records a number of camping trips during the Christmas holidays to Hinchinbrook Island where, according to his diary entry for 25 December 1882, they 'Got a lot of oysters & the Blacks took us to where we could get water. Bought some fish spears, canoe etc.' Boyd actively attempted to further his knowledge about Australian Aboriginal people. For example, he spent 29 December 1887 reading *The Australian Race* by E.M. Curr, which had been published in 1886, only a year earlier (Boyd, 1882-1898).

Boyd left Ripple Creek in 1898 after he was advised by his doctor to leave the tropics for the sake of his health but his son Reggie remained in North Queensland continuing to work at Ripple Creek and for other planters and pastoralists in the region.<sup>4</sup> Whether Reggie also collected artefacts is not clear. However, he clearly took an interest in Aboriginal cultural beliefs and practices. When

the anthropologist A.W. Howitt sought information on Aboriginal cultural beliefs and practices in the vicinity of Ripple Creek, Boyd forwarded the questionnaire to his son. On 25 September 1901 he returned the questionnaire, recommending Howitt to get out of his armchair and into the field:

I have the pleasure of enclosing the questionnaire returned by my son with some remarks thereon...It occurs to me that if you could find the time to take a run to the Herbert River... you could acquire more information in a few days than in years of correspondence. (Boyd, 1901)

While Reggie may or may not have collected artefacts, Boyd's friend Gaggin certainly did so. Gaggin also furnished A.W. Howitt with information on the beliefs and practices of Aboriginal people of the Herbert River (Howitt, 1904: 498-99).

John Gaggin came to North Queensland on 26 August 1883 from Fiji, having been persuaded by Boyd to join him at Ripple Creek. Gaggin initially worked as the store-master on the plantation. According to Boyd's diaries, Gaggin and he spent much time together exploring the countryside and generally enjoying life, hunting and fishing. Gaggin also accompanied Boyd to Java in 1890 in search of labour for the plantation. Gaggin acted as witness at Boyd's marriage to his second wife, Sarah (Jeanie) Miskin, in 1894, and dedicated his book, *Among the Man-eaters* to his 'old chum and comrade' (Gaggin, 1900). The two men maintained a life-long friendship.

The extent of Gaggin's collecting practices is unknown, but he collected several of the carved and painted anthropomorphic fire-makers. As mentioned above, one of them was donated to Museum Victoria (X983) and another was acquired by the Queensland Museum (QE559). It was placed on display in the latter museum during the early 1900s as a 'war charm' called 'Tikovana' (figure 8).

Gaggin collected more of these fire-makers but exactly how many is unknown. He visited A.J. North, of the Australian Museum, in 1896 and gave him one as a gift. In a letter dated 8 February 1896, North





FIG. 8. Fire-maker. Collected by John Gaggin c. 1895 and donated to the Queensland Museum on 17 September 1914. QE559. Source: Queensland Museum.

wrote of Gaggin's visit to J.A. Boyd as follows: 'He gave me one of his Tikowinnas, a charm which now descends from the handle of the dilly-bag you gave Mrs North when passing through to England' (North, 1896). According to North, Gaggin had more than one of these artefacts with him at the time of his visit in 1896.

I wondered what might have become of the particular fire-maker that Gaggin gave to North. As North was an employee of the Australian Museum, I began my search at the Australian Museum archives. There was no record of North having donated the fire-maker to the Museum, but I discovered correspondence about the trade of a 'tikovina' for boomerangs in 1903 (Australian Museum Archives, Exchange Schedule, No. 17, 1903). A fire-maker described as a 'tikovina' was offered to the Museum by Dr J. Sanders in exchange for two boomerangs on 5 March 1903. The address Sanders gave was c/- A.J. North. Whether Sanders was the actual owner of this artefact or whether he was acting on behalf of North is not stated in his correspondence with the Museum. It is possible that the fire-maker that Gaggin gave North is the same as the fire-maker that Sanders traded to the Australian Museum (E11411), particularly as John Gaggin provided information to the curator, R. Etheridge, on this particular artefact (Boyd, 1903).

## FIRESTICK AND FALLING STAR: JIGUBINA

Before J.A. Boyd departed North Queensland in 1898 he bought more artefacts to add to his collection, which he packed in cases and took with him to the home he eventually built at Eden on the south coast of New South Wales. Most of these artefacts are still in the possession of his descendants, the bulk of them in the care of his granddaughter, Elaine Roberts until she passed away in August 2015. During a visit to her home to document and photograph the collection in 2013, the Senior Curator of the Macleay Museum, Jude Philp, and I recorded nine beautifully painted fire-makers. Later, as I was reading Boyd's diaries I came across this entry for 24 November 1898:

Bought a lot of tikovinnas. They are used by the blacks for making fires in places where a lot of wood is not obtainable. Each black claims to know the maker of each tikovina but not of shields. Old Paddy<sup>5</sup> could not recognise the "coat of arms" on any though he said he picked out the tikovinnas. (Boyd, 1882-1898)

Was Boyd referring to the collection of fire-makers that were still in the possession of his granddaughter, I wondered? I had never heard the name *tikovina*. Was *tikovina* the name that Aboriginal people had given him for these things? I consulted with Aboriginal elder, Russell Butler Snr, whose mother was born at Ripple Creek and whose grandmother's name was, in fact, Nora Boyd. Nora's Aboriginal name at birth was Girdjul. She later took the name Boyd after the owners of the plantation at Ripple Creek, where she lived and where she eventually gave birth to Russell's mother. Nora was a fluent speaker of the coastal dialect of the Wargamay language (Biyay), the language of the people in whose country Ripple Creek plantation was located (Dixon, 1981: 15).

Russell Butler at first did not recognise the name *tikovina* but as we sat and puzzled over the word together, his eyes lit up and he exclaimed '*jigubina*'! *Jigubina* he told me are small spirit beings that inhabit the countryside, but mainly the top of a mountain in the region that is renowned for having 'those lights up there'. According to Butler, 'even today modern farmers during the 1960s saw

heaps and heaps of lights there and thought they were UFO. The name of that mountain, Mt Tyson, is Jigubina so when I go north I always talk to that mountain'. Butler said that if he goes fishing in the area he will always leave a fish behind for Jigubina. According to Butler 'when you make fire you have to talk to the spirit to ask permission to make fire. When you see the smoke starting to rise you know he has given permission. He sits beside you'. I confirmed Butler's account of *jigubina* with several other Aboriginal people from the region. For example, a woman instantly recognised the term as referring to what she called 'fire spirits'. She said that she had been told about these little spirits by her elders when she was a child. The elders would sometimes tell stories about these spirit beings to scare children into behaving well. She thought they were mischievous rather than evil, but could cause misfortune, including bushfires.

In her collection of stories by Aboriginal people from the valleys of the Davidson Creek, Tully and Murray Rivers, Gladys Henry (1967: 55) includes one about Jigubina:

The Chic-ah-bunnah [Jigubina] was a spirit in the shape of a man, and was always sighted rushing through the air. He emitted a strange blue light and was blinding to look upon. When he took off from the earth there was a frightful bang and a roaring rushing noise. He ate glowing red coals and only came to earth at certain places. The three known places in the area were Goondarlah Hill on the Murray River, the large rock at the back or western side of the crest of Mt Tyson (Mt Bulleroo) and another rock away up the Davidson Valley. The creature was frightful to behold and had a long hideous nose. Kitty Chilburrah was said to have seen one personally while on Palm Island, and the local witness, a little girl named Jaa-Jin-oo (the little eel), claims to have seen one in the last few years. There is no evidence of the chic-ah-bunnah having done anyone harm. He merely instilled great fear in the hearts of the beholders.

In his vocabularies of Wargamay and of the neighbouring Dyirbal language spoken to the north, Dixon (1972, 1981) records *jigubina* as meaning 'falling star' but *bayi jigubina* as referring to 'a legendary person, who can take the form of a falling star' (1972) and 'a mythical person – an ugly old bugger' (1981: 129). According to Dixon *bayi* is a noun marker (Class I of four classes of noun marker that he identified in Dyirbal) which refers to 'men, kangaroos and possums, most snakes and fishes, a few birds, most insects, the moon, storms, boomerangs and money' (Dixon, 1972: 47). The Class I noun marker *bayi* also indicates things that are 'visible and there', perhaps signifying that *jigubina* is thought to be a Being that is manifest in the world. The fact that *jigubina* is marked by *bayi* means that it is associated with human masculinity and animatedness (Dixon 1972: 308). On the other hand, 'anything to do with fire', including light, sun and stars, falls into Class II, along with women, fighting and shields, marked by *balan*. Thus, firesticks (*jiman*) are referred to as *balan jiman* (Aboriginal People of Jumbun, 1997: 41).

Dixon collected several unpublished texts concerning the 'mythical' Being, Jigubina, during his fieldwork among Dyirbal speakers in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. For example, he recorded and transcribed the following account by George Watson (Malanda, 11 September 1978). Here, I give only Dixon's English translation.

Jigubina is always flying up in the sky  
He throws the firestick out in front

Dixon was told that Jigubina, the shooting star, throws out a firestick and where it falls he will land:

Then he follows it, later on he flies, he goes down there, walking around in Mamu country, to the north and to the east he goes, he keeps flying, does Jigubina.

According to the texts that Dixon recorded over 40 years ago, and my recent enquiries in 2014, Jigubina appears to be a rather ambiguous character. He is spoken of in the singular as a particular spirit being that is at the same time a man, or that was previously a man. But *jigubina* is also spoken of in the plural. Clearly *jigubina*

(in the plural form) continue to inhabit the lifeworld of many rainforest Aboriginal people today as capricious beings that may do good deeds, such as warn people of danger, but may also cause harm. The following story was told to Dixon in Djirbal by Chloe Grant at Murray Upper on 11 August 1964. She was remembering what the tribal elders used to tell the children in the camp.

‘Don’t walk about too much when Jigubina’s around!’ ‘Or Jigubina’ll tickle you.’ He’s a man; he turns into one; then he’s really a man. He was the first person ... He lit a fire, and cooked a scrub-hen egg. Pushed the egg and the coals into his mouth until it was full. The coal made a light there in his stomach. The hot coals shone out a lot. That’s the light. That’s what they told me.

This man who turned was a man from the camp. He turned into Jigubina. Some Jigubinas come from way out west; some Jigubinas come from Mamu country; some are Jaganbarra coming way down there; some are Nungunbarra Jigubinas coming; to frighten all of us here.

Jigubina went down to the south, to get a painted basket (mindj). He’s flying back up there with it. He’s coming from the north, bringing a north-side painted dilly-bag (jabul) in return; Jigubina is.

Jigubina fell down somewhere there on a flat rock; he made a big noise.

‘Put the fire out and sit quiet for fear of Jigubina!’

‘That road lying out there belongs to Jigubina’

‘Don’t burn a light lest he see it!’ ‘Lest Jigubina come and frighten us all. He go round and round the camp chasing us round frightening us.’ ‘Yes.’

‘Yes, sit quiet for a good while, lest he run us down; he’d never leave us alone, even for a day, but he’d tickle us and keep on doing it until we shit ourselves; shake the

urine out of us; he’d tickle us, and keep on doing that until we died.’

They all pointed him out flying along up here, all the people sitting in the camp did.

‘Look out, look out, look out; beware of this Jigubina!’ [Noise of falling] There he goes.

‘There, who are you?’ they all called, and he just up there answered, ‘budlll’, a big indistinct noise.

According to the narratives, Jigubina is a Story Being associated with light and, thus, also with fire and the implements that are used to create fire (light). This is perhaps why, when Boyd asked his Aboriginal informants the name for the fire-makers, they responded with the word ‘jigubina’ (which J.A. Boyd heard and wrote as ‘tikovinna’). Boyd and Gaggin both referred to the fire-makers by that name, variously spelling it ‘tikovinna’, ‘tikovina’, ‘tikowinna’, ‘tikovana’ in their correspondence<sup>6</sup>. A.W. Howitt (1904: 499) includes an illustration (figure 9) of such a fire-maker in his book *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia*. The particular fire-maker was donated by Gaggin to Museum Victoria (registration number X983). Howitt describes it as follows, citing Gaggin as his authority:

The *Tikovina* is a flat thin piece of soft wood cut from the north Queensland fig-tree. It is about a foot long, by about three or four inches wide, brought gradually to a point at the bottom, while the top is cut in the rude representation of a man’s face with mouth and eyes. It is painted all over the front red and black with human blood and clay. As a sort of war-charm it is worn round the neck

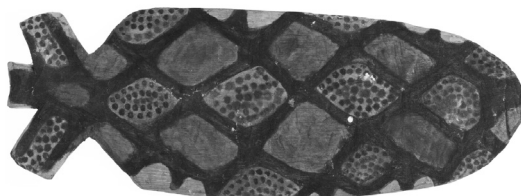


FIG. 9. Bagu or fire-maker from Herbert River, Queensland. Collected by John Gaggin. X983. Source: Museum Victoria.

of a warrior, and hangs down between the shoulders behind, showing that the wearer means fighting, and that he will not miss with his club, spear, and boomerang, while the weapons of his adversary will glance aside from him. It is kept hidden away from women and children, who seem afraid of it. (Howitt, 1904: 499)

Howitt (1904: 498) also includes an account of Aboriginal beliefs concerning the origin of these fire-makers, as conveyed to him by Gaggin:

In these tribes there is a striking belief in a supernatural being called *Kohin*. He is said to have his dwelling in the Milky Way (*Kuling*)...*Kohin* came long ago down from *Kuling*, and appeared to their fathers as a carpet-snake. He said that where he came from was a good land and in it a vast river full of splendid fish. He had two *Tikovinas* with him, which he presented to the tribe, and told them that if they were good men and wore them, they would not be killed in fight, and that they could fly. Two men tried it, and succeeded in going from tree to tree as the flying-squirrels do. Afterwards, becoming more expert, they flew from mountain to mountain. He then told them to get two large bags filled with gum-tree leaves, and to start for the Milky

Way. This they did, and confirmed all that *Kohin* had said. One returned, but the other refused to leave such good quarters, and sent his *Tikovina* by the other. *Kohin*, who had remained on the Herbert while the two were absent, and had cured some old women of sores and had made them young again, now went away, leaving the two *Tikovinas* with the tribe, telling them that when he sent another, marked red in the centre, they would have all to go to *Kuling*, and live there.

The stories above provide evidence that this particular object had value for Aboriginal people of the Herbert River, over and above its utilitarian value as a fire starting tool. The fire-makers had special significance because of their association with a powerful Ancestral Being and because of their capacity to transform men and protect them in battle. The bodies of the fire-makers may also have been considered consubstantial manifestations of *Jigubina*, or ‘transformations of subjects into objects’ (Munn 1970). If so, then this might explain why so few of these fire-makers made it into the hands of collectors and museums during the late nineteenth century. However, rainforest shields, painted bicornual baskets and most other objects also have significance beyond their use value, so the rarity of the fire-makers in museums may primarily be due to their limited geographical occurrence, rather than their cosmological value.



FIG. 10. 'Double headed' fire-maker found by J.A. Boyd in a hollow tree, possibly at Ripple Creek, Herbert River, sometime between 1882 and 1896. Photograph: Rosita Henry, 13 November 2013.

## ON VALUE: UTILITARIAN AND COSMOLOGICAL

According to David Graeber (2005), it is by paying attention to what people put their creative energies into that anthropologists can determine what people actually value. He notes that value can be defined 'as a way people's own actions become meaningful to them, how they take on importance by becoming incorporated into some larger system of meaning' (Graeber, 2005: 451–2). The men, who carved and painted fire-makers clearly put creative energy into their production. As noted above, Boyd recorded in his diary that his long term Aboriginal informant at Ripple Creek, Paddy, could recognise the 'owner' of each fire-maker on the basis of the particular design that was painted on it. Whether by 'owner' is also meant 'creator' he does not made clear. Whatever the case, for their Aboriginal owner/creators, fire-makers instantiated both positively and negatively valued social ties among themselves and with the world around them. Like the rainforest shields and the painted bicornual baskets, the fire-makers were associated with narrative knowledge and designs that linked Aboriginal people into a broader cosmological network of ancestral connections (Aaberge et al., 2014). The fire-makers not only served a practical purpose in enabling people to produce fire but were associated with the Story Being Jigubina and with ancestral life force. More than this, it is possible the artefacts were themselves believed to be actual transformations of this life force.

Yet, while Gaggin seems to have had some understanding of the cosmological significance of the fire-makers and emphasised their use as 'charms' that were believed to protect men in battle, Boyd thought of them as merely a fire starting tool. When the curator of the Australian Museum, R. Etheridge, wrote to Boyd to ask him for information about the artefact (E11411), described as a 'tikovina', that the Museum had procured in exchange for two boomerangs from Dr Sanders, Boyd replied as follows:

I regret that I have to differ from my old friend Gaggin's opinion. My inquiries led

me to infer that it was merely an aboriginal domestic article answering to the flint and steel of our ancestors & is used for making fire in wet weather or when crossing country where suitable timber for frictional purposes is scarce. I have seen a Black take one of the reeds which are usually fastened at the back of the 't', insert it in the 'eye' & get a light by twisting it rapidly between his open palms. I have some ten of these articles / mostly made for sale, some out of packing cases / which are valuable solely as showing the different patterns & colours used by aboriginals for ornamental purposes. Among them is a bona fide article that I found in a 'plant' in a hollow tree. It is unique to me in its pattern & colouration, it is also 'double headed' / 2 eyes at each end /. All I have represent an archaic human form...I can give you no information as to how far their distribution extends but if you write to my son 'Reggie', Ripple Creek, Herbert River, he may possibly be able to tell you, as he knows the Blacks of the country for hundreds of miles around. (emphasis in original; Boyd, 1903)

Nine of the fire-makers that were in Boyd's collection at the time he wrote this letter were still in the care of his granddaughter Elaine Roberts in 2015, over 110 years later. Some indeed appear to have been made from packing cases, but among them is the 'bona fide article' that Boyd describes, the one that he found stashed in a hollow tree (figure 10).

There is also one fire-maker in the possession of a great-grandson of J.A. Boyd (Elaine Roberts, 2015, pers. comm., 3 January). Thus, remarkably, unless Boyd later swapped any of them with another collector, all ten fire-makers that he referred to in his letter to Etheridge remain today in the possession of the Boyd family.

For J.A. Boyd's descendants these artefacts hold value as memory objects that were part of their childhoods. The artefacts hold heritage value for them as things that they inherited from their



ancestor. Boyd's granddaughter, Elaine Roberts, remembers spending holidays at her grandfather's house in Eden with the artefacts part of the everyday lives of the members of the household:

When he built 'The Hollies' at Eden, the house was designed with a long hall from the front to the back door. On both sides of it he hung all the shields and tikovinna as they were so colourful and people always remarked on them. He kept the spears and boomerangs in a room he called his den, which also contained his diaries... (Elaine Roberts 2015, pers. comm., 12 January)

Elaine remembers using the woven dilly bags in her grandfather's collection when her father took her prawning at Lake Curalo, the lake beside which 'The Hollies' was built.

We would go out at night with lanterns and wade around in knee-deep mud. The prawns were attracted by the light. When we saw them we would catch them in the hand nets we each had, then put them in those woven baskets we carried over our shoulders. (Elaine Roberts 2015, pers. comm. 20 February)

According to Elaine, her own children and their cousins, J.A. Boyd's great-grandchildren, also have strong memories of holidaying at his house at Eden where the artefacts were displayed on the walls. The artefacts provided fascinating evidence of the exciting life of their adventurous ancestor and his contact with Aboriginal people during the frontier days of early European settlement in North Queensland.

Yet, what did these artefacts mean to Boyd himself? What was their value to him? How did he come by these artefacts in the first place and why did he go to the trouble to carefully pack them and transport them to his new abode when he left Ripple Creek? There is no evidence that Boyd at any time attempted to give away, sell or donate to museums or anyone else any fire-makers, unlike his friend Gaggin. While Boyd donated numerous other artefacts, including rainforest shields, baskets and other tools

and weapons to the Macleay Museum,<sup>7</sup> he did not donate fire-makers. Perhaps this was because the 'tikovinnas' that he had in his possession were made for him personally by Aboriginal men who lived and worked at Ripple Creek, at least one of whom (Paddy) he had known for over 15 years. According to Boyd, in his letter to Etheridge at the Australian Museum (8 March 1903), he only had one 'tikovinna' that he considered 'bona fide', the one he had found stashed in a hollow tree.

It is possible that Boyd did not offer the museum any of his fire-makers because he thought that museums would only value 'bona fide' artefacts, things actually made in a pre-contact context. There was a widespread belief at this time that Aboriginal people were 'doomed to extinction' (McGregor 1997). Thus, artefacts that were made prior to European colonisation were highly sought after. The value of artefacts was determined by their perceived authenticity, 'defined in terms of the context of their production' (Erckenbrecht et al., 2010: 353). For example, German physical anthropologist Hermann Klaatsch (1863–1916), who spent time in North Queensland during 1904 and 1905, travelled by horseback to find remote Aboriginal camps in the rainforest where he could procure artefacts produced in as pristine a context as possible (Erckenbrecht et al., 2010: 353; Erckenbrecht, this volume).

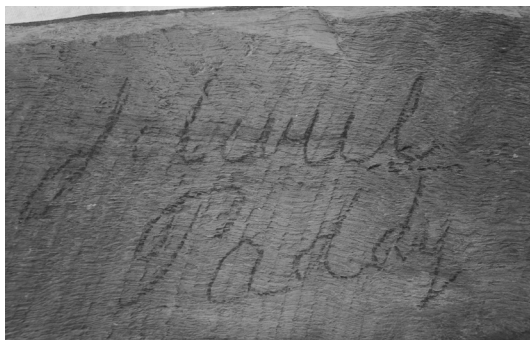
On the other hand, Boyd may have hung on to all the fire-makers in his possession because they stored place memory for him of Ripple Creek as well as of the particular Aboriginal men he had spent so many years with while living there. The fact that Boyd wrote the names of the Aboriginal men who had made them on the backs of some of the fire-makers is telling. Two are inscribed with the name 'Jilwul Paddy' and one with the name 'Wunjorn Willie' (figures 11 and 12).

