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We are bosses ourselves: the status and role of Aboriginal women today. Edited by Fay Gale. Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1983. Pp. 186. Numerous black and white illustrations. \$16.90 h.c. \$10.90 p.b.

Many voices speak in this book. Most pick up on an essential theme – the imposition of European values in interpretations and expectations of gender relations in Aboriginal society. The question is, who will hear and who will heed the critique?

The collection is drawn from contributions to a conference on Aboriginal women held in 1980 at the ANZAAS Congress in Adelaide. The editor, Fay Gale, writes:

This is a women's book; it is about women and mainly by women, and its most telling message is of the strength and solidarity of Aboriginal women in enormously different situations. (p. 1)

Most of the contributors are Aboriginal women. They came to the conference from various parts of the country, including remote areas, and from a great diversity of backgrounds. There are also papers from others but the conference was organised so as to make participation possible for Aboriginal women and to ensure that the information presented would be accessible to them. To this end, while there was a number of written papers there were also oral and taped contributions. Nor was it necessary to speak English in order to contribute as translators and interpreters were available. One presentation was both translated and interpreted thus spotlighting issues such as the possible loss of meaning in direct translation or the room for injection of meaning in interpretation. The latter has the plasticity to be made a vehicle for either quite specific messages or generalised discussion.

It is principally European participants who explicitly draw out the argument that the gender gulf and the restrictive and devalued position of women in European culture is inappropriately translated to Aboriginal society, with damaging consequences for both men and women. The point is, however, also strikingly embedded in the papers – written and oral – of the Aboriginal women who describe not only features of their role in traditional society and more recent and satisfying adaptations but their unhappy experiences of and critical reactions to a coercive behavioural model from another society.

An expectation of dependence of women on men, which has shackled Australian women of European descent in economic, political and general social terms has been part of the package of white ways thrust on Aborigines. The message in many of the papers is that this expectation was and is inappropriate in the context of traditional communities and has given rise to a number of social contradictions in that the position and role of both Aboriginal men and Aboriginal women has become grossly distorted. Boyle writes that Aboriginal woman may have coped better with the changes demanded of her:

But at the same time she has conflicting odds against her. She is being forced to play the role of the submissive sex in the wider society but at the same time forced to play the role of the dominant sex within the Aboriginal society because of the frustrations and alienation of the Aboriginal men, which has been brought about by the racism and class structure in this country. (p. 47)

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For Aboriginal women the conference obviously provided a sympathetic forum in which to express their concerns about Aboriginal society and their position in it. One of the threads drawn through the work is the socially corrosive effects of the unquestioned European assumption that ultimately social responsibility is vested in the individual. We see clearly that the stress on individualism generates difficulties and problems of many orders since Aboriginal values and behaviours are framed within a notion of the social collective and an understanding of collective responsibility.

Another theme, explicit in a number of papers, implicit in others, is the importance of land as a source of food, identity and social and spiritual belonging. That women have been virtually overlooked in non-Aboriginal views of Aboriginal/land relationships is a basis for misunderstanding of their position in traditional society and a source of frustration and anger for them. Other concerns, such as education and health and recognition of the importance of kin associations are commonly experienced and expressed.

Not all information presented, however, is coherently tied together. Different emphases may in part account for this. One of the papers is at pains to stress that women *contribute* to the ritual life of the group but, as described, their contribution appears secondary, their principle responsibilities being domestic. This interpretation sits uneasily with other arguments advancing the significance of women's social and ritual responsibilities. The community specifically cited is not what might be called a traditional community. It is, however, a traditionally oriented community adapting old behaviours and beliefs to changing circumstances. The apparent lack of coherence is, in this case, more than a difference in emphasis. It emerges because people are saying different things for different groups in quite different social circumstances. It is scarcely surprising that urban women would want to describe and stress some aspects of their life, women from dependent settlements others and women from independent communities others again. The incoherence reflects this diversity. It is an expression of the reality of Aboriginal existence today which does not diminish the binding force of common experiences and common concerns — the women's business — which is, after all, what the book is about.

GRETCHEN POINER

THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

Daughters of the Dreaming. By Diane Bell. George Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1983. Pp. 297. Black and white plates, index. \$14.95 p.b.

Diane Bell in this book has made significant contributions to various aspects of Aboriginal history. She writes that 'all the women I know at Warrabri who are over sixty can recount stories of the 1928 massacres' (p. 42), and that she 'was able to press older women for more life history material, to explore their memories of their first contacts with white men and to record their accounts of their role on cattle stations' (pp. 43-44). The women were a mine of stories and she pieced these stories together to recreate something of the women's life before the advent of Europeans and the enormous disruption that followed, including accounts of the 'killing-times' of the late

nineteen-twenties. The nineteen-forties memories are of the coming of the missionaries, the forcible gathering of most of the Central Australian people into settlements and the removal from their mothers of part-Aboriginal children. Finally to the settlement at Warrabri were brought Kaytej, Warlpiri, Alyawarra and Warumungu, speakers of different languages, who still keep mostly to themselves and distrust the others. Warrabri itself is on Kaytej land — a fact which was not considered when the administrators moved a mixture of language speakers there. This has been a continued source of tension.

Bell disclaims any intention to write the history of the peoples now resident at Warrabri, but rather 'I am exploring the context within which the shift was effected from a hunter-gatherer mode of existence to a sedentary life style . . . I am seeking answers to my questions concerning the nature of the changes in woman's worlds, and hence in her role and status' (p. 47). Bell claims that pronouncements by previous writers that Aboriginal men had a much higher status than women both in secular and religious affairs were because these writers, mostly male, assumed that such conditions were the same as in the society that they themselves inhabited. Moreover European settlers, missionaries and administrators allotted to Aboriginal men all the important tasks, while consulting them and not the women for all major decisions, so that women became only wives and mothers, subservient to their husbands, losing their previous role of essential food providers. Bell claims that neither the men nor the women she knew at Warrabri accepted the new differential status. This is where my own research findings did not coincide with hers. Looking back over my time spent with Pitjantjatjara speakers, I felt that the men took advantage of what the Europeans expected of them and asserted increased power over women, while the women in turn took advantage of European expectations to assert their power where they could — for example in supporting daughters who wished to marry the husbands of their own choice rather than the men to whom they were promised. The net effect was to increase tension between the sexes. However one should beware of the common mistake of assuming that all Aboriginal societies were similar and that all have reacted in the same way to European contact. I believe that the Yalata people, among whom I spent most time, suffered more drastic changes than the Kaytej.

Although Bell had worked hard to learn Warlpiri in preparation for her original plan of working with Warlpiri women, it was on Kaytej women that her study became centred, partly because they showed more desire to have her with them, and partly because she discovered that the Kaytej women's *jilimi*, 'the home of the ritually powerful and respected leaders, was the focus of activities in the main Kaytej camp for men and women alike' (p. 110). Others who have carried out research in Aboriginal communities have found that what they learn and from whom they learn is a function of their age, sex and marital status. A young male researcher will gain knowledge appropriate to young Aboriginal men, an older man may learn ritual secrets known only to older men. (It is of course for this reason that until recently so little was known about Aboriginal women, nearly all researchers having been male.) To Diane Bell, a woman with growing children but without a husband, were revealed the secrets of the *jilimi*, the area of the camp set aside for widows, women living temporarily or permanently apart from their husbands, and the daily retreat and meeting place for all the women. It is in the *jilimi* that women's affairs are discussed and women's rituals

planned. The Kaytej *jilimi* was the site for Bell of much essential learning about items of women's life and behaviour. Here she had lessons on how to behave properly as a Kaytej woman, and the more she imbibed this knowledge and acted accordingly the more the other women treated her as one of themselves. They expected her to join in all their activities, both in daily tasks and in women's ceremonies, according to the kinship status and subsection affiliation which she had been given.

An important part of this learning concerned women's ties to the land and the ceremonies they continue to perform for maintaining and caring for it. Rights are inherited from both parents so that a woman is *kirda* for her father's country and *kurdungulu* for her mother's father's. As *kirda*, women 'had to dance for the country and wear designs for the dreamings and places in the country. . . . The *kurdungulu* women had to sing, paint the *kirda*, and ensure that the law was correctly followed' (p. 20). Bell's knowledge of women's relationships to their ancestral land played an essential part in her success when, after completing her original research, she assisted various Aboriginal groups to present their claims before the Northern Territory land claim hearings. In a number of hearings women appeared before the judge to assert the claim.

It is not only to sustain their country that women perform ceremonies. They take responsibility for the nurturance, health and welfare of their community. Bell witnessed special rituals to heal the sick and to maintain good health, both physical and mental, as well as learning about medicinal plants and other cures. She discusses a further type of ritual, *yilpinji*, usually translated as love magic, though in fact possessing much more positive functions, such as maintaining proper relations between men and women.

