



# World Archaeological Bulletin

## BOOK REVIEWS

**PREHISTORY OF AUSTRALIA. D.J. Mulvaney and J. Kamminga 1999. Allen and Unwin, Sydney. ISBN 1-86448-950-2 (pb.). Pp.480 + xx. Price AUD29.95**

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It is pleasing that several new Australian prehistories have been published over the last couple of years, filling a gap which, with the exception of new editions of *Archaeology of the Dreamtime* by Josephine Flood, was last visited in 1982 by J.P. White and J.F. O'Connell in their landmark, *A Prehistory of Australia, New Guinea and Sahul*. The latest *Prehistory of Australia* is another contribution to the literature on Australian prehistory which has its ancestry in the first synthesis of modern Australian archaeology by one of the authors, Mulvaney, first published in 1969. This more recent effort includes an outline of the issues relevant to Australian prehistory common to most of the recent books. However, I feel that the book is clearly designed for a lay audience or, at best, high school level, and is too simplistic for use as a university text. There is great potential for a book of this sort to be a "cross-over" text, appealing to both lay and academic markets in much the way that *Archaeology of the Dreamtime* attempts to do. Having said this, however, there is much to be commended in disseminating Australian prehistory to a lay audience and the book is certainly easy to read and very accessible to those with a limited knowledge of prehistoric Australia.

Chapters 1 to 6, making up the first 79 pages, deal with a wide range of historical, ethnographic and general observations relating to such things as who owns the past, what material evidence remains for archaeology, dating techniques employed in Australian archaeology, as well as a background to the Australian hunter-gatherer way of life which deals with language and society, settlement and subsistence. These chapters are designed to provide some background to Aboriginal society and Australian archaeology to the lay reader, and to set the scene for the subsequent archaeological evidence.

Chapters 7, 8 and 9 provide a commonly accepted outline of the initial peopling of the continent. Throughout the various chapters the authors present archaeological evidence relating to various issues in Australian archaeology, before discussing the theories in the light of their own ideas. Given the stated aim in the preface, that the book is a personal appraisal, the critique of models other their own is acceptable and by and large the final appraisals outlined by the authors are parsimonious and reasonable. The lack of citations throughout is, however, a minor distraction and I feel these discussions would benefit greatly from being referenced in the text. Whilst not personally agreeing with all of the "Initial Colonisation" chapter (Chapter 9), I found the section on "seeking solid foundations" a timely reiteration of the nature of the evidence for a pre-40,000 BP occupation of the continent, which at worst is just plain wrong (e.g. Jinmium) and at best still open to debate (e.g. Malakunanja). This is an important issue, as the idea of a 60,000, or even 100,000 year occupation is already becoming firmly entrenched in popular thought on the basis of very little scientific evidence.

Chapter 10 looks at the biological evidence regarding the original Australians, in which historically-superseded theories such as Birdsell's Tri-hybrid theory are reviewed before examining some of the later research of Thorne, Brown, Webb and Pardoe in a balanced

and reasonably comprehensive way. However, I find some of the sections in this chapter dated and it is hard to know what can be gained from describing apparent differences between Aboriginal physical features such as hair colour, skin colour and degree of body hair.

Chapters 11 and 12 deal with the Pleistocene occupation of the various biogeographical areas of Sahul. Surprisingly the coasts and islands, New Guinea, the forest and woodland belt, "Cold Steppe and Moorlands" and Tasmania are dealt with collectively in just 14 pages. This is in contrast with the 17 pages devoted to desert regions (Chapter 12), which were never important in terms of early occupation or population densities. A better title for this chapter might be "Arid Regions", as some of the sites discussed in this section are not strictly in deserts.

By and large I think that while some people may not agree with the authors' interpretations relating to various issues, they could agree that in a very general sense many of the main issues/theories relating to Australian prehistory had been touched on in a reasonably acceptable manner as they relate to the various headings between Chapters 1 and 12. However, the major area of concern which I believe leaves this book flawed to some extent, are the two chapters on stone artefacts: Chapter 13 "Pleistocene Artefacts" and Chapter 14 "Holocene Stone Tool Innovations". The uncritical use of outmoded typological characterisations of Australian stone technology in these two chapters denies a decade or more of research which has highlighted the shortcomings, and in some cases absurdities, of typological categories for Australian stone technology. Put simply, most of the 'types' outlined in these chapters are no longer relevant today and are certainly not used by the majority of archaeologists in this country. This is obviously a serious flaw in what is the most recent synthesis of Australian prehistory. At the very least, Chapter 13 should have had a comment on the debate between typological characterisation versus technological analysis in Australian stone artefact studies. As it is, the reader is left with the erroneous impression that typology is still relevant to cutting-edge stone artefact studies in this country when this is plainly not the case.

