

**Australian Rock Art Research Association (AURA)
and International Federation of Rock Art Organizations (IFRAO)**

ROCK ART RESEARCH

Volume 14, Number 2

NOVEMBER 1997



Anthropomorphic paintings,
Kimberley, Australia.
(See article by David M. Welch, pages 88-112.)



Anthropomorphic paintings,
Kimberley, Australia.
(See article by David M. Welch,
pages 88-112.)



KEYWORDS: *Interpretation - Dance - Ceremony - Spearthrower - Kimberley - Kakadu*

FIGHT OR DANCE? CEREMONY AND THE SPEARTHROWER IN NORTHERN AUSTRALIAN ROCK ART

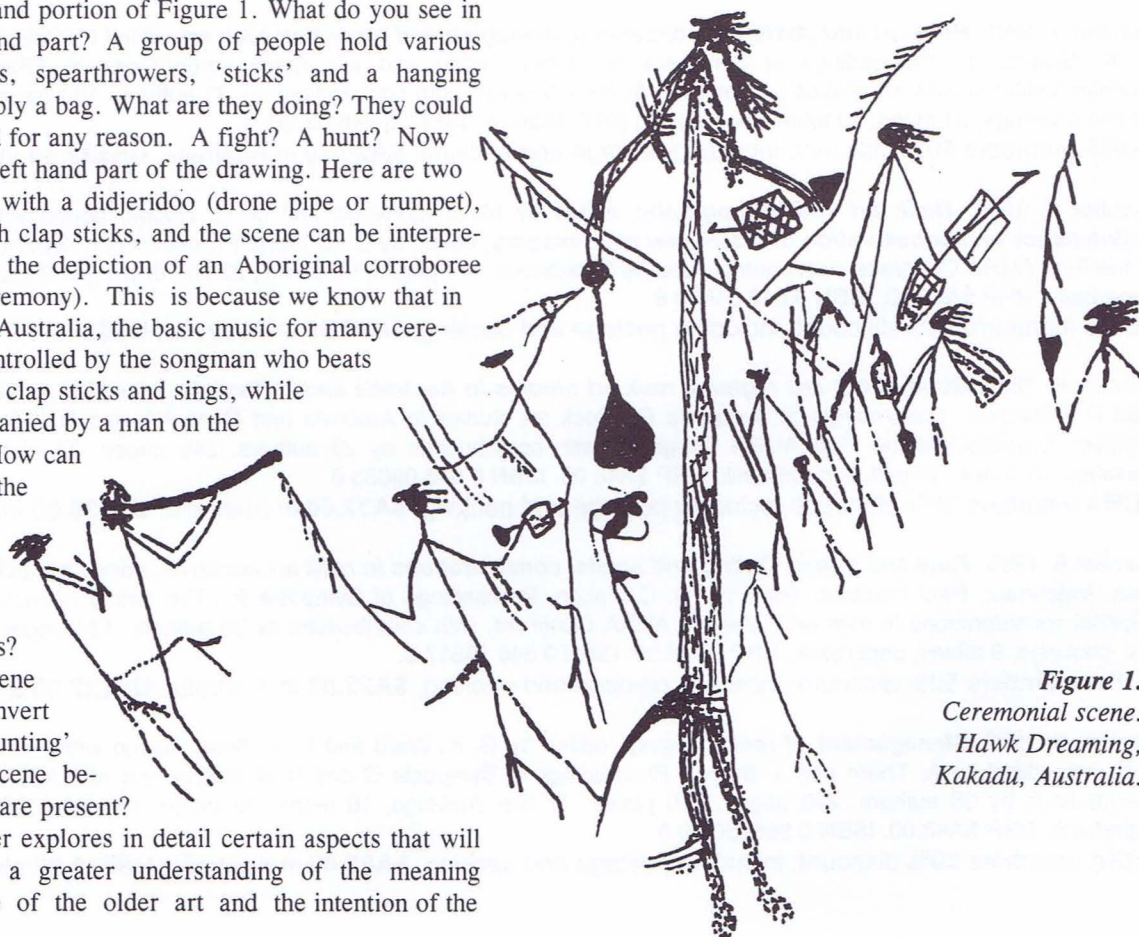
David M. Welch

Abstract. Aspects of Aboriginal dance and ceremony are defined in relation to their appearance in northern Australian rock art. Some paintings depicting human figures with weapons such as boomerangs, spears and spearthrowers have previously been interpreted as hunting or fighting scenes. Some larger groups of human figures have been interpreted as battle scenes, thought to be associated with competition for diminishing resources, in particular a shortage of land caused by rising sea levels over 6000 years ago. Human figures in these scenes are holding a 'hooked stick' thought to be a 'fighting pick' used to inflict harm. However, it will be argued that these are really dancing or ceremonial scenes and the 'hooked stick' or 'fighting pick' is a spearthrower being held or waved about.

