

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

STUDENT RESEARCH PAPERS

IN

EARLY AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

1976

C O N T E N T S

RACE AGAINST TIME

by Christine Misko

CONVICT OFFENCES: SHAW/ROBSON?

by Gary Luxford

JAMES MUDIE, CIVILIAN MAGISTRATE, PROPERTY OWNER,
"CASTLE FORBES", PATRICK PLAINS

by Louis Greenwell

THE AUSTRALIAN AGRICULTURAL COMPANY

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THE SQUATTING WOMEN OF AUSTRALIA

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P R E F A C E

Each year students in the History IIB Class are asked in First Term to research a paper on some aspect of the History of Australia before Federation that interests them, basing their work, wherever possible, on primary sources. Some of these papers reach high standards, and not infrequently make original contributions to the understanding of our history, especially to the local history of this region.

This collection of five of the papers presented this year has been assembled to make the fruits of some of this research available to others, and at the same time to show students the standard of work that can be achieved. These essays are not necessarily the best essays, but they are good ones and are technically well presented. They have been chosen, however, more to demonstrate the variety of issues that interest students: local as well as national; female as well as male; black as well and white.

They display a solid background and provide an insight into several themes developed during the First Term. In this way they constitute a useful supplement to the course and should prove interesting reading.

It is hoped that this project will continue from year to year both to encourage research and originality and to slowly build up a body of material to which later students can refer.

Carol Bacchi
Peter Hempenstall
Noel Rutherford

RACE AGAINST TIME

by Christine Misko

SYNOPSIS

Early unfavourable descriptions of the Australian Aborigines tended to shape the attitudes of indifference which prevented the recording of valuable objective data of the nomadic experience. The change in attitude, concomitant with increasing knowledge, generated interest and ultimately recognised the existence of a complex aboriginal culture. The realisation that the Aborigine and his way of life presented vast opportunities for extensive research, and the belief in the inevitable extinction of this race, accelerated research in order to extract as much information as possible before the Aborigines disappeared from the face of the earth. Although 'the Tyranny of Distance' prevents an accurate reconstruction of the past, the current co-operative interdisciplinary approach is yielding valuable information about the Australian nomad. Specifically, genetic distance data is being correlated with geographic and linguistic distances to shed new light on the origins, racial affinities and migration patterns of the Australian Aborigines.

When the Australian Aborigines witnessed the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788 and subsequent establishment of the first European colony in Australia, little did they realise that they would become subjects for lively debate and research in the time to follow. Nor did they apprehend that their 'Dreamtime' philosophy would be matched by a nightmare reality in the very near future. For the white man proceeded to usurp aboriginal tribal territory which was not only an economic necessity for the hunter-gatherers, but also a spiritual necessity. Deprivation of their ancient lands which harboured the immortal works of their spiritual ancestors meant spiritual annihilation for the Aborigines as the link with their ancestral spirits, their 'Dreamtime', in which lay their origins and *raison d'être*, was severed. A native saying, paraphrased, reveals the belief that "He who loses his dreaming is lost". (1) Because of the absence of a visible link with the land, the early settlers were unaware of any terrestrial relationships and assumed that the Aborigines could move elsewhere. Certainly, the Aborigines were not consulted about the distribution of European settlement. Indeed, they were not even informed that Australia in its entirety was appropriated in the name of King George III. Some of the sentiments felt by the Aborigines as they eventually comprehended the full impact of the white man's arrival are expressed in the following verses of a tribal land rights song:

"The only thing that's wrong my boy
Is that we were never told
That this applied to the tribal land
That we were pledged to hold.

If Governor Phillip landed here
And tried to take Yirrkala
It wouldn't have taken us very long
To fix that English fella". (2)

Dampier's famous description of the Aborigines was premature; they were yet to become 'the miserablest creatures on earth'.

The plethora of early unfavourable accounts of the Aborigines was a direct result of prevailing attitudes, beliefs and lack of understanding and appreciation of a different way of life.

The Aborigines were seen through European eyes with vision blurred by ideological blindfolds and superficial knowledge. Thus nakedness was synonymous with savagery. The lack of sepulchres interpreted as a sign of cannibalism. Absence of permanent dwellings and paucity of material acquisitions was judged as reflecting poverty. The cuisine based on hunter-gatherer activities was thought to be indicative of a haphazard, brink-of-starvation existence. The Aborigines' essentials for life did not correspond with the white man's version. These early opinions were instrumental in shaping attitudes towards the dark inhabitants. The initial government policy, although well-intentioned, amounted to an imposition of European culture onto this seemingly wretched, godless and aimless nomad. They were to be helped to enter "the white man's Pearly Gates" (3) to civilization. Even before the death of Truganini in 1876 which completed the genocide of the entire Tasmanian population, the Aborigines were considered as a temporary feature of the Australian landscape, scheduled for extinction by natural progression and to be survived by the superior Anglo-Saxon race.