The author, during her eighteen months' residence at Warrabri, participated with other women both in Warlpiri and Alyawarra initiation cycles and began to understand the complementary and cooperative roles of the women. Vital knowledge she gained at this time was the central part which the women play in arranging the betrothals of the boys being initiated. At the beginning of the cycle, during a night of dancing, the older women review each boy's potential mothers-in-law and finally each boy's mother chooses her son's mother-in-law, whose daughter should later become his wife. Bell's findings run counter to previous reports, by men who have witnessed initiation ceremonies, (e.g. Meggitt)¹ that it is the boy's male relatives who choose the circumcisor and thus settle the descent line of his future wife (or wives). Bell discusses this paradox at some length and admits she was not able to gain an entirely satisfactory answer except that the partners in the arranged marriage were left with a degree of choice.

Bell's book is significant not only for Aboriginal history, but also for the history of the anthropology of Aboriginal Australia. It is only the fourth book written by a female anthropologist about Aboriginal women. The forerunners are Kaberry, C.H. Berndt and Goodale.² In addition there have been collections of papers about various aspects of Aboriginal women's life, notably those edited by Gale³ and a number of articles.

How then does *Daughters of the Dreaming* rate against previous writings? Kaberry opened a whole new chapter when she proclaimed unequivocally that Aboriginal women had economic autonomy, were individuals in their own right and not merely

their husbands' chattels. Moreover they performed significant religious ceremonies of their own, countering Durkheim's pronouncement that men could become sacred, women remained always profane. Catherine Berndt in her monograph on women's ceremonies goes further than Kaberry in exemplifying women's religious autonomy. Jane Goodale writing about her fieldwork on Melville Island in the late nineteen-fifties stressed that Tiwi women had secular and religious equality with men (on Bathurst and Melville Islands women do not have separate ceremonies as they do in the Centre and West). Diane Bell devotes some pages of her book to discussing existing literature about Aboriginal women, so I merely remark that Bell had these previous writings to build on and went further in annotating the significance for the whole community of the women's ceremonies, in caring for the land, in maintaining health and welfare and in the arrangement (and maintenance) of marriages. Her book therefore represents a major contribution to our knowledge of past and present Aboriginal societies and demonstrates the significance of women in every aspect of community existence. To quote her own words 'What I saw was a strong, articulate and knowledgeable group of women who were substantially independent of their menfolk in economic and ritual terms' (p. 231).

¹ See 1962: 299-300.

² Kaberry 1939; C.H. Berndt 1950; Goodale 1971.

³ Gale 1970 and 1983.

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The Canadian Journal of Native Studies. Vol. III, No. 2 Special Issue: Development and Planning: After Land Claims. Editor Samuel W. Corrigan.

This volume of the *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 'examines concerns to land claim settlements in Canada, with a special emphasis upon the twin topics of long range planning and economic development' (Introduction). Why is there stress on 'economic development', and why is 'development' considered to be important following the settlement of claims? The reason in Canada is similar to that in Aboriginal Australia: without an adequate economic base, self-management will not be possible. And further, without an adequate concession to Native or Aboriginal structures, imposed political and economic structures are not only likely to fail, but are also contrary to the notion of self-determination.

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Native affairs in both Canada and Australia have many interesting parallels; both countries have political systems derived from British political structures. There are also differences. For example, unlike Canada, no treaties have been signed by the original inhabitants of Australia.

Many of the contributions to the Journal deal with particular cases (for example, Mineral Rights on Indian Reserves in Ontario; Algonquian Land Tenure and State Structures in the North; Planning and Development after the James Bay Agreement), and thus the reader who is not a specialist in Canadian Native studies, but is rather, say, involved in Aboriginal Australia, will get most interest from those articles which concern similar problems to those in their own fields, or supply relevant comparative material.

A most interesting article is that of Wertman (Planning and Development after the James Bay Agreement). This is in part because it articulates well with Australian Aboriginal situations, revealing similarities and contrasts, but also because it examines social history and the reasons for present-day structures and the problems encountered by the Cree after the James Bay Agreement. In Aboriginal Australia, just as with the Cree, it has been confirmed that comparative studies in, say, social impact assessment, are difficult, because each community has had a different contact history, can vary in mission (and other) affiliation, and therefore can vary in membership of external networks. These factors mean that negotiations for land settlements (of whatever kind) begin with little sense of regional, let alone national, identity. Wertman lists positive and negative outcomes of negotiations – and these are similar to Australian cases: the dependence on non-Native advisers, increase in bureaucratisation, increasing dependence on 'compensation' money to pay for basic services, and a lack of direction and objectives regarding development.

Dacks points out in his article (Worker Controlled Native Enterprises: A Vehicle for Community Development in Northern Canada?) that governments prefer to give economic rights to Natives, rather than giving them enduring legal rights or political institutions. At the same time, governments seem incapable of relating traditional values to the context of contemporary economic activity. The remedy, as Dacks sees it, is to form Native companies, which ensure there is no incompatibility of values between employer and employees, and no racial basis to that interaction. Nevertheless, there are still likely to be problems in the Native corporate structures that emerge – for example, the interests of the individual and those of the group need not be congruent.

Davidson (Indian Economic Development in *The Indian News* (1954-1982)) examines economic development as reflected in the 'flavour' of an Indian Affairs newspaper. The paper provided, in the 1950s, stories of Indians who made it, modelling themselves on other successful Indians (in whose terms?), and was a propaganda sheet for the Indian Affairs Bureau in the early 1960s, talking of Indian employment but not mentioning information related to wages, working conditions, safety standards, unions . . . When the newspaper was taken over by Indians from the late 1960s on, the information offered was expanded considerably, and drew in a wide range of Indian organisations. Information offered was expanded, and outside news of interest to Indians was also included. Ultimately the paper had to be severed from the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, because the latter was accountable

to Parliament, yet this accountability placed the newspaper's independence in jeopardy. And one wonders in what ways the 'newsletters' of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the Northern Territory's Department of Aboriginal Liaison are accountable to, or useful to, Aborigines. What purpose do they really serve?

Smith's article (The Role of Basic Needs and Provisions in Planning and Development) draws on experience in Jamaica. There are arguments presented concerning the measurement of 'development', particularly the inadequacy of GNP and GDP criteria, and an argument is put for the inclusion of services in the measurement of GNP. Modern society requires goods and planning, and so education, health, housing, legal structures, and so on are prerequisites of such a society, no less indispensable than energy or raw materials. Social services are required to allow people to participate in society and the economy, otherwise those people become marginal. One also should consider that sport and entertainment improve the quality of life (as well as forming minor industries), and therefore should be taken into account in measuring the well-being of a society. There is, however, no extrapolation made about preserving traditional values.

Following the Special Issue articles, there is a 'Policy/Discussion' section. Here, Hon. T.R. Berger, in describing the background to Native claims and drawing on his experience in the MacKenzie Valley pipeline inquiry, makes the point that Native claims are for more than just land; they also encompass resources (both renewable and non-renewable), education, health and social services, public order and the shape and composition of political entities. He also makes the point that by ensuring the rights of Indians, one is ensuring the rights of others (and not necessarily minorities) who want to be different.

In the section entitled 'Native Studies', the paper by McCaskill (Native Economic Development and Small Business Management Course: An Experimental Partnership Between a Native Association and a University) concerns local employment schemes. The problems in rural Canada are similar to those in rural Australia: since there are few business, accountancy and similar skills locally, either non-locals have to be employed, or unskilled people carry out the work. The former is of little benefit to the community, while the latter usually leads to failure of the project. Indeed, in Australia, unskilled non-locals often fill positions, and so both outcomes occur. McCaskill then goes on to describe a course in Native economic development and small business management, developed by the Department of Native Studies at Trent University, in conjunction with a Native economic development association, Native Five Alliance. There were a number of problems, including the diversity of backgrounds of the students, diversity of ages, academic skills, confidence. Major self-image changes were required: the disadvantaged had to become managers. The course included undertaking a study of needs and resources for economic development in a home community (in fact, one of the selection criteria for students was their desire to return to their community), identification of suitable financing sources, and the consideration of the relationships between Native traditions, and business development in Native communities. There were problems in the conflict between the educational norms of the University (such as in student selection criteria) and those of the Alliance (who were accused of political bias in the selection of the students). There were problems of outcome: a new cadre of skilled leaders, who were a potential threat to existing political

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leadership (in which case bias in the selection of students might be seen as maintaining the political peace of the community, or as self-interest in maintaining it). Nevertheless, the programme was judged to be a success, and this warts-and-all picture has interesting possibilities for the Australian situation.

The volume concludes with book reviews and reviews of other media, including films.

Other volumes of the Journal show that entire issues are sometimes addressed to particular topics (such as: The Metis since 1870, Learning for Self-Determination: Community-Based Options for Native Training and Research), also with Policy/Discussion and Native Studies articles. This Journal can be seen to have interesting possibilities in comparative Australian and Canadian Native studies, in showing up differences and similarities. One could only wish for the provision of maps for those unsure of all locations mentioned. The covers of the Journal are a delight.

SUE KESTEVEN

AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF ABORIGINAL STUDIES

Australian Aborigines: the languages and customs of several tribes of Aborigines in the Western District of Victoria, Australia. By James Dawson. George Robertson, Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide, 1881. Facsimile edition, plus new Introduction by J. Critchett. Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. Canberra, 1981. Pp. 112 + CIV. \$14.95 (hard cover).