Boyd's diaries reveal that a Paddy was living in the Aboriginal camp at Ripple Creek in 1882. During the 15 years that Boyd spent at Ripple Creek, Paddy regularly supplied Boyd with natural specimens and appears to have been a key informant with regard



to the Aboriginal language names for various flora and fauna. It appears that Boyd developed close relationships of trust and friendship with some of the Aboriginal people at Ripple Creek. Therefore, it is not inconceivable that upon the eve of his departure, these men decided to present him with fire-makers they had made especially for him. While Boyd notes that he paid for the fire-makers, to define the transaction as commodity exchange in contrast to

gift exchange is problematic. There is not a distinct boundary between gift and commodity exchange (Henry et al., 2013; Gregory, 1982). Perhaps Boyd carefully packed the fire-makers and other artefacts he had collected during his years at Ripple Creek, transported them to his new home in NSW and chose never to part with them, because their value for him lay mostly in the treasured memories they held of his life and his relationships with Aboriginal people at Ripple Creek. For Boyd, as much as for the Aboriginal men with whom he transacted, 'artefacts constitute and *instantiate* social relations' (Henare, 2005: 2), past, present and future. It appears that the fire-makers also had aesthetic value for Boyd and his family because, unlike most of the other artefacts, which were kept out of sight in his 'den', they were put on display in the hallway with the rainforest shields 'as they were so colourful and people always remarked on them' (Roberts 2015, pers. comm., 12 January).



FIGS 11 & 12. Jilwul Paddy and Wunjorn Willie written in blue on the backs of the fire-makers. Photographs: Rosita Henry, 13 November 2013.



## CONCLUSION

Tracing the history of transactions concerning a particular type of fire-maker originating in the Wet Tropics of North Queensland presents us with a dynamic field for reflection on the concept of value. By focusing on just this one type of fire-maker I have attempted to explore how artefacts 'circulate in different regimes of value in space and time' (Appadurai, 1986: 4). These fire-making utensils carry the value of their ability to generate fire and light and for their correspondent cosmological connection to ancestral creative power. In terms of their capacity to make fire, they are instruments of transformation. Yet they are potentially themselves transformations of the creative energy of *jigubina*, Story Beings that have both dangerous and protective qualities depending on how people engage with them.

Although their utilitarian value as fire-making utensils diminished from the 1860s onwards, due to the introduction and adoption of flint and steel, their cosmological value has survived. From the 1890s and into the early twentieth century the fire-makers gathered value as 'artefacts', things that could be traded, bought, sold, donated and gifted among collectors and museums. During the mid to late twentieth century Aboriginal people began to make the fire-makers for sale to tourists and eventually they were revitalised as contemporary artworks. Thus transformed, they continue to carry with them their significance as *jigubina*, which through the creative endeavour of the artists have not only been freed from the confines of museum stores and displays but also from the limits of place, as cosmopolitan travelers making their way around the nation and the world.

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## □ ENDNOTES

1. Cairns Indigenous Art Fair (CIAF) is an event sponsored by Arts Queensland that brings together commercial art galleries and Indigenous art centres to showcase and sell art by Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists. Since the first CIAF in 2009, the fair has grown to be a significant annual event.
2. Xstrata was a multinational mining company. On 2 May 2013 ownership of Xstrata was fully acquired by Glencore.
3. Artists whose *bagu* were exhibited include Betty Andy, Daniel Beeron, Maureen Beeron, Nancy Beeron, Theresa Beeron, Nancy Cowan, Nephi Denham, Allison Murray, Doris Kinjun, Emily Murray, John Murray, Sally Murray and Ninney Murray.
4. Reginald Boyd's niece, Elaine Roberts, has conducted research on him. Elaine (pers. comm. 20 Feb. 2015) notes that in 1887 Reggie worked for a Mr. Atkinson of 'Greenvale' station and that in 1888 his address was Oak Hills Station via Cardwell. In October 1893 he signed an agreement with A.C. Gardiner, Marybank: 'He was to receive one Pound per week, board and lodging, and horses for working the estate'. In March 1895 he was manager of 'Bronte' for Mr. Crosby. The 1908 Census records him as working as a storekeeper at Ripple Creek and the 1913 Census also records him as living at Ripple Creek. He died on 20 April 1919 and his death certificate notes that he was a 'grazier' at Baalcoomo in the North Kennedy district. According to Elaine, 'Reggie's life revolved round breeding and training horses, both for racing and for shows. He was involved in Aboriginal affairs and problems. He never married as he did not believe mixed marriages were a good idea'.
5. An Aboriginal man named Paddy was living at Ripple Creek in 1882, the year Boyd arrived on the plantation as Boyd noted in his diary (22 October 1882): 'Got Paddy at Blacks camp. Shot a pair of piping geese in lagoon. Saw a black duck & killed a pair of cockatoo...' Boyd's diaries evidence that over a period of fifteen years Paddy regularly supplied him with various natural specimens – especially birds and bird eggs. For example, on 7 April 1897 Boyd notes that 'Paddy brought 3 eggs taken from nest containing 4, one of which he broke'.
6. There is also a fire-maker in the Museum Victoria (X 087363), identified as a restricted ceremonial object, which was acquired from the Australian Board of Missions. Written in pencil on the object are the words 'war charm Tikovilla Herbert River'.
7. Included in what Boyd donated to the Macleay Museum are the following artefacts: baskets (ET817, ET20139, ETB1069, ETB1070), boomerang (ETH101), spearthrower (ETH1111), and rainforest shields (ETH1120, ETH1121, ETH1122, ETH 1130).



# Dudley Bulmer's Artefacts as Autobiography

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During a visit to Yarrabah in 1938, Norman Tindale, then working for the South Australian Museum, collected and documented a number of artefacts given to him by Dudley Bulmer, who was originally from Starcke River, north of Cooktown. This paper uses Tindale's notes on these artefacts to show how Bulmer sometimes inscribed aspects of himself into his artefacts by combining events from his life with representations of Ancestral beings that were important in ceremony. Partly reflecting the power of the state to restrict his freedom, a feature of Bulmer's presence in his artefacts is his absence from his homeland. I argue these elements make some of Bulmer's artefacts inscriptive equivalents to the life story genre of Indigenous writing.

□ Dudley Bulmer, Tindale, artefacts, the Dreaming, autobiography, Yarrabah, North Queensland

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A feature of Dudley Bulmer's life was his involvement in the production of artefacts, rock art and various cultural performances in the Yarrabah region of North Queensland. Relying heavily, but not exclusively, on Norman Tindale's 1938 notes of his meetings with Bulmer and accounts of Bulmer in the 1950s, I adopt what can be broadly termed a biographical approach to the artefacts with an emphasis on autobiographical elements. I favor an expansive notion of biography (and autobiography) that includes any oral, literary, or other semiotic form, that outlined elements of an individual's life (Beckett, 1996: 313). This extension of biographical characteristics to artefacts draws on claims that made objects are expressions of their creators (Munn, 1970) and the social transactions through which they circulate (Hoskins, 2006).<sup>1</sup>

Taking an autobiographical approach to Bulmer's works necessarily emphasizes the episodic elements of his autobiography since we have limited data on what he made. The autobiographical elements I outline are not really ordered by an overarching life story understood to be a, more or less, continuous chronology that outlines a developmental trajectory of the subject into the person they have become (Rowse, 2006: 188). Instead this paper discusses Bulmer from around 1916-20 to the 1950s and then moves back to 1938. It is primarily structured by a concern with Bulmer's artefacts, art and performance and this focus, given the limits of the data, highlights the role of the 'fragmentary, occasional, episodic and ephemeral' (Grossman, 2006) as part of any biography and autobiography.

Tindale's notes of his 1938 conversations with Bulmer are not just a guide to Bulmer's biography, but give us access to the autobiographical elements involved in some of Bulmer's artefacts. Tindale details Bulmer's interpretations of the artefacts and designs and outlines some of Bulmer's explicit intentions to self-represent. Bulmer often refers to ancestral figures in his works and outlines distinctly autobiographical components in two of them. In addition he made a message stick that I argue is strongly individualised and autobiographical in the sense that it makes no direct reference to the

ancestral. Given these features I argue Bulmer was creating artefactual and inscriptive equivalents of the Indigenous life story genre of written autobiographies that emerged in Australia in the late 1950s and 1960s (Haag, 2008: 8). Such an argument depends on a generous definition of life story that would not confine it to only one semiotic medium such as writing.

## **SELF REPRESENTATION, HISTORICAL SUBJECTS AND THE ANCESTORS**

A key issue in recent discussion of life stories, understood to include some of Bulmer's artefacts, is whether they can be understood as products of dominant Western discourses about history, the rise of individualism, and the self-production of representations of identity. In some accounts Indigenous artefacts and life stories are presented as primarily part of a wider encompassing or immanent religious framework – the Dreaming – that is radically different to Western understandings of time, history and personhood and the autobiographical (Westphalen, 2002: 2). In this view the Indigenous life story (as text or artefact) is not necessarily significantly 'autobiographical' or 'innovative' in a manner that can be contrasted to the Dreaming. Instead the life story is something that is fundamentally derived from the framework provided by the Dreaming. In this argument all aspects of a known subject's everyday experience are to be ultimately understood, and made meaningful, only by reference to the immanent ancestral order of the Dreaming. Within such understandings it would be improper, and illogical, to credit a single individual with an innovation, such as a life story, because this would ignore the agency of the Dreaming (Poirier, 2005: 244).<sup>2</sup>

While some of these arguments suggest exclusionary distinctions between an Indigenous relational cosmology, and Western history and individualism, it is clear that many aspects of Indigenous life can involve a subject that is, for a certain time, independent of the Ancestral. It is widely recognised that in many parts of Aboriginal

Australia a complex array of inscriptive practices can be deployed in producing and reproducing Indigenous meaning and memory rather than just those attributable to the agency of the Dreaming in the landscape, events and persons (Beckett, 1996). Rumsey argues that 'a good deal of what we call "history" – the past actions of known human beings – are also inscribed in and retrieved from the landscape' (Rumsey, 1994: 116). These historical events often form part of narratives concerning the Dreaming, fusing mythic and historical modes of orientation and we find, in some areas of Australia, Dreaming events are understood as 'history' and sacred sites are termed history places (Sutton, 1994: 252). Historical elements are inscribed and retrieved in the same way as are those attributable to the Dreaming – both sometimes 'make similar use of the trope of punctuated movement through a fixed series of named places' (Rumsey, 1994: 124) – a point developed below in reference to Bulmer's portrayal of places in his autobiographical works. The forms of social memory created by people like Bulmer are best understood, not in terms of mutually exclusive binary oppositions between oral (myth) and written (history), but as involving a diverse range of inscriptive and other semiotic practices which, in this case concerning Bulmer's artefacts, are similar to some of those practices that are now thought to constitute the life story. Elements of this similarity begin to emerge from a brief consideration of Bulmer's life, his relationship with Tindale and accounts of some of Bulmer's innovative activities at Yarrabah. After this biographical interlude we will consider the more distinctly autobiographical qualities of some of Bulmer's artefacts.

## BULMER, TINDALE AND TOURISTS

Dudley Bulmer was from the Jeannie and Starcke rivers north of Hopevale<sup>3</sup>, with Tindale linking him to 'Koko Imidji' country (Tindale, 1938: 527).<sup>4</sup> Bulmer was born in 1887 (Denigan, 2008: 60), or in 1893 according to Tindale and Birdsell's estimates.<sup>5</sup> He remained in the area until he was subject to removal orders issued in 1916 that were concerned with

'destitution'. His wife Polly was targeted at the same time, along with four other family members. There was considerable delay in executing the orders and by 1919 police were unsure as to whom the removal order applied (Denigan, 2008: 60). Bulmer gained employment on stations around Cooktown and then in Atherton. It was not until 1923 that Bulmer was served with removal orders (Denigan, 2008: 61). At the time he was working full time as bullock driver on Bert Veiver's farm in Kuranda (Denigan, 2008: 61; Henry 2012: 34). The Veivers asked Yarrabah mission that he be returned to them, but this did not happen. Bulmer's movement away from his home to Yarrabah was a mix of state power and his own freedom to move. These movements crucially influenced his artefacts and performances. A number of the artefacts evoke the Starcke region and show how Bulmer was linked to both Starcke and to his new home of Yarrabah. Also relevant to my interpretation of Bulmer's artefacts as like a life story, according to his descendants he was not a fluent writer of English.

Tindale had a number of meetings with Dudley Bulmer at Yarrabah in 1938 and the Birdsells, who were working with Tindale, recorded Bulmer's physical features. Tindale, with Bulmer's help, recorded a fairly detailed genealogy of the Bulmer family and some material on kinship organisation in the Starcke River region. Tindale also documented and collected Bulmer's artefacts and moved them into the South Australia Museum, which now acts as custodian of these nine works. Unfortunately the two dancing staffs and the message stick made by Bulmer, and given to Tindale, have been difficult to access. Another consequence of moving Bulmer's artefacts to Adelaide was that, until I arrived at Yarrabah High School in 2013, with copies of Tindale's notes on the artefacts for two of Bulmer's descendants to review, Bulmer's descendants had no knowledge of the existence of these artefacts.

The family has welcomed the artefacts's emergence into their lives. The works contain the possibility of generating new knowledge about Bulmer and his connections to his homeland. One of Bulmer's grandchildren, herself an enthusiastic researcher of Bulmer family history, told me how excited she was

to be attending a Native Title handover ceremony up at Hopevale, but that she was also frightened of going because she did not know more about her 'grandad'. The objects, and Tindale's notes on them, may come to play some productive role in native title claims to Bulmer's land, and the associated politics of ancestral identity, descent, inclusion and exclusion.

Tindale's notes from his discussions with Bulmer are fundamentally about the objects rather than topics relevant to land claims. The notes are often supplemented by beautiful drawings of the works that are, in a number of cases, the only record of the artefact's physical appearance. Unlike Roth's work where Aboriginal people do not emerge as anything other than producers of material objects (Fuery and McGregor, this volume), Tindale's account of Bulmer's works significantly contextualises them in Bulmer's own accounts of their meaning. As a result we are able to partially understand the integration of Bulmer's sense of self, and his own history, with the works he made.

While Tindale records Bulmer's interpretations of the artefacts, it is also the case that he sometimes found Bulmer 'difficult to understand' (Tindale, 1938: 525). At one point he felt Bulmer had given him a 'superficial account' of a story about crocodile Ancestors associated with some carvings and dancing staffs compared to what would have been told and performed in country (Tindale, 1938: 525). He thought Bulmer's account was a 'degenerate' version of the original. Bulmer's was positioned here not so much as an innovator, but as someone producing cultural loss and degrees of inauthenticity due to his absence from country.

Tindale indicated that Bulmer, while at Yarrabah, performed a dance associated with his crocodile Ancestors. Tindale did not see this performance and does not discuss its specific social context. Some idea of what may have been involved is found in Tindale's account of other dances he witnessed at Yarrabah:

One dance performed was from Mitchell River. A second one was performed by Yarrabah native after the Torres Strait

manner. It was claimed that the Torres Strait people had taken this from an Aboriginal corroboree and that it had now come back again. Those who took part all had some Island blood in their veins – none of them knew the meaning of the words they sang. (Tindale, 1938: 441)

What Tindale highlighted was the cosmopolitan ethos of cultural exchanges between different regions of North Queensland, marked by a concern with the right to perform dances (the dance was not really a Torres Strait dance, but 'Aboriginal') and working rules as to who should perform (only people with ties of kinship to Torres Strait).

In his account of the dances, Bulmer presented himself to Tindale as a cultural innovator responsive to the audience:

When the dance was enacted at Yarrabah head dresses were used to which were added the feather 'wheel' ornaments of Tjapukai type. Dudley Bulmer explained these were innovations, which he added to make the dance appeal to the local people, some of whom he had taught to dance in the set because there were not enough of his own people to take all the parts. (Tindale, 1938: 527; (see figure 1))

However Tindale returned to questions of authenticity. Tindale felt that Bulmer's performance of these dances would 'give only a glimpse of the content of the dance as formerly in use in the Koko Imidji country' (Tindale, 1938: 527). Tindale again implied Bulmer was inauthentic due partly to his alienation from his land and what was the full version of his culture.

Dudley Bulmer not only had to deal with this kind of understanding of Aboriginality which structured some of his interaction with Tindale, he was, especially in the 1950s, an enthusiastic participant in local tourist markets with their own requirements for the public performance of Aboriginality. Dudley Bulmer was remembered by his daughter Agnes as being an active seller of artefacts to tourists.



FIG. 1. Bulmer's headdress with Tjapukai wheel. Source: South Australian Museum A27478

Using such sales as a means of gaining an income became more feasible after World War Two if not before. Certainly the Yarrabah mission had banned the selling of artefacts directly to tourists prior to Tindale's arrival there in 1938. He noted that in Yarrabah:

money is not permitted to circulate but credit is awarded on the basis of work done. This is causing no little clash between natives and authority for they were formerly allowed to sell trinkets, curios, and goods in Cairns and to tourists and to obtain money at will. At present everything must pass through the stores books and be sold by missionary staff. Natives claim that the personal contact with tourists brings many sales and that the store makes no effort to sell – the result being a virtual disappearance of incentive for the making of objects with whence to amplify their earnings. (Tindale, 1938: 457)

Bulmer worked for Berkeley Cook, who ran a launch and pleasure resort at Brown's Bay. Bulmer would explain the rock art, make fire and sell artefacts.

Douglas Seaton (1952a, 1952b), a sign-writer from Cairns with a deep interest in the region's rock art, provides us with some idea of Bulmer's work with the tourists. Seaton corresponded with Tindale and in one letter he outlined how Bulmer's performances for tourists could be quite exuberant:

Dudley Bulmer is still the life of the party when tourists visit Browns Bay. Berkeley Cook his employer told me that on one occasion Dudley promised him a surprise when the next lot of tourists arrived. They certainly got a surprise:- when the tourists arrived at the rock paintings Dudley sprang out from behind the rock wearing a gee string and painted up and yelling like a myall. Cook had to quieten things down. Dudley is certainly an actor.<sup>6</sup>

Bulmer also rather exuberantly repainted all the figures in the rock art gallery behind Mr. Cook's house. Apparently local landowners authorized this highly innovative, possibly transgressive, procedure. Bulmer's paintings quickly gained some publicity through Seaton, who was invited to see the rock art by the Cooks. They arranged that Bulmer accompany Seaton when he visited the rock art site. Seaton recorded the rock art (see figure 2) and recorded how Bulmer named the entities he portrayed. These names are primarily in the Yidinj language, but one is probably Guugu Yimidhirr, a language widely spoken in Bulmer's homeland. Seaton also reported that Bulmer told him:

the old men had asked him to keep the drawings fresh. The outstanding figures in this gallery are the paintings of trees: one in particular has a snake painted in a panel on the trunk. The tree represents a large black pine tree (*Podocarpus*) which grows on the edge of the rain forest near the Yarrabah track. The tree is still venerated by Dudley and was "taboo" to any damage by the tribesmen. In the fruiting season the message stick (*wonnggalukken*) was sent out to invite friends to the feast. The snake in the panel signified that this was also good meat country. (Seaton, 1952b: 19)



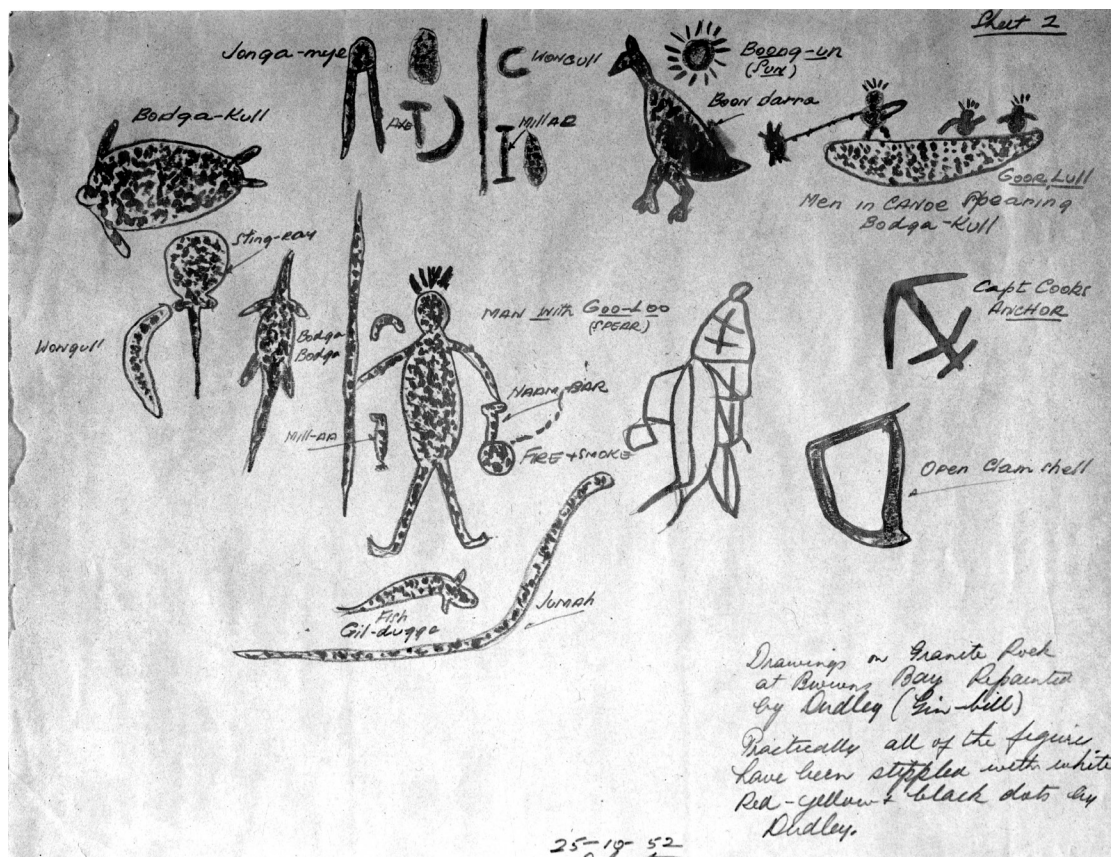


FIG. 2. Douglas Seaton's recording of rock art at Brown's Bay painted and retouched by Dudley Bulmer. Image: AA 287 Seaton Collection, South Australian Museum

Bulmer seemingly failed to tell Seaton anything distinctly autobiographical about these pictures; nor did Seaton record, in the material currently available, any explicit links between the rock art and the Ancestral.

