On Some Rock Carvings Found in the Neighbourhood of Sydney.

Author(s): Charles Nicholson

Source: *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 9 (1880), pp. 31-35

Published by: [Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2841867>

Accessed: 16/06/2014 16:34

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

From the EDITOR.—*Materiaux pour l'Histoire de l'Homme*, Dec., 1878.

From the ACADEMY.—*Atti della R. Accademia dei Lincei*, Vol. III., No. 3.

From the AUTHOR.—*The Ancient Commerce of India. The Classification of Languages.* By Dr. Gustav Oppert.

From the EDITOR.—*Revue Internationale des Sciences*, No. 3, 1879.

From the EDITOR.—*Revue Scientifique*, Nos. 37 and 38, 1879.

From the EDITOR.—“*Nature*” (to date).

MR. HENRY SEEBOHM read a paper entitled “Some particulars respecting the native Races of Arctic Siberia,” accompanied by an Exhibition of Ethnological objects collected in that region.

The following paper was read :—

On some ROCK CARVINGS found in the neighbourhood of SYDNEY.
By SIR CHARLES NICHOLSON, Bart., LL.D.

IN various localities along the Coast of New Holland, especially on the eastern side extending from Cape Howe to Moreton Bay, carvings are found on the surface of rocks, representing in low relief the human figure, portions of the human body, as the hand or foot; and various animals, such as the kangaroo and whale. Some carefully executed drawings of these, by my friend Colonel Vigors, have been handed to me by that gentleman, and accompany this short communication. The soft and friable sandstone which is associated with the great coal formation of Eastern Australia, presents facilities for these rude intaglios that have been taken advantage of very largely by the native artists. The spots selected for the tracing of these outlines are the sides and shelving roofs of open caves, but more generally the smooth horizontal surface of the rock itself, at points near the edge of the cliffs overhanging the sea, or forming the boundaries of the different inlets by which the coast-line is broken, in various places along its eastern face. On the rocks overhanging the harbour of Port Jackson and along the countless bays into which its waters spread; at Broken Bay, and the estuary of the Hawkesbury River, these remains are discoverable and are often only brought to light when the soil which has accumulated on the surface and the vegetable growths by which they are concealed are removed. As not only brushwood but large trees of considerable age are often found rooted

in the soil that conceals these carvings, a considerable interval must have elapsed since the period when they were executed. Those delineated in the accompanying drawings were discovered by Colonel Vigors whilst engaged in superintending the erection of a battery at Middle Head, Port Jackson. On clearing away the superficial soil and brushwood preparatory to the levelling of the rock the carvings were brought to light. Exact measurements of the various objects were then made and carefully reduced according to a given scale. In a memorandum addressed to me by the above-named able and intelligent officer, he makes the following observations: "The sandstone rock is formed into large horizontal tables and on these the outlines were cut. They were covered with several inches of vegetable mould. No. 1 is the only specimen of the human form I could discover. I look on No. 8 as interesting, as it shows the manner in which the natives began the work. Small holes were drilled or made in the rock at intervals of a few inches and were subsequently joined into one continuous line as shown in the other figures. No. 17 is upwards of 30 feet in length, and no doubt was meant to represent a whale. No. 19 is the next longest. What fish No. 21 is intended to represent it would be very difficult to determine. The kangaroo (jumping), figure 24 as well as 27, where he is at bay, are amongst the most interesting."

I have little to add to these remarks, except that I have myself seen many similar examples of these "graphiti" on the escarpments and surface of the rocks adjacent to the locality from whence the accompanying drawings were derived. Among these latter I have no doubt the Dogong and other varieties of the Phocæ are meant to be indicated by the aboriginal sculptor, as these form a very important article of food to all the native tribes living on the sea-coast. A very common form of the carving here referred to is one representing the human hand or foot. As to the age of these remains it is difficult to form any opinion. From the extent of the erosion to which those have been subjected which have been exposed to the open air, as well as from the depth of the alluvium and size of the trees by which the horizontal carvings are concealed, it is evident that a very considerable interval must have elapsed since the era of their production. The present native race can give no account of these remains, and I think it will be generally admitted that no aboriginal tribe, with whom any of the European inhabitants of Australia have been brought into contact, could have been the authors of even such rudimentary examples of artistic skill. Like other similar pre-historic carvings found on the coasts of North America and other parts of the world, they may be regarded as the very earliest examples of the efforts of particular

aces of man to give expression to the imitative faculty by way of pictorial design. In the examples now brought before the Anthropological Institute there seems to be something like a perception of the laws of proportion, for the figures for the most part leave little doubt as to the intentions of the artist with respect to the object meant to be delineated.