Staunch defender of Aboriginal rights during unsympathetic times, James Dawson first arrived in the fledgling colony of Victoria (then Port Phillip) in 1840, a few years following the siting of Melbourne. He settled in the Port Fairy region of the Western District and with his daughter, Isabella, familiarised himself with the languages and customs of the local Aboriginal people, especially those who resided in the region between the Hopkins River and Portland. Dawson's public support of the Aboriginal people led him to criticise the attitude and behaviour of European society towards Aborigines, including the 'Religious advice from men holding Magnificent Estates from which the Aborigines were expelled and massacred wholesale' (Introduction). In spite of this, indeed as acknowledgement of his commitment to the Aboriginal community, he was appointed Local Guardian of Aborigines in the Camperdown area in 1876.

The Dawsons' accounts of Aboriginal languages and customs appeared in newspapers of the day, such as *The Australasian*; finally Dawson drew together this information for publication in the present volume. An amateur ethnographer, he relied closely on the testimony of a few key Aboriginal informants, such as Yuruun Parpur Tarneen, 'Chiefess' of the Mopor, or Spring Creek, people. He claimed to have double-checked all the text with his Aboriginal assistants, a process taking several years to accomplish. In this regard, he can be distinguished somewhat from his contemporaries, such as Smyth (1878), Howitt (1904) and Curr (1886-87), who relied heavily upon correspondence rather than direct interview when compiling their ethnographies.

Dawson was also a staunch critic of government policy concerning Aborigines. He

opposed, for example, the setting aside of reserves, (such as Framlingham and Lake Condah) to which Aboriginal people were removed from their traditional homelands. He was critical of the choice of location for the reserves, which were often on inferior ground, and of the restrictions to personal freedom imposed on Aborigines. He supported the Aborigines' claims for payment for labour carried out on the reserves. He felt that such reserves destroyed morale as well as Aboriginal society and culture. He opposed the later subdivision of Framlingham, an issue which has recently been revived (nearly one hundred years later) as a source of modern Aboriginal Land Rights claims.

In his day a rather unique humanitarian, Dawson was still fighting the good fight on behalf of Aborigines in his ninety-third year, as Victorian Parliamentary Debates record (Introduction).

For the most part, Dawson's account of Aboriginal life in the Western District of Victoria is detailed and informative, containing references to ceremonial performances and myths through to aspects of daily life which are often lacking in contemporary ethnographies. In these aspects his work was well received. His overriding aim was to counter the disparaging image of Australian Aboriginal culture as barbarous and inferior to the European, with few redeeming features.

In contrast, he presents a picture of a well-peopled district, involved in complex social relations. Intercourse between neighbouring and/or hostile groups, speaking different dialects and languages, was mediated by a complex of social, ceremonial and trading events. These included spectacular and large-scale mass hunts, held in the centre of the district in summer, involving large numbers of people drawn from a variety of language groups. Large groups of people were also observed on other occasions associated with the acquisition of key natural resources, such as eels, whales and native fruit. As well as extensive trading networks, exchange meetings took place, which involved the circulation of prestigious items, such as greenstone axes (Cf. McBryde 1978).

Dawson writes of the displays of shamanism, given by leading initiated men of influence, on occasions following inter-group festivities. These meetings were often arranged by such politically powerful males, as were the mass hunts. Competitive games, such as football and wrestling, were performed on these occasions. Dawson also describes the wide range of weaponry made and used by males of different social groups. This equipment included elaborately carved clubs, 'scimitars', boomerangs, war spears and shields. They were used as much for display as for combat. Obviously we have evidence here for complex territorial inter-group and inter-personal relations, which have been formalised to some extent by the development of a specific material culture.

Dawson writes at length of subsistence activities, and the range of technological equipment employed. Perhaps, the widest-ranging practices were associated with fishing which was performed in a variety of ways, and took place both in the day-time as well as at night. Eels of course were the prized species and captured in substantial weirs, traps and by large-scale excavated drainage ditches in areas of inundation.

Dawson emphasises the importance of vegetable foods, in particular the tuber, called 'muurang' (murnong), which can be identified as the yam-daisy, *Microseris scapigera*. 'When several families live near each other and cook their roots together,

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sometimes the baskets form a pile three feet high. The cooking of the muurang entails a considerable amount of labour on the women, inasmuch as the baskets are made by them; and as these often get burnt, they rarely serve more than twice' (p. 20).

Storage appears to have been attempted at times in association with eels and other meat (which were cooked or dried) whale meat (which was buried in quantity as were eels), and acacia gum, which was tapped from trees at the end of summer and stored in balls for winter usage.

Fire was used extensively to aid hunting and also as a land management technique. Open areas were fired to facilitate harvesting yams, and dried out overgrown swamps were cleared in summer to expose food for birds. Such practices must also have helped to extend areas of open vegetation, thus favouring certain species, among them tubers (see also Gott 1982), as well as rejuvenating swamplands. Today, the use of fire in a similar fashion is considered an ecologically sound practice in the management of wetlands.

By the time Dawson's book was published traditional Aboriginal settlement patterns had to be more or less reconstructed, with the inclusion even of archaeological information. He writes that earth mounds were still very numerous throughout the Western District, and that they 'were the sites of large, permanent habitations, which formed homes for many generations. The great size of them, and the vast accumulation of burnt earth, charcoal and ashes which is found in and around them, is accounted for by the long continuance of the domestic hearth, the decomposition of the building materials and the debris arising from their frequent destruction by bushfires' (p. 103). He denied that the mounds were ovens, which he explains as a popular misconception, and he tested his theories by the excavation of one large mound, sixty five feet in diameter and five feet high. In this way he can be acknowledged as one of our earliest amateur ethnoarchaeologists.

In his documentation of language groups and social relations, of subsistence and settlement patterns, and even of population estimates, Dawson's work can be supported by the written accounts of others, such as G.A. Robinson, who was Protector of Aborigines (1839-1849) and toured the Western District at the time Dawson first arrived there. Further support can be derived from the works of Smyth (1878) and Howitt (1904), which largely concern other parts of Victoria. Indeed, I have employed Dawson's work extensively in my own ethnohistorical research on southwestern Victoria (Lourandos 1977, 1980a, 1980b) and found him to be an invaluable source of information, as well as adhering quite closely in most respects to the accounts of the above writers.

In addition, Dawson provides us with a wealth of other information, including marriage systems, naming of persons, superstitions and diseases, death and burial, together with notes on the avenging of death, and myths. One intriguing myth may include a historical reference to megafauna. The extinct giant emu, it was stated, which was speared by hunters concealed in trees, was last seen near the town of Hamilton, during a time 'when the volcanic hills were in a state of eruption' (p. 92). Recent geomorphological evidence suggests that volcanoes were still active in the Western District even during Holocene times, thus lending some credence to these myths (Ollier and Joyce 1973). There is even a mythological reference to the bunyip.

Dawson also provides us with information on the spread of smallpox and of the resulting decimation of Aboriginal populations. He records Aboriginal songs and stories which told of this crisis and which were carried south into Victoria from affected regions in New South Wales.

Contemporary criticism of Dawson's work however, centred upon one key issue, and it has coloured to some extent the general evaluation of his work ever since. Dawson claimed that Western District Aboriginal society was socially stratified along class lines and that overriding authority was in the hands of hereditary chieftans. Curr vehemently opposed this contention, claiming that no such authority structure existed in Australian Aboriginal society and his viewpoint has remained generally accepted to this day. 'Chief' is a title usually reserved by present-day anthropologists for ranked societies such as those of Polynesia. In contrast, they point to the bulk of the societies which make up Melanesia (including Papua New Guinea) as being more egalitarian in structure and largely composed of autonomous units, bound by kinship but with power residing informally in the hands of prominent males or 'big men'. Australian Aboriginal societies share many similarities with the latter Melanesian groups; thus it is not surprising that Dawson's claim appears a little extraordinary. The task at hand, however, is surely to re-evaluate his information more carefully. He may have been documenting aspects of Aboriginal society concerning degrees of power, prestige and status, lost to us through the breakdown of their society during the volatile period of culture contact. The degree of complex social interaction, of corporate subsistence activities (such as mass hunts, large-scale excavated drainage systems, large dams and weirs) may have allowed for significant power and status to be exercised by prominent individuals. Extensive and prestigious trade (e.g. greenstone axes), shamanism, together with differing levels of polygyny (aspects of life in Victoria as well as other parts of Australia), may have served to intensify such concentrations of power. Dawson's ambiguous terminology ('chief' and the like) may be misleading us.