The picture of an aimless, barbaric wanderer began to fade, however, with increasing knowledge concomitant with association over the years. The anthropologist endowed aboriginal society with complexities which in turn generated interest and provided opportunity for studies. Gradually, it was realised that the Aborigine presented a unique situation for the study of stone age culture and stone age man, with the possibility of yielding valuable insights into global history. The observed decline in aboriginal numbers which earlier tended to support the doomed race theory and justify indifference and brutality now emphasised the importance of research before this ancient race vanished from the face of the earth. Although the Aborigines have outlived the doomsday predictions and currently number about 45,000 full-blooded Aborigines, the race against time is still relevant if one is to obtain a final glimpse of the nomadic experience before it is supplanted. It is vital to record all aspects of traditional aboriginal life before they are superimposed by inevitable changes. The vulnerability to deterioration and vandalism of aboriginal material culture such as bone tools, wooden spears, canoe trees, ceremonial stone arrangements and rock art gives added urgency to this race. Finding and preserving aboriginal sites which are a unique legacy of human behaviour is of utmost significance. However, the implicit difficulties in studying the illiterate aboriginal civilization with its lack of monuments, tombs and paucity of archaeological paraphernalia is offset by the privileged opportunity of being able to observe the few surviving remnant nomadic populations in the world.

Currently, scholars from many diverse branches are approaching aboriginal studies with an objective attitude and with a sense of urgency of a corroboree. The multi-disciplinary approach by biologists, historians, geologists, anthropologists, linguists and ecologists has increased the conceptual framework and the possibility of a more detailed picture. For instance, studies in genetics and linguistics are contributing an interpretation of Aboriginal origins, racial affinities and movements before the European invasion. Although archaeological evidence reveals the presence of man in Australia about 30,000BP testified by the radio-carbon dated sites at Kellor 31,000 ± 1100 and at
 - 1300
 Koonalda Cave 31,000 ± 1650 BP (4) it is still equivocal whether the entire area was occupied by one racial type or by a diversity of racial types concurrently or successively.

However classified racially, the Australian Aborigine belongs to the species *Homo sapiens* which shared a common gene pool at the time of the first emergence of fully sapient man from earlier

homonoids some 100,000 to 200,000 years ago. (5) From this initial common ancestry an enormous variety of physical (and cultural) diversity has been achieved on an individual, population and racial level. This diversity is explained in terms of the evolutionary process, both Darwinian and non-Darwinian, involving the mechanisms of adaptation, natural selection, modification by progressive and non-progressive mutations, and by the chance component within evolutionary theory of random drift and change. Early attempts to classify racial affinities and origins of the Australian Aborigines were based on observable differences and morphometric studies. The observation of difference in physiognomy in living aboriginal populations prompted Tindale and Birdsell (1941) to undertake extensive studies which resulted in the tri-hybrid theory of origin of the Australian Aborigine. (Birdsell, 1968). The earliest of the migrant groups envisaged by Birdsell were the Oceanic Negritos, identifiable with the extinct Tasmanians, Barrineans of the rain-forest in Queensland, south-eastern Victoria, south-western Western Australia and in the Melville and Bathurst Islands off the Northern Territory. Birdsell's second migrant wave, the Murrayians, who occupied the Murray River basin, were regarded as a primitive Caucasoid variant. The third major racial element to enter Australia, the Carpentarians, were seen as Vedoid elements from India.

Although regional diversity in physical attributes exists between populations of Aborigines, it is not clear whether these differences developed internally from a uni-racial population or resulted from hybridisation of two or more distinct races. Proponents of the uni-racial composition of the Aborigines explain the variation by geographical isolation, environmental adaptation, random drift and the channeling of gene flow by cultural factors regulating breeding habits such as language barriers. Interestingly, Abbie (1968) in studying morphological criteria of Aborigines in South Australia, Northern Territory and Western Australia, has confidently concluded that data presented for statistical analysis showed "that the Aborigines under study, whether considered by region, or by group or as a whole, are in fact physically homogenous and the statistician considers the finding conclusive". In tracing the evolutionary tree of ten populations including the Australian Aborigines, Cavalli-Sforza (1974) asserts that characteristics such as body size, facial traits and skin colour are superficial and represent adaptations to specific climatic conditions: "the interface between the body and the environment, particularly the climatic dimension of the environment, is the body surface". (6)

The recent application of genetic analysis measuring gene frequencies and variations has provided a more refined method of measuring human diversity. Some genetically overt traits such as skin colour and stature are strongly modulated by variations of the environment, whereas many cryptic traits such as those expressed by human blood systems are far less influenced by environmental variation and provide suitable markers to measure the homogeneity of a population. Gene frequencies which are the calculated frequencies of alleles controlling the expression of phenotypic traits such as blood groups, can quantify the genetic differences in aboriginal populations and thereby establish regional genetic distance. In fact, genetic differentiation based on analyses of blood groups, serum proteins, and enzyme systems is clearly demonstrable among living populations of aborigines, varying considerably from locality to locality. Furthermore, it seems that genetic distances are highly correlated with geographic distance, accentuated by sea barriers in the case of island tribes inhabiting Melville and Bathurst Islands. Moreover, it appears that geographic separation produces both genetic and linguistic differentiation. Though there is a slightly lower correlation between geographic distance and linguistic distance, as seen by the linguistic relationship between the Aranda in Central Australia and the Malag of north-east Arnhem Land. Both belong to the Pama-Nyungan phyllic family which is structurally different from the

most of the languages in Arnhem Land. Also, genetically these tribes are more closely related than is indicated by their geographic position. This suggests a split of a larger population and a migratory trend eastwards. In addition, the genetic distance of the north-east Arnhem Land tribe and its geographic neighbours supports the hypothesis that language is an important socio-cultural isolating mechanism, which in influencing breeding habits, can also in turn lead to genetic differentiation.