At whatever period, and by whoever these and similar sculptures were created, they are, I believe, the only real examples we have of genuine Archaic Australian art. On the north-west coast of Australia, Sir George Grey discovered, many years since, some caves, on the sloping roof of one of which is painted on a black ground the rude form of a human figure in red and white, clothed with a short tunic, and with the head surrounded by a sort of nimbus, like that seen in mediæval pictures of Saints. Were it not for the absence of the symbol of the Cross, the figure here referred to might be supposed to be a specimen of early Christian iconography. There are also drawings in other adjacent caves of men carrying kangaroos, and of various objects the nature of which it is not very easy to divine, but which Sir George Grey suggests as representing implements of the chase. These chromatic pictorial representations found at the north-west coast of Australia, are evidently of a wholly different character from the sculptured rocks described above. The localities where the painted figures are found are not very distant from those parts of the northern coast frequented by the Malays fishing for trepang and the pearl oyster, and holding more or less intercourse with the natives of the soil. I would venture to suggest the probability that the paintings discovered by Sir George Grey and described by him in the account of his explorations in the north-east of Australia, may be the work of some accidental visitors, Malays, or possibly shipwrecked European sailors, attributable to someone belonging to a race distinct and superior to that which, so far as observation has hitherto extended, has held exclusive possession of the vast territory of Australasia. That Europeans have occasionally been isolated or seized by the natives, and compelled to consort with them for a length of time, sufficient to obliterate nearly all the habits and associations of earlier civilised life, is well known to those acquainted with history of the various colonies of Australia. When the first settlement from Van Diemens Land was made in Victoria in 1836, an Englishman, of the name of Berkley, was discovered living with one of the tribes of the Aborigines. He had left one of the penal settlements of the colony, had associated himself with the blacks, and for some 30 years had never seen the face of a white man. In this long interval he had lost, with the exception of a

few words, the use of his native language, had dispensed with all clothing, and had conformed in every way to the habits of the race amongst whom his lot had been cast. The early habits of civilised life had, however, left a sufficient impress on his character to enable him to exercise a considerable ascendancy in the tribe to which he had attached himself. It is quite conceivable that such a man, during his enforced residence amongst savages, may have sought to preserve some of the earlier reminiscences of his life in rude pictorial representations, such as those described by Sir George Grey.

With reference to the chiseled drawings to which attention is herein more especially made, it must be admitted that they exhibit a degree of mechanical skill and a sense of pictorial effect, that could only have belonged to a race considerably in advance of any now extant on the Continent of New Holland. The existing aboriginal native of Australia presents one of the very lowest of all known types of humanity. Has there been any degradation from an earlier and somewhat higher standard? Whatever conclusion we may come to on the subject it is at all events interesting to recognise in these uncouth and infantile efforts of the savage to give permanent expression to the images that occupy his mind, the existence of a faculty and an instinct which have their highest development and influence in the most advanced stages of civilisation.

DISCUSSION.

Mr. JAMES BONWICK made reference to other localities in which similar artistic displays were known, especially drawings made with red or yellow ochre and charcoal. A high opinion of the native ability has been entertained by several observers. Mr. Surveyor Hodgkinson saw a boy sketch with a freedom and correctness he considered superior to the work of English lads. Captain Stokes noticed many drawings on Depuch Isle, with not the slightest trace of indecency. Flinders found about one hundred and fifty designs on an island in the Gulf of Carpentaria. Peron observed fair carvings on boomerangs. The Tasmanians had at least two words to express figures drawn with charcoal. Their power of imitating novel objects has been attested by several. The first time a bullock-drag passed through a certain district of the interior, a black fellow left a remembrance of the event in a capital sketch with charcoal on the bark of a tree. Robinson, exploring the West in 1831, came upon several specimens of native art. The permanent huts of Macquarie Harbour were seen so illustrated. Elsewhere a boat, or bark catamoran, was depicted, with five persons in it.

Mr. W. L. DISTANT drew attention to a paper by Dr. Julius von Haast, recently read before the Institute, on "Rock Paintings in

New Zealand," in which there were many analogies to the interesting facts related by Sir Charles Nicholson in New South Wales. The New Zealand rock paintings were also of a red colour, red oxide of iron being employed as a pigment, and fishes or whales were also portrayed.

RELATIONSHIPS *and the NAMES used for THEM among the PEOPLES of MADAGASCAR, chiefly the HOVAS; together with OBSERVATIONS upon MARRIAGE CUSTOMS and MORALS among the MALAGASY.* By the Rev. JAMES SIBREE, Junior.

A PERUSAL of Mr. C. S. Wake's interesting paper upon "The Origin of the Classificatory System of Relationships used among Primitive Peoples" ("Journ. Anthropol. Inst.," Nov., 1878), has called my attention to several facts connected with this subject as found among the peoples of Madagascar. As some of these have not, I believe, as yet been brought into public notice, it may perhaps be of some service to note them down as a slight contribution to a fuller knowledge of the state of society among primitive races of mankind.

When a foreigner first settles down in the country and begins to study the language, he finds in many classes of words strange deficiencies as compared with English, while at the same time he finds in other groups a much greater fulness and minuteness of distinction than exists in his own or allied languages.

This remark applies fully to the names used for relationships among the Hovas, if not also to those employed by the other Malagasy tribes.

The words for "father," *ray*, and "mother," *rény*, are used with a very wide signification, and are applied not only to the actual father and mother, but also to step-father and step-mother (who are also called *raikely* and *renikely*, "little father," and "little mother"), and to uncles and aunts, with their wives and husbands; so that it is almost impossible to get to know the exact relationship people bear to one another without asking, "Is he the father who begat him?" or "Is she the mother who bore him?" (It may not be unworthy of remark here that the same word, *mitéraka*, is used both for begetting and for bearing children.) Consequently there are no single words in Malagasy corresponding to our "uncle" and "aunt;" one must say "father's brother" or "sister," or "mother's brother" or "sister," as the case may be. And so it naturally follows that there are also no single words for "nephew" or "niece;" these are all *zànaka*,

D 2