

“The Colonisation of Australia prior to European Settlement”

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The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind.

The Tempest IV, i, 148.

Shakespeare:

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If I have done one small thing it is because I have sat at the feet of Colossi
- Diogenes

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ABSTRACT

This thesis presents a view of multiple human contacts with Australia, using a variety of data from the literature; linguistic, ethnographic, geographic, physical anthropology and art history. It will be shown that successive groups of people arrived in Australia before its settlement by Europeans. These people made their presence felt in various ways, which have been considered.

Some in ancient and later times may have arrived from Africa, perhaps being blown off course and carried by the currents and winds of the Indian Ocean. Later migrations came from Asia, and finally technologically advanced peoples of Indonesia and China came to Australia. Some of these people left artefacts, practices and language that became part of some Aboriginal languages and some religious beliefs and practice, along with some physical biological traces.

The peoples named "Aborigines" by European settlers were a diverse set of groups with a diverse set of physical and cultural influences. In particular the Batak people of Sumatra over a period of time contributed a large component of these diverse influences.

INTRODUCTION

A hypothesis considered here is that Australia has been settled many times in the past. The evidence is found all over Australia and in parts of the East. In a number of instances the evidence has not been previously researched in an Australian context, raising questions which warrant further research.

A number of arguments support this hypothesis and the thesis presents an outline of the general movements of peoples: what is known of the peoples who came, settled and left, and of those who stayed. A view of the Indian Ocean rim as a united populated territory is presented. The several waves of arrivals are traced, beginning with an account of the mythical Baijini of Arnhem Land and progressing through to evidence of Sumatran settlement.

The thesis explores published evidence of a succession of peoples who may have earlier come to Australia. It draws on the work of Bonwick, Birdsell, Wood Jones and others. Stone collections, stone buildings and other artefacts indicating the presence of various peoples in Australia in the past, and various historical records, are discussed. The chapters set out, in turn, the available evidence for each arrival to the final settlement by the British, which is briefly touched on.

Because this thesis suggests alternatives to what is accepted about the first peoples inhabiting Australia, the "Out of Africa" thesis will be mentioned briefly in this introduction. This theory has been accepted for a number of years to explain migrations from Africa to other destinations including Australia. A possible survival route is suggested out of Africa to the North West Coast of Australia (Appendix 6) based on a study of relevant waterways, oceans, coastal depths, continental shelves and land-fall between possible destinations.

Beginning with the finding of Dubois' "man-like ape", *Pithecanthropus* (now *Homo erectus*) in Java the idea of Asia as a potential source for migrations to Australia has strengthened. Recently, renewed focus on Asia has been stimulated by the recent finding of a small, controversial pygmy species, *Homo floresiensis*, at Liang Bua on Flores (Morwood et al. 2005, Jacobs et al. 2006).

A focus of this study is the work of two researchers, James Bonwick (1873) and Joseph Birdsell (1993). Both claim autochthonic occupation of Australia for the pygmy peoples and considered them one and the same people, the only difference being their point of entry into Australia. Bonwick proposed that the Tasmanians and the Buandik were both earlier migrants from the extreme southern tip of Africa. He suggested the Tasmanians and Buandik were Bushman type people who had entered the extreme tip of Western Australia as a result of an ancient oceanic catastrophe which left dry paths. Although his work was done well over a century ago and has long been overlooked, Bonwick was a keen observer and is, in fact, almost our only source of information about the appearance and culture of peoples who have either ceased to exist or have changed out of all recognition, and it is time to take a new look at what he said.

Joseph Birdsell's Tri-Hybrid Theory described three major waves of ancient migration which, he claimed came from southeastern Asia. He suggested the original Australians "reached their ultimate homeland" in the late Pleistocene (1993:22). He used his massive study of physical traits (1993) to test this theory. This thesis will not deal particularly with the biological characteristics of indigenous people of Australia, but with other instances of evidence of arrival by migration.

According to Yolngu history the Baijini were the first people who settled in Australia, growing rice and building houses. Many visitors came and left – including the Macassans who left their influence on the art and culture of the Yolngu. Others too settled, among them the Sumatran Batak, in the Northern area and the Kimberleys. The story of this group leads into the final section of this thesis which deals with the Wandjina paintings of the Kimberleys. This study draws attention to possible external contacts implicated in the Wandjinas.

It could be said there is one over-arching motif running constantly through this thesis. Over time Wood Jones's "lines of formed stones" have been the subject of inquiry and myth. These stones obviously served an important purpose; transport of such massive stones needs many men. Photographs record that hundreds of men moved similar stones in Sumatra (Appendix 1). Wood Jones (1926) states that collections of formed and unformed stones are not uncommon in Australia but the meaning of these collections is by no means clear and explanations vary.

The thesis discusses these collections as evidence of settlement. Wood Jones was one of the first seriously to suggest that Australia may have had settlements of people other than the ancestors of the main present-day Aboriginal population, even beyond living memory. The thesis also reinforces the conclusion that the Australian continent was not, at settlement, *Terra Nullius*.

Wood Jones's stones may be part of a remnant of religious practices of Batak people in Australia. This theme recalls Perry (1926) in "Children of the Sun": "by the time the Archaic Age had reached Australia [the Australian Aboriginal] culture was already in decline". The Batak culture and religion was one of the numerous contributors to indigenous culture.

Gamble (1993) argues the world's pre-history is not only concerned with how the world is colonized but with the commonality of the "mosaic" of humanity, and is to be seen as a "Global Village" (paraphrased Gamble, 1993). This thesis will exemplify his view: many claims have been made of foreign visitors to Australian shores, and some are quite without foundation, but the evidence for others seems more substantial – humanity is indeed a Global Village.