The theory of a homogeneous origin of the Aborigine and the suggestion by Kirk (1971) that differentiation can be internally achieved within a 10,000 year span is supported by the observation of the great linguistic and genetic divergences characterising the more densely populated areas of the north. Here there is a greater gene pool and consequently greater scope for diversity. In fact, this northern area represents all the 25 phyllic family groups of languages into which the 200 to 300 languages spoken in Australia are classified. These languages show a remarkable phonological uniformity over the greater part of the continent. The speakers of the large Pam-Nyungan phyllic family occupy the largest but most sparsely populated area of Australia and are genetically less divergent. This shows that population densities influenced by climatic and environmental factors, such as the availability of food, "have influenced breeding patterns within communities as well as the mobility and consequently the rates of gene flow between groups". (7)

The Cape York populations are of particular interest because of their genetic remoteness, but linguistic similarities, to the Pam-Nyungan phyllic family group of languages. This may indicate that the Pama-Nyungan group was numerically small, but a linguistically strong population, which moved southwards leaving a remnant group in Cape York.

The absence of certain genes such as A_2 , S, rh, and the sickle-cell trait gene marker associated with sickle-cell anaemia, (8) and their presence in African Negroes and Negritos, suggests no relationship between Oceanic Negritos and African pygmy groups. The extensive data on blood group gene frequencies for the African, Asian and Oceanic groups disagree with Birdsell's statement that "of the great Negroid race only the Negritos succeeded in reaching southeast Asia and Australasia". (9) There is no genetic evidence of an African Negritoid element contribution to the Australian aboriginal population. In fact, a recent article by Benveniste and Todaro (1976) presents evidence for an Asian origin of man indicating that the Australian Aborigine evolved before the African Negroes.

Comparisons between New Guinean and Australian populations reveal the widespread presence of the allele " G_C Aborigine" in Melanesia, its occurrence in Cape York and towards the Kimberleys, its very low frequency in the central areas of Australia, and its virtual absence in the western desert. This reflects considerable contact, probably dating back to 8000 BP and earlier, during the existence of the land bridge between Australia and New Guinea. The opportunity for migration or major contact was undoubtedly severely lessened by the flooding of the causeway between New Guinea and Australia. The evidence in favour of limited contact is perhaps borne out by the development of distinctive human activity, such as agriculture and pig-farming in New Guinea, and the absence of this activity on the Australian landscape.

In view of the geographical realities such as the existence of the land bridge, conducive to migration and the subsequent formation of Torres Strait between 8000 to 5000 BP, it is plausible to assume that Australia may have been populated by heterogeneous man at one stage in history. The morphological differences of skulls from different localities of specimens older than 10,000 BP suggests a heterogeneous presence. However, the genetic distance between

current aboriginal populations could have accumulated within a homogeneous population by internal migration of the various sub-populations, mutation, selection and genetic drift during geographic isolation. It is quite possible that a homogeneous population supplanted earlier inhabitants prior to Australia's separation from New Guinea. The introduction of fresh genes by occasional contact through Torres Strait or by casual visitors in the north cannot be discounted.

Post-contact aboriginal history may be summarised by two lines:

"I could tell you of heartbreak, hatred, blind,
I could tell you of crimes that shame mankind". (10)

The pre-contact assessment is more complicated. For a detailed reconstruction of the past, it is important to consider and integrate multi-disciplinary data. Fortunately, with the current co-operative multi-disciplinary approach eliciting information about the nomad's occupation of Australia, there is a greater chance to succeed in the race against time.

FOOTNOTES

- (1) B. Harney, Songs of the Songman, Adelaide, 1968, p.1.
- (2) S. Harris, This is our Land, Canberra, 1972, p.9.
- (3) L. Lippmann, To Achieve our Country, Melbourne, 1970, p.6.
- (4) V. R. Kabo, Proisskhozhdenie i Ranniia Istorii Aborigenov Avstralii, Moscow, 1969, p.399.
- (5) R. L. Kirk, Genetic Diversity among Australian Aborigines, Canberra, 1975, p.1.
- (6) L. L. Cavalli-Sforza, "The Genetics of Human Populations", Scientific American, September 1974, p.87.
- (7) R. L. Kirk, op.cit., p.81.
- (8) R. T. Simmons, Blood Group Genetic Studies in the Cape York Area, Canberra, 1973, p.23.
- (9) J. B. Birdsell, "Preliminary Data on the Trihybrid Origin of the Australian Aborigines", Oceanic, 1968, p.124.
- (10) W. McNally, Goodbye Dreamtime, Australia, 1973, prologue.

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