In 1953 Seaton visited Tindale in Adelaide, having sent records of the Brown's Bay paintings made by Bulmer to Tindale (figure 2). Tindale's account of these discussions highlighted how:

in redecorating the designs Bulmer has introduced characteristics of the northern style of painting by which he is represented at our Museum in a series of specimens. In one or two instances, according to Mr Seaton, he has modified the shape of the older designs by joining them together

with new lines ... Among the designs are at least three of sailing ships, which Bulmer claims represent the ship of Captain Cook, and in one very well drawn anchor which is said to have been painted by a native to commemorate an exploit in which he retrieved an anchor for "Captain Cook".<sup>7</sup>

Tindale was primarily interested in Bulmer's rock art 'as an example of a known superimposition of ideas as expressed in paintings'.<sup>8</sup> Bulmer's painting was then perhaps one of the few documented examples of this process. But it is also the case that Tindale had invested considerable intellectual effort in developing the idea of a specific rainforest culture and people that was based on a unique understanding of the region's history (McGregor, this volume). In the literature on rock

art the northern style is said to be more figurative than the abstract style found in the rainforest region around Cairns and the Tablelands (Buhrich, Goldfinch & Greer, this volume). Edwards, a scholar of rock art in North Queensland, visited the site in 1964 and suggested 'Bulmer's art was after the style of that found in the Laura Cooktown area and was quite different to that found in other old shelters in this area which are quite abstract in nature' (Edwards, 2007: 11). At that time it was possible that there was no highly constraining 'tradition of innovation' (Glaskin, 2005) in respect to this kind of 'abstract' style of rock art painting around Yarrabah and that Bulmer was 'free' to deploy artistic conventions derived from his own country. Nonetheless it is also possible that Bulmer's repainting involved a certain degree of risk.

However innovative, Bulmer's contribution was a marginal, single intervention into the abstract rock art tradition, and it was also ephemeral. When Edwards visited the site in 2007 he could find 'no trace of these paintings. It may be the landowner had erased them to discourage visitors when the resort was closed to the public' (Edwards, 2007: 11).

Dudley Bulmer also positioned himself in other understandings of local history and representations of Aboriginality. He appeared in a film on Captain Cook that was part of a series called 'In the Steps of the Explorers'. Most of the film involved introducing the viewer to the different places and industries that now could be found along the east coast of Australia. These were presented as outcomes of the settlement of Australia initiated by Cook. As part humorous travelogue and part nationalist celebration of the development of modern Australia there was little substantial concern with Captain Cook per se and more with representing novel, possibly exotic, potential tourist destinations to a wider urban audience.

In 1959 Seaton wrote to Tindale and raised issues of authenticity:

I fear old Dudley will not last many more seasons. He recently featured in a 'shell' [text obscure]...film called in the wake of Capt. Cook. The scene was shot at Browns Bay & featured Dudley making fire in front of his

rock paintings this scene was supposed to be at Mission Bay where Cook put Banks & Solander ashore for the day while he looked for water around the beaches. I checked on these facts from Cooks Journal in the Mitchell Library. The commentary during this scene was a bit of tripe they gave a jumble of rainbow snakes & didgeridoo which were unknown to these people. You would think these people would get things right in a film of this type...<sup>9</sup>

Seaton was concerned with the authenticity of the film makers' representations of Aboriginal cultural traits and in opposing the film's version of the history of Cook's travels with Cook's own written version of history. In Seaton's view Bulmer's role became largely a fabrication of the film-makers' understandings of what cinematic Aboriginality should involve.

## PERSONAL HISTORIES AND CROCODILE DREAMINGS

What then of Bulmer's own sense of his history, of his life and times? One answer to such questions involves considering, in some detail, Tindale's notes on Bulmer's works. Tindale starts his account in the following manner:

obtained some ceremonial objects made by Dudley Bulmer (N. 652. Sheet 38 genealogy) that were made for a ceremonial dance. Formerly only men attended these dances, but in their "modified" form women were permitted to see them. They were performed north of Cooktown at Starcke River. The first object represents the sea crocodile called *kanja:r*; the second also carved in animal form represents the less ferocious (Johnstone Crocodila) called *dandji djir* which lives only in fresh water (Tindale, 1938: 521).

Linked to these sculptures of the saltwater and freshwater crocodiles (figure 3) were two dancing staffs – one associated with the freshwater crocodile and the other with the saltwater crocodile. The dancing staffs and carvings were related to a



narrative about the country around Starcke River that involved the saltwater crocodile man drowning a man who becomes a freshwater crocodile (*dandji djir*). This story was the subject of the dances, mentioned above, that Bulmer performed at Yarrabah.

Tindale explained some of the designs on the freshwater staff in the following terms:

On the stick associated with *dandji djir* are depicted at one end, *dandji djir* and at the end is *kanja:r* while in between are shown various totemic creatures which were formerly men, the *bigarior* tiger snake, the red kangaroo *njarkali*, the big leech which lives in water batan, the white lily root of swamps, *mumba*, the freshwater turtle *minja dokol* (meat turtle) and other creatures<sup>10</sup>...The other sides of the stick are associated with *kanja:r*. The designs

denote places in the story of *kanja:r* which are now also associated with totemic beings. Such designs recalls to the informant [Dudley Bulmer] a detail from the mythology of the tribe...At one end of the stick is denoted a river at Wurumbuku which is opposite 'Noble Island'. Next is depicted a sharp angle double bend in Jeannie River at the place called *Jalnga:ngmuku*.<sup>11</sup> Next is a spear thrower *mibbe:r* shown with its *ngolmo* or shell handle....(Tindale, 1938: 523; my addition of Bulmer's name)

Tindale argues that the staff was a form of social memory that functioned as a mnemonic device in recalling places and ancestral totems. We do not know which of the sites depicted by Bulmer were visited by either crocodile (or other ancestors depicted) nor do we know if the staff was an attempt to portray the sequence of the two crocodiles'

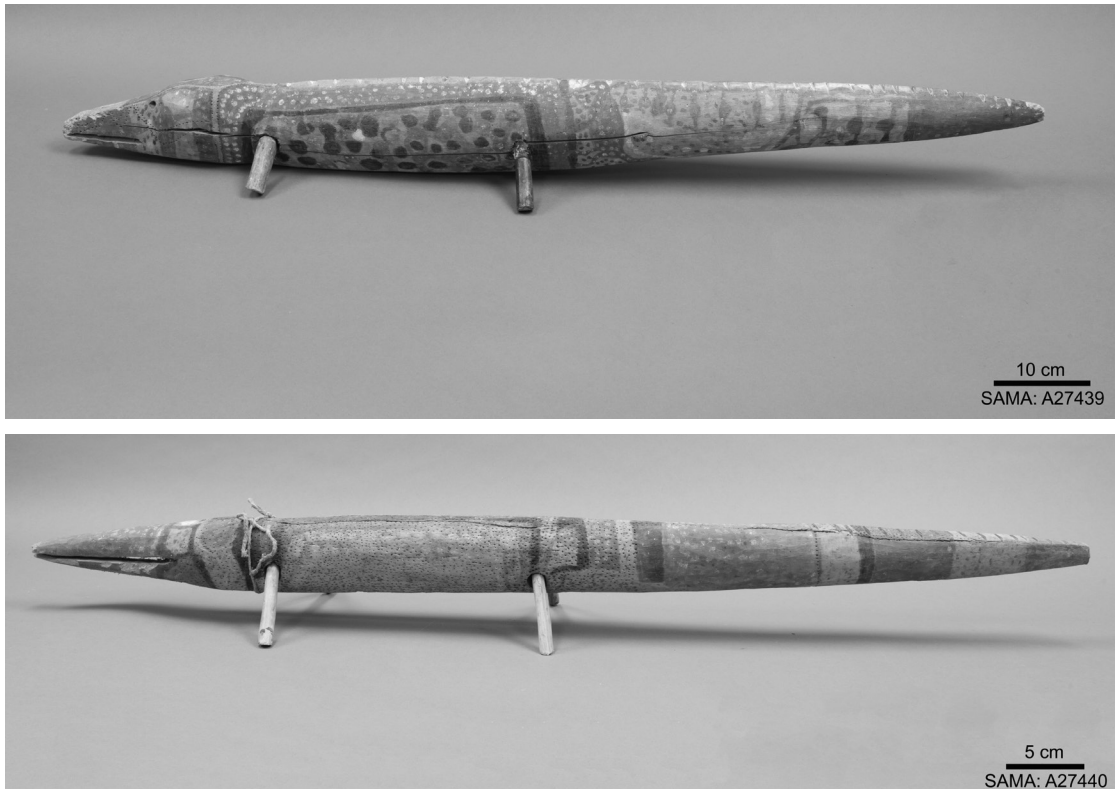


FIG. 3. Top: Bulmer's saltwater crocodile, *kanja:r*. Bottom: freshwater crocodile *dandji djir*. Source: South Australian Museum

travels. The staff's mnemonic function may have been enhanced by the figurative style of the totemic ancestors, but it is possible Bulmer was also thinking of creating images that were thought to be suitable for the tourist market for Aboriginal curios.

Overall this dancing staff, and the other objects so far considered, evokes a classical cosmology linked to the Starcke region. Tindale argues 'the staffs and the crocodile models represent the "story" of the country about Starcke River' (Tindale, 1938: 525-7). These artefacts constitute a specific mode of inscription of this story that is part of a wider and integrated array of semiotic practices found in dance, song, verbal narration and the landscape itself.

Links with Bulmer's life become more evident in the second staff (see figure 4). Tindale wrote that this staff was similar to the other dancing staff, 'but deals with Dudley's own adventures' (Tindale, 1938: 525).

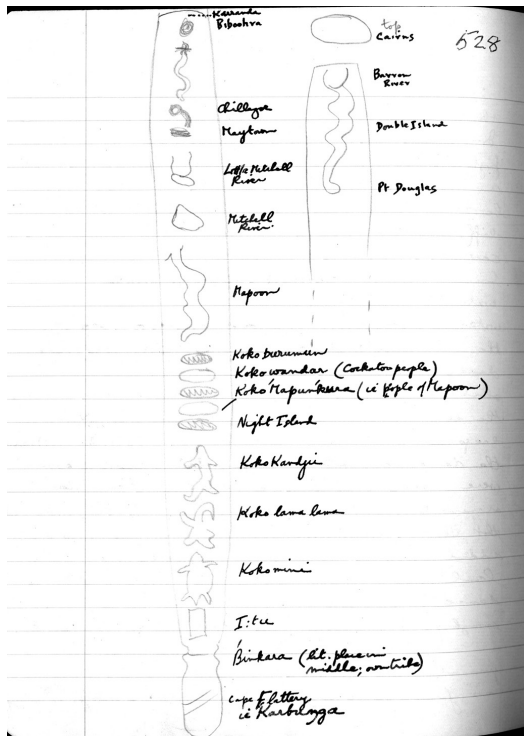


FIG. 4. Tindale's drawing of one side of the saltwater crocodile (*kanja:r*) dancing staff highlighting Dudley Bulmer's travel. Image: AA 338/1/15/1\_528 Tindale Collection, South Australian Museum.

In this artefact Dudley Bulmer linked the crocodile *kanja:r* with his own life and travels. *Kanja:r* is depicted on the staff but also depicted are groups of people Bulmer met during his travels. Tindale states the staff:

is associated with the *kanja:r* which is drawn on it. Also depicted ...are figures which represent each of the groups of natives whom Dudley has encountered on his many years of wanderings with whitefolk as trepanger, cattle hand and gold rush guide etc. It becomes a sort of history of whom he has encountered and the places he has visited (Tindale, 1938: 529).

These groups are indicated by different figures and shapes but the relationship between group and design are not explained. Some groups are indicated in Tindale's notes by place names such as Mapoon, Chillagoe, Maytown or Port Douglas and others by language name such as Koko Lama Lama, Koko Mini, Koko Kandju. Others names indicated by Tindale are possibly names of kinship groups such as 'I:tu' or involve a fusion of place names and kinship group as in 'Cape Flattery ie Karbungga' (Tindale, 1938: 528). On Bulmer's genealogy Tindale indicated Karbungga was a 'tribe' of Jeannie River and was associated with Bulmer. He also noted the I:tu and Karbungga tribes were in the process of merging together.

One way of reading the spatial organisation of these designs is that all the groups and places are located in the artefact between the region Bulmer originated from – I:tu, Karbungga, Cape Flattery – and the region where he was then living – the Barron River, Cairns and Double Island, just north of Cairns. This emphasis on Cairns, and his place of origin, framed his representation of his travels. These two locations contextualized, and thereby helped make meaningful, his travels to all other places. This spatial framing suggests that the relationship between birth place and Bulmer's then current residence in the Cairns region was deliberately given salience because the disjunction between the two places was a core feature of his life.

While Tindale does not provide us with an illustration of the staff face containing the crocodile, the fact that Bulmer, and his Ancestral relations, are brought

into conjunction with his apparently more secular autobiographical experiences with the wider world suggests Bulmer saw them as related orientations. By combining self representations of his recent past with representations of selfhood associated with Ancestral powers Bulmer was making a claim similar to that made by Rumsey, in a rather different context, that in Australia 'the forms in which everyday experience of life "on the ground" is constructed or represented' (Rumsey 1994: 119) can be identical, or structurally analogous to, those of the Dreaming. In this artefact Bulmer represented his own mobility, and the persons and places he encountered during his travels as complementary, and as equivalently important, to his relationship with personally relevant parts of the Ancestral (*kanja:r*).

### **MAPPING PERSONAL HISTORY ON TO A 'MESSAGE STICK'**

Another of Bulmer's creations – a message stick (figure 5) – intensified the representation of self and did so partly by making no explicit or direct reference to Dreamings or ancestral figures. In this it differs from Bulmer's crocodile dance staffs which combined his self-representation with the Dreaming. Perhaps for Bulmer message sticks took on more secular functions than did the dancing staffs, and certainly message sticks have long been regarded by Europeans as a kind of Indigenous writing or inscriptive practice.

Message sticks are typically short pieces of wood whose surfaces had designs painted or inscribed on to them. The designs on the stick provided users with degrees of access to a message. Message sticks were often about the social organisation of future events (such as proposed ceremonies or marriages, the organisation of trade) or could involve sequencing past debts and future repayments.

A related key feature of message sticks has been their role in debates about the definition, origin and impact of writing. There were claims that a message stick's inscriptions had a recognizable semantics and contained sufficient information to ensure delivery of a correct message (Bucknell, 1897; Howitt, 1889). The message could be independent from any supporting speech by the messenger.

Others, such as Tindale, argued the message stick was simply a mnemonic device that assisted the messenger to remember the message to be transmitted – no one could determine the message just from the inscriptions (Hamlyn-Harris, 1918; Roth, 1897). This could only be achieved by listening to the messenger's talk. Tindale argued, in general terms, that 'no one else can read a message stick 'unless they have previously been instructed & experience in reading one has no clue to the meaning of any other similar stick' (Tindale, 1938: 535). This unpublished intervention into on-going debates, via his description of Bulmer's message stick, was possibly linked to Tindale's prior (1927) field experiences with message sticks found in the Princess Charlotte Bay area. This is just north of the Starcke river region that was the original home and birthplace of Bulmer. It seems the people of the area visited by Tindale and Hale could not 'read' their message sticks to refresh their memories about details of past events.

Hale and Tindale indicate that in this region:

After messages have been delivered the sticks are usually retained for a long time, being either stowed in string bags or tucked away among leafy coverings of the huts. When interest was expressed by us, more than a hundred old ones were produced for inspection within in a few moments; only in a proportion of the cases could the message be recalled (Hale and Tindale, 1934: 117).

At the time Tindale and Hale visited the Bathurst Head-Flinders Island region of Princess Charlotte Bay in 1927 there were only ten men and fifteen women (and no children) present. So each adult had an average of four message sticks in their possession. This could indicate the importance of message sticks as mementos of past social events and people, something which was also reflected in Bulmer's autobiographical artefacts that were a record of his past.

Tindale and Hale indicate that only in some cases could the specific message associated with each stick be recalled. The carefully stored, seemingly inalienable, message sticks Tindale and Hale encountered were

both memory and other, a memorial of forgetting. Message stick as memory, as a kind of presence of an absent speaker's or inscriber's intentions, was here partly transformed into the absence of meaningful presence. Message sticks involved not just practices linked to the retrieval of memory, but also forms of forgetting and loss that, in the Princess Charlotte Bay area, were seemingly actively maintained and protected over time.

Von Toorn (2006), in her history of Aboriginal literacies, has recently tried to shift the terms of the debate over the message stick's legibility, partly by emphasizing the enabling power and complexity of Indigenous innovations concerning message sticks. She claimed that there is considerable evidence that Indigenous Australians were interested in creating equivalences between letter writing and message sticks, despite the differences between the kinds of signs carried on message-sticks and written texts. She asserted that message sticks and letters were made to perform similar functions (Von Toorn, 2006: 212).

Spencer and Gillen observed written texts known as 'paper yabber' functioning as message-sticks (Von Toorn, 2006: 213).<sup>12</sup> At one point Spencer and Gillen saw 'two strange natives' carrying letters in a cleft stick and noted that:

Though the natives had come through strange tribes...yet so long as they carried this emblem of the fact that they were messengers, they were perfectly safe... Such messengers always carry a token of some kind – very often a sacred stick or bull-roarer. Their persons are always safe, and so the same safety is granted to natives carrying 'paper yabbers' (Spencer and Gillen, cited in Von Toorn, 2006: 213).

This suggests that in various areas of Australia, ritual objects, message sticks and written texts were sometimes treated as equivalent and substitutable in practice. And this seems to be something that Bulmer was doing in his dancing staffs that combined a ritual object with a distinct emphasis on the representation of the self. Bulmer also created an equation of message stick and autobiographical

narrative (but without so explicitly referencing ritual or Dreaming connections).

In his message stick<sup>13</sup> Bulmer presented himself as a profoundly relational subject, but he does not, in this artefact, indicate any links between himself, his kin, and Ancestral figures. The message stick is in this sense quite different to the staffs. The staffs linked crocodile Ancestors (that were strongly associated with Bulmer) both to places around Starcke and to places Bulmer visited during his work-related travel. The message stick presents Bulmer as an individual independent of any explicit links to the Ancestral.

As Tindale explains, Bulmer's message stick presented a synthesis of his kin with the places he visited on one of his trips from Cape Bedford to Cairns:

Dudley also gave me today a message stick upon which he had cut marks to represent the country between the Jeannie River and Cairns and the various relations whose countries were at those places. It represents a map stick of the country in which he lives. While modified by the artificial extension of the country over which he roamed to include the Cairns district it gives a good idea of how records were kept of the interrelations of peoples. The narration starts from the point marked A, and goes to B, C, D then returning to A. A is Cape Bedford where the informant lived for many years. It is a Mission. ...

[One] cross represents informants father (*pi:pa*), beyond it, 'half way' to Mclvor River is mother's (*ngam:u*) country. At Mclvor River his sister (*kanjal*) was born, while further north is *jap:a* or elder brother. While still further north an area of land near Cape Flattery is represented as younger brother *tja:ga*. Starcke River is about the centre of the stick, this is the country of the informant's son (*ngatu kangkal* – my – son).....At the top of the stick is *Janga: moko* the place where the informant was born and where he also fought the memorable fight to which he refers...(Tindale, 1938: 533; my addition square brackets)<sup>14</sup>

The fight is indicated at the top of the left image marked as B. Bulmer started a quarrel about the woman at Jeannie River and then prepared for a fight which took place at Jangamoko which is Bulmer's birth place. The other side of the message stick – shown as on the right in figure 5 – continues the story of the fight over the women. But there is a long gap in the time. Bulmer is presented as looking for a wife in Cairns, indicated at the top of the image where Tindale, following discussion with Dudley Bulmer, has written Cairns and 'look for wife'.

As well as outlining this intriguing story, Bulmer's message stick takes on the value that derives from depicting a series of places Bulmer visited on his journey to find a wife and merging those places with a very dense array of kinship categories and, sometimes, specific persons ('my son') that also had value in Bulmer's life. Place and kinship relationships were often coded into cross boomerang shapes and elbow bends respectively, but occasionally place and kinship relationship were coded by the same elbow bend design. Bulmer did not just highlight his own autobiography, his wilful fighting and need to find a wife, but also articulated his relationship to places via various categories of kin.

Another feature of the message stick was to provide an account of Bulmer's past movements and the places he visited.<sup>15</sup> This salience as a narrative about Bulmer's past highlights another feature of Bulmer's message stick – its inability to be easily fixed into understandings of message sticks as primarily, but not exclusively, functioning within a predominantly future orientation. While many message sticks convey elements of an unfolding narrative concerning the future organisation of events such as peace, ceremony, trade and debt, and consequently implicate future states full of biographical and autobiographical resonances for the actors enrolled in future acts, Bulmer's message stick lacked any obvious or direct functional integration with potential future events, their organisation or likely outcomes. Bulmer's message stick was primarily a narrative concerning past events understood as completed and as already causally consequential. It was not a 'classic' future

orientated message stick, but a record of past events, and as such a significant innovation. However this statement needs to be qualified by two points: that all semiotic acts, including creating artefacts, create a future and that now Bulmer's artefacts, including his message stick, have re-emerged, in significant ways, from a previously hidden past in the museum, into the present, and potential, futures of Bulmer's descendants (Wood, 2015).

