

Preface

I first encountered Carl Strehlow's work over 25 years ago whilst studying ethnology, Germanistic (German studies) and linguistics in Zürich. At the time *Die Aranda- und Loritja-Stämme in Zentral-Australien* did not strike a chord in me, although I was keenly interested in Aboriginal cultures and particularly interested in language *per se*. My interest in oral literatures was sparked by my father. In my childhood he had read to me every available collection of mythology ranging from Swiss legends, to Greek myths and Tibetan fairy-tales. Carl Strehlow's work did not seem unusual among other collections of *Mythen, Sagen und Märchen* (myths, legends and fairy-tales) found in a German context, although it seemed rather cryptic due to the lack of a glossary that explained Aranda and Loritja terms used in the translations of the indigenous texts. The collection presupposed an enormous amount of knowledge and language proficiency which I did not have at the time. It was soon returned to the library shelf.

Many years later, having worked with Aboriginal people on land and native title claims as well as on mining related issues in central Australia, I again encountered Carl Strehlow's ethnographic work during research into Western Aranda culture and country. The nature of my work provided me the opportunity to travel with Central Australian indigenous people over their traditional lands, and in time I became attuned to mythology associated with landscape and the mastery of Carl Strehlow's work, compiled in the first decade of the last century, revealed itself. *Die Aranda- und Loritja-Stämme in Zentral-Australien* and his unpublished materials described the sophistication of Aboriginal cultures that other Australian works of the time lacked.

Not only had he written the base for a successful 'claim book', which is a legal anthropological report, and compiled family trees of the people who own the country featured in these narratives, he had also compiled as Marcel Mauss expressed it 'un précieux recueil de 1500 vers aranda qui forme une sorte de Rig Veda australien' (Mauss 1913: 103).