Although ostensibly a 1999 publication written between 1995 and 1997, in many respects the problems in regard to Chapters 13 and 14 sum up the 'feel' of much of the book, which harks back to an earlier era. In the preface, the authors state that "we decided to maintain the orientation and much of the structure of the earlier books written by Mulvaney solely." I think this may have been a mistake, as after 20 years many of the themes and certainly the evidence has changed to such an extent that the authors may have been better starting from scratch with an entirely different approach. Consequently there are a number of errors and weaknesses relating to the use of out-of-date research. Whilst I realise that this is one of the difficulties in publishing archaeological syntheses when new evidence is continuously coming to hand, I feel that omissions relating to published material available at the time of writing is a serious issue. The lack of any discussion relating to technological analysis as a theoretical and methodological approach is but one example. Another is on page 244, where, when dealing with so called 'Juan Knives', the authors state that only a single archaeological specimen, a few from museum collections and a couple from excavations are known. A series of not-so-recent publications (Knight 1990, Barker and Schon 1994 and Lamb 1996) clearly quantify the presence of large numbers of 'Juan Knives' elsewhere in Australia.

Chapter 15 "Theories and Models: Explaining Change" looks at change in the Late Holocene, including the introduction of new stone technologies, cultural diffusion, risk minimisation and the 'intensification debate'. In relation to these topics, the authors highlight the complexity of issues relating to change, but by and large view change as part of an internal, historical, adaptive process, which is a common thread throughout the book.

The section on Intensification provides a much simplified but accessible summary of Lourandos's model and quite rightly acknowledges the importance of this work in "challenging perceptions of causation and change in Australian Prehistory and broaden[ing] research directions" (page 272).

Chapters 16, 17 and 18 all deal with regional variation throughout the Holocene, with Chapter 16 looking at the "People of the Coast", Chapter 17 "Regional Challenges and Responses" looking at the Snowy Mountains, Murray River Societies, and the Arid Zone and Chapter 18 looking at "Island Settlement". I find it curious that coastal settlement and island settlement are treated separately here, as in general, especially in the south of the continent, island use is largely an extension of mainland coastal settlement.

Chapter 19 looks at Island Tasmania post-12,000 years ago which, in common with much the book, makes heavy use of the historical record. The end of this section deals with the "rupture in relations between dedicated archaeologists and the Tasmanian Aboriginal Land Council" (page 356), which sheds little light on the actual circumstances of the suspension of archaeological fieldwork in Tasmania. It may have been appropriate to have included some references at the back of this section relating to *both sides* of the argument for the general reader, as it is a crucial issue in Australian archaeology and there are valid points to be made from both points of view.

Chapters 20, 21 and 22 all deal with rock art in Australia. While it may be considered that 49 pages on rock art is an undue emphasis in a volume of 400 pages, I feel that given its likely audience, this is justified. Rock art for the general public is among the most tangible of prehistoric remains in Australia and generates enormous interest. These chapters reiterate the indigenous origins of art styles throughout the continent, while also dealing with some of the more fanciful interpretations of the origins of rock art in certain regions of Australia.

The book finishes with a large section on contact history which, although important, sits uneasily in a volume titled "Prehistory of Australia".

Overall I am sure this book will be very popular with the general public and in a broad sense provides a general outline of some of the major issues in Australian prehistory. However, in light of its clear debt to an earlier era of Australian archaeology, it is hoped that the interest generated from reading this very accessible prehistory will encourage the reader into pursuing supplementary reading from a more contemporary perspective.

## References

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**ARCHAEOLOGY OF ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIA: A READER.** Tim Murray (ed.) 1998. St Leonards NSW: Allen and Unwin. ISBN 1-86448-066-1 (pb.). Pp. xi +364. Price AUD39.95.

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*Archaeology of Aboriginal Australia: A Reader* is structured thematically in order to communicate to the student of archaeology the sense of continuing debates amongst professional archaeologists about the "past 40,000 years of human action" (p. 4) in Australia. Indeed, Tim Murray states (p. 4) that "the main objective of this book is to convey a sense of the excitement and of the significance of the research which has been undertaken since archaeological research became professionalised during the 1960s". This compilation of papers will indeed be a useful tool in introducing students to general theories, critical problems and areas of specific research within Australian Indigenous archaeology.

This edited book consists of two parts. Part I consists of general surveys of Pleistocene and Holocene Australia. This section covers the antiquity and nature of the human settlement of Australia, dating determinations and intensification. Part II consists of special studies that present perspectives on stone artefact analysis, rock art and the reconstruction of palaeoecology. Overall there are 26 separate articles to this multi-authored book with 24 contributors from at least 9 different affiliations. Of these 26 separate articles, 16 are reproductions of previously published material. The remaining previously unpublished material was specifically commissioned for the book or written by Murray himself to introduce and contextualize each general survey or section within the special studies.