## CONCLUSION

I have argued Bulmer's message stick and dancing staffs involved intentionally autobiographical elements being inscribed in to the artefacts. Following van Toorn (2006), I showed that message sticks were a site of considerable innovation concerning the possibility that forms of writing could be deployed productively in the organisation of Aboriginal social life. Bulmer's message stick and dancing staffs were part of that wider interest. Where he may be unique is that his message stick was primarily about himself rather than the future organisation of social events. Instead it was part of a 'narrative process of self-definition' (Hoskins, 2006: 78) that was related to his past and to his regulation of Bulmer's life by the state and Yarrabah mission and his separation from his country.

While parts of Dudley Bulmer's legacy have been erased – his rock art has been erased, his artefacts were unknown to his family for a time, and some of his artefacts have been hard to locate – the picture of Bulmer I have presented in this paper is of someone who, sometimes quite creatively, responded to the different forms of public Aboriginality, and wider understandings of history, that influenced his life. Bulmer's artefacts, and some of his other forms of expression, are a history of his life that included distinctly autobiographical elements. Bulmer through his made works negotiated and defined a number of relationships between the Dreaming and himself as a historical subject. They also record how Bulmer sought to define aspects of his Aboriginality.



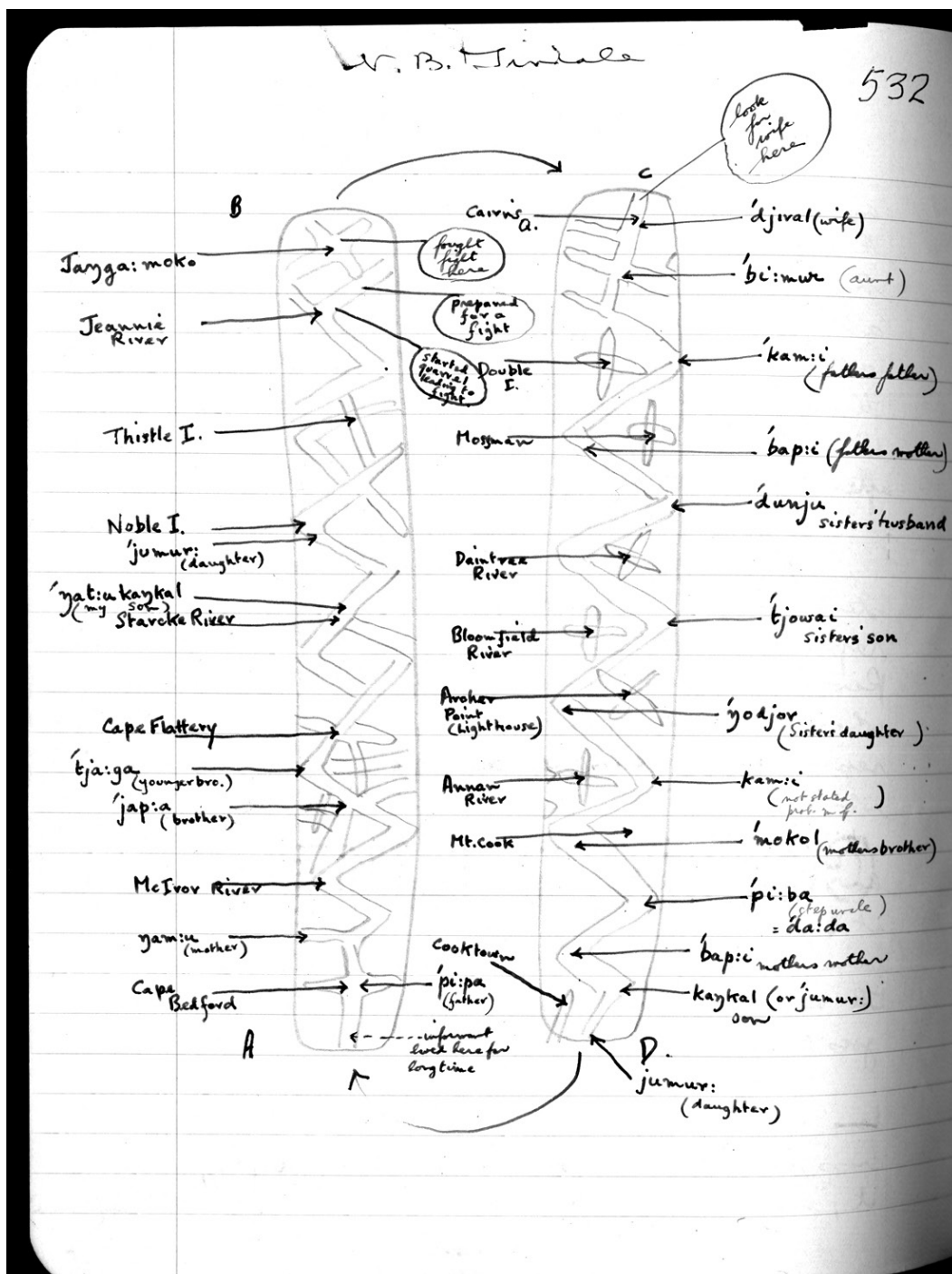


FIG. 5. Tindale's drawing of the Bulmer message stick. Source AA 338/1/15/1\_532 Tindale Collection, South Australian Museum (from Tindale 1938: 532).



As a record of these processes some of Bulmer's works emerge as distinctly artefactual versions of the life story genre that developed in the 1950s. Making this claim was equivalent to adjudicating on different approaches to the life story, autobiography and other related, but contested terms. I outlined what in my view were two opposed approaches to the life story, myth and history. These two approaches were the usefully provocative, but somewhat restrictive, accounts provided by Rowse (2006) and Westpalen (2002). They served as a foil to position Rumsey's (1994) approach to Indigenous representations of historical subjects and events. Rumsey's attempts to break down distinctions between the Dreaming and everyday life, between myth and history, oral and textual, resonated with my attempt to treat some of Bulmer's artefacts as like an autobiographical text. What remains as a question is just how novel are Bulmer's more autobiographical works?<sup>16</sup>

Equally at issue is the possibility of further linking the current Bulmer family to Dudley Bulmer's artefacts. In 2014 I was able to take Kathleen Bulmer to the South Australian Museum and she was able to see her grandfather's artefacts and read Tindale's notes. Kathleen was primarily interested in discovering genealogical ties with other families that may have links to the Bulmer family or country. Such links could potentially secure further state and legal recognition of Bulmer claims to an interest in country. Her difficulty in finding clear connections was in part an effect of Bulmer's departure from the area. These difficulties were compounded by the fact that Bulmer developed forms of self representation that, while often related to his country, were developed in a time when authoritative state definitions of Aboriginality were not linked to acknowledging rights in land. Kathleen's trip to Adelaide suggests that the Bulmer family have now started the process of creating their own histories and life stories of Dudley Bulmer and will use his artefacts to create new kinds of understanding of their own social relationships, land rights and identity.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My main debts in writing this paper are to the Bulmer family who allowed this research to proceed. Kathleen Bulmer has been an enthusiastic co-researcher with me and I appreciate access to her detailed notes and understandings of Bulmer family history. In particular I want acknowledge Dudley Bulmer's daughter Agnes Bulmer who passed away in 2014 while I was working on this paper. She was a source of great tales and jokes about her life and her father. Julie-Anne Deemera and Merton Bulmer were also crucial to my understanding of Bulmer family history. This research was supported by staff of the South Australian Museum especially Ali Abdullah-Highfold, Shane Agius, Alice Beal, Tara Collier, Lea Gardam, Philip Jones, Trisha Kidd, Fran Zillo (and Peter Sutton who was, at the time of my research, affiliated to the Museum). I also want to thank staff at the Oxley Library and State Archives in Brisbane. I am also indebted to my colleagues working on the ARC – Trish Barnard, Shelley Greer, Russell McGregor, Rosita Henry, Maureen Fuary and Alice Buhrich – who usefully shifted my thinking on various topics addressed in this paper. The research for this paper was funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC) Discovery grant for the project 'Objects of Possession: Artefact transactions in the Wet Tropics of North Queensland, 1870–2013' (DP110102291) and James Cook University.

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## □ ENDNOTES

1. Reviews of claims about the subject-like and biographical characteristics of artefacts can be found in Chua and Salmond (2012) and Fowles (2008). Some of this work wants to move away from human-centered semiotics to the things themselves. Others, like Holbraad (2011), argue artefacts and objects may contain 'autobiographical' characteristics in the sense that such objects can contain their own contexts of interpretation or, at least, specify links to such contexts. A possibly stronger version of this kind of autobiographical argument is that objects contain, or are, their own concepts.
2. Poirier (2005: 248), like many other writers I mention, gives considerable emphasis to the contingent, negotiated quality of the Dreaming that co-constitutes individual agency, but she also argues that ultimately the individual responsible for creative innovation 'disappears' over the long term. This perspective, which implies the reproduction of cosmology in manner not available to Dudley Bulmer, would downplay the kind of histories that Bulmer was both responding to, and creating, in his diverse cultural performances and artefacts.
3. Birdsell Physical Card 652, South Australian Museum (SAM). Tindale Physical Card files
4. Guugu Yimidhirr (Haviland 1979) is a more recent spelling of this language name.
5. Birdsell Physical Card 652, South Australian Museum (SAM). Tindale Physical Card files. Tindale Yarrabah Genealogy Sheet 38. AAR 34-6/5/3. Harvard and Adelaide Universities Anthropological Expedition Genealogies, 1938-39.
6. Seaton letter to Tindale 28.5.55; in South Australian Museum AA 338/1/38. 'Tjapukai Grammar, Kuranda Queensland and Research Notes on Queensland Tribes by Norman B. Tindale. 1938-1960+', p.75.
7. Tindale, N. 1953. Natives of Cairns District. Unpublished manuscript. South Australian Museum. Box AA 338/1/38. 'Tjapukai Grammar, Kuranda Queensland and Research Notes on Queensland Tribes by Norman B. Tindale. 1938-1960+'.
8. Tindale, N. 1953. Natives of Cairns District. Unpublished manuscript. South Australian Museum. Box AA 338/1/38. 'Tjapukai Grammar, Kuranda Queensland and Research Notes on Queensland Tribes by Norman B. Tindale. 1938-1960+'.
9. Seaton to Tindale 1959. AA 338/1/38. 'Tjapukai Grammar, Kuranda Queensland and Research Notes on Queensland Tribes by Norman B. Tindale. 1938-1960+'.
10. The terms used by Bulmer seem to be Gugu Yimidhirr as recorded by Haviland (1979: 173).
11. This is later identified by Tindale (1938: 533) as Bulmer's birthplace.
12. Meggit (1966: 283) provides an example of what he calls a "map-cum-letter" functioning as a message stick among the Walpiri in 1953.
13. Tindale also called it a 'map stick' – suggesting that Bulmer's message stick had attributes that did not easily fit Tindale's understanding of a message stick as a particular type of artefact. I elaborate on this innovative quality below. For overviews of Indigenous topographical representations and mapping see Sutton (1998a, 1998b).
14. Most of the kin terms used by Bulmer to indicate these relationships are similar to Gugu Yimidhirr kin terms (Haviland, 1979: 73).
15. It is possible that Bulmer's travels did not actually correspond to the places shown on the message stick. And it is likely that his merging of specific kinship relationships with the places indicated is not always accurate according to current understandings of interests in land. Narrative histories are 'never, simply, factual accounts' (Austin-Broos cited in Henry, 2012: 23). What primarily interests me is that Bulmer inscribes into the message stick a vision of a world of places fully defined by kinship and himself.
16. I can only point to some indications of data that might provide an answer. Mathews (1897) discusses a message stick from the Queensland-NSW border that contains figurative images of the message sender, message deliverer, and message recipient and thereby involves biographical, and possibly autobiographical, elements. Hayley Young 's' (2014) Honours thesis drew my attention to these images. Allen points to the use of marks that are like the maker's 'signature' on a spear functioning as message stick and a similar use of a marks in 1935 by Wonggu who made a message stick for Donald Thomson as part of negotiating a peace (Allen, 2015: 122). Thomson noted that Wonggu 'explained that the marks inscribed upon it represented himself sitting down quietly and maintaining peace among the people' (cited in Allen, 2015: 125).

# The Politics of Time: Hermann Klaatsch in the Wet Tropics and the fate of his ethnographic collection in Europe

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This article examines the scientific and political background and the multiple changes in ownership of the Aboriginal artefacts from Australia collected by the German physical anthropologist Hermann Klaatsch. Originally, Klaatsch travelled to Australia in 1904 in search of the origins of humanity. However, the lack of evidence for the 'Out of Australia' theory and the requests by German Museums of Ethnology to collect artefacts for their institutions led to Klaatsch becoming a full-time collector of cultural artefacts, especially during his time in the Wet Tropics. He inscribed the artefacts and sent them to Germany in several shipments to various museums where they were later re-united, displayed and redistributed. Upon his return to Germany in 1907 Klaatsch was appointed professor of anthropology at Breslau University. He took there a portion of his artefact collection for his own teaching and study purposes. Due to political changes in central Europe after the Second World War, this collection was transferred to Warsaw, Poland, in 1953. New ownership insignia were applied while others were (partly) erased. Through these transformations the artefacts became encoded with a rich history and new meanings. A detailed study of Klaatsch's historical documents allows cross-referencing of the artefacts to the original localities and circumstances of their acquisition. Thus, more than one hundred years after first being collected, the artefact transactions and property claims can be re-assessed.



Hermann Klaatsch, ethnographic collecting, North Queensland, museums, Aboriginal artefacts, German Museums of Ethnology, European history

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The Transcultural Heritage of Northwest Australia: Dynamics and Resistencies

During the early 1900s, the German medical doctor, comparative anatomist and physical anthropologist, Hermann Klaatsch (1863-1916), travelled around Australia, spending his entire first year in North Queensland. Here, he increasingly focused on the collecting of cultural artefacts due to requests from German Museums of Ethnology and his need to finance his travels. Klaatsch's accumulation of objects grew rapidly and he developed a means of marking his ownership of the objects via personalised lists, numbering and naming; a system that was later subjected to dissociation and division of the collection as a consequence of further transactions conducted on personal, institutional, political and international levels. While becoming a full-time collector of cultural artefacts during his time in the Wet Tropics of North Queensland from November 1904 to January 1905, Klaatsch sent his collections to several museums and academies of ethnology in Germany, in several consignments at different times. He clearly differentiated his various shipments after carefully considering where best to send them, taking into account his own as well as third parties' academic and financial interests. After Klaatsch's return to Germany in 1907 his whole collection was re-united for an exhibition in Cologne, but re-distributed again in 1908 in very different proportions to the three museums of ethnology in Germany (Leipzig, Hamburg, Cologne) which had all contributed to the financial support of the collector (see Erckenbrecht, 2010).

One part of the collection, however, Klaatsch took with him to Breslau University where he was appointed professor of anthropology in 1907, Breslau then being a German city. After Klaatsch's sudden death in 1916 his Australian collection of cultural artefacts remained there, although not displayed in later years. As a result of political changes in central Europe after the Second World War, Breslau became Polish and all cultural artefacts originally collected by Klaatsch (together with other collections) were moved in 1953 from Wrocław (as Breslau was renamed) to Warsaw, the Polish capital, because of the fear of a revisionist German policy during the Cold War. The collector's name and numbers and the previous numbers of the German museums on the artefacts were erased and

new numbers of the Polish museum in Warsaw were applied, the artefacts thus receiving a new national identity inside Europe.

However, not all artefacts were completely re-numbered and some of the old numbers and labels signs survived. Research on the historical documents, photographs and artefact lists of the collector in addition to the post-war political history of the two neighbouring countries in central Europe has revealed a multiplicity of transactions and ownership changes from the beginning of the artefacts' acquisition in the Wet Tropics more than 100 years ago until today, each transaction being related to the politics of its time.

This research also helps to reveal the models and methods of collecting in terms of temporality and (processual) fluidity, the impact of various political developments and strategies as well as the implicit implementation of Western categories of work and value. More specifically, the study shows how time and history became encoded and encapsulated in Indigenous cultural artefacts over more than 100 years while the artefacts themselves remained physically unaltered. Through various spacio-temporal transactions they became increasingly charged with time, history and meaning. New signs and symbols of ownership were added whereas others were scratched off. Yet even these blank spots or scratches on the artefacts can still 'speak' to us. By deciphering, decoding and cross-referencing the symbols, codes and numbers on these time capsules, we can finally open and reveal their rich history and meaning. Thus, cultural artefacts from overseas kept by European museums today can be important transmitters of knowledge about the cultural and international politics of their time.

## **KLAATSCH'S AIMS AND MOTIVATIONS FOR HIS AUSTRALIAN TRIP**

Hermann Klaatsch (figure 1) travelled to Australia in 1904 with no lesser aim than finding the origin of humanity. During the second half of the nineteenth century, archaeological, biological and anatomical research suggested more and more that

the diversity of species – including *Homo sapiens* – was an outcome of natural selection processes, not of divine creation. Klaatsch and his friend and colleague Otto Schoetensack, lecturer in prehistory at Heidelberg University, were both primarily influenced by Charles Darwin and Thomas Huxley, the latter having emphasized the importance of Australia and the Australian Aborigines in this respect (Huxley, 1863). Klaatsch and Schoetensack both firmly believed that they were on the brink of finding the origin of mankind. Schoetensack in particular was convinced that the crucial evolutionary step had taken place under the special eco-climatic and zoo-geographic conditions of prehistoric Australia (Schoetensack, 1901, 1904). At the turn of the twentieth century it was generally



FIG. 1. Hermann Klaatsch in Australia 1907. Image: Private archive of the Klaatsch family, USA

believed that anthropogenesis had taken place somewhere in the tropics.<sup>1</sup> No-one in the contemporary literature mentioned Africa in this context. So the level of knowledge at that time, the hope of making revolutionary discoveries about the emergence of humanity, the geographical orientation towards the tropics, and the politics in archaeology, anatomy and physical anthropology with their key method of comparative analysis, may have all contributed to Klaatsch's decision to travel to Australia.

The opportunity to implement his plans arose suddenly when Klaatsch met the German representative of a Queensland mining company, the Lancelot Freehold Tin & Copper Mines Ltd, at an anthropological meeting in the German city of Worms in 1903. Francis E. Clotten, a businessman from Frankfurt interested in science and anthropology, was going to travel to Australia to inspect the Lancelot mine in the Silver Valley near Herberton (see Erckenbrecht, 2010: 52; Kerr, 1991, 2000). At a second meeting of the two men around Christmas 1903, Clotten offered Klaatsch to accompany him to Australia, indicating that he was willing to pay for his trip and finance his photographic equipment. Klaatsch jumped at the opportunity. He did not hold a salaried position at a university at that time and had no family obligations to take care of. So, quite spontaneously in February 1904, he set out on this journey which had no planned time limit, but which would change the course of his life.

## ARTEFACT ACQUISITION AND MUSEUM POLITICS IN THE GERMAN EMPIRE

Klaatsch spent his first year in Queensland attempting to find evidence for Schoetensack's 'Out of Australia' theory, but was soon disappointed. After only a few months, in June 1904, he began to lament that the 'prehistoric fountain did not bubble' as he and Schoetensack had thought it would.<sup>2</sup> However, while living in Australia Klaatsch grew genuinely interested in Aboriginal people and their social and material culture. He remained in Australia for almost three years, interrupted only once for a six-month stay on Java, prolonged involuntarily by a bout of malaria.



Klaatsch constantly sought money and sponsors to finance his travels. Clotten, his original supporter, left Australia in September 1904, quite to Klaatsch's surprise. Since his arrival in Queensland Klaatsch had been a good friend of Walter E. Roth, to whom Clotten had introduced Klaatsch in the Department of Public Lands in Brisbane. As Queensland's Chief Protector of Aborigines, Roth supported Klaatsch in many practical ways, like allowing Klaatsch to use the government sailboat *Melbidir* for a trip to the Gulf of Carpentaria in 1904. However, during 1904 Roth became involved in an investigation into the maltreatment of Aboriginal people in Western Australia, subsequently losing his job and influence and finally leaving Australia in 1906. So Klaatsch, unwilling to return to Germany probably because of the lack of employment prospects there, was on his own in Australia, dependent on whatever new resources he could find to finance the continuation of his journey. In this situation the request from a German Museum of Ethnology took on great significance. Only a few days after Klaatsch's departure from Germany the director of the German Museum of Ethnology in Leipzig, Hermann Obst, had written him a letter asking if he would collect artefacts for his museum. This letter was forwarded to Klaatsch in Australia where he received it many months later in Townsville (Erckenbrecht, 2010: 67-69). Other contacts and inquiries by other museums and academies followed during the subsequent months and years.

This interest in a German scientist travelling abroad and his possible collecting activities for German museums at home was due to the founding of many municipal museums in the second half of the nineteenth century in Germany. The dissolution of the feudally class-structured society and the emergence of an emancipist bourgeoisie or middle class in the urban centres — often also port cities — led to an interested and open-minded civil society dedicated to science, culture and education in a general way (Felt, 2000; Laitko, 1996; Laukötter, 2007). In the relatively prosperous era before the First World War when the German Empire had its own colonies,<sup>3</sup> there was a desire to fill the museums with

artefacts from all over the world (Penny, 1998, 2002; Penny & Bunzl, 2003). The political and economic processes of industrialization and urbanization, plus the new experiences in the colonies, led to an interest in folklore as well as in the lives of indigenous peoples around the world who were categorized primarily in historical and evolutionist terms (see for example Foy, 1909; Graebner, 1911). Large and attractive new museum buildings were erected either in the city centres or in the well-to-do suburbs where members of the educated middle-class had their homes (see Laukötter, 2007: 32-33). Museum directors were eager to obtain as many artefacts as possible in competition with other museums and cities, thus enhancing the importance of their own institution and providing the necessary proof for their legitimacy. It was 'a race to rake the treasure' (Schmeltz, 1888: 135) and sometimes even a 'collecting mania' as some of the municipal administrators who ran the museums complained (Laukötter, 2007: 159).

