

PART I.

GENERAL REMARKS.

1. INTRODUCTION.

OF the seven territorial subdivisions—six States and one Territory—comprising the Commonwealth of Australia, New South Wales may aptly be dominated “The Country of Dendroglyphs.”¹

This term is a very convenient one to designate trees as a whole, the boles of which have been incised, carved, or marked by a process of cutting in some fashion or another.

Arborglyph is another term sometimes used, and appears to have been first proposed, so far as Australia is concerned, at any rate, by Mr. Deputy Railway Commissioner Edmund Milne.² This term is, however, less satisfactory than that of Dendroglyphs, being a mixture of Latin and Greek, whilst the latter term is derived from the language of the ancient Greeks alone. It is the custom in some parts of the State to colloquially speak of these trees as “carved trees,” and the operation of so utilising them is in some parts known as “tattooing.” Throughout this memoir they will be consistently, in a generic sense, dendroglyphs.

Many writers have incidentally referred to these interesting objects, and a number have been figured, but, so far as I am aware, no detailed account has been published, and certainly no effort made to trace their distribution throughout New South Wales.

An attempt will now be made to—(1) record all those occurrences I have been able to trace, either by the help of obliging correspondents, personal observation, or by literary research; (2) compare the various “glyphs”³ depicted on the boles, with the view of ascertaining whether or not any particular “motive”⁴ is restricted to a given area, or widely distributed; (3) record any individual history, or well authenticated tradition; (4) indicate the distribution of the dendroglyphs by aid of a map. Needless

¹ δένδρον, a tree; and γλυφή, a carving.

² Milne—*Scientific Australian*, xx, 1914, No. 2, p. 29.

³ I use this term to indicate a carving as a whole on a surface from which the bark has, or has not, been wholly removed. Strictly speaking in archaeology, a carved figure or character, incised or in relief.

⁴ By motive, I define the guiding or controlling idea manifested in a glyph, or any part of it; in other words, a pattern.

to say, the subject will be as freely augmented with illustrations as possible. The study of these tree-boles has revealed more than one very interesting generalisation.

Under the term "dendroglyph," it must be distinctly understood I do not include those processes of bark or wood-stripping to provide canoes, coolamons, shields, gunyahs, and the like.

"The arborglyphs as seen to-day," says Mr. Milne, "indicate skill, industry, and artistic design of exceptional quality; many of them may be described as elegant, and all represent strenuous mental and physical efforts."⁵

I, at first, intended to treat these interesting objects collectively, whether appertaining to inhumation or initiation ceremonies, but on mature reflection I came to the conclusion it would be better and simpler to render the subject clearer by considering the two subjects separately.

On the distribution map the positions of all will be indicated by Arabic numerals. The result, I am sorry to say, will disclose how little information of a detailed nature we possess. Nor, will the map do justice to the subject if we take into consideration the very great number of dendroglyphs destroyed without record during agricultural and pastoral operations, to say nothing of bush fires, wanton destruction, or natural decay.

2. BRIEF HISTORY.

It is not my intention to enter on either a full chronological or bibliographical history of our dendroglyphs, but merely to refer to a few of the earlier and more important accounts. The less important will be noticed in the "Distribution" chapter under the localities to which they refer.

4^o. *Oxley, J.*—Surveyor-General John Oxley was the first author to relate the occurrence of carved trees in connection with an interment. During his memorable exploration of the Lachlan River⁷, the party on the 29th July, 1817, discovered a semicircular tumulus (Pl. i), with three tiers of seats around one-half of it. To the west and north of the grave were two carved cypress trees. This spot remained practically unidentified and unknown until Mr. E. Milne (when District Railway Superintendent at Orange), with

⁵ Milne—*Loc. cit.*, p. 31.

⁶ These numbers, throughout the Memoir, denote the position of the locality on the Distribution Map.