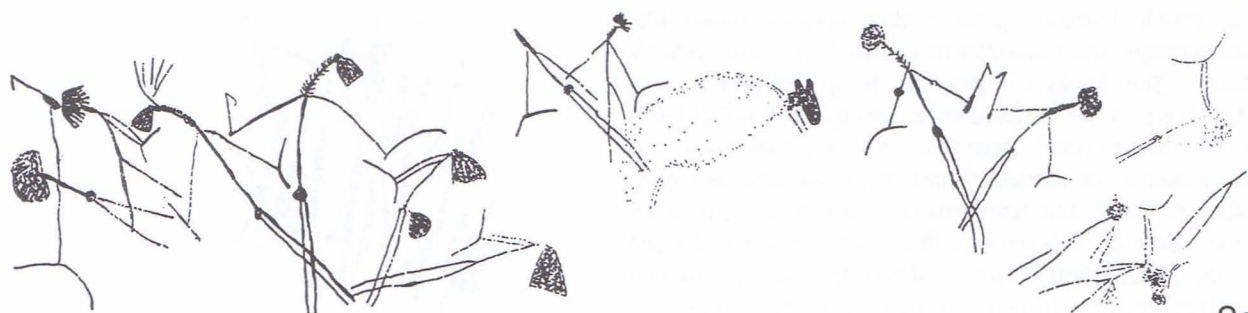
Introduction

Take a piece of paper, or use your hand, and cover up the left hand portion of Figure 1. What do you see in the right hand part? A group of people hold various items; spears, spearthrowers, 'sticks' and a hanging object, possibly a bag. What are they doing? They could be assembled for any reason. A fight? A hunt? Now uncover the left hand part of the drawing. Here are two figures, one with a didgeridoo (drone pipe or trumpet), the other with clap sticks, and the scene can be interpreted as being the depiction of an Aboriginal corroboree (dance or ceremony). This is because we know that in far northern Australia, the basic music for many ceremonies is controlled by the songman who beats time with his clap sticks and sings, while he is accompanied by a man on the didgeridoo. How can we interpret the meaning of this same scene without the two music makers? Does the scene suddenly convert to being a 'hunting' or 'battle' scene because spears are present?

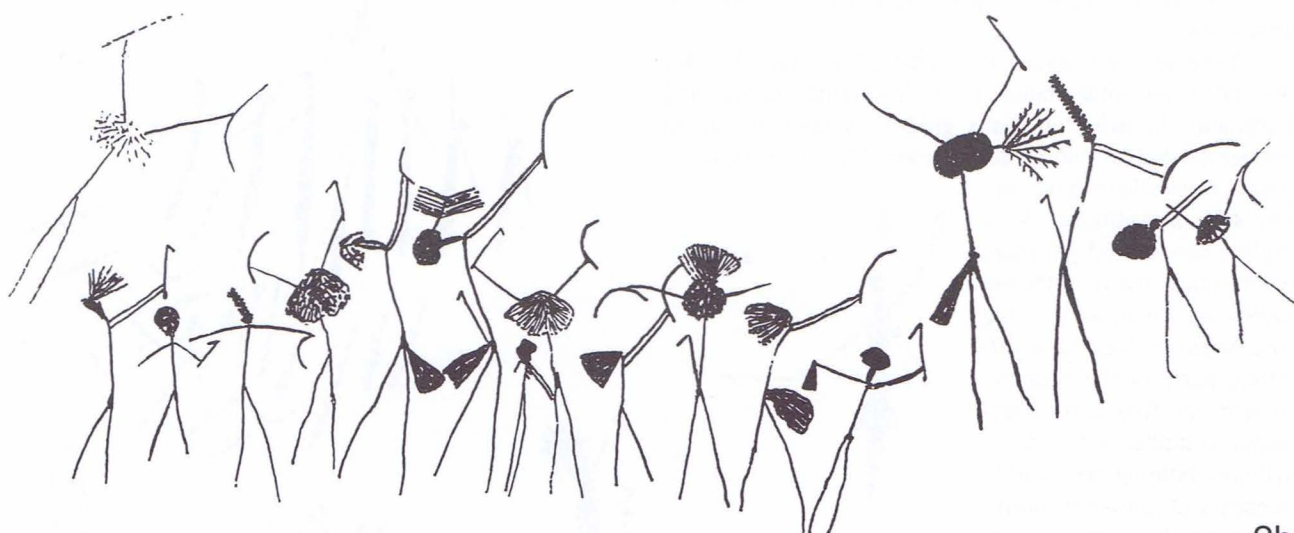
This paper explores in detail certain aspects that will bring us to a greater understanding of the meaning behind some of the older art and the intention of the