Anthropological case examples such as those of the Tiwi of Melville and Bathurst Islands, off the Arnhem Land coast (Hart and Pilling 1960), attest to the existence of authority figures, or 'big men', as the ethnographers referred to them. Such individuals, together with their power bases, also were to be found in other parts of Australia (e.g. Elkin 1945). Indeed, Dawson's claim of a hereditary transference of power was in some ways supported by Howitt who wrote of a semi-hereditary practice in other parts of southeastern Australia, such as among the *Wiradjuri* (1904: 303). Stahle (Howitt 1904: 305-6) independently came to similar conclusions for the *Gunditjmara* of south-western Victoria. Pilling (1968) argues for a general uniformity of social institutions throughout Australia, including the south-east, but he may have overlooked more subtle aspects of the power game. After all, the general 'big man' system of Melanesia includes a very wide range of variation, so it is not implausible to suggest that a broad range may have existed in Australian societies. Such fragile formations, lacking clear cut formal structures, would have been among the first aspects of Australian Aboriginal societies to disappear, long before the arrival of the anthropologist. The rather patronising attitudes of later Europeans towards Aboriginal society would also have served to eradicate the operation and perhaps awareness of past authority figures.

It is now time to assess this material more carefully in light of recent theoretical

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debates concerning the development of such power structures in non-stratified societies. Also important is the association between these social structures and the organisation of production. These issues concern hunter-gatherers just as much as Melanesian horticulturalists, as is exemplified by the connection between large-scale man-made drainage systems, eeling and inter-group occasions in the Western District of Victoria (Lourandos 1980a, 1980b, 1983).

Problems such as these raise doubts concerning the accuracy of our assessment or knowledge of traditional Aboriginal societies, especially those of the more Europeanised parts of the continent, such as southeastern Australia. The work of Dawson, among others, may lead us to accept that a wider range of societies and cultures existed in 1788, a conclusion arrived at by recent investigations (e.g. Butlin 1983). In such a climate of opinion even some of the more controversial writings of a man of conscience, like Dawson, may receive a more sympathetic hearing.

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Australian Aborigines: The languages and customs of several tribes of Aborigines in the Western District of Victoria, Australia. By James Dawson. George Robertson, Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide, 1881.

Facsimile edition, with new Introduction by J. Critchett. Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1981. Pp. 112+ CIV. \$14.95.

This facsimile edition has been published one hundred years after the original edition. It would be difficult to think of a work that has stood the test of time to the same degree as Dawson's. When it was first published the book was outstanding: it was a sympathetic and detailed account of Aboriginal traditions and vocabularies from the Western District, well ahead of its time. A hundred years later the knowledge preserved in Dawson's book remains as a unique record of a culture that was.

The Introduction to the facsimile edition, written by Jan Critchett provides valuable historical information on James Dawson and gives a warm personal account of the man. She criticises him over his views on 'chiefs' and 'chiefesses' quoting both E.M. Curr¹ and the general evaluation of Dawson by P. Corris.² The situation is however not nearly as clear-cut as Jan Critchett would have us believe: Aboriginal society was not as universally egalitarian as Curr thought. There were always ritual leaders and men more equal than others, and this was presumably the case in the Western District. Dawson did not misrepresent the situation; he interpreted it in a European manner. The most recent analysis of the problem, by Hiatt,³ shows that Dawson's views cannot simply be dismissed.

Dawson gives a sensitive and detailed description of customs, foods and kinships, the only topic on which his sympathies have obviously broken down altogether is music: 'Little can be said in favour of the Aboriginal music. The airs are monotonous and doleful, and there is no such thing as harmony' (p. 80). Nevertheless he gives an account of ceremonies and meetings and does much to document the sociology of the Western District Aborigines.

The second half of Dawson's book consists of a general vocabulary of three Western District languages, followed by specialised vocabularies of fauna, flora and kinship terms and finally there is a section 'Grammar and Sentences'. The three languages are:

- *Chaap wuorong*, 'soft lip' the language of the 'Kolor' tribe, who according to Dawson once occupied the Dunkeld, Wickliffe, Lake Boloke and Caramut areas;
- *Kuurn kopan noot* 'small lip', which was spoken further to the south-west;
- *Peek whurrong*, 'kelp lip', the language of the Port Fairy tribe, who lived still further to the south-west.

It is clear from Dawson's work that these last two languages were so closely related that they should in fact be considered as dialects of one language. R.H. Mathews⁴ calls

¹ 1886, I: 55.

² 1968: 19.

³ 1984.

⁴ 1904: 57.

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this language *Dhauhurtwurru*. R.M.W. Dixon,⁵ in a map showing the language distribution of the south-east of Australia, has included both under a heading which he calls F2.

Chaap wuurong was considerably different. It was a dialect of Western Kulin, which was spoken over a large area further north. R.H. Mathews⁶ was already aware of this and R.M.W. Dixon⁷ has dispelled subsequent misapprehensions on this matter. He has listed *Chaap wuurong* with the Western Kulin languages which he calls H1.

Dawson's testimony is all the more important since, tragically, all these languages are now extinct. In 1963, while searching for the remnants of Victorian languages I was fortunate enough to meet Mr Angus Alberts, from Lake Condah. This was very shortly before his death, and the recording, however brief, gives at least some indication of what the language of the Portland – Port Fairy area must have sounded like. There was no one who could recall *Chaap wuurong*, but it is possible to interpret data on this language in the light of the more northerly dialects of Western Kulin, particularly *Wergaia* from the Lake Hindmarsh area: in 1963 there still people who could recall an extensive vocabulary in *Wergaia*.⁸

Nothing can detract from Dawson's achievement in helping us, and hopefully future generations, to appreciate information that would otherwise be lost. The re-edition of the book provides a good opportunity for taking a closer look at the language material.

The weakest part of the work would appear to be the section entitled 'Grammar and Sentences'. The main problem was that Dawson could not get away from the idea, widespread in his day, that 'the Native Grammar is very meagre' (lxxxv). In spite of this a lot can be gleaned from the section: Dawson may not have been able to present a grammatical analysis, but he could obviously 'hear' the language and put down in a comprehensible fashion what he heard. He only gave sentences in *Kuurn kopan noot*, so we have a single system of internal evidence. How this can help to give the possibility of an improved analysis can be shown by the following examples.

We read (p. xcv):

They killed the dog.

Burtanoot daaelakanare kaal.

Killed the dog.

This analysis shows signs of the nineteenth century preoccupation with articles: Dawson here interprets the demonstrative (and third person) pronoun as an article 'the'. But he lists *daelakanaree* as the third person plural pronoun 'they', (p. lxxxviii).

We might therefore suggest an improved interpretation:

They killed the dog.

Burtanoot daaelakanare kaal.

Killed they dog.

⁵ 1980: 241.

⁶ 1902: 85.

⁷ 1980: 263.

⁸ Hercus 1969: 111.

In his *Dhauhurtwurru* grammar R.H. Mathews states⁹ that 'verbs have the same numbers and persons as the pronouns'; in other words a bound pronoun subject marker is suffixed to the tense form of the verb.

This is exactly the same situation as in *Wergaia*, the Kulin language to the north of *Kuurn Kopan Noot*. The verb can appear in any position in the sentence. This is opposed to the more complex situation in the more north-easterly Kulin language *Wembawemba*, where the bound pronoun subject can appear only with the head-word of a sentence. Dawson's work is therefore vital in showing us there was some kind of regional similarity between the languages of the Western District. This regional similarity encompassed those which were genetically 'Kulin' languages, like *Chaap wuurong* and *Wergaia*, as well as those of the far southern coastal variety like *Kuurn Kopan Noot*.

Using the evidence supplied by Dawson himself in various other sentences we can see that there was a suffix -oot, sometimes written -oort and -uut which marked the third person plural:

They will burn down your dwelling.

Pappakuut wuurn gnuutaeen.

Burn wuurn yours.

We can also see from a number of other examples that -n- (Kulin -n-) marked the past and -k- the future. A more detailed analysis of the first sentence is therefore possible:

They killed the dog.

Burtanoot daaelakanarae kaal.

burta- n -oot daaelakanarae kaal.

kill - PAST - 3pl they dog.

Similarly for the second sentence:

They will burn down your dwelling.

Pappakuut wuurn gnuutaeen

pappa-k -uut wuurn gnuutaeen.

Burn -FUTURE - 3pl wuurn yours.

There is some inconsistency in the notation of final -a, nevertheless there is no doubt that -a, as noted also by Mathews marks the agent, the ergative case. This can be illustrated by a sentence from p.xci:

The dog bit him.

Puundan deen kaal a.

Bit dog

This can now be analysed as:

puunda- n deen kaal- a.

Bite PAST this dog - ERG.

Dawson thought that the grammar of *Kuurn Kopan Noot* was simple; he had no idea of its intricacies, but he wrote down what he heard. R.H. Mathews realised that the languages were very complex, and thought that the best way of explaining them was to simplify them. He says:

⁹ 1904: 60.

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It should be stated that in all the expressions illustrating the several cases of nouns in this article the demonstrative pronouns are purposely omitted, for the two-fold purpose of saving space, and of avoiding confusion by introducing any more words than are really required . . .¹⁰

R.H. Mathews knew that languages had rules and systems and he was apt to get rid of irregularities. Dawson made no attempt to force any regularity. It seems that if one day he heard something sounding a little different, he simply put it down a little different. Despite the resulting inconsistencies we must thank him for it. What he wrote down gives the impression of living reality.