⁷ Oxley—"Journ. Two Exped. Int. N. S. Wales (1817-18)," 1820, pp. 138 and 141, plate.

his friends, Messrs. S. J. Waite, O. L. May, H. F. May, and T. Richards, on the 21st July, 1913, exactly ninety years after Oxley's discovery, located "one of these trees still intact, and the stump of the other showing the lower portion of the original carving." Mr. Milne fixed the position as close to the southern bank of the Lachlan River, on a stock route between the river and Gobothery Hill, quite close to the Condobolin-Mabalong Road, and the northern boundary of Wardy Holding⁸; the bole of the intact tree is now in the Australian Museum collection (Pl. iv, fig. 2). Oxley's plate was reproduced by Mr. T. Worsnop in 1896, in his "Prehistoric Arts of the Australian Aborigines."⁹

66. *Henderson, J.*—The next reference I have a note of, in order of date, is in an interesting old work, "Observations on the Colonies of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land," by J. Henderson, published in Calcutta in 1832. The author was evidently an all-round observer of no mean order, and his description of the Bora ground in a "secluded part of the forest, near the rich green banks of the river Macquarie," was, I believe, the first record of a ceremony of this nature, outside the metropolitan area. Henderson described both the arrangement of the ceremonial ground and portions of the ceremony itself.¹⁰ Twenty-eight incised trees are figured (Pl. ii, fig. 1).

Breton, W. H.—One of the earliest general descriptions was by Lieut. W. H. Breton, R. N., who wrote, referring to the burial of four men and a woman of the Comleroy tribe, killed in an affray on the Wollombi River:—"The trees for some distance round, to the height of fifteen or twenty feet, are covered over with grotesque figures meant to represent kangaroos, emus, opossums, snakes, &c., with rude representations, also, of different weapons they use."^{10a} This reads more like the description of a Bora than a burial-ground.

37. *Sturt, C.*—Captain Charles Sturt's ever-memorable "Expedition down the Banks of the Macquarie River in 1828 and 1829" is well known to all readers of Australian exploration. On this river, below the junction of Taylor's Rivulet, "the first stream upon the right bank below the Wellington Valley," a tumulus grave was discovered about one and a half miles from Buddah Lake, spoken of by Sturt as "the lake." The grave consisted "of an oblong mound with three semicircular seats. A walk encompassed the

⁸ Milne—In a letter to the writer.

⁹ Worsnop—*Proc. Austr. Assoc. Adv. Sci. for 1895*, vi, 1896, pl. xxiv ("U").

¹⁰ Henderson—1832, p. 145.

^{10a} Breton—"Excursions in N. S. Wales, W. Australia, and V. D. Land," 1833, p. 204.

whole, from which three others branched off for a few yards only into the forest," several cypress trees "overhanging the graves were fancifully carved."¹¹ An illustration of this, but without the three tiers of seats, forms the frontispiece to the first volume of Sturt's work (Pl. ii, fig. 2).

61. *Govett, W. R.*—In one of a very little-known series of most interesting articles that appeared in the old *Saturday Magazine* for 1836, over the initials "W.R.G.," presumably Surveyor W. R. Govett, is an illustration¹² of a bush scene, with a circular tumulus grave and three women mourning and gashing themselves, with the writer of the articles (presumably) standing by, and evidently expostulating with the mourners on their self-inflicted mutilations; there are several carved trees around (Pl. iii, fig. 1). The locality of this scene was near Mount Wayo, County Argyle, about ten miles north-east of Goulburn.

Backhouse, J.—Amongst other interesting items collected by the Rev. J. Backhouse during his "Visit to the Australian Colonies" in 1832-38, was the record of trees around a grave near the junction of the Bell and Macquarie Rivers:—"Some undulating lines, and others forming in perfect ovals, were inscribed on the trunks of adjacent trees."¹³

Taylor, R.—In a work devoted to New Zealand and its Inhabitants—"Te ika a Maui"—by the Rev. R. Taylor, published in 1870, one would hardly look for the illustration of an Australian burial scene. Such, however, is the case in this book. Opposite to p. 378 is a plate purporting to be the "Grave of an Australian Native, with his name, rank, title, &c., cut in hieroglyphics on the trees." Neither locality nor other reference is given so far as I can see.

As I was quite unable to trace the source of this plate (Pl. iii, fig. 2), I wrote to my friend, Mr. T. Gill, of Adelaide, the well-known Australian bibliographer, to ascertain if he could refer me to the original of the reverend author's illustration, on the supposition (then in my mind) that it was merely a copy. Mr. Gill replied, as follows, under date of 27th September, 1915:—"I fancy de Rougemont primus was the artist in Taylor's book, and if you look up the illustration in Oxley's book you will probably come to the same conclusion as myself, that Taylor's is an improvement on Oxley's.

