

## Foreword

Although Chris Clarkson journeyed to the remote Victoria River region of the Northern Territory to investigate the prehistoric past, it is not the exotic location of the study that makes this an important work. Rather, it is the new intellectual landscape in which he has situated this project that created the praiseworthy volume you hold. Developing the already distinctively Australian approach to flaking technology, Clarkson presents quantified analyses of the ways artefact attributes changed during manufacture and varied through time and space. While his results are congruent with earlier generations of typological research, Clarkson has gone far beyond the constraints of arbitrary shape classifications to explore the nature of variation in artefact form, measuring shifts in tool character, standardisation and diversity. His discussion of chronological change and continuity in technological practices is powered by not only the original depiction of tools and tool production, but also his embedding of those practices in interpretations of altered land use and mobility to create an understanding of continuous, long-term adaptations.

The connecting of foraging theory and lithic interpretation has been rarely attempted in Australia, but in this work Clarkson succeeds in magnifying the interpretative power of each through identifying the significant connections between them. Regional studies of alterations in archaeological debris of tool use have formed the basis for scientific examinations of prehistoric life and cultural change for nearly a century. During much of that time descriptions of the archaeological materials remained similar, and those descriptions continued to be abstracted from interpretations of the subsistence practices of prehistoric foragers. Ultimately, those historical typological characterisations of 'traditions' and 'cultures' did not yield coherent or potent understandings of past life ways, and it is only in recent years, with the quantified expressions of reduction and reference to the articulation of technology to foraging strategies and risk, that the field has been revitalised.

This volume presents a novel and forceful model of the technological responses to past subsistence activities, a model which not only enhances our understanding of ancient life in Australia but also offers a research direction to be explored by others. Such a monograph establishes Chris Clarkson as one of the foremost figures in a new and exciting generation of Australian archaeologists who are seeking to embed technically sophisticated analyses in broad and theoretically robust explanations of Australia's human past.

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