The type of inconsistency that appears in Dawson's work can best be seen from the vocabulary. It is well known that we cannot expect a word for word equivalence between English and Australian languages. By juxtaposing some of the items where there is an overlap we can see how Dawson proceeded:

English	<i>Chaap wuurong</i>	<i>Kuurn kopan noot</i>	<i>Peek whurrong</i>
Bad	<i>Pirnaewuuchuup</i>	<i>Warrakeek laeak</i>	<i>Gnumeen char</i>
Wild	<i>Pirna wuuchuup</i>	<i>Warrakeek laek</i>	<i>Warrakeek laek</i>
Anger	<i>Pirnawuchuup</i>	<i>Warrakealeek</i>	<i>Watee leek</i>
Wrong	<i>Porn porn jaa</i>	<i>Gnummee kuunan</i>	<i>Gnumme kuunan</i>
Bird	<i>Yowwir</i>	<i>Muttal</i>	<i>Muttal</i>
Body	<i>Pengneeung uratt</i>	<i>Turang muttnaen</i>	<i>Turang muttnaen</i>
Flesh	<i>Ping yin</i>	<i>Tuurap muttnin</i>	<i>Tuuramp muttal</i>
(for food)			
Flesh, human	<i>Beng guuk</i>	<i>Tuurap neung</i>	<i>Muttal</i>
Flesh of whale	<i>Banggok</i>	<i>Tuurap neung</i>	

These and many other examples could be cited to show how Dawson varies his spellings and readily splits up words. The *Chaap wuurong* words are particularly telling because we can analyse them in the light of first hand information on the closely related *Wergaia* language:

<i>Pengneeung uratt</i>	= <i>pengangurak</i>	'our body' :	Dawson 'body'
<i>Ping yin</i>	= <i>pengin</i>	'your body' :	" 'flesh'
<i>Beng guuk</i>	= <i>pengkuk</i>	'his body' :	" 'human flesh'
<i>Banggok</i>	= "	" "	" 'whale flesh'

Throughout the vocabulary possessive suffixes for various persons are used without any system, verbs appear in the imperative singular or plural, the present, the purposive, the present participle and the reciprocal, or even both of those last two as in:

Fight	<i>Tukcherrang</i>	i.e. <i>tak-tjer-ang</i> , 'hitting one another'
		hit-RECIP-PTC
Quarrel	<i>Challecharrang</i>	i.e. <i>tjali-tjer-ang</i> , 'abusing one another'
		abuse-RECIP-PTC

Because of its extent and total honesty however the work remains as a fund of information particularly on *Kuurn kopan noot*, for which we have so little else. The notes given here are meant not as a criticism of this pioneer work, but as an indication that much more could be learnt from a detailed linguistic study of the data given by

¹⁰ 1903: 61.

Dawson. Hitherto, to my knowledge, there has only been one study, an unpublished honours thesis by M. Wilkinson, of the Australian National University. A more expanded and intensive study would be of great interest from the point of view of comparative linguistics, and it would be treasured by the descendants of the Aboriginal people who once lived in the Port Fairy — Lake Condah area.

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Archaeology of the Dreamtime. The story of prehistoric Australia and her people. By Josephine Flood. William Collins, Sydney, 1983. Pp. 288. Colour and black and white plates. \$14.95 p.b.

In the author's own words this book was written for 'the general reader, for Aborigines interested in learning more of their own heritage, and for secondary and tertiary students'. On the whole, the author has succeeded in these aims: I know several Aborigines who have read the book with interest; it does appear on university book lists as introductory reading material for prehistory students, and I often recommend it to members of the public.

The book's chief value is as a highly readable account of research into the Aboriginal past, bringing together a vast array of knowledge built up by research workers and presenting it in a manner that is understandable and interesting to the average reader. This has been achieved largely through summarising and paraphrasing the research papers of numerous scholars.

But the book has its faults too, one particularly infuriating one being the author's determination to fit in somewhere every fact and idea known to her, often halting the flow of what promises to be an excellent stretch of narrative to pop in a somewhat irrelevant snippet or two. The tone becomes quite garrulous at times, whirling from topic to topic at breathless pace to ensure that all the various crumbs of knowledge are

at least tasted if not consumed. As a result the book is uneven, some sections being quite splendid, others very curious mixtures.

The chapters are grouped into five major sections which are ordered chronologically. The first section begins by telling the reader how archaeologists learn about the human past by studying such objects as tools and food refuse that people left behind at their camp sites. This is illustrated by one of the author's own excavations, at Cloggs Cave in eastern Victoria. In descriptions such as this the author is at her best. We can share with her a sense of enthusiasm and excitement as cave deposits more than two metres deep are peeled slowly away, layer by layer, to reveal 17,000 years of human history. This section continues with a discussion of how Australia was originally colonised by the 'first boat people', and concludes with a description of Australia's best known archaeological site, Lake Mungo.

The second section, titled 'Human origins', deals with the variation discovered by physical anthropologists in ancient Aboriginal skeletal remains and traces the ancestry of the two main physical types to separate locations in Southeast Asia. This is pretty speculative stuff, the more so because some of the remains have not yet been fully reported on by the anthropologists involved. 'Human origins' is followed by 'Ice age beginnings', a section devoted by and large to the distribution of early sites and the presumed manner in which people spread across the continent. A description of early sites in Queensland is interrupted to tell us about the exciting find of a wooden boomerang on a rock ledge. Does this also belong to the ice age? We are not told it doesn't. And why in a chapter on the east coast during the Pleistocene does a photograph of a *Diprotodon* skeleton from Lake Callabonna suddenly appear, unrelated to anything in that chapter? 'The rising of the seas' follows, a section dealing with the time of post-glacial rise in sea level that separated Tasmania and New Guinea from the mainland. The possible effects on the Tasmanians of 12,000 years of isolation from the mainland are discussed, including a reiteration of the varied speculation on two well known, and probably unanswerable, problems, 'why did the Tasmanians stop eating fish?' and 'the decline in useful arts'. These the author finds too irresistible to omit. Included in this section is a chapter that deals mainly with the advent of a new stone technology some 4000 years ago, but is rather strangely titled 'The arrival of the dingo' even though discussion on the origins of this animal is a minor event towards the end of the chapter. The last chapter in this section, 'Harvesters, engineers and fire-stick farmers', together with the final section of the book, titled 'The last two thousand years', tell the reader about some of the vast number of different economic strategies that enabled Aborigines to subsist in a variety of environments.

This section relies for its information as much on ethnography and oral traditions as it does on archaeology. It deals also with other aspects of Aboriginal life, notably art and religion, but addresses some topics in too cursory a manner; the usefulness of a single sentence description of a complex subject like totemism is indeed questionable. The section also misses out on an opportunity to demonstrate how the various aspects — for example material culture, art, religion, social structure, — all articulate with each other to form the cohesive whole known as Aboriginal culture, and that archaeology is just one of the many windows through which we can view it.

A prehistory of Australia, New Guinea and Sahul. By J. Peter White and James F. O'Connell. Academic Press, Sydney, New York, etc., 1982. Pp. xiii + 286. Plates, diagrams, figures. \$18.15. p.b.

Australian prehistory is of world significance. It is not surprising then that an Australian archaeologist (who has worked mainly in New Guinea, once part of Greater Australia or Sahul) should collaborate with an American archaeologist who has worked in Australia to convey that significance, aiming certainly at Australian and American students of prehistory, and presumably a yet wider British, European and world audience.

Those of us who were brought up in Western industrial society and its offshoots are peculiarly ill-equipped for the study of hunter-gatherer prehistory, which comprises, after all, more than 99 per cent of the past of all mankind. Our academic traditions have urban roots. The 'civilisations' we cherish are the 'cultures of cities', and our urbanised societies rest upon the economic and cultural foundations of agricultural and peasant modes of life, with their virtues of hard work and thrift and respect for material possessions. In European-derived societies we are distanced by hundreds of generations from any understanding of the ways of life of foragers and fishers, hunters, harvesters and husbanders of wild animal and plant resources.

Australian prehistory can provide opportunities to escape the mental limitations imposed by the narrowness of our urban experience. The great significance of Australian archaeology is that it gives glimpses into the multitudinous possibilities of hunter-gatherer prehistories. So our chances of comprehension are heightened and enriched by the resources of Australian ethnographic and ethnohistorical materials. Yet in using ethnographic data we should not assume lack of change. Rather the ethnographies provide regional base-lines which represent the end points of processes of change, and so enable us to measure change. To comprehend the significance of the spectacular burials of around 7000 years ago at Roonka or Lake Nitchie we must appreciate that they are indeed 'forms unknown in the nineteenth century' (as White and O'Connell point out on p. 214) and indicators of *differences* in social structuring over time. There is no need to be apologetic about use of the *ethnographic* record. Of course it is 'inadequate as a direct guide' (p. 215). But without it we should be unable to assess the meaning of the *archaeological* record, or test and trace the trajectories of change made evident by the juxtaposition of evidence from different timespans, including the changes and processes of change within the period since first European contact.