Murray's introduction to this reader begins with a discussion concerning the changes in and understanding of Australian Indigenous archaeology since the 1960s. He highlights changes in archaeology as a profession, access to the physical remains of the past and the social and cultural contexts of the archaeology of Indigenous Australia. This introduction will be useful to the new student of archaeology, as it contextualizes the research and research methodologies of today by teaching the changes in consciousness and politics of the past. Problematically, however, Murray in this introduction reinforces or sets up a dichotomy between the 'archaeologist' and the 'Indigenous person' without acknowledging the contribution of Indigenous archaeologists today and the contribution that will be made by Indigenous archaeologists in the future.

The first general survey focuses on the problems in addressing the 'antiquity' of human actions (Jim Allen), with obvious attention paid to the debates concerning dating determinations within Indigenous Australian archaeology (Jim Allen, Richard Roberts, Rhys Jones, Mike Smith and Simon Holdaway).

The second general survey discusses the timing and pattern of the original colonisation of Australia and New Guinea as well as the changes in occupation over time. This section includes papers which address the general theories of settlement patterns (Mike Smith and Jim Allen) as well as papers that specifically discuss the nature and extent of late Pleistocene settlement in Tasmania (Kevin Kiernan, Rhys Jones and Don Ranson), New Ireland (Jim Allen, Chris Gosden, Rhys Jones and J. Peter White) as well as arid central Australia (Mike Smith).

The third general survey addresses the archaeology of Sahul and how it relates to and comments upon Australian Indigenous archaeology (Tim Murray, Jim Allen and Rhys Jones). In addition, this section includes an examination of the theories concerning the settlement of the sand-ridge deserts (Mike Smith). All of these papers are again pre-occupied with the timing and pattern of the original colonisation of Australia and New Guinea, and one wonders why there was a need to separate these articles from the previous section.

The majority of the papers in the fourth general survey address the late Holocene intensification debate through a variety of approaches (Christine Williamson, Anne Ross, Norman Yoffee and Colin Pardoe). The exception to these discussions is Murray's paper on contact archaeology and Aboriginality in Tasmania.

The first section of the special studies in Part II of this book are focussed on the ways in which palaeoecology can be applied to archaeology. Simon Holdaway provides an introductory article to this section. In addition, Richard Cosgrove, Jim Allen and Brendan Marshall through their previously published paper provide an ecological model which is certainly useful as a case study for the new student of Australian Indigenous archaeology. The second section of the special studies addresses the much debated and highly contentious field of stone artefact analysis. Peter Hiscock provides a clear and concise overview of and introduction to stone tool analysis. This is followed by Brian Hayden's ethnographic study of stone tool functions in the Western Desert. The third section of the special studies provides an overview of the archaeology of rock art in Australia by Christopher Chippindale. In addition, Bruno David, Ian McNiven, Val Attenbrow, Josephine Flood and Jackie Collins supply their study on the rock art of the Wardaman country.

Following the special studies, Murray concludes with a discussion on the literature of archaeology of Australia and role of Australian archaeology in society. In addition, he includes lists of general 'prehistories', major compilations and significant journals to assist the new student.

The technical aspects of this compilation are generally good, but there is room for improvement in a couple of areas. Firstly, one feels that there needs to be a clearer indication of the origin of the re-published material, as many of the readers of this book will be unfamiliar with past debates and the context in which they arose. It would definitely be most useful to have this information printed at the beginning of such articles rather than a half reference to the material in the acknowledgments and sometimes a full reference in the bibliography. In addition, the list of contributors at the beginning of the book is incomplete, as only names of authors of single-author articles and the first author of multi-author articles are listed. The commissioned articles are certainly a useful addition to each

thematic section as they supply background information to the following debates and special studies, but there is room for improvements in the contextualizing of the issues in some of these papers. Although it is acknowledged in this review that many of these articles are straight re-prints, it must be stated that the gender-specific language used in some of the articles as well as words used to refer to Indigenous Australians and their past may be insulting to some readers. This edited book, however, certainly makes a good contribution to the archaeology of Indigenous Australia in that unlike other works, e.g. *Archaeology of the Dreamtime* by Josephine Flood, more than one viewpoint is expressed through the debates that have occurred over the past 30 years amongst archaeological practitioners. This multi-authored reader will be most valuable to students with a basic understanding of archaeological principles. It will also be a useful volume for the more experienced archaeologist as it collates a number of important articles.

## References

Flood, J. 1995 *Archaeology of the Dreamtime*, 3rd edition. Sydney: William Collins.