¹¹ Sturt—"Two Exped. Int. Southern Australia, 1828-31," 1834, p. 12.

¹² Govett—*Saturday Mag.*, IX, No. 279, p. 104, text fig.

¹³ Backhouse—"A Narrative of a Visit to the Australian Colonies," 1843, p. 322.

The artist in the former has made a hybrid picture of New Zealand and Australian art. The sculpture on the trees and the dress of the man are characteristic of New Zealand, whatever the other portion may be of Australia."

The forest scene is certainly un-Australian, and some of the "hieroglyphics" equally so, but if an adapted copy of any other illustration, I think the idea is more likely to have been taken from Govett's picture. The whole view is too conventional to be genuine, especially the stiff and wooden-looking tumulus. After all, it is not of very much importance, but as it has crept into an exceedingly fine memoir, by Colonel E. Mallery, on the "Pictographs of the North American Indians"¹⁴ I thought it best to refer to it. In reproducing this plate Colonel Mallery committed an unintentional error. He says:—"Which 'hieroglyphics' are supposed to be connected with his tattoo marks." The Australians do not tattoo, but scarify, a very different process, and one producing very dissimilar results. An appropriate term for this practice is "cicatrisation," or *chinbari* (see p. 32).

An interesting account of a burial is given by Commodore Charles Wilkes, U.S.N.,¹⁵ on the banks of the Macquarie. After describing the mode of interment, Wilkes says:—"The excavated earth was then put over the whole, forming a conical heap eight or nine feet high. The trees on each side were marked with irregular incisions, but whether intended as symbols or merely to identify the place of sepulture, was not understood."

As an illustration of how little has been written on this most interesting subject, and to how small an extent it excited the curiosity of earlier writers on Australian Anthropology and Ethnology, the following short passage is all that is to be found in that otherwise most comprehensive work "The Aborigines of Victoria," by Mr. R. B. Smyth, published in 1878:—"The natives of the Murray and the Darling, and those in other parts adjacent, carved on the trees near the tombs of deceased warriors strange figures having meanings no doubt intelligible to all the tribes in the vast area watered by these rivers." And again:—"The natives, as already stated, frequently carved figures of some kind on the trees growing near the graves of deceased warriors."¹⁶

¹⁴ Mallery—"Pictographs of the North American Indians"—4th Ann. Report American Bureau Ethnol. for 1882-83 (1886), p. 76; "Picture Writing of the American Indians"—*Ibid.*, 16th Ann. Report for 1888-89 (1893), p. 408.

¹⁵ Wilkes—"Narr. U. S. Explor. Exped. 1838-1842," ii, 1845, p. 186.

¹⁶ Smyth—"Aborigines of Victoria," 1878, i, pp. 286, 288.

Neither Messrs. L. Fison and A. W. Howitt,¹⁶ nor the Rev. J. Mathew,¹⁷ make any mention, although their works deal in a great measure with the people who in particular practise this cult; the Rev. W. Ridley,¹⁸ merely gives a passing reference at second hand, and in Mrs. K. L. Parker's work,¹⁹ there is only a similar allusion. Even Dr. A. W. Howitt in his latest and finest work contents himself by saying of the Wiradjuri burial, "the surrounding trees are marked, the grave is left, no one going near it and no one speaking of it."²⁰ Most of the casual references are to be found in the writings of Mr. R. H. Mathews, but from the misleading habit he has of publishing, to all intents and purposes, the same paper in more than one serial neither quotation nor rapidity of reference are facilitated.

One would have expected some reference to dendroglyphs by Sir T. L. Mitchell, who twice passed through country contiguous to the centre of the cult, the Bogan-Macquarie area. Not even in his picture of the "Burying ground of Milmeridien," described as a "fairy-like spot,"²¹ no great distance from Nyngan,²² is there any trace of a marked tree.

3. CLASSIFICATION.

So far as I am aware Mr. Milne is the only writer who has proposed a classification of our dendroglyphs. He suggested a threefold division,²³—

1. "Trees which from their proximity to native graves may be regarded as grave or memorial arborglyphs; these may be single or in groups up to five in number."
2. "Trees marked to commemorate some important tribal event. These are very rare, and evidence of purpose is not ample."
3. "Trees carved with sacred symbols and totems, of the tribes or families taking part in the Bora or man-making ceremonies, in conjunction with others clearly intended to be educational to the neophytes undergoing initiatory ordeals. These are found in avenues or dotted over a space of several acres, interspersed amongst the ground models and designs."