By looking at the prehistories not only of Australia and Tasmania, but also of New Guinea, White and O'Connell give themselves the opportunity to consider the options and dynamics of the lifeways of foragers and hunters, and their reactions to and impacts upon changing environments. They also survey the differing options taken by those groups which, by developing horticulture, chose to intensify resource usage to support rapidly increasing population densities, rather than restraining population within the limits of available resources.

Here they touch upon one of the major themes of world prehistory — what determined whether societies found themselves on a *positive*-feedback treadmill of rising populations and labour-intensive resource usage, extracting more meals per square

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mile? or alternatively, how elsewhere did *negative*-feedback mechanisms operate to hold populations comfortably below the ceiling of carrying-capacity? Is the dichotomy absolute? Australia has many examples of intensive plant usage, including 'husbanding' of plants which are now cultivated in Southeast Asia. The early dates for drainage channels in New Guinea upland valleys show cultivation well under way before Torres Strait was established. What factors determined a southern boundary for such practices? Or, should we envisage a cline in plant manipulation? Is it possible that some mainland Australian groups moved towards sedentism, horticulture and high demographic densities; but from environmental necessity or cultural choice moved again towards using a wider spectrum of resources less intensively?

These are major questions which invite discussion of the evidence from Sahul and their bearing on world prehistory. There are others. What is the nature and date of the *Homo erectus* to *Homo sapiens* transition and its bearing on the colonisation of continents outside the main African/Eurasian landmass? What of the relationships between robust and gracile populations? What light can Australian colonisation throw on American prehistory and vice versa? Especially regarding questions of big game and megafaunal extinctions. What is the relationship (inverse or complementary?) between tuber-based and seed-based economies? broad spectrum and/or specialised subsistence patterns? How far can cultural change and activity patterns be understood by considering the occurrence and properties of particular formal tool types, or is it necessary to consider rather the properties of entire assemblages?

Some of these questions White and O'Connell tackle. I particularly appreciated the comparisons between Australia and the Americas. The subject is discussed twice – in the initial section on the 'Early Prehistory' of Sahul, and again in a final debate on 'Sahul in World Prehistory'. On the one hand, given the lack of visibility of big game in American caves and rockshelters, despite the clear evidence of open kill and butchering sites, should we put too much reliance on the perhaps exaggerated sparsity and ambiguity of Australian big-game evidence? – 'it is certainly not impossible that Sahulian and American mega-faunal hunting patterns displayed close similarities' (p. 217). On the other hand, while for Sahul we have dates approaching the 40,000 mark, none the less, 'prehistorians now suggest that . . . the amount of evidence for the early settlement period one can expect to find will be very small, given the small numbers of people' and 'belief in a slow rate of colonisation' with 'time needed for environmental adaptation' reinforces a similar argument for the Americas, and the likelihood that 'the northern continent, at least, was colonised no later than 20,000 years ago, and probably ten or more millennia earlier'. Even more forceful is the argument that if 'experimental plant manipulation' was occurring in the Americas by 9000 years ago (as also in New Guinea within Sahul) then 'the chronologies of American prehistory have allowed totally insufficient time for a long term secure environmental understanding to be developed' So a time scale similar to that of Sahul, could be envisaged.

Some problems are discussed not because they are held to be of world importance, but 'because they . . . have . . . generated their own literature' (p.73). Yet, just because rivers of ink have flowed over Tasmanian fish why pour away more? Perhaps the converse reasoning should be applied. Students should be stimulated to consider topics on which there are data, but inadequate discussion – for instance archaeological and ethnographic evidence for population distributions in relation to distribution of

resources such as tuberous plants; or regional and temporal variation in Pleistocene stone tool assemblages.

Although White and O'Connell choose to focus on tools as one of their three main topics for discussion (megafauna, waves of settlers, and stone tools), their section on flaked stone artefacts is very general, and considers the properties of individual artefacts rather than the characteristics of total assemblages. Nowhere is this discussion brought down to Australian brass tacks. Are 'Kartan' assemblages significantly different from other assemblages of comparable antiquity? Can we distinguish temporal differences? regional differences? activity differences?¹ differences due to raw material? and to distance from raw material sources? Byrne's study,² for instance, is concerned not just with the distribution of raw material from a source (p. 85), but with how distance affects assemblage composition and the sizes of the flakes and flaked pieces discarded to form those assemblages. It is an Australian study in assemblage taphonomy with lessons for understanding stone assemblage formation anywhere on earth.

In general the authors appear unaware of the detailed content of studies of Australian stone tool assemblages. They see Johnson's ideas on reduction in artefact size over time and increase in flaking control as original, and state (p.106) that these trends 'have not been studied or documented in detail'. What of Lampert's meticulous studies of the Burrill Lake material? or Jones on Rocky Cape? or Rosenfeld on 'Early Man Shelter' or Schrire on Alligator River? or the Jones/Lorblanchet study which they have previously cited (p. 86)? Stockton's ideas on 'intermediate' flake assemblages are ignored.

An example of the emphasis on 'stone tools as cultural markers' approach, is the discussion of the earliest dates for secondarily-trimmed points in Arnhem Land. This sort of detailed fascination with 'marker fossils' is surely inappropriate, when many wider questions are treated briefly, even brusquely (e.g. 'backed blades' in one paragraph). If the authors had looked at Kimberley material³ they would see a wide range of ways of trimming (or not trimming) elongated flake blanks giving everything from a 'leilera' to a 'backed blade' to a 'pirri' or 'Kimberley point'. They would also realise that all or any of these possibilities can crystallise out of the multidimensional matrix of possible ways of retrimming and hafting a long flake. The exercise of isolating and considering only certain 'types' obscures the nature of *assemblages* which stress elongated flakes. The development of such flake assemblages is vital to understanding so-called 'small tool' traditions. It seems inconsistent to insist on *external*, sudden, origins for late Australian tool traditions while insisting on an *internal* gradual genesis for New Guinea horticulture (where at least some of the domesticates must have been brought in).

The discussions of colonisation, and waves of colonisation, wallow in difficulties that seem unnecessary if one assumes (as these authors do) a slow and rather sparse

¹ McBryde 1977.

² Byrne 1980.

³ or Dortch 1977.

initial settling of most of the continent, by whatever routes; and if, additionally, we allow a sufficient timespan for an archaic group to have entered and completed its spread before a more modern group entered about 50,000 years ago. Duncan Merrilees was among the first to point out (pers. comm.— 1976) that the Asian skeletal evidence *necessitates* such a long timescale if we are to derive from it Australian populations with heavy skulls and skull ridges (binding will not account for these). The Lake George pollen evidence and the Murchison geomorphology certainly leave the possibility open. If these 'first wave' populations remained extremely thin over much of the continent, but achieved high densities in a few favoured areas (such as the middle Murray), there is no reason why a more 'modern' second wave should not have swamped the sparse older populations over much of the interior, but failed for a long time to sub-merge the characteristics of some relict enclaves in areas of highest density, particularly if *cultural* isolating mechanisms also operated. There is no 'problem [in] getting them ashore in sufficient numbers to replace earlier populations' if those earlier populations were sparse, and merging (rather than replacement) incomplete.

The authors dismiss the 'remarkably few serious attempts to claim that the pre-history of Australia is several hundred thousand years old' into the category of Tertiary man and a Central Australian Garden of Eden. They prefer to stick to 'a conservative guess' of 50,000 to 70,000 years for human presence in Australia. Yet the only argument advanced is the *lack* of archaeologically visible material in last interglacial coastal dunes and the Golgol deposits of the Willandra Lakes. We may expect populations to have always been heavier on the plant-rich alluvium of permanent rivers in well-watered areas than on the sandy margins of lakes fed by less dependable streams, within areas which themselves receive little rainfall. Early archaeological visibility is not necessarily to be expected from the Willandra system, nor the rather specialised immediate littoral. The lack should not justify closing our minds to the possibility that materials elsewhere may be early. White and O'Connell dismiss the Murchison in a few lines (p. 42) with no consideration of the nature of the artefacts or the geomorphology. The evidence is as good as that for artefacts 'found in sediments of the same age' as the Trinil fauna (p. 43).

Equally the account of colonisation is pinned to the antithesis between 'coastal colonisation' and 'rapid spread'; except in the addendum on Horton's 'woodland' model⁴ it does not consider intermediate possibilities. In 1974 I envisaged 'an initial Australian settlement phase . . . with generalised subsistence patterns emphasising the plant component in the diet towards the equator and more specialised, hunting cultures over the more open lands further from the equator', or 'the semi-arid annulus around the arid centre', with only later penetration of the southwest and east coastal belts. Here 'frequenting and usage, including firing, may have opened up and improved the grazing in the initially unattractive, because heavily wooded, margins of the continent', while leading to degradation in the more arid interior.⁵ Shawcross envisaged adaptation and spread through semiarid environments before 40,000 BP.⁶ We must now en-

⁴ Horton 1981.

⁵ Hallam 1977a.

⁶ Shawcross 1975; Shawcross and Kaye 1980.

visage a more complex interaction of environmental change and human impact over a much longer timespan than seemed probable a decade ago.