**EGYPT'S MAKING: THE ORIGINS OF ANCIENT EGYPT 5000 – 2000 BC.**  
Michael Rice 1991. London: Routledge. ISBN 0-415-06454-6 (pb.). Pp. xxii + 322. Price USD27.99.

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The author states his motivation for writing in the first sentence of the preface: "I began writing this book as a sort of celebration of most ancient Egypt, of the origins of a culture which seems to me to be without precedent or equal." It is a statement which can go one of two extreme ways: it can emphasise the greatness of the evolution of the Ancient Egyptian state in comparison with those of the neighbouring Near East, or it can seek the reasons for its rise in the inspiration of neighbouring city-states such as Ur, Ubaid and Enki. It is to the detriment of the book that Rice opted for the latter instead of forging a middle path. Rice is not a professional Egyptologist nor a prehistoric archaeologist involved in studying Predynastic and early Dynastic Egypt. He is archaeologically concerned with the Arabian Peninsula and this influences many of his ideas throughout the book.

*Egypt's Making* is divided into six chapters, an appendix and a bibliography. It should be noted, however, that references are generally not cited in the text and are only those the author thinks relevant.

The first chapter discusses the geography of Ancient Egypt and particularly the influence of the Nile on the developing civilisation. A brief outline is presented of the history of Egyptology, with the main emphasis on Sir Flinders Petrie.

The second chapter deals with the typological industries preceding the First Dynasty: the Badarian, Naqada I, Naqada II and Naqada III. The discussion of the concentration of sites, as well as the artefacts excavated, from these periods is concise and informative. Problems creep in, though, in his analyses of the artefacts. While acknowledging there is no archaeological evidence for a Lower Egyptian kingdom in the Nile Delta, he does not discard this possibility because of its persistence in the written Ancient Egyptian record, contra Kemp (1989). Rice reiterates the influence on craftsmanship design on the Predynastic by the city-states of the Near East. There are two currently-acknowledged routes through which Mesopotamian influence could feasibly have reached Ancient Egypt: the Levant and the Wadi Hammamat. Rice attributes greater significance and trade importance to the Wadi Hammamat, bucking current archaeological evidence favouring the Levant. Following this train of thought, Rice claims that Osiris originated in Western Asia and entered Egypt where he was a late arrival in the pantheon, only rising to significance in the late Old Kingdom. Although he claims that this has been proposed by “some authorities”, Rice gives neither the age of these sources nor does he cite them. The age of Osiris and his Egyptian origins are well attested through the Early Dynastic and the Old Kingdom, and the Pyramid Texts cite him in some vocations dating to the Predynastic. It is comforting that amidst the many inferences of Mesopotamian influence on Egypt that Rice does not ascribe to the theory of a “dynastic race” (Emery 1961).

Chapter 3 describes the development of hierarchy through the Predynastic and the way it manifested itself through societal expressions. Hierakonpolis is discussed in depth and the origins of the ideology of kingship. The development of maceheads and palettes are traced in parallel, as are the early tombs. A brief outline is given of the first pharaohs. All in all this is the most informative and factually accurate chapter of the book, although Rice makes the critical errors of firstly ascribing to the outdated theory that the origins of the Horus-Seth conflict is found in the political characters of the protagonists Peribsen (Seth) and Khasekhem-Khasekhemui (Horus), and secondly accepting without question or discussion that attribution of the mythological name of “Menes” to the historical personage of Narmer.

Chapters four and five deal with the Third Dynasty until the end of the Old Kingdom. They plot the course of Egypt’s “Golden Age”, which contained in it the roots of its ultimate collapse.

The final chapter deals with Rice’s psychological mentor – Jung. Jung himself expressed great interest in Ancient Egypt, a factor that heightens, in Rice’s view, the validity of using Jung’s philosophy in interpreting the development of the Ancient Egyptians through “analytical psychology”. Kemp suggests that “for those who regard the processes of state formation as a socio-economic phenomenon this approach may be anathema”. It is difficult to see how that can reasonably be so, for the socio-economic approach does not take into account the interactive cognitive abilities of the Ancient Egyptian to any great degree: this is a line of questioning which holds, in our opinion, promising research opportunities, although not necessarily following Jungian principles which we have difficulty with.

A lot careful and hard work has gone into producing this very lucid text. The pictures are numerous and informative. Rice brings to the fore again the seemingly dismissed possibility that the Arabian Peninsula islands played a big role in the development of Ancient Egypt by means of being a contact and trade route from Mesopotamia. However, this results in chronological problems, which Rice readily admits. This weakens his case. While there is much useful information for both academics and interested scholars of Ancient Egypt to take note, Rice’s text is littered with factual errors which makes the book problematic. The book should be read with critical open-mindedness.

## References

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Kemp, B. 1989 *Ancient Egypt: Anatomy of a civilisation*. London: Routledge.