Moreover, many researchers and scientists at that time believed in 'salvage anthropology' (Gruber, 1959, 1970), an attempt to record and preserve the remnants of native cultures considered to be under threat of disappearing. During Klaatsch's time in Australia it was commonly believed that the Australian Aborigines would soon die out (McGregor, 1997). Klaatsch, too, saw his collecting activities as salvage work which would give him the opportunity to bring together a large collection, to be eventually sold to German museums.<sup>4</sup> According to the strategies of 'salvage anthropology', artefacts had to be brought to the 'centres of civilisation' to be rescued and stored in orderly facilities where staff members could conduct scientific research on them according to the latest theories or display them to the public for educational purposes. In the meantime, the indigenous peoples — the creators, manufacturers and users of the artefacts — were believed to be doomed to extinction. This further increased the attractiveness and value of the artefacts. They received an aura as what he thought of as 'the last artefacts of the last Aborigines' and were therefore considered scarce and special.

In order to facilitate these aims and direct the stream of artefacts to their institutions, the German museums were prepared to at least partly pay collectors and scientists abroad to collect artefacts for them. Klaatsch was paid by the Museum of Ethnology in Leipzig, the Museum of Ethnology in Hamburg, the Academy of Science in Berlin and the Museum of Ethnology in Cologne. All these institutions asked him at various stages of his travels to collect artefacts and they sometimes provided considerable sums (between 1000 and 4000 old German Reichsmark) for his artefact collecting.

These political, scientific, colonial, emancipist and educational developments at home, together with his need to generate financial support for his continuing travels, contributed to Klaatsch's important metamorphosis into a full-time collector of cultural artefacts in the course of his first year in Australia. He underwent this transformation while in North Queensland.

## COLLECTING IN THE WET TROPICS

Having returned from a trip around the Gulf of Carpentaria from July to October 1904 (on board the government sailboat *Melbidir* which was normally used for Roth's trips to this area in his capacity as protector) Klaatsch stayed in the Wet Tropics from November 1904 to January 1905, first in Cooktown and then mainly in Cairns. During this time he made several trips into the surrounding countryside in order to find Aboriginal people and to collect cultural artefacts directly from them. He was especially interested in the Bellenden Ker Range for several reasons. Firstly, he had studied articles and photographs by Archibald Meston<sup>5</sup> in the *Australasian* and the *Queenslander*, one photo depicting a 'warrior party of the wild Bellenden Ker blacks'.<sup>6</sup> From these articles and reports Klaatsch concluded that Aboriginal people were still living 'wild' and 'naked' in the Bellenden Ker Range. This was one of the reasons he wanted to meet with them there.<sup>7</sup> Another reason why Klaatsch made his excursions into this area and why he chose a particular travel route into the range was his

acquaintance with the Anglican Archdeacon of Cairns, Joseph Campbell. Klaatsch was introduced to Campbell by Clotten when they were both in Cairns in June 1904. Clotten donated money to the church (via his wife) so that the archdeacon would be favourably inclined towards Klaatsch's collecting interests.<sup>8</sup> In return, Campbell advised Klaatsch where to go to in the Bellenden Ker Range. Campbell had chosen places for the scientist and had already talked to some local farmers. So arrangements had already been made by a network of third parties to introduce and guide Klaatsch as a travelling collector.

Moreover, Klaatsch was well aware that other collectors and scientists were active in the field. In particular he regarded himself as in competition with Roth – although they always remained friends. This competition is illustrated by his persistent comparison with what Roth had already collected, where Roth had already been etc., thus acknowledging at the same time Roth's leading role in the fields of anthropology and collecting. Since Roth had not been to the Bellenden Ker Range himself, Klaatsch saw a special opportunity as a scientist and collector here: to go to places where few had been before and where no-one else would go in the future because soon, as was generally expected, there would be no Aboriginal people left and no artefacts to collect.

Thus Klaatsch was motivated to begin the first of his three excursions into the Bellenden Ker Range shortly after his arrival in Cairns, on horseback and on foot with the help of a guide<sup>9</sup>. The first expedition was from 2 to 13 December 1904 via Harvey's Creek and Babinda Creek to Mt Bartle Frere; the second trip from 17 December 1904 to 3 January 1905 was via Kuranda and Atherton to a place called 'Boenje' (a gold digger's camp) on the Upper Russell River Gold Fields; and the third expedition was from 21 to 30 January 1905 via Mulgrave and Aloomba to the Pyramid Mountain. Between these excursions Klaatsch also visited the nearby mission station of Yarrabah in January 1905.<sup>10</sup>

According to his own notes, Klaatsch tried to get to places where hardly any colonist from Cairns had

been before – and he found that there was little interest in what he was doing. People in Cairns did not talk about Aboriginal people or did not expect them to be still living in their camps, which were well hidden on the slopes of the Bellenden Ker Range. Klaatsch found and visited many of these Aboriginal camps and observed, for instance, how the Aboriginal people built their huts (*bunja*); he tried to learn their language, compiling several word lists which he later tested and cross-checked; and he drew some quite good portraits of individuals (Erckenbrecht, 2010: 95-104). The breadth of his activities shows that Klaatsch was not only an artefact collector interested in material culture but also a multi-faceted researcher with many interrelated and overlapping research interests in accordance with the German tradition embodying the Humboldtian educational ideal. He was an interdisciplinary, independent scholar with a 'radial' research perspective, paying attention to many different topics at the same time.

## COLLECTING IN THE BELLENDEN KER RANGE

Through these excursions into the Bellenden Ker Range and his direct contact with Aboriginal people, Klaatsch was able to observe the actual living conditions of local Aboriginal groups. They differed greatly from Meston's descriptions. Klaatsch found that Aboriginal people were living at gold digger's camps or in hidden camps in the scrub, afraid that visitors like himself were from the police and were trying to take their children away, especially when he approached the camps on horseback. They mostly hid, Klaatsch noted, shy, fearful and intimidated (see Erckenbrecht, 2010: 100).

Klaatsch also perceived clearly the wider political framework and the complicated political, ethnic, demographic and health situation in north Queensland at that time: the multi-ethnic and multi-national mixture of the local population with Anglo-European settlers, Melanesian workers on the sugar-cane farms, Chinese shop-keepers and businessmen (many of whom he considered to be

opium dealers), and, amongst the mixture, the small, fearful groups of Aboriginal people trying to hide in camps in the rainforest. They were marginal groups.<sup>11</sup> Sometimes Klaatsch felt guilty for compounding their problems 'by taking away the last artefacts they had'.<sup>12</sup> Yet he apparently did exactly that and collected several hundred artefacts from his three trips to the Bellenden Ker Range (the exact figure is not discoverable). He applied a wide variety of methods in obtaining artefacts including purchase, exchange for tobacco, food or clothes, arrangement by friendly whites, but also took artefacts from deserted camps. In addition, Klaatsch bought artefacts from commercial traders, received gifts from police inspectors and (German) missionaries and exchanged artefacts with white local inhabitants interested in Aboriginal culture.<sup>13</sup> These additional activities of acquiring cultural artefacts show, first, that there was a considerable market for Indigenous artefacts, the artefacts having become a commodity for local traders, interested individuals, private collectors and professional travelling collectors like Klaatsch. Secondly, as he was in touch with several German museums and academies, Klaatsch needed sufficient sets of artefacts to meet the demands of more than just one customer. Because of his high travel expenses and the limited financial possibilities of the museums in Germany he needed several supporters who would finance him. Thus, he always aimed at getting as many artefacts from as many sources as possible to satisfy the inquiries of more than one museum. Consequently, he collected great numbers of each artefact type simultaneously, although these numerous sets of artefacts led to the complaint of the 'great monotony of material', for instance by the director of the Museum of Ethnology in Hamburg, Georg Thilenius.<sup>14</sup>

So in this phase of political, economic and cultural change in the Wet Tropics – encountered and observed by a travelling collector from overseas – there was a multi-faceted network and 'micro-climate' affecting the demand for cultural artefacts. The same factors influenced the attributed value and availability of the artefacts.

## CLAIMING AND NEGOTIATING OWNERSHIP RIGHTS

As soon as Klaatsch had acquired an artefact he wrote his name and/or his number on it, thus claiming his personal property rights. He also compiled long inventories of artefacts, the personalised headings of which maintained that all artefacts listed therein would be his property – although he was prepared in some cases to acknowledge that he had received some artefacts from others (for instance, Clotten in the Silver Valley or police inspector Durham in Cairns). As mentioned above, Klaatsch was aware of several other collectors in the region, such as Walter Roth, Carl Lumholtz, P. G. Black (in Sydney), and G. Fritsch (another German scientist). These were collectors and scientists who were either engaged in or planning to undertake collecting activities; thus it was very important for him to distinguish ‘his’ artefacts from ‘theirs’. So the ‘race to rake the treasures’ took place not only inside the European museums but also in the field. Roth especially seemed to be a competitor since Klaatsch often claimed that he had been able to collect certain artefacts that Roth had not been able to obtain. To some extent, he

saw Roth as setting the standards which were to be met, or outdone, by extra efforts or detours (see McGregor and Fuayr this volume for more information on Roth).

Klaatsch sent the artefacts to Germany as soon as possible after he had obtained them. There were practical reasons for this as it would have been impractical to carry around hundreds of artefacts while still travelling. At the same time, according to Klaatsch, it was a way of saving the artefacts from possible seizure by others. When sending the artefacts away, he clearly indicated where in Germany to send them. He first sent them to Leipzig, as that museum had asked (and paid) him first; then to Hamburg to secure this new customer by sending what he considered to be excellent examples to them. Later he discussed payment and collecting conditions with the Berlin Academy of Science, which tried to impose an exclusivity clause on him – a nightmare for Klaatsch (Erckenbrecht, 2010: 91-93). Finally, some artefacts were sent to Cologne, because the museum director at that time, W. Foy, had also offered the possibility of a special exhibition of Klaatsch’s entire Australian collection at the newly founded Museum of Ethnology in Cologne (figure 2). Klaatsch sent smaller numbers of artefacts



FIG. 2. Bicornual baskets in the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum, Cologne, Germany. Photo: Rosita Henry

to other places and to friends and colleagues and also a large collection to his own home in Heidelberg which he kept throughout his time in Australia. So the initial act of collecting quickly moved into a process of dissociation, division and distribution, determined by the collector's personal, economic and academic choices.

When Klaatsch sent portions of his continuously growing collection back home to Germany, he always emphasized in his letters that he sent them to the museums on the assumption that they were still his property and that they were to be stored at the museums on a temporary and provisional basis only. In his correspondence with the museum directors he repeatedly discussed this issue, sometimes quite frankly and in detail, sometimes — especially in the beginning — subtly and cautiously while inquiring about artefact and payment transactions in general. However, he always maintained that the collections remained his property no matter where they were stored. The fact that he sent them to a particular museum for storage did not mean that they were the property of this museum — or that those artefacts were already the equivalent of the money that the museum had sent him. Their money was not a payment yet, but merely a deposit. He pointed out over and over again in his correspondence that the museums could not conclude from the fact that they stored *his* collection that they now would be the owners. Rather, Klaatsch regarded himself as still engaged in the process of collecting. Only when he stopped collecting after his return would his whole collection be evaluated for its monetary worth, and only then would parts of his collections belong to the three museums which had financed him in the first place.<sup>15</sup>

These negotiations with German museums and academies show that Klaatsch, originally a university professor with pure academic research interests and high-minded aims of finding the origin of humankind in Australia, had turned into an entrepreneurial collector and salesman of artefacts. He developed his own economy of collecting in which the cultural artefacts became commodities and the business of collecting took on a commercial purpose. The collection had become his 'capital', needed desperately for his economic survival. Collecting had become the *basis* of all his continuing travels in Australia without which he

would not have been able to carry on. These economic and financial negotiations and considerations continued until after Klaatsch's return to Germany in 1907 when he still had high debts at his bank. Only when he succeeded in selling a large part of his collection to the Cologne museum, where the director had found wealthy sponsors, was his project of collecting Australian artefacts finally completed. He then, again, became a university academic solely interested in scientific and non-commercial research.<sup>16</sup>

## TEMPORALITY, VALUE AND THE LOCKEAN CONCEPT OF LABOUR

When looking at Klaatsch's collecting methods and strategies as well as his distribution policies several conclusions can be drawn. First of all, collecting was a fluid and temporal process for Klaatsch. He collected artefacts, carried them with him — albeit for a very short time — then sent many of them home, collected new ones, and so the process was repeated. Over the years, more than 2000 artefacts went through his hands in that way. The artefacts remained with him only temporarily. Secondly, he left no doubt that they were his property as soon as he had collected them. He wrote his name and number on them and used the written evidence of his own artefact lists to assert his property claims. Thirdly, the artefacts were not mere material things in his eyes, but their value increased according to the effort involved in obtaining them. He often emphasised that it took him a lot more labour and extra expense to travel to those areas where Aboriginal people could be actually met and the artefacts obtained direct from their makers. So he added his own work to the pre-existing artefact itself — his own effort on top of the 'real' work of the original Indigenous owner and producer who manufactured the artefact in the first place. Thus, Klaatsch added a Lockean kind of labour to the artefacts, increasing the worth of the collected items in terms of both prestige and price.<sup>17</sup> Another factor adding to the value of the artefact was its rare and last-chance-to-see-character, mentioned above, because the Aboriginal people were allegedly doomed to extinction and would not manufacture the artefacts any more. Also, other collectors might have been through a particular



area already and 'finished it off'. Thus, the two Western market-economy categories, work and scarcity, were applied both implicitly and explicitly to increase (or, vice versa, to decrease) the value of the artefact, for which the collector, in turn, wanted to be paid.

In addition, although he parted with the artefacts and sent them to German museums, Klaatsch always claimed to remain the legal and full owner of the artefacts until his travels and collecting activities in Australia were completed. As the collector in the field he claimed – and exercised – exclusive and indisputable ownership over his growing acquisitions. Spatial removals did not mean that ownership moved too. Rather, ownership as a symbolic and virtual order remained untouched by spatial movement. So wherever Klaatsch travelled and wherever his artefacts were stored in the meantime, he remained their owner until the final financial and spatial transactions were settled. No matter where the artefacts were physically located, they were always his in his mind – they were in his 'mental realm' as Jean Baudrillard (1994: 7) put it. Finally, the museums inventoried the artefacts that they eventually bought from Klaatsch in their entry books and catalogues. It was only at this point that the artefacts finally became the property of the museums.

So the whole transaction of turning an ethnographic artefact manufactured by an Aboriginal person into the property of a European collector and then into the property of a museum abroad was, in Klaatsch's case, a processual procedure in several distinctive stages spanning several years. At the same time these transactions were accompanied by constant negotiations over ownership rights, economic considerations and discussions in Klaatsch's extensive correspondence with various museum directors and colleagues, thus making the artefacts subject to social relationships also.

## **BRESLAU UNIVERSITY AND POST-WAR EUROPE**

During the exhibition in Cologne in 1907 Klaatsch's complete collection was re-united. Following the exhibition, it was re-distributed to the museums

involved. However, each received quite different proportions to those they had previously received from Klaatsch's original shipments. In the same year, Klaatsch was appointed professor of anthropology at Breslau University. He took a selection of up to 400 cultural artefacts with him to his new home city. It remains unclear whether Klaatsch just took the remainder of artefacts that no museum wanted, or whether he actively chose a good selection for himself for his study and teaching purposes. His notes are inconclusive and/or contradictory on this point.

At Breslau University Klaatsch established his own anthropological institute with a special individual profile that included ethnography. After his sudden death in January 1916 at the age of only 52, the chair remained vacant for several years. Egon von Eickstedt (1892-1965) was appointed professor of anthropology at Breslau from 1933 until 1945, but his role during the fascist regime in Germany was controversial both at that time and today. Today, it is mainly von Eickstedt's name that is connected with the professorship of anthropology at Breslau University, whereas Klaatsch is largely forgotten.

Klaatsch's Australian collection remained in Breslau throughout von Eickstedt's professorship. In 1944, one year before the end of the Second World War, the German authorities planned to evacuate several collections from Breslau, so they were gathered at the Botanical Gardens where they were packed and listed. However, this evacuation was never carried out, probably because the German authorities had more pressing problems than moving artefacts in the last year of the war. The German list, however, survived and was analyzed in detail by the author (see below).<sup>18</sup> After the war a new political order was established in central Europe and many national borders were rearranged. Breslau became Polish, and renamed Wrocław. At the beginning of the 1950s the Cold War set in and the Polish government and people were afraid of a revisionist policy in Germany. This in turn caused a political move to centralise many cultural artefacts in Warsaw, the Polish heartland. So in 1953 Klaatsch's collection of cultural artefacts from Indigenous Australia was moved to Warsaw for political reasons. The German list from 1944 was used again for this purpose.



When an inventory of the new artefacts at the Museum in Warsaw was compiled, the old numbers inscribed first by Klaatsch, then by the German museums where they first arrived in Europe, and finally at Klaatsch's former Breslau institute, were erased in order to delete all German traces. New numbers were attached according to the Polish museum numeration system. But this did not happen in all cases, perhaps merely because they were overlooked. Some artefacts still carry the old inscriptions on them. So in some cases the cultural artefacts originally collected from Aboriginal people in the Wet Tropics of North Queensland in 1904-1905 can be cross-referenced and re-identified with the help of the collector's own notes and artefact lists. These artefacts still document their marks of provenance, their ownership claims and changes, and the broader transoceanic and trans-European transactions, including the post-war political history in Europe, spanning a period of more than 100 years.

## THE COLLECTION IN WARSAW TODAY

The Klaatsch collection in Warsaw is kept by the Państwowe Muzeum Etnograficzne (PME) or State Ethnographical Museum. It is the largest museum of the kind in Poland with altogether 80,000 artefacts. However, in Poland (as in many other countries) 'ethnography' includes the study of local, traditional folk art from the various ethnic and cultural groups of Poland as well as of cultural traditions from inside Europe. Thus, the collection at the PME contains 58,000 artefacts from Poland and Europe, while only 22,000 artefacts are from overseas. Of the latter, 4,000 are from Oceania and Australia, with over 400 from Australia itself. This is the largest Australian collection in Poland (Dul, 2008; Glowczewski, 2012).

According to the original German list from 1944, 379 cultural artefacts from Australia collected by Klaatsch were transferred from Wrocław to Warsaw in 1953. Today, 312 of these artefacts are still kept at the PME (a normal average loss over the years)



FIG 3. Boomerang PME 5156, collected by Klaatsch and now in the Państwowe Muzeum Etnograficzne (PME) or State Ethnographical Museum, Warsaw, Poland. Photo: Corinna Erckenbrecht.

and I examined these during a research visit to the museum in 2005 (Erckenbrecht, 2010: 221-223). Most are very well preserved and in good condition. It is an almost representative selection from all those places that Klaatsch visited and where he collected, with an emphasis on men's weapons and tools.<sup>19</sup>

During research in Warsaw in 2013, 42 artefacts could be identified as being from the Wet Tropics.<sup>20</sup> They are mainly boomerangs, but include a number of other interesting artefacts such as rainforest shields, clubs, a sword, a spear thrower, a basket, a child's toy, an amulet and a stone axe blade. Some of the artefacts are outstanding since they still have the whole history of their transactions inscribed on them, as discussed above. These include Klaatsch's name (or his abbreviation 'K' or 'KI'), the number from his own artefact list, then, in some cases, the number from the Leipzig museum where the artefacts were first inventoried (or the blank spots where these Leipzig numbers once had been and were later erased), Klaatsch's official number, probably from Breslau (in most cases together with the repeated provenance), and finally the new Warsaw museum abbreviation and number.

One artefact in particular sums up quintessentially this history and time-depth. It is a boomerang, now catalogued PME 5156, which Klaatsch collected via direct contact with Aboriginal people at Babinda Creek (figure 3). We know when, why and how. Klaatsch's first trip to the Bellenden Ker Range was from 2 to 13 December 1904. He travelled via Harvey's Creek and Babinda Creek up to Mt Bartle Frere. Klaatsch recorded the exact locality where he collected it (Babinda Creek), wrote his artefact number on it (309) and put it on his artefact list.<sup>21</sup> He sent this boomerang together with other artefacts to Leipzig where it was inventoried and numbered. Then it was sent to Cologne for the special exhibition in 1907. Later it was not re-distributed to Leipzig or any other museum, but Klaatsch took it with him to Breslau. Either in Cologne or in Breslau the former Leipzig number was scraped off. Another number in red colour was put on it, probably by Klaatsch himself, and also the provenance was repeated (Babinda Creek, Bellenden Kerr). Then later again, in 1953 when the artefact was transferred to Warsaw, the new number of the Warsaw museum was put on it.<sup>22</sup>

## CONCLUSION

As shown by the above analysis and examples, political history became encoded and encapsulated in cultural artefacts across a range of spatio-temporal transactions. The artefacts changed their individual, ethnic, political and national owners over time and space for various reasons: the collecting of cultural artefacts from Indigenous people by a German scientist (as an income to finance travelling); for exhibition (as displays at recently-founded German museums); in the course of a professional appointment (as a professor at a university with an ambition to keep and to display his own ethnographic collection); during a world war (with two neighbouring countries whose national territories and borders were changed after the war); and the post-war fear of a revisionist policy. Despite bearing over 100 years of annotations and inscriptions that added multiple layers of history and meaning, the artefacts remained otherwise unaltered.