White and O'Connell realise that it is 120,000 years since coasts were as stable, and hence as productive, as in the last 6000 years. They do not deduce that the literally *extra-ordinary* situation of the last few thousand years cannot be extrapolated back over the previous tens of thousands. While it is a truism that the first settlers *must* have been 'people used to living by or from seas and coasts' (p. 31) it does *not* follow that we can speak of 'the *strongly* coastal adaptation of the earliest settlers' (p. 49 my emphasis). As the authors realise (p. 49) coastal plains, with their lagoons and interdunal swales, are richer in reliable resources than the actual beach while rivers or estuaries cutting through the coastal plain produce a concentration of resources.⁷ There is a sort of sleight of pen in putting over the assumption that riverine equates with littoral. In fact, populations familiar with the resources of a coastal *plain* can move easily on to river alluvium. Penetration and adaptation to 'dry seasonal woodland ecosystems' and grassy tablelands could also come about gradually and easily, so long as we do not attempt to compress the processes into a short timescale.

White and O'Connell argue for a slow progress of spread; but they do not break up the pre-10,000 BP evidence into a sufficient number of environmentally different timespans. Which environments do we know to have been penetrated by the mid-thirty thousands? Which by the mid-twenty thousands? Which retained visible populations into twenty to fifteen thousand, while on the one hand game-rich tundra opened the uplands, and on the other aridity afflicted what had been well-watered savannah? While water is *the* crucial factor in human distributions, openness may be almost as important — it is the common factor between semiarid open woodland and cold upland grasslands. What shifts of population attended the spread of forests towards ten thousand years ago? By bundling their data into too few bags, the authors give us a muddled picture of a consolidated 'Late Pleistocene' then a hiatus in the story until about 5000.

However, when we *are* given a regional account, as in the section on local subsistence patterns, the treatment becomes unbalanced. Pages 133 to 157 deal exclusively with sites immediately on the east coast and the catalogue becomes tedious. Why not use more varied examples? Gould's Western Desert data? Dortch's Miriwun material?⁸ Or McBryde's fascinating analyses linking assemblage patterning and subsistence patterning?⁹ Similarly in the late New Guinea section we are given an exhaustive account of each individual tree, and lose sight of any wood there may be. No general contrasts are drawn between New Guinean and other Australian developments.

The shape of this book depends on the shape of arguments among a particular clique of Australian prehistorians. Where we are going is seen in terms of where we have been. There is nothing inevitable about this. Jones could have asked why the people of the southwest stopped eating shellfish. The Hallam/Shawcross hypothesis of

⁷ See Hallam 1983.

⁸ Dortch 1977.

⁹ McBryde 1976 and 1977.

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savannah spread might have attracted a tithe of the attention which went to shell middens. We might not attach the importance we do to fish and islands and coasts and contemporaneity with megafauna. We might accord more importance to plants and less to game. We might not start from here.¹⁰

To write a prehistory of Greater Australia, need one start from the dilemmas which Australian archaeologists have created for themselves? To instruct the great uncatechised body of American, Australian (and British?) undergraduates, should one start with the same tired old questions which previous generations have faced in essays and examinations? Should one go back over the tracks of controversy, the mutual back-slapping of contrived debate? — single or multiple origins? coastal colonisation or savannah spread? did megafauna succumb to drought or degradation of the environment? do backed blades bespeak diffusion or invention? why did the Tasmanians stop eating fish?

Might we not, for a change, start with the *data*? Take a date — say 15,000 BP. What is the evidence for the shape of the continent? and, region by region, what do we know of localities in which artefacts were being deposited? in what geomorphic deposits and conditions — river deposits, lake-side dunes, cave sediments? which ecological zones had Aboriginal groups explored and used? under what varieties of climatic or vegetational conditions were they living? had climatic change or human firing extended or opened up the tundra of Tasmania or the forests of the southwest? what fauna were available? were utilised? what plant resources influenced distributions? what technologies? what evidence have we of the corpus of lore and law which structured Aboriginal grouping and spacing, maintained attachment to terrain or formed a basis for exploration and expansion? what sorts of sites did these activities generate? If indeed 'disputes . . . are resolved as much by the strength of competing models [or modellers?]' as they are by the data' (p. 54) then this is A BAD THING, and it behoves writers of prehistory to restore the balance in favour of data.

There are one or two startling infelicities. For instance (p. 87) 'flakes [were] used for scarifying, haircutting [and] circumcision and subincision. The degree to which flaked stone tools were used on other kinds of meat is unclear'! What is meant by an 'inverse correlation between body shape [*breadth* perhaps?] and mean temperature' (p. 75)?

One or two statements appear to be errors of fact. After discussing Miriwun White and O'Connell state 'No other material dating to this period [25,000 to 10,000 BP] has been found in the west' except Devil's Lair, yet only two pages later mention Ferguson's 'open sites' at Quininup. The walls of Devil's Lair have no engravings which could have fragmented into the deposit (p. 62). The suggestion that Pleistocene sites show a 'skew' towards small animals (p. 92) is again not supported by Devil's Lair. I have detected few errors of detail. On p. 196 should 'overtly' be 'overly'? On p. 55, what is meant by 'few adequated watered inland areas such as the eastern part of the south coast'? Some omissions are surprising. For instance Pearce's papers on Walyunga,¹¹

¹⁰ The village yokel, when asked the way to Nether wallop, replied 'If I were going to Nether wallop, I wouldn't start from here!'

¹¹ Pearce 1977 and 1978.

which relate lithological and typological change to rise in sea level. But then, the maps show hardly any sites in the west. Even Roonka is too far west!

This is Sydney—Canberra participant prehistory. Let us hope for a data-based prehistory some time this century. Perhaps we should not start from here.

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From bush to station: Aboriginal labour in the North Queensland pastoral industry, 1861-1897. By Dawn May. History Department, James Cook University, Townsville, 1983. Pp. viii + 183, s.c. price unstated.

This monograph is one of a series published by the History Department at James Cook University; the series concentrates on studies in North Queensland history. Dawn May's study is an account of the development of the pastoral industry and the involvement of Aboriginal labour. It concentrates specifically on a period from 1861 (when sheep were first introduced to North Queensland) to the turn of the century. The underlying hypothesis that the author investigates is whether the social relations of production in the pastoral industry (particularly with respect to black labour) were exploitative.

The book begins with a brief investigation of the economic development of the pastoral industry in the region encompassed by the Cook, Burke and Kennedy pastoral districts. In Chapter 2, the pastoral labour market in this area from 1860 to the 1890s is analysed, although a discussion of Aboriginal labour force participation is eschewed from the analysis, possibly for analytical simplicity, but also because Aboriginal labour was non-unionised and outside the formal labour force. As the pastoral industry grew, demand for labour increased, but for a variety of reasons including climatic factors, isolation, disease and attractive alternatives like gold seeking, there was a perennial shortage of non-Aboriginal labour. Consequently, there was upward pressure on wages to the extent that pastoralists experimented unsuccessfully with imported indentured Melanesian labour and also with Chinese labour. By 1890, with increased northern development, northern migration and a slump in both the pastoral sector and the Australian economy, conditions of excess demand rapidly turned to excess supply.

Chapter 3 gauges, primarily from historical sources, the advantages and disadvantages of utilising Aboriginal labour. From the 1870s, Aboriginal labour was increasingly incorporated into the pastoral economy. Its advantages from the pastoralists' perspective were that it was readily available, cheap, and relatively immune to the contagious gold fever. May estimates that Aboriginal labour cost a mere 25 per cent of white or Melanesian alternatives although she notes that frequently it was used 'uneconomically' — because of its relative cheapness, more Aboriginal labour was employed than was necessary. Interestingly, the use of Aboriginal labour was quite acceptable to non-Aboriginal unionised labour whereas the importation of coloured labour was not. The disadvantages of Aborigines (as expressed by whites) included worker unreliability and lack of skills. However, as Dawn May notes, the economic benefits of using Aboriginal labour must have outweighed the costs, otherwise pastoralists would not have incorporated it into the pastoral economy.

In Chapter 4, a description is presented of labour conditions during those harsh pioneering days, a mere century ago. Aboriginal labour was acquired in a number of ways — by 'letting in' local Aborigines onto properties (that is, by allowing traditional owners to remain on 'their land'), by recruiting labour on the fringes of new towns (often by kidnapping) and by force (usually by kidnapping). Rather obviously, the first method was the most fruitful. May provides some anecdotal evidence of incredible brutality meted out to Aboriginal people, although she notes that such behaviour usually resulted in their leaving stations or less frequently retaliating in kind. May notes that there is evidence that the pastoralists used opium to both 'quieten' and reward Aboriginal labour; an unexplored possibility is that opium addiction trapped Aborigines at stations. The evidence on employment conditions is not clearcut, for while station owners rarely paid their Aboriginal workers with cash, they were rewarded in kind and with keep usually similar to that provided other labour. However, the dependants of workers were frequently uncared for; there was ongoing disagreement between pastoralists and the colonial government regarding responsibility for the care of non-workers.