*Figure 1.
Ceremonial scene.
Hawk Dreaming,
Kakadu, Australia.*



2a



2b



2c

Figures 2a, 2b, 2c. Human figures with spearthrowers and boomerangs, Mount Brockman, Kakadu.

artists. It will deal with the art of the Kakadu/Arnhem Land and Kimberley regions where there are thousands of paintings and drawings of human figures carrying various combinations of spears, spearthrowers and boomerangs. What have the artists had in mind when so many paintings and drawings have been made? What specific meaning has been encoded into the art by the artists? Without some parameters or guidelines, we can only look at many of the human figures and say we do not know what they are doing. Some rock art researchers believe we cannot interpret the art, people are depicted 'just standing there' (G. Walsh, pers. comm.). Other

researchers believe we cannot even know with certainty whether this art represents real human beings and they argue that for this reason the term 'human figure' should always be written in inverted commas because the paintings may represent something else, or the term 'anthropomorphs' should be used because we do not know their meaning, even when a painting or drawing looks exactly like a human being (R. G. Bednarik, pers. comm.).

Some large scenes showing interactions of human figures have been difficult to interpret. One from Mount Brockman in Kakadu, shown in Figures 2a, 2b and 2c,

has simple human figures holding objects shaped like boomerangs and spearthrowers poised over each other's heads. The hooked object has been interpreted as a 'fighting pick' or 'hooked stick', designed to inflict harm in this 'battle scene'. Figure 3a, from the Kimberley, has been interpreted as two groups of people who face each other in battle and have thrown their spears past each other. Both these scenes are discussed in detail at the end of the paper when it will be shown they are ceremonial or dance scenes. In fact, the purpose of this paper is to open the reader's eyes to the view that many human figures in the art depict people taking part in dance or ceremony.

There are two issues that need addressing. Firstly, we need an understanding of Aboriginal dance and ceremony in order to form guidelines enabling us to recognise such scenes in the rock art. Most non-Aboriginal Australians have never seen a traditional Aboriginal dance, and yet there were once many different styles and tempos to song and dance performed in different parts of the country. Hence, the first part of this paper compiles a list of attributes helping to identify scenes and figures in northern Australian rock art associated with ceremony, dance or ritual.