During this process the original producers, owners and users of the artefacts seem to have been almost forgotten. However, the story remains alive and accessible today, since the original notes of the collector still exist and can tell us where and why he travelled and who he met. So by cross-referencing and interpreting the various signs, codes, symbols and numbers associated with these objects, this time capsule can finally be opened and we can read in it the Indigenous, the transoceanic and the trans-European histories alike.

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## □ ENDNOTES

1. Eugène Dubois, for instance, the Dutch anthropologist, geologist and military surgeon, deliberately joined the army in order to travel to the Dutch colonies in the tropics to conduct excavations there. He discovered the *Pithecanthropos* on Java.
2. Klaatsch's letter to Schoetensack, no. 8 from 17 June 1904 reads: '... und wieder concentrierte sich meine Gedankenwelt auf den sonderbaren Punkt, dass gerade hier die Documente für ein hohes Alter des Menschengeschlechts so schwierig zu erbringen sind, -gerade hier, wo doch nach Deinen und meinen Anschauungen die praehistorische Quelle am reichlichsten sprudeln müsste.' (Private Archive of the Klaatsch Family, USA)
3. The German colonies were a patchwork of several countries in Africa and the Pacific, among them the northern half of what is today Papua New Guinea, the Bismarck Archipelago, Bougainville, northern Solomon Islands, part of Samoa, northern Mariana Islands, Marshall Islands, Palau, Caroline Islands and Nauru. Germany had fewer colonies than many other European colonial powers, but the total landmass of its overseas colonies was six times the size of the German state at that time.
4. In a letter to the director of the Leipzig museum on 12 November 1904 Klaatsch wrote from Cooktown: 'Bei dem rapiden Rückgang der Eingeborenen ist es jetzt die hoechste Zeit, noch zu retten, was moeglich ist und ich werde daher versuchen, eine moeglichst grosse Collection zusammenzubringen.' (Private Archive of the Klaatsch Family, USA)
5. Archibald Meston (1851-1924) had led a government expedition to the Bellenden Ker Range in January 1889 and another in 1904. He was also Queensland's Southern Protector of Aborigines from 1898 to 1903.
6. Unfortunately, Klaatsch did not provide a reference for the article and the photograph.
7. Letter no. 16, p. 3, from Klaatsch, Cairns, to Schoetensack, 17 December 1904; & letter no. 17, p. 3, from Klaatsch, Cairns, to Schoetensack, 10- 20 January 1905 (Private Archive of the Klaatsch Family, USA).
8. According to letter no. 10, p. 4, from Clotten, Herberton, to Klaatsch, 29 August 1904, this money was used partly for the cathedral in Townsville and partly for the mission station at Yarrabah (Private Archive of the Klaatsch Family, USA).
9. We don't know who this guide named 'Jack' was, and whether he was Indigenous or not.
10. He had also visited Yarrabah once before, in June 1904.
11. However, the picture varied considerably: there seems to have been a larger population and rather good relationships among the multi-national groups, especially Europeans and Aborigines, in Cairns, at the Upper Barron River and at Kuranda. Klaatsch described in his observations of the Aboriginal camps at the Barron River and Kuranda how black and white children lived and played peacefully together. This, however, was not the case at the Upper Russell River, where the Aboriginal population had been decimated by heavy fighting and dispersal. And it did not happen on the coastal side of the range where the Aborigines tried to hide from the authorities because of fear that their children would be taken away to the mission stations (see Erckenbrecht 2010: 95-104).
12. 'Diese Blacks leben unter den elendesten Bedingungen, wie wilde Tiere scheu und veraengstigt. Sie haben fast garnichts mehr von ihren alten Waffen, und es widerstrebte mir vielfach, ihnen die letzten Schilder und Schwerter abzunehmen.' Letter no. 18, p. 5, from Klaatsch, Maryborough, to Schoetensack, 19-23 February 1905 (Private Archive of the Klaatsch Family, USA).
13. For a full analysis of Klaatsch's collecting methods see Erckenbrecht (2010: 188-190).
14. Letter from Thilenius, Hamburg, to Foy, 7 January 1907. (Historical Archive of the City of Cologne)
15. Letter from Klaatsch to Weule (director of the Museum of Ethnology), from 14th August 1905 from Sydney, Archive of the Museum of Ethnology, Leipzig. See also Erckenbrecht (2010: 67-8, 144-5, 218-223) and Erckenbrecht September/October 2011, Second Report 'Research in the Klaatsch collection at the Museum of Ethnology in Cologne', unpublished manuscript for the ARC Project 'Objects of Possession: Artefact Transaction in the Wet Tropics of North Queensland, 1870-2013'.
16. The next, very interesting period in his professional career was his involvement in archaeological excavations of early man in the Dordogne, France, together with the Swiss prehistorian Otto Hauser.
17. For Locke's theories on property and labour see Macpherson, 1980. Locke claimed that everything that was taken out of nature and mingled or combined with one's own labour (thus being transformed through human work and no longer belonging to the realm of untouched nature) was then one's personal property. Because Aboriginal people were seen as part of nature – Klaatsch made this claim many times (Erckenbrecht 2010: 210f) – therefore their artefacts were part of nature. The artefacts were removed 'out of nature', that is, taken away from the 'children of nature', as Klaatsch often described the Australian Aborigines, by the act of collecting: taking the artefacts 'out of their natural state' with one's own hands.

## ENDNOTES cont.d

18. This is an internal archival document with no reference number kept at the Museum of Ethnology in Warsaw where I was able to study it during my research visit.
19. This emphasis is probably due to the general tendency of male collectors to collect primarily items of the men's world. However, Klaatsch – especially towards the end of his 3-year stay in Australia – was well aware that Aboriginal women had their own profane and sacred lives including their own secret-sacred artefacts with their own gender-specific artefact terms. Since we do not know exactly how Klaatsch assembled the Breslau selection of artefacts, it is not possible to interpret its composition with certainty.
20. I would like to thank Dr Adam Czyżewski, director of the PME, Dr Bogna Lakomska and Dr Maria Wronski-Friend for the opportunity to do this research and for their kind help and support during my stay there in April 2013. While there I compiled a detailed 5-page table of those 42 artefacts which I identified as being from the Wet Tropics.
21. List B, no. 309; for Klaatsch's artefact lists see Erckenbrecht, 2010: 33-34.
22. There are other artefacts carrying a great deal of information that can tell similar stories but which cannot be detailed in this article.

# Indigenised Souvenirs and Homewares in the Glenn Cooke Collection

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This paper offers an interpretive evaluation of a collection that was donated to the Queensland Museum by Mr Glenn R. Cooke. The collection consists of 1,395 souvenir tourist objects and items of domestic homeware decorated with indigenised motifs that were manufactured for the Australian market between the 1930s and the 1980s. The motifs on many of the objects are based on traditional designs of rainforest Aboriginal groups from the Wet Tropics of North Queensland, misappropriated by non-Indigenous artists and craft-workers. Research into the sources of the motifs traces the transformation of the original designs into decorative patterns for domestic homeware and tourist products.

□ Glenn Cooke, North Queensland, Indigenous motifs, Wet Tropics, rainforest shields, Indigenised souvenirs

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Australian domestic homeware and souvenir tourist objects featuring Indigenous designs have attracted national and international attention. This paper focuses on a collection of souvenir tourist objects and domestic homewares manufactured for the Australian market from the 1930s to the 1980s. The collection was donated to the Queensland Museum by Glenn Cooke. It consists of 1,395 objects predominantly created by non-Indigenous artisans and collected by Cooke over a period of 30 years. At first glance, the collection appears to be merely an assortment of kitsch objects such as one often sees in second-hand stores today, but these artefacts provide a valuable resource for analysis of the history of appropriation of Aboriginal motifs by non-Indigenous artists and the misrepresentation of Aboriginal cultural forms. My investigation into the genealogy of the Indigenous motifs found on objects that are part of this unique collection reveals a pattern of socially constructed acceptance of the use of Aboriginal motifs and an appropriation phenomenon that is often dismissive of Indigenous cultural contexts. The imagery on the objects creates a disconnection from the original intended purpose of the artefact. The designs have been transformed following a series of transactions involving the traditional owners, the collectors, the non-Indigenous artisans who transformed the designs and the manufacturers who mass produced products for retail. Through a series of transactions, the design taken from a rainforest shield, for example, was transformed into a generic representation of Aboriginal people from the Wet Tropics region.

### GLENN COOKE

Glenn Cooke was raised in country Queensland and combined his passion for history and the arts to complete a Bachelor of Arts degree. From 1981 to 2012 he was the first and only Curator of Decorative Arts at the Queensland Art Gallery, and was later appointed its first Research Curator of Queensland Heritage.

Like many Australians, Cooke developed a familiarity with Aboriginal images through the indigenised designs applied to domestic homewares

and ceramic paraphernalia available in Australia, and he assumed this gave him some understanding of Aboriginal culture. When he undertook a Master of Arts in Museum Studies at George Washington University in America, interpreting representations of Aboriginal Australia, he realised how little he actually knew about Aboriginal cultural beliefs and practices. Through his studies and travel Cooke became acutely aware of the popularisation of Indigenous peoples as the exotic other depicted on many souvenir products around the world. He also noted that American postcards and cartoons often represented African Americans as subservient, shoe shine boys, musicians or various other characters and these may have influenced the way Australian artists at this time represented Aboriginal people (figure 1). On his return to Australia in 1980 Cooke became interested in the use of Aboriginal motifs



FIG. 1. E-21305 Card, late 1940s, Queensland Museum Collection.

and decoration produced since the 1930s. In his essay *Kitsch or Kind* he described Australian attitudes of the 1930s:

Aboriginal people and their traditional lifestyles had all but disappeared from the state capitals during the 1930s but as tales of exploration and settlement on the frontiers of Australia's north appeared frequently in popular magazines the image of Aboriginal people took on a distinctly romantic cast. For instance, in the quaintly named Queensland Magazine *The Steering Wheel and Society and Home* an article on 'The most feared and dangerous Aborigines in Australia' appeared in 1933 followed by 'A white man's vengeance' on 'the black devils of the Dawson River' in 1934 while F. E. Baume wrote a serial 'Tragedy track' and provided a series of articles on Aboriginal people over the next few years. Subsequently, in 1939, Charles Broome wrote a 'romance of North Australian wilds' in 'The Blood of Marlee'. I feel sure other magazines would have had a similar incidence of these articles. This was also the time when Charles Chauvel produced his film *Uncivilised*. (Cooke 1995)

So it is no surprise that contemporary imagery stereotyped Aboriginal people, representing them as an exotic race.

## A HISTORY OF APPROPRIATION

Following World War One a heightened sense of national identity was developing and Australians began to develop strong pride and patriotism, while romantically portraying Aboriginal people and their culture at the same time. Artists such as Margaret Preston (1875-1963) had the notion that Aboriginal art would 'cease to be practised in 30 years' and believed 'appropriation thus provided an opportunity for maintaining their art' (Baddeley & Ballarat Fine Art Gallery, 1999: 10). Preston had travelled extensively throughout Europe between 1904 and 1919; she studied arts at various leading

institutions and was inspired by works she had seen from Pablo Picasso's African-influenced period highlighting the exotic cultures. She returned to Australia in 1919 and in 1923 began advocating a national artistic style based on Aboriginal art. Initially Preston applied this principle to craft objects and domestic homewares, and began visits to the Aboriginal collection at the South Australian Museum 'hunting' for aesthetic designs (Edwards et al., 2005: 10). As early as 1925 she encouraged Australian artists to utilize Aboriginal designs before they were misappropriated by artists from other countries. Preston began visits to collections held at the Australian Museum in Sydney searching for aesthetic designs and advocating a national style based on Aboriginal art (Edwards et al., 2005: 10). Frederick McCarthy, Curator of Anthropology and Archaeology at the Australian Museum in Sydney, provided Preston with access to many cultural materials from the Wet Tropics region. One particular rainforest shield held in the Australian Museum was collected from the Mamu people near the Russell River in 1891 and depicted the foot of their major totem, the cassowary. Given present understandings of rainforest shields, we know that this artefact would have had cultural significance for the person to whom it once belonged. After copying the design on the shield, Preston transformed it as a gouache painting on paper and titled it *Aboriginal Design – Design from a Pikan Shield c.1927*. This artwork is now held in the Art Gallery of Western Australia collection (Eagle et al., 2001: 18). *Pikan* is one of the language words for shield from the North Queensland rainforest region.

Claire Baddeley, curator of *Motif and Meaning: Aboriginal Influences in Australian Arts 1930-1970* at the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery in 1999-2000, states that Preston travelled extensively throughout Australia from the 1920s to study Aboriginal art. However, Preston did not visit any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities until a trip to Thursday Island in 1925, followed by a tour of North Queensland in 1927, both of which were a few years after she began collecting designs and adopting Indigenous motifs in her work (Butel, 1986: 11). It is

generally accepted that Preston's transformative intent was to promote Aboriginal art, including that of the rainforest region, and bring it to the attention of other Australian artists and the wider Australian public. However, Elizabeth Butel (1986) expresses concern regarding Preston's artistic transformation of designs that hold cultural significance for the traditional owners and makers of the artefacts. She argues that Preston had contradictory objectives:

Her championing of Aboriginal art was accompanied by a virulent artistic colonialism, which advocated the adoption of Aboriginal methods and ways of seeing but at the same time, denied the culture that gave them meaning. (Butel, 1986: 50)

Preston and other non-Indigenous artists did not seek permission to use the imagery and motifs in their own designs. In fact, they did not attempt to engage with any Aboriginal people at all, despite professing to promote Aboriginal art and cultures. They misappropriated and used Indigenous motifs as a means of making a contribution from the arts to the growth of an Australian national identity. Butel (1986) also notes contradictions in Preston's declarations, made in statements in 1925 and again in 1941, regarding the mythological and religious symbolism associated with Aboriginal artworks. She quotes Preston, who in 1930 stated that, 'the student must be careful not to bother about what myths the carver may have tried to illustrate. Mythology and symbolism do not matter to the artist, only to the anthropologist.' More patronisingly, Preston stated that 'We simply cannot get to the bottom of their minds, it's all just a little too simple for us' (Butel, 1986: 52). Such statements indicate that although Preston was aware of Frederick McCarthy's dictum that Aboriginal art was not just an 'aesthetic impulse', she saw Aboriginal motifs and imagery as a resource for all Australian artists to draw upon and exploit for their own benefit to sanctify their own unique Australian identity.

McCarthy argued that, 'adapted with intelligence and taste, aboriginal art can make a unique contribution to modern Australian enterprise in craft-work'

(cited in Baddeley & Ballarat Fine Art Gallery 1999: 11). During the early 1930s popular books and journal publications were reproducing images of Aboriginal motifs, including unique artefacts from the Wet Tropics, promoting Aboriginal art as decorative design. In 1938 McCarthy published *Australian Aboriginal Decorative Art*, which was to become a most useful resource for many artists seeking to copy Indigenous designs and presenting opportunities to capitalize on Aboriginal images that would authenticate objects as Australian.

The appropriation of Aboriginal designs has been a continuing issue for curators and art critics. Some have raised concerns about a blurring of distinctions between 'influence', 'inspiration' 'interpretation', 'appropriation' and 'misappropriation'. (Edwards, Preston, Peel, Mimmocchi, & Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2005).

## APPROPRIATION OF RAINFOREST SHIELD DESIGNS

In 1935, just prior to McCarthy's publication of *Australian Aboriginal Decorative Art*, images of material collected from the Wet Tropics by anthropologist Ursula McConnel were published in *Oceania* (McConnel, 1935). McConnel's publication 'Inspiration and design in Aboriginal art' also played a major role in the development of Indigenous motifs. A wall hanging from Donald Clark Handcrafts in the Cooke collection (figure 2) features a North Queensland rainforest shield from McConnel's publication. This wall hanging depicts the star fish totem which belongs to the Gunggandji people from Yarrabah near Cairns painted on a shield collected by McConnel and deposited with the South Australian Museum. On a visit to Menmyny Museum in Yarrabah in 2009, I found another Donald Clark wall hanging displayed in a case, which appeared to be a stylised reference to a rainforest shield from this region, but with images of fish (figure 3). I instantly recognised that this shield had been copied from McCarthy's *Australian Aboriginal Decorative Art* publication citing the fish totem shield that





FIG. 2. E-20870 Wall hanging, 1954-1958, by Donald Clark Handcrafts, Queensland Museum collection.



FIG. 3. Wall hanging, 1954-1958, by Donald Clark Handcrafts, Menmyny Museum collection, Yarrabah. Photographed by author in September 2011.

is held in the South Australian Museum collection (McCarthy, 1938: 30). Shield designs are featured on many wall hangings produced by commercial operator Donald Clark Handcrafts (1954-1985), which were popular during the 1960s and 1970s with consumers, as if these homewares might allow Aboriginal culture to be absorbed into the home. Franklin proposed that the inclusion of these homewares ‘...ironically planted in their minds the association of Aboriginal culture as an integral part of Australian life and culture and it stayed there owing to its status as a receptacle of memory and biography’ (Franklin, 2010: 202).

Similarly, many ceramic objects in the Cooke collection produced in the 1950s show evidence of designs that can be sourced to McConnell’s 1935 article. This practice of appropriation was encouraged by ceramic studios ‘not fully aware of the spiritual, social and political values intrinsic in Aboriginal art’ (Baddeley & Ballarat Fine Art Gallery, 1999: 3), and some artists were particularly drawn to

the rainforest shield designs illustrated in McConnel (1935). For example, a Gunggandji shield collected by McConnel from the Yarrabah Mission south of Cairns depicts the leaves of a plant used as a cure for nettle sting. This cultural design was simplified and transformed for a motif on a small ceramic egg cup for the Little Sydney Pottery studio during the 1950s (figure 4). It was probably decorated by Lisalotte (Lilo) Pakulski (b.1924) (Johnston, 2002: 21). Within the Cooke collection there are many similar examples of misappropriation, with motifs copied from images of artefacts published in magazines. According to Johnston, Pakulski later admitted to using Aboriginal motifs while at the Little Sydney Pottery studio and said:

I was hesitant about them [using Aboriginal motifs]. But it was what people wanted. I bought a small book from the Museum and studied the photos. I am an artist and do not like the idea of copying the work of others. One lady just copied the serpent motif and made decorations on that theme; I thought that was pretty dreadful. (Johnston, 2002: 86)

Pakulski was one of many European ceramicists who migrated to Australia after World War Two when the Australian Government advocated industrial development and advertised for skilled workers as part of Post-War Reconstruction. Numerous expert ceramicists from Czechoslovakia, Poland and Germany responded, and were employed by Commonwealth Ceramics, operating at Alexandria in Sydney, and other Australian potteries. The appropriation of Aboriginal motifs continued to



FIG. 4. E-20990 Egg cup, 1950s, by the Little Sydney Pottery, Queensland Museum collection.

flourish after their arrival because they quickly started to adapt Indigenous motifs in order to be more Australian (Johnston, 2002: 71). Kathryn Chisholm refers to indigenised ceramics produced between the 1940s and 1960s as 'kitsch crockery', and notes that ceramicists at Martin Boyd Pottery in North Sydney were searching to inject an Australian flavour into the domestic market. They completely transformed the cultural meaning of Indigenous motifs into colourful abstract designs inspired by the interest in Aboriginal art that 'swept the domestic Australian manufacturing market in the decades after World War 2' (Chisholm, 2007: 22).

## INDIGENISED SOUVENIRS

The perfect opportunity to promote Australia presented itself with the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games. The Australian airline QANTAS featured Martin Boyd Pottery in their *Airways* magazine, but Florenz Pottery was the only official range chosen by the Olympic Committee (Johnston, 2002: 73). This provided other studios with significant opportunity to produce souvenirs for the multitude of visitors to Australia. The Olympics also generated an increase in sales for Studio Anna, which capitalised on visiting tourists seeking souvenirs with an Australian theme, and 'thus adaptations of Aboriginal cave and bark paintings as well as images of Aboriginal people became popular' (Johnston, 2002: 44, 52). This was an early instance of Australian Aboriginal culture being presented (and misrepresented) to a global market, with the imagery already becoming much hybridised. Until this time, indigenised souvenirs and homewares were still being produced with hand painted motifs as if to imply authenticity. Following the Olympics, many artists capitalised on the popularity of Australia's newfound Indigenous identity. At this time, Aboriginal culture was being transformed, recoded and exoticised as a new quintessential symbol of Australian nationhood. Adrian Franklin states that this implied that 'Aboriginal culture was an integral part of Australian life and culture' (Franklin, 2010: 202).

One ceramicist operating around this time was Latvian-born Gundars Zigurts Lusis (1928-1996) who worked from his parents' garage at Camberwell in the late 1950s under the name of Gunda and produced a huge variety of products that included dishes, vases, bowls, cups, plates, salt and pepper shakers, lamps and ashtrays. His ceramics reflected a new decorative approach with uniquely abstracted graphic designs in the emerging craft movement of the 1950s (figure 5). Franklin (2010: 203) argued that Lusis was 'attempting to include Aboriginal culture in the modern sense of Australia' and borrowed motifs from Aboriginal art to cater for the international tourists attending the Melbourne Olympics in 1956. Such products apparently represented Indigenous Australia and Franklin described them as 'repositories of recognition' that affirmed the presence and repression of Australia's Aboriginal people. In his paper, Franklin cited Richard White as stating that 'eventually they were to reach the indignity of being 'Our Aborigines', their image no longer representative of Australia except as garden ornaments in suburban backyards and ashtrays in souvenir shops' (Franklin, 2010: 198).