A special mention is made in this chapter of the role of Aboriginal women in the pastoral economy. Females were frequently employed as domestics, and resided with Europeans; May suggests that pastoralists were more willing to incorporate female labour than male. This may have been linked to the rampant sexual exploitation of

Aboriginal women during this period, although the author notes that both European and Aboriginal men were involved in this practice. It is interesting that at some remote stations, Aboriginal women were also employed in stock work, thereby transcending the usual sexual division of labour in Victorian European society. May notes though that the different employment experiences of males and females did not result in any definite or discernible changes in gender status in Aboriginal society.

The book concludes with an attempt to broaden the significance of this regional, and time specific, study. In particular, the author attempts to utilise radical development theory (primarily dependency theory and Marxist articulation of modes of production analysis) to explain the North Queensland situation. For a number of reasons, the exploration of the relevance of these models is unsatisfactory and inconclusive. Firstly, the author makes little effort to differentiate each particular theoretical position she identifies and to systematically test their validity. Secondly, there is no analysis of the Aboriginal 'mode of production', beyond an acceptance of popularist depictions of the traditional Aboriginal economy being in a state of egalitarian primitive affluence. Thirdly, there is no attempt to provide historical information (if it exists) that the extent of capital accumulation in the pastoral economy was influenced by the use, abuse or non-use of Aboriginal labour. While there is no doubt that Aboriginal labour was incorporated into the capitalist world economy, there is limited clearcut evidence whether pastoralists set out to destroy the pre-contact Aboriginal economy, or whether they aimed to maintain it to reproduce cheap labour (in a Wolpian internal colonialism sense). The possibilities that Aboriginal subsistence activities continued and that the social relations of production remained unchanged within Aboriginal society are unexplored.

The book is a significant historiography of the pastoral industry in Australia at a particular place during a particular slice of time. The book is extremely thoroughly researched, and unfortunately this makes for somewhat onerous reading — 100 pages of text are followed by 44 pages of footnotes. There is also a great deal of direct quotation from historical sources. The material presented gives one a good feel for the frontier situation and the treatment of Aborigines late last century, yet it is also a little ambiguous. On one hand the information is extremely diverse (in both time and place) so that one is left with an impression of great variability. This diversity was partly the result of limited state intervention; pastoralists almost had a free hand. Its existence makes it difficult to explain the situation using any one particular model. On the other hand, the historical material presented could be more closely scrutinised — there is little attempt to differentiate nineteenth century dogma (as expressed by Europeans) from frontier practice. Ultimately, the book whetted my appetite to hear the Aboriginal point of view, that was not presented in this monograph, presumably because a written Aboriginal record does not exist. Still there must be opportunities to elicit oral history from those Aborigines who have continued to live on North Queensland pastoral properties.

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BOOK NOTES

(Inclusion here does not preclude review in future issues)

Matya-Mundu: A History of the Aboriginal people of south-west Queensland, By Hazel McKellar, edited by Thom Blake. Cunnamulla Australian Native Welfare Association, Cunnamulla, 1984. Pp. 99. Illustrated with maps, photographs and diagrams.

Matya-Mundu presents the results of Hazel McKellar's research into Aboriginal sites in the Bulloo, Warrego and Culgoa districts of south-west Queensland. This was a community project based in Cunnamulla. It developed from the concern of these people to record their history and put together the local knowledge of the sites that bear witness to the history of both recent and very distant times. The text summarises this and is complemented by an extremely useful series of maps and historic photographs. The resulting book provides a valuable summary of knowledge of the Aboriginal societies of this fascinating region, written, as Hazel McKellar says in her Preface 'as a tribute to all the old people who maintained their culture and language despite great difficulties' . . . and 'to help the present generation, and generations to come, to see and know there is much to be proud of'.

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When the wattles bloom again: the life and times of William Barak last chief of the Yarra Yarra tribe. By Shirley W. Wienke. Published by the author, Woori Yallock, 1984. Illustrated by photographs and line drawings. Pp. X + 110. Paperback \$10.00.

This life history of William Barak is woven around the brief account 'my words', reminiscences of Barak himself. The author has expanded on this brief account of Aboriginal-settler contact and taken the story on to Barak's life at Coranderrk as leader of that Aboriginal community. Important events in Aboriginal history are covered in this account written for the general reader. It is illustrated by an interesting series of line drawings and historic photographs.

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Anthropological Literature: An index to periodical articles and essays. Compiled by the staff of Tozzer Library, Harvard University and issued by the Library quarterly, also annually. Now available: Volume 6 (1984), U.S. \$35 (individuals); volume 6 (1985) U.S. \$40 (individuals).

This index gives a comprehensive, current coverage of articles in the discipline, surveying over a thousand journals and 150 collections of essays. It covers material in all languages with the emphasis on articles in English, French, Spanish, German and Slavic languages.

The new microfiche format gives access according to subject (e.g. sites, cultures, ethnic groups, linguistic groups), and sub-fields of the discipline of anthropology (archaeology, biological anthropology, cultural anthropology, linguistics and theory and method), as well as author and title for works cited.

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Who owns the past? Edited by Isabel McBryde. Oxford University Press Australia, Melbourne 1985. Pp. 198. h.c. \$29.00.

The essays in this volume survey the issues relating to the use, ownership and control of the past. This involves both the physical remains of the past (archaeological sites, artefacts, art treasures, museum collections) as well as the ideas and information that come to us from the past. The control or use of certain visions or versions of the past in dominating the present and the future must also be considered. These issues are surveyed in the chapters of the book from the perspectives of archaeologists, anthropologists, indigenous peoples, museum curators, art historians, historians, legislators and cultural resource managers.

The papers were given at the 1983 Symposium of the Australian Academy of Humanities. Contributors include Les Groube, Elizabeth Jeffreys, Isabel McBryde, John Mulvaney, Bernard Smith, Sharon Sullivan, Alice Tay, Wang Gungwu, Eric Willmot and Sir David Wilson.

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Aboriginal Heritage Newsletter. Aboriginal Heritage Section, Department of Environment and Planning, South Australia.

This newsletter provides information on the current work of the Aboriginal Heritage Section, on field projects undertaken, and conservation issues relating to Aboriginal sites in South Australia. The issue for March 1985 contains a report on work in the Yorke Peninsula by the Heritage Section and the Point Pearce community. As well there is a paper by the Section's historian, Peggy Brock who recently visited the United States to study the writing of American Indian history there. She surveys current work in ethnohistory in the United States and Canada in relation to the writing of Aboriginal history, particularly research in South Australia. This paper is of particular relevance for readers of *Aboriginal History*.

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The mountains call me back. A history of the Aborigines and forests of the Far South Coast of N.S.W. By Denis Byrne. N.S.W. Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, Occasional Paper No. 5, Sydney, 1984. Pp. 32.

In 1979 the proposed woodchip logging of forests on Mumbulla Mountain on the Far South Coast of New South Wales was opposed by the Yuin Aboriginal communities of the area. Their opposition rested on the fact that the mountain with its sacred sites had been and was of great significance. A series of studies was then initiated by the State Government to investigate the claim. This booklet summarises the results of these detailed studies of Mumbulla Mountain and the surrounding Five Forests area. It gives a useful summary of the evidence on prehistoric Aboriginal land use, the history of the contact period and the conflict over land use for the Mumbulla Mountain area from 1978 to 1980. Though, as Denis Byrne comments in this conclusion, this conflict was 'not so much a land rights issue as a question of Aborigines having the right to protect their sacred sites'. (p. 28). In 1980 the 7509 ha Biamanga Aboriginal Place was

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established under the National Parks and Wildlife Service Act to preserve the sacred sites and archaeological sites in the Mumbulla Mountain area. The Forestry Commission, National Parks and the local Yuin Community are now all involved in the future management of this area.

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European-Aboriginal relations in Western Australian history. Edited by Bob Reece and Tom Stannage. Studies in Western Australian History VIII, December 1984. University of Western Australia Press, Perth, 1984. Pp. 142.

This volume of essays on Aboriginal history in Western Australia presents the research of members of the history departments of Perth's two universities and of the staff of its Batty Library. The topics range from relations in the areas of early settlement ('The Battle for Pinjarra') to those in the far north-west in the more recent past. ('Forrest River massacres, 1926'). In addition there are papers on source material, and questions of historiography. Both editors discuss the approaches to the past in Western Australian historical writing — approaches dominated until recently by ideas of progress, the achievements of pastoral expansion, male values and a 'gentry' tradition. In the historical studies so produced Aboriginal history had little place. Recent work by both Aboriginal writers and academic researchers has aimed to redress the balance; the essays presented in this volume summarise some of the results from this recent work and the new approaches to the history of West Australians, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. They will prove of value to all interested in the history of Australia's western state and certainly also have wider implications.

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The Kurnai of Gippsland. By Phillip Pepper in collaboration with Tess de Araugo. Hyland House, Melbourne, 1985. Pp. vi+ 336, with maps and black and white plates. h.c. \$30.00.

As volume 1 of a series entitled *What did happen to the Aborigines of Victoria* this book covers the history of the Kurnai people of Gippsland from 1835 to 1958. The authors spent twelve years preparing the volume and it presents a wealth of material on the Kurnai of the distant and more recent past. The illustrations, particularly the historic photographs, are of special interest and value.