¹⁶ Fison and Howitt—"Kamilaroi and Kurnai," Svo., 1880.

¹⁷ Mathew—"Eaglehawk and Crow," Svo., 1899.

¹⁸ Ridley—"Kamilaroi and other Australian Languages," 4to, 1875, p. 156.

¹⁹ Parker—"The Euahlayi Tribe," Svo., 1895.

²⁰ Howitt—"Native Tribes S. E. Austr.," 1904, p. 466.

²¹ Mitchell—"Three Expeditions into E. Australia," i, 1838, pl. 20.

²² Spelt by Mitchell as Nyngan, "a long pond of water," *Loc. cit.*, p. 201.

²³ Milne—*Scientific Australian*, xx, No. 2, 1914, p. 29.

In the present state of our knowledge I do not see how a clear distinction can be drawn between the first and second sections. The second is certainly weak from the difficulty experienced in distinguishing between a single burial tree and a commemorative one—indeed I will only be able to indicate one instance with even a semblance of certainty.

For trees of the first section I propose the name of tapho-dendroglyphs,²⁴; for the third important section that of telete-dendroglyphs,²⁵. Or, for brevity sake, as "taphoglyphs," "teleteglyphs" respectively.

There is yet another form of glyph termed by d'Albertis a "hieroglyph," a word used by the eminent Italian Naturalist and Explorer to signify a black symbol on a white ground. During the "Second Exploration of the Fly River, 1876," on 4th June, and at some distance above Ellangowan Island he remarked²⁶:—"I was surprised to-day to see a hieroglyph on a tree near the shore . . . The tree on which I remarked this sign being very white, and the sign itself very black, it was apparent to everyone passing along the river." It was refigured by Colonel Mallery in his fine paper on "Picture-writing of the American Indians" already referred to.

Some may feel disposed to prefer a classification based on method of production, but whilst interesting in itself, such a division tends to lose sight of what appears to be of far greater importance—the object and meaning of our dendroglyphs. This will be referred to more in detail in Section 5, "Method of Production."

It is possible others may prefer to retain the second section—memnoscoglyphs²⁷ or "Record-trees," as necessary. On the other hand, if all those occurrences here listed as taphoglyphs do not indicate an interment there is then reason in the retention of the section in question. But the difficulty, in the lack of explicit knowledge or well-established tradition, in distinguishing one from the other is great.

I can only cite two instances said to be of this nature, and even one may simply be a taphoglyph and is not even in New South Wales.

²⁴ Ταφος—interment.

²⁵ Τελετή—initiation.

²⁶ D'Albertis—"New Guinea--What I Did and What I Saw," ii, 1880, p. 66, fig.

²⁷ μεμνησκει—to commemorate.

On some portion of the Diamantina River Mr. E. M. Curr reported²⁸ a dead tree with simple notch-like incisions as "a record of a fight." No further information is given, neither on what part of the river the tree stood, or between whom the fight occurred (Pl. xix, fig. 4).

The second, a Victorian instance, that may be of this nature is as follows:—Mr. W. von Blandowski, who was Sir F. McCoy's predecessor as Director of the National Museum, Melbourne, referred to certain trees in the Seymour District one of which became the depository of the extracted tooth of an initiate at a Bora.²⁹ The tooth was inserted in the "fork of two of the topmost branches." This tree is made known only to certain persons of the tribe, and is strictly kept from the knowledge of the youth himself. In case the person to whom the tree is thus dedicated dies, the foot of it is stripped of its bark, and it is killed by the application of fire; thus becoming a monument of the deceased.

4. TERMINOLOGY.

For the purpose of simplicity and to avoid repetition in description the following terms will be used throughout this Memoir.

Anthropomorphous—Having resemblance to a human form.

Bicircinate—Two circinate figures united end to end (see *Circinate*).

Bigeniculate—Two knee-shaped figures conjoined and one following the other (see *Geniculate*).

Bipyriiform—Two pear-shaped figures united by their attenuated ends (see *Pyriform*).

Cenotaph—Monument in honour of one who is buried elsewhere.

Checker—Rectangular figures as the squares on a chess-board.

Chevron—Figure of two rafters meeting at the top; an inverted V, thus Λ .