The souvenir market and the demand for indigenised ornaments and memorabilia also flourished in North Queensland. During the 1950s, Cairns was fast becoming a destination point for tourists and souvenirs with implied indigeneity and association with local Aboriginal culture were sought after, despite the fact that there was little Aboriginal tourism offered by any operators. The romanticised

images of Aboriginal children generated by Viola Edith Downing (1924-1995), nicknamed Brownie, were mass-produced and presented as appealing and functional souvenirs. Downing once amused herself as a young girl by reading stories about magical fairies from her Balgowlah home north of Sydney. Interestingly, she cultivated her own new world by replacing the fairy characters with 'Aboriginal heroes inspired by her father's collection of books on Aborigines' (Johnston, 2002: 53). Later in 1950 she moved into a shared studio at Circular Quay with a young graduate from East Sydney Technical College named Toni Coles (who married ceramic artist Karel Jungvirt). Downing dabbled in watercolour paintings depicting romanticized images of Aboriginal children inspired by stories from her youth, but later became interested in ceramics after she married Ronald Parsons, who had some marketing experience. They sent her Aboriginal 'Piccaninny' designs to Japan 'where they were mass reproduced as transfers and applied to semi-porcelain wares and imported back into Australia,' where 'people believed they were buying authentic Australian hand painted ceramics because of her signature included into the transfer' (Johnston, 2002: 54). One plate (figure 6) shows a small decal at the top with the words 'Greetings from Cairns'. Any commercial tourist operator could



FIG. 5. E-20989 Dish, 1956, by Gunda, Queensland Museum collection.



FIG. 6. QE-14024 Plate Greetings from Cairns, by Brownie Downing, Queensland Museum collection.



apparently purchase from her catalogue and have their own decal applied, such as this souvenir of Cairns referencing the local Aboriginal people, yet misrepresenting the culture and romanticising and stereotyping the Aboriginal baby as an 'Australian wild child of nature' (Conor, 2009: 13). Conor highlights the fact that ironically these 'recurrent images of happy children in a bush environment' were predominant at a time when the removal of Aboriginal children from their families was at a peak (Conor, 2009: 6).

Cairns and the Wet Tropics region continues to be a tourist mecca with a plethora of indigenised homewares and souvenir products made by non-Indigenous artists available for sale in shops. Such indigenised products could be interpreted as a response to the market demand for a token memento, with little regard for the culture and meaning behind the appropriated motif. The transactions involved in creation and sale of indigenised products made by non-Indigenous artists disadvantages Indigenous artists with respect to the integrity of their cultural representations and opportunities for economic remuneration. Sallie Anderson (2001) argues that the 'widespread perception of Queensland's Aboriginal artists as no longer living a traditional lifestyle creates a situation where the art-buying public views Cairns Aboriginal artists as neither traditional nor contemporary' and that artists are expected to 'negotiate their own identity and artistic style' (Anderson, 2001: 8). Since the launch of the Cairns Indigenous Art Fair (CIAF) in 2009, consumers are becoming more discerning, with more merchandise, fine art, souvenirs and homewares designed by Indigenous people being exhibited and marketed.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has briefly outlined a history of misappropriation of Aboriginal motifs by non-Indigenous artists and makers in Australia through an exploration of a particular collection. Objects from this collection present an interesting narrative of transactions and acquisitions of designs from the 1930s to the 1970s that mispresent Aboriginal culture through the misappropriation of Aboriginal motifs. Within the cultural framework that prevailed from the 1930s to the 1970s, most non-Indigenous artists sincerely believed that they were promoting Aboriginal Australia. However, their use of motifs was a form of misappropriation, because they did not have permission to use the images nor did they engage with any Aboriginal people; rather, the use of Indigenous motifs was promoted as an expression of national identity. Today, Aboriginal artists are reclaiming their rights to reproduce their own artefacts and designs. The annual Cairns Indigenous Art Fair (CIAF), for example, now aims to present authentically made Indigenous arts and crafts in an ethical market place.

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# Transforming Artefacts into Digital Heritage: Developing interactive databases for use by Aboriginal communities

Ton OTTO and Dianna HARDY

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This paper deals with the possibilities and challenges of the digitisation of artefacts. It argues that artefacts are complex phenomena that consist of the material objects as well as the various forms of categorization and documentation that are connected with the objects. Digitalisation presents a genuine transformation of the artefacts that opens up new possibilities of use. These include providing access to and facilitating the reappropriation of cultural knowledge stored elsewhere, maintaining and developing a living digital cultural heritage, and gathering, sharing and transferring knowledge that is available within Aboriginal communities. In this paper we examine different types of digital repositories and we assess their suitability for use by Aboriginal communities. We classify a number of institutional archiving systems and analyse in some detail two interactive systems that were specifically designed for use by Aboriginal communities. The paper ends with a set of recommendations for designing digital databases for Indigenous usage.

□ digital artefacts, cultural heritage, digitisation, interactive database, Gugu Badhun, Ara Irititja

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Late nineteenth and early twentieth century Aboriginal artefacts from the Wet Tropics – just as for artefacts from other Indigenous Australian groups – have a long history of being alienated, collected, transacted, documented, and stored in places that are far from their original places of production and use (Henry et. al., 2013). This poses the formidable challenge of the repatriation of these key items of cultural heritage and their reappropriation by the descendants of the original owners and producers. Digital databases are an important modern means to make knowledge of artefacts accessible to Aboriginal communities. They also provide the possibility to add and share new information within the group of users of the database. However, there are a whole range of challenges and pitfalls connected with the use of these digital media that are of a technical, social, legal and also of a cultural nature. Issues of access, control and ownership loom large. As part of the ARC funded research project ‘Objects of Possession: Artefact Transactions in the Wet Tropics of North Queensland 1870-2013’<sup>1</sup>, the authors of this paper decided to examine what solutions could be gained from existing databases and digitisation projects. One the of the aims of the ‘Objects of Possession’ project was to make the knowledge gained from our studies in many different museums, archives, and government institutions accessible to the concerned Aboriginal groups; and preferably to do it in such a way that these groups could easily access, add to, and interact with such digital repositories, so that the information stored within them could become a part of their living cultural heritage.

In this paper we report on our appraisal and analysis of different types of databases designed as repositories for cultural knowledge. We have looked at large systems developed and maintained by major research institutions and also at systems that have been specifically designed for use by local Aboriginal communities. This information has been gathered to assist us in choosing and developing an interactive digital repository for our own project, which due to limited funding as well as issues of intellectual property and copyright is still under development. In this paper we sum up our conclusions as a series

of recommendations for ‘best practice’ that may inspire others facing similar challenges. A key insight from our project is that digitalisation leads to a transformation of the artefacts that gives them new possibilities for mediating knowledge as well as social relations, a new ‘social life’ so to speak. We see artefacts as composite phenomena that include the material objects as well as the different kinds of documentation that provide the objects with cultural meaning and context. We argue that digitalisation alters the social life and the relational possibilities of Aboriginal artefacts. In this way they can become important elements of the contemporary heritage of Aboriginal groups, who partly define their distinct identity in relation to this heritage.

## **DIGITISATION, DIGITALISATION AND REPATRIATION**

As part of the ‘Objects of Possession’ project, one of the authors, Ton Otto, visited the Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm, Sweden, to study the collection of Australian Wet Tropics artefacts assembled by Eric Mjöberg. The latter was a Swedish zoologist who travelled through the Cairns region in 1913. In addition to collecting insects and other animal species, Mjöberg made a collection of more than 200 artefacts, ranging from stone tools and bicornual baskets to throwing sticks, shields and a dugout canoe. The Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm acquired 120 pieces of this collection in 1920. During his visit in June 2011, Otto was able to see and study the whole collection that was in storage in storerooms of the museum. An important outcome of this visit was that the museum used this occasion to photograph the whole collection – a part had already been photographed previously – and consequently made these photographs available via its homepage on the Internet. The museum has a policy to do this with all its collections in order to make them available for research and for the interested public.

At a meeting with the Indigenous Consultative Group connected to the research project in Cairns in July 2011, Otto presented the Swedish website. The members of the Consultative Group welcomed

the availability of the artefacts in this digital form. They enthusiastically discussed the quality and design of the baskets and the function and use of other objects as well as their possible origin. The issue of repatriation was addressed but there was no consensus at the time that this necessarily was a good idea, because identifying the exact origin and ownership of the objects was likely to be very difficult, if not impossible, due to the lack of precise documentation of provenance. Therefore, if the artefacts were to be repatriated, determining right and responsibility could become an issue of disagreement and strife. But the possibility to view and study this collection and thus, in a sense, reappropriate it as part of the regional cultural heritage was seen as very important and the wish was expressed that access should be organised in a more user friendly way. So the transformation of the original material artefacts into digitally accessible data could possibly be seen as an alternative to repatriation or perhaps even as a form of repatriation.

Although digitisation and digitalisation are sometimes used interchangeably, the words are not identical in meaning. To digitise something is to create a digital version of a physical item. Digitalisation is the process of leveraging digital information to achieve some purpose (Gray and Rumpel, 2015). In order to develop what we mean with the statement that digitalisation may be a form of repatriation, it is useful to look more closely at what we understand by the term artefact. Here we opt to follow the definition by Henry, Otto and Wood (2013: 35): 'We define an artefact as a complex phenomenon, consisting of a collected material thing, its specific documentation, and the stories and theories that give it a history'. Thus we see an artefact as more than just the material object, as it includes the inscriptions, registrations, descriptions, photographic images as well as different forms of contextualisation and interpretation that make it into something with a specific value and meaning. Transforming this complex phenomenon, including its documentation and visual representation, into digital data can, potentially, ensure wide access on

the Internet. This move intensifies the artefact's complexity but also extends its reach (Cameron and Kenderdine, 2007; Erckenbrecht, this volume). Fascinated by these kinds of transformations and prompted by the expressed wish of our Aboriginal consultants, Ton Otto and Dianna Hardy decided to investigate the possibilities and limitations of existing digital databases in relation to the preservation and repatriation of cultural knowledge, with focus on artefacts as complex cultural heritage phenomena.

The digital revolution has facilitated the transformation and electronic storage of very diverse kinds of data linked to an artefact, such as typed documents, printed photographs, 3-D models of artefacts as well as maps and audio-visual material. This has made it possible to access and annotate information in completely new ways, and, with the coming of the Internet, the reach of these new possibilities has been extended in space in quite unforeseen ways. As described in the vignette above, digitalisation can make artefacts – at least partly – accessible to the descendants of those from whom they were originally collected. Graeme Were (2015) deals with similar issues among the Nalik in New Ireland, Papua New Guinea. Referring to Phillips (2013), Were (2015: 161) writes:

Digital return...could be seen as a form of 'first level' repatriation in which the digital object supports the opportunity to gain new knowledge and understanding of Nalik culture through community-based research without the issue of dealing with the physical object.

Were observes that there may be some advantages in the absence of the physical object. First, just as was the case with the Mjöberg collection, among the Nalik it is seen as problematic to return carvings to a community without knowing their exact provenance and therefore their rightful owners. And second, the objects may have a certain potency for the local population, which makes them difficult to deal with outside the ritual context in which they were traditionally used. Thus digital return may be an



important first step, which secures access for the Indigenous community to a substantial part of the complex phenomenon that an artefact is, while avoiding some of the pitfalls that may occur when repatriating the material object itself.

Involved in the digitisation of artefacts is their positioning within various kinds of databases. While digital databases hold great promise for preserving and annotating information and allowing for forms of repatriation, there is also a challenge built into this promise. As databases generally need relatively fixed categories and procedures to operate, there is the very real risk that these categories and procedures are not flexible enough to incorporate all relevant information (Geismar, 2012). This problem is even more acute in the case of artefacts and other cultural knowledge, because cultural heritage material is always in a process of change and adaptation to the present situation (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004; Harrison, 2013; Otto, 2015). So, instead of supporting a living cultural heritage, a wrongly designed digital medium may lead to the storage of unused – that is dead – data, securely but impractically buried in digital repositories. So there is a major challenge here to design systems that have a certain open-endedness and flexibility to remain of interest to the communities using them for storing and accessing cultural knowledge (see for example Holcombe, 2009; Verran and Christie, 2007; Christie and Verran, 2013).

Finally, because digital databases are a new kind of media, their management, ownership and accessibility require serious consideration and specific local solutions. As we will discuss below, most existing databases privilege the needs of the researchers and/or the institutions that control them. There are issues of ownership of knowledge and artefacts between researchers and collectors/keepers on the one hand and source communities on the other. These issues exist irrespective of digital databases, but the development of open access digital media prompts new reflection on and new solutions for these questions. In addition, there are issues of control and management within the Indigenous communities due to their cultural norms

concerning authority, social control and access to specific kinds of knowledge. As Thomas Widlok (2013: 192) says, ‘New technologies do not solve problems of access and exchange but rather shed a particularly sharp light on these problems.’

In the following we will first review different kinds of existing databases in light of the above questions and then discuss in more detail two specific digital systems that have been developed to cater for the needs of two very different Australian Aboriginal communities.

## **TYPES OF EXISTING DIGITAL DATABASES**

The issues outlined above lead to competing priorities for digital cultural management. Every collection of artefacts and every connected research activity results in the production of information that may be of value. Researchers need to consider from the very beginning of their research how information obtained from participants can be repatriated back into the Indigenous communities (Holcombe, 2009; Verran and Christie, 2007). Many governmental and research institutions now require that research data be archived and also be made available to suitable members of the research community and/or the public in general as a condition of receiving funding for the project. Field researchers often enter reciprocal relationships with the people they collaborate with and this involves returning the results of their research.<sup>2</sup> In the past, data had textual, material and analogical form and often remained in the keeping of the researcher, but as digital technologies developed researchers have built digital databases and repositories of the information obtained from their studies. These new data storage places are generally designed and built with the needs of the researcher in mind. Often the repositories take the form of a digital library using western notions of data organization and access (Widlok, 2013).

As a background to the discussion about using digital means to preserve and sustain a living cultural heritage, we first describe four types of data repositories that are designed to manage data

from a multitude of groups and communities: (1) multi-project researcher field notes and recordings repositories; (2) multi-project digitisation assistance and storage; (3) individual project storage and institutional repositories and (4) Indigenous knowledge centres. The first three are led by researchers and focus on academic outputs for information, and the fourth is established with the assistance of governmental agencies such as libraries and community councils (and often set up by consultant researchers).

### **MULTI-PROJECT RESEARCHER FIELD NOTES AND RECORDINGS REPOSITORIES**

These sites are primarily focused on meeting the needs of social science and humanities researchers and provide a platform for the storage and handling of individual and collective annotations of digital resources. Users of these sites generally must be granted an account, which often requires that they are acknowledged as bona fide researchers and are not just members of the general public. Once granted an account, a user can upload data, attach annotations to the digital resource, and search across the corpus of data. The owner of the data (the researcher who uploaded it) manages permissions regarding access and annotation of the data. An example is The Online Digital Sources and Annotation Systems (ODSAS) developed and hosted by the research group CREDO (Centre for Research and Documentation on Oceania) in Marseille and widely used by researchers affiliated with this organisation. Laurent Dousset, one of the main architects of this database, lists three main reasons for the creation of this kind of storage facility: to ensure ethnological data are not lost; to provide a storage mechanism for the data to be used for political reasons such as recognition of groups as entities; and to repatriate the data back to groups and societies (Dousset, 2013). However, the goals of political use and repatriation are not without problems, as the datasets are the result of researcher interests and categorisations, and the use of the facility requires a certain level of digital know-how.

### **MULTI-PROJECT DIGITISATION ASSISTANCE AND STORAGE**

Other data storage sites move beyond simple archiving of data to take a more active stance in the creation of new data. Participants in these sites are provided with tools allowing collaboration with other groups (i.e. researchers) in order to promote good field practice in the documentation and digital archiving of endangered languages and cultural practices. The collaboration tools established in some database storage projects such as the Australian based PARADISEC (Pacific and Regional Archive for Digital Sources in Endangered Cultures) allow the recording, digitisation, annotation and access to video and audio files concerning anthropological exploration into languages and cultures (<http://paradisec.org.au/>; see Thieberger and Barwick, 2012). Others such as the Volkswagen Foundation sponsored DoBeS (Documentation of Endangered Languages, <http://dobes.mpi.nl/>; see Drude et al., 2012) provide not only a structured database repository but also funding for undertaking the recording of such data in the field. These databases generally provide reading access to the public but researchers/data owners can define parts of their data as restricted – requiring permission to access – or fully closed.

### **INDIVIDUAL PROJECT STORAGE AND INSTITUTIONAL REPOSITORIES**

The third category of data repository is the most common. Nearly every research project ethics proposal includes a description of where the data will reside during the project, and where they will be deposited at the end of the research. Although in the past these were generally individual databases stored on the home drives and personal laptops of researchers, increasingly research teams are uploading their data to institutional repositories. A primary goal of this type of repository is to encourage discoverability of research data, not just storage. This is accomplished through the use of metadata (provenance information about the data) records associated with each piece of data. An example is the Tropical Data Hub, developed by James Cook University, Australia (<https://tropicaldatahub.org/>).

## INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE CENTRES

These entities provide communities with a central space through which they can access information and communication technologies associated with archives of historical and cultural information pertaining to their community, along with other services often provided through a library that performs an educational function for the group. Although the centres focus on disadvantaged Indigenous groups, their placement in non-Indigenous locations of authority such as libraries have led to criticisms, for example by Papua New Guinea academic Digim'Rina (1997) who suggests that institutions should 'situate the centre with the people,' otherwise they risk further colonializing Indigenous knowledge through collection and control. However, as libraries have become more decentralised and shift their focus from curation of content to facilitating access to content, this control aspect has lessened (Srinivasan, et al., 2010).

While both the researcher and the community care deeply about the sustainability of the recorded digital heritage, they may have differing views as to how that should be accomplished and what the priorities are for ensuring its satisfactory completion. In the past several years, improvements in technology have solved many of the issues of curation that are related to storing and accessing digital data. However, the social and cultural ramifications of controlling the data and making them available to others are more problematic. Moreover, Indigenous groups often find themselves on the wrong side of the so-called 'digital divide' when it comes to use of information technologies. Aboriginal adoption of IT lags behind that of other Australians, limiting their ability to exploit the technology (ABS, 2009).

One of the primary goals of data curation is to ensure data sustainability over time as historical records and as resources for further use and research. Much of the data related to social science research is held in field notebooks, reports, transcripts, photographs, audio and video recordings and other offline mediums. The collection of these research outputs in an online repository ensures that they can be made accessible to others. This however leads to the need to ensure the confidentiality of those who provided the data

in the first instance. Transcripts can be anonymised, but it is much harder to protect individuals' identities in photos, video or audio recordings. An additional problem is the need to be familiar with the context surrounding the collection of the data in order to be able to interpret them and assess their quality. The tension between the ethical demand of anonymity versus the research requirement of documenting the context of the artefacts, narratives and other cultural information can be difficult to resolve. On the technical side, due to the heterogeneity of multiple types of data (text, audio, video) searching across multiple datasets can be difficult. Added to this is the relatively small amounts of time that researchers have available for archiving their data. Merely adding an adequate amount of metadata to make a record discoverable can be an onerous process (Ellul et. al., in press; Jessup et al., 2010). Documentation projects such as DoBeS and PARADISEC mentioned above attempt to make the uploading and documenting of data less difficult.

Table 1 outlines some of the issues as articulated by the researcher and Indigenous community perspectives. While the priorities defined by the academy are well described in literature (Mauthner & Parry, 2013; Zeitlyn, 2012; ICPSR, 2009), in the following section we detail some of the issues from an Indigenous user perspective that need to be resolved regarding the digital archiving of cultural heritage data.

**Table 1. Researcher versus Indigenous community priorities for digital cultural heritage.**

Researcher perspective	Indigenous community perspective
Confidentiality and sensitivity of data	Control of data by outsiders
Making data understandable to others (context)	Internal debate over who should have authority over data sharing decisions
Heterogeneity of types of data – hard to search across	Reintegrating data/ knowledge into their current lifestyles
Archiving processes should not be too time consuming	Access to and annotation of data should be user friendly as well as culturally sensitive
Sustainability of data	Sustainability of data and keeping it safe/secure

## TWO CASE STUDIES

In this section we describe two case studies concerned with the design and development of digital databases for storage of and access to traditional cultural knowledge, including but not exclusively related to knowledge about artefacts. The Aboriginal groups are very different with regard to their social and geographical situation in contemporary Australia and they reveal a range of the complexities involved in the repatriation, preservation and connotation of artefacts and other cultural data. The first case describes a cultural heritage archiving project from a remote region in South Australia that has been reported in the literature. And the second case study was conducted by Hardy as part of her PhD research in 2007-10 (see Hardy, 2011)<sup>3</sup> We use these two studies to compare and contrast issues associated with cultural heritage archiving with Indigenous groups in Australia.<sup>4</sup>

### ANANGU AND THE ARA IRITITJA PROJECT

In 1994 John Dallwitz worked with Aboriginal people in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands (APY Lands), a large Aboriginal government area located in the remote northwest of South Australia, to develop a culturally appropriate digital archive for the large amount of historical and culturally significant items such as artefacts, photographs, videos, sound recordings, and documents held by public institutions and private groups. Due to the harsh climate of the central desert as well as the lack of infrastructure, repatriation of physical artefacts was considered unfeasible, but a digital archive would allow access to the more than 3,000 members of the Anangu group spread throughout the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands (over 102,600 square kilometres in size). The Ara Irititja ("stories from a long time ago") project was developed to allow the Anangu access to digital versions of these cultural artefacts, and to provide them with a mechanism to add and edit metadata regarding the items, making the archive

a growing, interactive system. The emphasis of the system was on the Anangu's stories, in their words, about their peoples and their places (Hughes & Dallwitz, 2007). A significant part of the project entailed gaining access to artefacts from external collections, digitizing them, and adding them to the system. Then appropriate members of the Anangu provided metadata entries to elaborate on the stories by placing each item in its historical and cultural context.