Circinate—Rolled inwards from the summit towards the base, as the veneration of a fern.

Circular—In the form of a circle, single or concentric.

Clan—Subdivisions of a tribe having the same language, laws, &c. (see *Nation* and *Tribe*).

²⁸ Curr—"The Australian Race," ii, 1886, fig. opp. p. 413.

²⁹ Blandowski—*Trans. Phil. Soc. Vict.*, i, 1855, p. 72.

Cross-hatched—Parallel lines in two series crossing one another obliquely; small multi-rhomboids.

Fluctuate or *Serpentine*—Rising and falling lines as in waves, single or multi-waved.

Fluting—Decoration by means of flutes or channels.

Fulmen—Lightning.

Geniculate—Bent like a knee.

Glyph—A carving.

Herring-bone—Rows of parallel lines, which in any two successive rows slope in reverse directions.

Hexagonal—Figure having six sides and six angles.

Horologiate—Hour-glass shaped.

Inhumation—Interment.

Lunate—Half-moon shaped.

Motive—Controlling idea manifested in a work, or part of one.

Multifluctuate—Many times waved (see *Fluctuate*).

Nation—A group of kindred tribes.

Oval—Having the form of an egg, single or concentric.

Punctate—Surface covered with "full points."

Pyriform—Pear-shaped.

Rhomboid—Four-sided figure with the opposite sides equal, but the angles not right angles, single or concentric.

Scroll—Ornament in form resembling a roll of paper, loosely or partly rolled.

Semicircular—Half-circular, single or concentric.

Spiral—Winding or circling round a centre.

Tribe—Community of people whose language, laws, ceremonies, and customs are identical, and are called by a certain definite name.

Zigzag—United "herring-bone" motive (see *Herring-bone*).

Zoomorph—Work of art with the form of an animal or bird.

5. METHOD OF PRODUCTION.

A dendroglyph, according to Mr. R. H. Mathews, may be produced by any one of four operations³⁰ :—

1. The object to be portrayed is outlined by nicks cut in the bark of a tree with a tomahawk.

³⁰ Mathews—"Aboriginal Ground and Tree Drawings"—*Science of Man*, i, No. 8, 1898, p. 186.

As an example of this method may be cited the Kamilaroi teleteglyphs on the Moonie River, a little below the New South Wales-Queensland border, near Gundablui, where about a dozen trees were so treated.³¹ (No. 77, Pl. vii, fig. 6.) Probably also, under this head, would fall the teleteglyphs described by Mr. Macdonald,³² near the junction of the Page and Isis Rivers, which are also said to have been cut with a tomahawk (No. 90, Pl. xviii, figs. 1a-d).

2. The whole of the bark within the outline of the figure is removed, leaving the sapwood exposed.

In such a case the removal of the bark represents the emblem or symbol without further incision. Good examples are the lace-lizard ("iguana") at Coronga Park (No. 67, Pl. xxix, fig. 2); the double-lace lizards at the Bogan ground, near Nyngan (No. 68, Pl. xxvi, fig. 2); and the tiger snake at the same site (No. 68, Pl. xxvi, fig. 5).

3. Portions of the bark and sapwood are first removed, and the glyphs then cut in the heartwood proper.

This is by far the commonest method adopted, and is particularly characteristic of taphoglyphs. Both bark and sapwood were cut away as a general rule, and it is by their re-enclosing growths that so many of these inhumation carvings become either indecipherable or lost. Numerous excellent examples of this form will be found in the accompanying illustrations, in particular the subjects of Pl. xi, fig. 1, and Pl. xxx, fig. 3. This method is applied to both tapho- and teleteglyphs.

4. Figures are represented by merely scratching or incising the motive on the bark-surface without penetrating to the sapwood, as distinguished from nicks or cuts with a sharp instrument as detailed in No. 1.

Two very fine examples of this method may be quoted—the magnificent teleteglyph from the Smoky Cape Ranges (No. 81, Pl. xiii, fig. 3), preserved in the Australian Museum, and a similar tree in the neighbourhood of Hillgrove (No. 83, Pl. xiv, fig. 1).

³¹ Mathews—*Journ. Anthropol. Inst.*, xxiv, 1895, pl. xxi., figs. 9-13.

³² Macdonald—*Journ. Anthropol. Inst.*, vii, 1878, p. 255.