Rather than consisting of one central database, the system is made up of three separate databases, each targeted toward a different user group. The first is a community archive that all Anangu can view. The second is a men-only collection and the third is a women-only collection. The language displayed in the user interface of the system is Pitjantjatjara. The interface was designed to avoid the western business-type icons and style and to better reflect the Anangu culture. In addition, due to the poor-eyesight of many elderly community members (caused by the harsh climate), the interface uses large print, bright colours and easily recognizable icons. The software is installed in mobile workstations containing a computer (with monitor, keyboard and mouse), a display projector, a printer and powered by an uninterruptible power supply, all housed in a protective case that is mounted on inflatable wheels so that the device can be moved easily on flat surfaces or rough terrain. The Anangu call the workstations "Niri-niri", the Pitjantjatjara word for scarab beetle. Each stand-alone workstation contains a copy of the software and the database, which is updated by community members at several locations on Anangu lands. The resulting datasets are sent to Adelaide and are synched together, with a new version of the software being re-installed on the workstation several times a year (Gibson, 2008). Development of the software occurred over a lengthy period of consultation with the members of the community in order to ensure the system was suited to the Anangu, rather than forcing them to adapt to the software (Bidwell & Hardy, 2009). Due to this extensive collaboration the system was well accepted, and now contains over 600,000 items.

The Ara Irititja software is available under license from the Pitjantjatjara and is the most well-known software that is suited to Aboriginal community archiving projects. For example, Gibson (2008) relates a development project using the Ara Irititja software for the Northern Territory Library's (NTL) 'Our Story' databases, installed in 14 sites across the Northern Territory. However, in order to make the software usable in a library context, the group was forced to make some adaptations to the software to bring it in line with modern systems and to adapt it for use in a library setting. The issues encountered by the NTL in using the Ara Irititja software reveal the complexity of applying an "off-the-shelf" solution to the provision of archive facilities. As each group has varying requirements and expectations for the use of such archives a "one-size-fits-all" answer does not seem likely. This makes it doubly important that applications created for use in communities are flexible and extendable in order to handle different environments.<sup>5</sup>

## GUGU BADHUN WOMEN ON THE MOVE

The Gugu Badhun are a group of Aboriginal people whose traditional lands lie around the modern town of Greenvale in rural North Queensland about 200 km north west of Townsville. Following European colonization in the mid-1800s, the people worked for cattle station owners in the area in order to stay on their country. After World War Two the families dispersed to other towns in Queensland and the Northern Territory in order to find secure employment and education for their children. The Gugu Badhun have initiated several projects to record their language, traditional culture and family histories and make these available to their descendants. At the end of the previous decade (2007-10) the group participated in a PhD research project (Hardy, 2011) to explore the potential for usage of information and communication technology (ICT) to assist in developing wellbeing among community members. An ongoing concern of the group is the difficulty in maintaining connections with family members who are widely separated and in conveying cultural heritage to the younger generation. ICT has been explored as a mechanism to allow this needed communication and transfer of heritage.

Because the Gugu Badhun are living in many separate locations, the group experienced difficulty in passing on their cultural heritage to their descendants and keep their identity as a group intact and vital. A small group of Gugu Badhun women worked with Hardy, using a participatory action research methodology to develop an online platform, where the women could document and share stories about culture or family and where they could hold discussions about items of interest. The system was developed over the course of a year, and then used actively for about 6 months after which usage of the system became less active. The participant group was made up of 10 women aged 18-60. The front page of the web application is shown in figure 1 below.

The research for this project occurred in three linked but separate research cycles: 1) interviews and group workshops, 2) use of a technology probe, and 3) feedback from participants. The participants for Cycle One resided in Townsville and Greenvale. In Cycles Two & Three the participants recruited five additional group members.

In Cycle One (December 2007 – December 2008), interviews and group workshops were conducted over the course of a year. At the end of the cycle, the group decided to implement a prototype website. Cycle Two consisted of using the website, dubbed the 'Gugu Badhun Women on the Move' site. The participants extended the list of people involved in the project to include 5 other female relatives living in Darwin, Cairns and Brisbane. In this cycle,

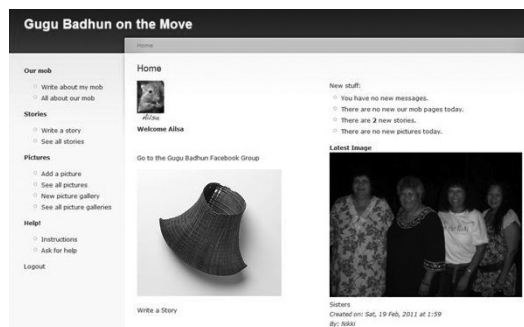


FIG. 1. website for sharing cultural heritage. Source: Madden et al., 2012



the participants experimented with using the probe to send messages to each other, post photos (both new and old) and to tell stories. After the site had been used for a year, the group met again to discuss outcomes from this cycle and next steps to take. Once these cycles had completed, Cycle Three consisted of conducting evaluation interviews and soliciting feedback regarding the collected data. It also included the formulation of possible next steps and writing up the theoretical results of the research for the PhD project. A final output of this cycle was an updated list of functionality items requested for the Women on the Move (WOTM) site.


Tied to the idea of using the website for passing on family and cultural history was the use of the site by younger members to request missing information from their elders. In one posting one of the participants related a story regarding her grandmother and great-grandmother. This entry produced one of the largest amounts of comments in response from the women. The original story is listed in figure 2; the ellipses are from the original text and do not denote omissions in this case. Dianna used them to show places where details are missing from the story and requesting for the additional information to be filled in by her relatives.

Analysis of the group interviews and technology probe showed that the group had a keen interest in utilising targeted ICT applications, especially those of the older generation who had no interest in using social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Storytelling via the technology probe emerged as a commonplace activity and provided a new mechanism of communication. Storytelling via the probe enabled the participants to mentally revisit scenes that had been highly significant to them (for both positive and negative reasons) and to reframe these incidents in ways that enhanced their feelings of wellbeing. Evidence for this is found in reports from group members that the probe activity has been very healing for them. The probe site allowed the women a platform to discuss concepts that continue to be intrinsic to their existence, and how these concepts interlink and enmesh with each other; for example the importance of connection to country, and activities regarding identity and sustainability as a group. Although all of the women posted information on the site, the older women were more prolific in their postings. In conversation with group members after the ending of the project the younger women cited lack of time as a limitation in using the site, but also a feeling that the site was about 'telling

Domestic servants
View
Edit
Track

Mon, 31/08/2009 - 2:07pm — Diane

Beware this is a sad story! but relevant to the times. Can anyone fill in the gaps / names pls and I'm curious if Nan ever told anyone else this story.



Always fascinated with the past I was always begging Nan (my mothers' mother Cecilia Gertz) to tell me about the olden days. One day out of the blue she just started telling me this story.... When I was a little girl my Mum worked for Mrs.....? we both lived and worked there at her house. We would scrub the wooden floors and cook and do all the washing. I soon realized with a heavy heart that they were domestic servants and that my Nan worked as hard as an adult even though she was just a child, at least they were together I thought. My Nan would talk fondly of the owner of the house Mrs.....? but her daughter was a mean spirited person who was at times cruel to my Nana and her Mum. On this particular day my Nan and her Mum were asked to bake cookies by Mrs. ? for an afternoon tea. Mrs. ? then went out but before she left she told my Nan and her Mum that they could have some of the cookies because they always worked so hard. Later that day my Nan as a young girl was enjoining eating some of those cookies in the sunshine when the daughter appeared - she accused my Nan of stealing the cookies and wouldn't listen to the explanation that my Nan's Mum was trying to give, that the boss of the house had given them permission to eat some. The daughter didn't want to listen, next she made my Nans Mum punish my Nan and hit her with a stick. When the boss lady returned home - she told the daughter that she did give permission for them to have some cookies and they weren't stealing, Mrs. ? gave her daughter a stern talking to but my Nans punishment for doing nothing was much worse. How hard it must of been to be a domestic servant and then how hard must it have been for her Mum to hit her when they both knew she did nothing wrong. My Nan had big expressive brown eyes and I remember the sadness in those eyes when she told me this story even 40 years after it happened it was a stand out memory of her childhood. I remember just sitting there afterwards holding my Nan's hand both of us lost in our own thoughts - my thoughts of rage, sadness, injustices of the times and how certain individuals abuse power - and I think my Nan was thinking of her Mum and the times they had together.

FIG. 2. Story from the probe site. Source: Hardy et al., 2011



old stories'. While the younger women were quite interested in the stories, they did not feel it was their place to tell the stories themselves (see Madden et. al., 2012 for further information about this study).

This case study revealed that the Gugu Badhun had three general goals in mind regarding the storage of cultural heritage data. Their first priority was the documentation of cultural knowledge and group history in an online setting and mandating appropriate access to it. In a discussion one of the participants, Ailsa, said:

Yeah it's such a pity we didn't get so much more off those old people. I'm sure our grandkids and whatever down the track will be very grateful for [recording] all that sort of stuff, otherwise you lose it. Gosh we must have been that far away from losing it. This sort of stuff keeps it alive, it's there, and um yeah, people have access to it.

Cultural restrictions, such as segregating knowledge between the genders and according to age or initiation status, is appropriate in traditional Aboriginal societies, but can be difficult to organize in westernized ICT systems. Where these restrictions are put in place, the systems often require outside intervention by repository staff rather than the community members themselves. The practical implication of this is that fine-grained differences in access are difficult to implement. In addition, the uploading of this type of knowledge may need to be handled by outsiders with limited or no understanding of these constraints. The Gugu Badhun women group opted not to set up restrictions to the knowledge conveyed on the site, due to the fact that only Gugu Badhun people had access to the site. The site was made at the initiative of the female elders, and the information they uploaded was naturally biased toward the interests and perspectives of the people who posted. Conversation with the larger group, including male elders, indicated that they would be interested to contribute to a similar site, but with more focus on the collection of documents and artefacts. The design of sites as being either inward-focused (for use by group members only) or outward-

focused (for research and education purposes for a wider audience) requires different structures for the segmenting of access.

The second goal for the Gugu Badhun women group was to provide training for younger community members using these cultural data. Although groups may make some of their data available to younger people, it is beyond the scope of large, generic repositories to create instructional media for children or young adults. Thirdly, additional projects that the Gugu Badhun, both women and men, would like to undertake include the collection of the varied records, documents and artefacts held by governmental agencies and museums that would help them articulate and sustain their identity as a group.

## DISCUSSION OF THE CASES

The groups described in the case studies held differing views regarding the purpose of the archiving systems being described. The Anangu live in their home country, on a very large area of land in central Australia. They have retained much of their traditional knowledge and use it in their day-to-day life. The Ara Irititja software systems have been deployed to various small communities and the members use it to make artefacts concerning their history available to group members and to allow them to add their knowledge regarding these objects to the database as descriptive metadata, thus adding to the rich complexity of the artefacts. All this information, including the additional comments or metadata, can then be conveyed to their descendants once it has been "captured" in the system. In contrast, the Gugu Badhun in general do not live on their traditional lands (although a small percentage do). They are a highly urbanized Indigenous group, who live across Queensland and the Northern Territory. Their primary use of an ICT system was as a communication mechanism to share cultural stories and to stay in contact with each other. The group has planned to create another system to archive cultural artefacts and documents, but has not implemented more software as they lack the funds at present to do so. The Anangu people

currently do not allow any outsider access to their data via the Internet, but the Gugu Badhun do allow certain information to be viewed by outsiders. These variations in living circumstances and relationships with non-Indigenous Australians mean that their needs for information systems vary as well.

While the two groups have differing requirements for data sharing and storage, there are many functional items that are similar enough that a generic system could address many of them. Indeed, the Ara Irititja software has been used in many different communities due to these overlapping needs. Also, when Hardy was demonstrating the Gugu Badhun software at a workshop on recording family stories, an Indigenous elder from another group stated 'We've got to get our mob one of these'. Both of these systems make heavy use of a digital artefact or story as a central focus, with community members providing additional context through descriptive metadata such as comments. Each system is themed and designed to appeal to the cultural interests of the group through the use of colour, imaging and Indigenous language rather than a more traditional Microsoft-type interface. Additionally, the development of each system took place over a period of several months or years, allowing community members a significant amount of time to provide input regarding functionality, useability, and cultural appropriateness.

The process of occupation and colonisation restricted many Indigenous people from pursuing their traditional cultural activities so it is ethically imperative that any remaining information stored in archives is returned to them. Over ten years ago, Nakata (2002) posited that the role of ICT should evolve to acknowledge the intersections of various types of knowledge, not just that of the Western world:

I would hope that the information profession would be mindful of just how complex the underlying issues are and just how much is at stake for us when the remnants of our knowledge, for some of us all that we have left to us, are the focus of so much external interest. (Nakata, 2002: 25)

While ICT cannot be disassociated from the Western world that created it (Widlok, 2013), efforts are being made to diminish the ethnocentric aspects of it by providing local groups with the ability to digitally manage their own cultural heritage. Sometimes this takes the form of alternative repositories accessible only to the group. In other situations it consists of exploiting ICT for the communities' purposes through the creation of culturally appropriate communication and archiving services. A concerted effort on the part of the system designer and the community members can lead to software that reflects much less predefined Western and researcher categories and that is better adapted to the needs and cultural categories of the Indigenous groups. The two cases show how different the situation and communication needs between different Indigenous communities can be with respect to residence, preservation of traditional knowledge, and integration in the wider Australian society. But they also show that there is sufficient overlap in the functional requirements of a digital system, supporting a living cultural heritage, such that local development and adaptation can occur from existing models and designs.

The two cases also illustrate two additional common concerns with the archiving of Indigenous cultural heritage, namely the repatriation and reappropriation of digital versions of a group's heritage; and the role of community agency in the management of this cultural heritage and data. Concerning the first issue, many of the original artefacts collected by non-Indigenous people are held in governmentally funded repositories such as museums or state and federal institutions that previously were in an authoritarian position towards Indigenous people. In the case of a physical artefact, museums will only repatriate the item to the community if the group can provide a suitable environment for the future conservation of the item. With digital versions of heritage, museums and other agencies may retain final ownership of the item even though the local community can prove that the photo or file is part of their cultural history. The burden of negotiating access to or

return of items lies normally with the community group, not with the government agency.

While developing our own net-based repository we experienced a number of these problems. The copyright for many of the images of the artefacts that we wished to show on the web site was held by museums throughout Australia. Although some were willing to allow us to use the images on our site, others were not. In the end, we were required to negotiate with each museum separately to gain permission to display the artefacts. In some cases we were able to place copies of the images on our site, in other cases we were restricted to linking to the website of the museum holding the artefact. Another problem involved the inclusion of relevant publications and other documentation. Here we ran into the problem that journals may keep the copyright of articles for 100 years, which makes it illegal to put relevant articles on a website, even if this site is only accessible for the descendants of the people from whom the information was originally collected.

The second additional issue illustrated by the cases studies concerns how community groups are facilitated to manage their own cultural heritage. This can be problematic when dealing with Westernised ICT systems. Information security roles are formulated from a Western view on information ownership and intellectual copyright. Management of access roles becomes much more complex when the system must handle group-held ownership based on initiation, age or gender (Radoll, 2009). Here the two cases show how this issue needs to be handled and solved locally. While Anangu live on their traditional lands and have opted for a solution that excluded outsiders and organised differentiated internal access, the Gugu Badhun, living dispersedly in urban environments, generally had a high level of knowledge of modern media and welcomed the Internet for their purposes. Christie and Verran (2013), working with Yolngu communities in Arnhem Land, provide other examples of local challenges and solutions, disruptions and potent possibilities.

## **CONCLUSION: DESIGNING DATABASES AND APPROPRIATING ARTEFACTS**

While the larger, institutional data archiving systems mentioned above such as DoBeS, PARADISEC and ODSAS provide assistance for the depositing of large amounts of data, they are researcher-focused rather than designed to assist communities to interact with their own cultural heritage data. This has led local groups to obtain the assistance of software developers to create systems more appropriate to their needs for recording and managing cultural heritage. The ever-changing nature of cultural practices means that the data concerning cultural heritage requires periodic updates to reflect current community practice. These locally adapted systems, by remaining lightweight and flexible in nature, can evolve with the needs of the group using the software. Based on the two case studies described in this paper, and a literature review of other research in this area, we have identified several tactics, which can provide a platform for 'best practice' in the development of digital archiving systems for Indigenous cultural heritage.

**Use of open source software.** Due to the variable nature of most community-based systems, there is not a single off-the-shelf software application that is capable of meeting the functionality requirements for these different types of environments. Software that is a so-called "black box" and unable to be adapted to the local group's needs has limited benefit to the community. In contrast, open source software (the source being the code itself that makes up the program) offers more opportunity for customising the application to suit the needs of the users. Therefore, we recommend the use of open source software, which by its very structure and purpose implies development by more than one individual. While the software is free, the development effort requires a trained IT professional to program the application to suit the specific functionality requirements. This leads us to our next suggestion.

**Support the training of Indigenous ICT professionals.** Local community groups should encourage members of their group to learn the

ICT skills necessary to work with these types of frameworks. Just as recent initiatives have been put in place to assist Indigenous people to obtain training as doctors, nurses and schoolteachers to support their communities, ICT training should be added to this list as well. As long as Indigenous people are unable to exploit ICT for their own benefit they will be put in the situation of having to request these services from the non-Indigenous community and wait upon their willingness (or not) to provide it.

**Improved software development methods needed.** Most Indigenous groups have had more contact with governmental agencies including anthropologists and social workers than with ICT professionals. This has led to a situation where very few programmers have ever worked with an Indigenous group. Cultural awareness programs can assist IT developers to acquire an understanding of cultural issues over time, but this is not an instantaneous process. The use of a cultural mentor from the community is of benefit as well, but ultimately the software development process needs to be amended to suit the cultural environment of the community. Collaborative methods such as participatory action research and user-centred design show much promise in community software design and are often cited as the most appropriate for use in this context. Due to the nature of the methodology, ICT professionals need to work with community members to develop the design, implement it, improve it, and when it has been fully adapted to the needs of the group, then make it available for community use (Madden et al., 2012).

**Enable community ownership and management of cultural data.** Community members should participate in all stages of the development of the data sharing system. This close connection with the project allows members to determine what functionality is included in the system, and how it should be designed (Madden et al., 2014). Once a data sharing system has been developed, community members will need to set up the criteria through which access to the information is permitted. In some groups like the Anangu, strict provisions must

be put in place to protect users from viewing data that is inappropriate for their gender, age and/or initiation status. Software developers should work through these issues early on, so that the access and interaction guidelines can be implemented from the very beginning. The software interface should be developed in a way that feels comfortable and appropriate for the people who will be using the system. We believe that this is only possible through a joint partnership between the developer(s) and the community members. During this development process the community should be encouraged to consider ways in which this cultural information can be re-integrated into their everyday life.

The transformation of artefacts through digitalisation creates new possibilities for their use and relevance in contemporary Aboriginal communities. In particular digitalisation can provide alternative means for sustaining a strong and dynamic cultural heritage that is of central importance to the expression and reproduction of Aboriginal group identities in the modern world. As argued above we see artefacts as complex, composite phenomena that include all the different kinds of information that are linked to the material objects. As such, artefacts are important elements in the constitution of social relations and identities. Digitalisation changes the nature of artefacts in important ways, and we wish in particular to point out the following possibilities.

1. Digitalisation via the process of digitising an object can provide an alternative for the physical repatriation of the material object itself. There can be various reasons, why physical repatriation to the descendants of the original owners is not a preferred option. These include uncertainty about provenance and ownership but also problems of management and preservation. Virtual access to images of the artefacts as well as all the connected documentation can be a good way for the concerned groups to reappropriate and use the cultural knowledge represented by the artefacts as part of a living heritage.

2. Digital databases of cultural heritage provide new and promising means for preservation and maintenance. If properly designed and sufficiently user-friendly, these databases can be used to add knowledge through ongoing annotation. This will make the included artefacts even more information rich and relevant for the social group that maintains the cultural heritage.
3. As discussed in the Gugu Badhun case, digital means of sustaining cultural heritage can also play an important role in the transfer of cultural knowledge to younger generations. As the databases we have discussed do not really cater for this specific educational purpose, this requires the development of specific tools and learning situations. Given the increasing digital literacy of young Aboriginal people, this issue may well assume high priority for institutions concerned with the maintenance and future vitality of Indigenous cultural heritage.

Thus the digitalisation of artefacts is a promising development on a number of accounts. Much will depend on whether Aboriginal communities, possibly in collaboration with research institutions, will be able to raise the necessary funds for development and implementation. In addition to the technical challenges there are serious obstacles of another nature that need to be dealt with. We have only touched upon these in our paper, but they are very real and can cause substantial delays in the implementation of workable systems, as we have experienced in our own digitalisation project. These obstacles include copyright claims and access regulations, as practiced by publishers, museums, archives and other public and private institutions. And they also include the development of workable procedures by Aboriginal communities for making decisions on management responsibilities, annotation rights, and access restrictions to culturally sensitive materials. These are big and complex issues, which need to be elaborated in another paper.

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## □ ENDNOTES

1. ARC funded project, nr. DP110102291
2. This reciprocal relationship includes not only research results but also other products such as practical solutions for local problems, material contributions and social relationships (see Otto et al, 2013, Glowczewski et al, 2013).
3. Hardy has also published on this research under the name Madden, see Madden et al, 2012.
4. Additional examples of community led projects are: (a) Mukurtu Wumpurrani-kari Archive-Tennant Creek, (b) Groot Eylandt Aboriginal Knowledge Database, (c) Warlpiri Media as a Keeping Place (Yuendumu), (d) Yanyuwa song line project and the Yanyuwa website (Borroloola).
5. See also Geismar (2012: 272-276) who discusses the openness, flexibility and accountability of a number of Australian Aboriginal digital archives including the Ara Iritija project

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