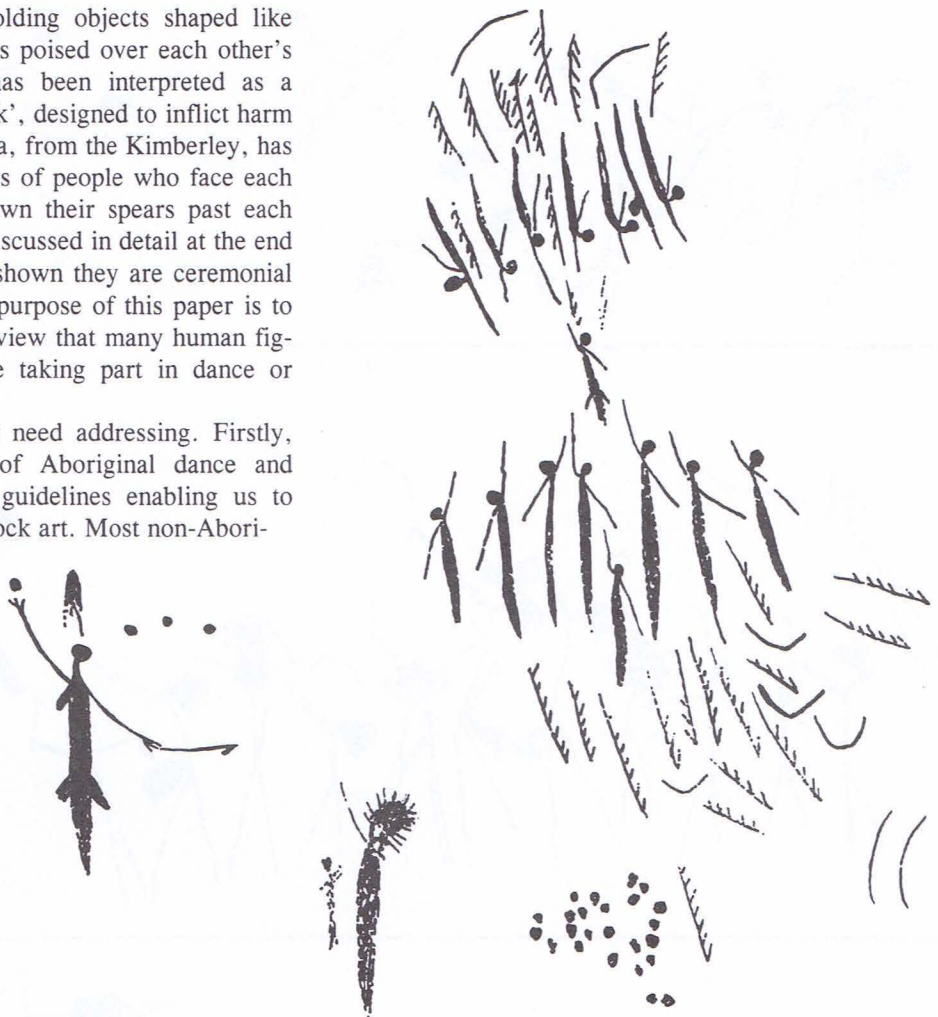


Figure 3a. Human figures surrounded by spears and boomerangs, Mitchell Plateau, Kimberley.

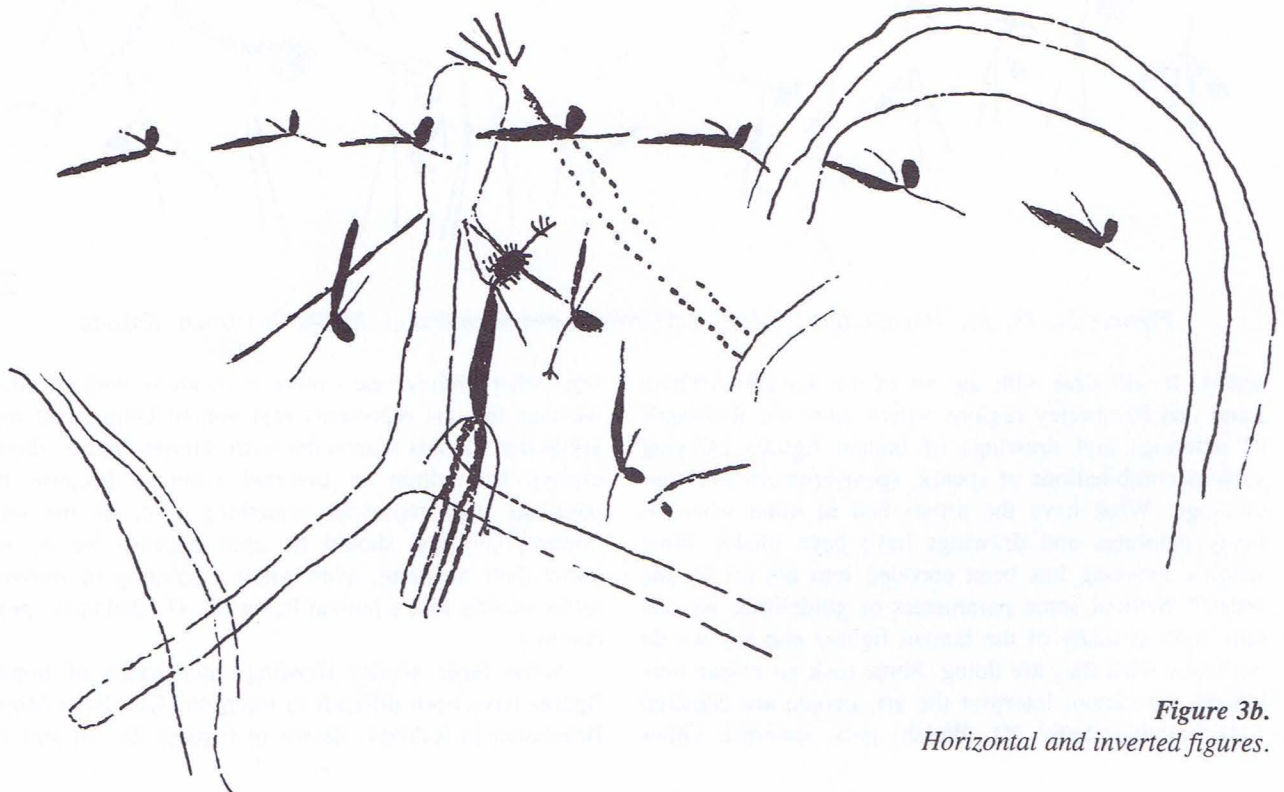


Figure 3b. Horizontal and inverted figures.

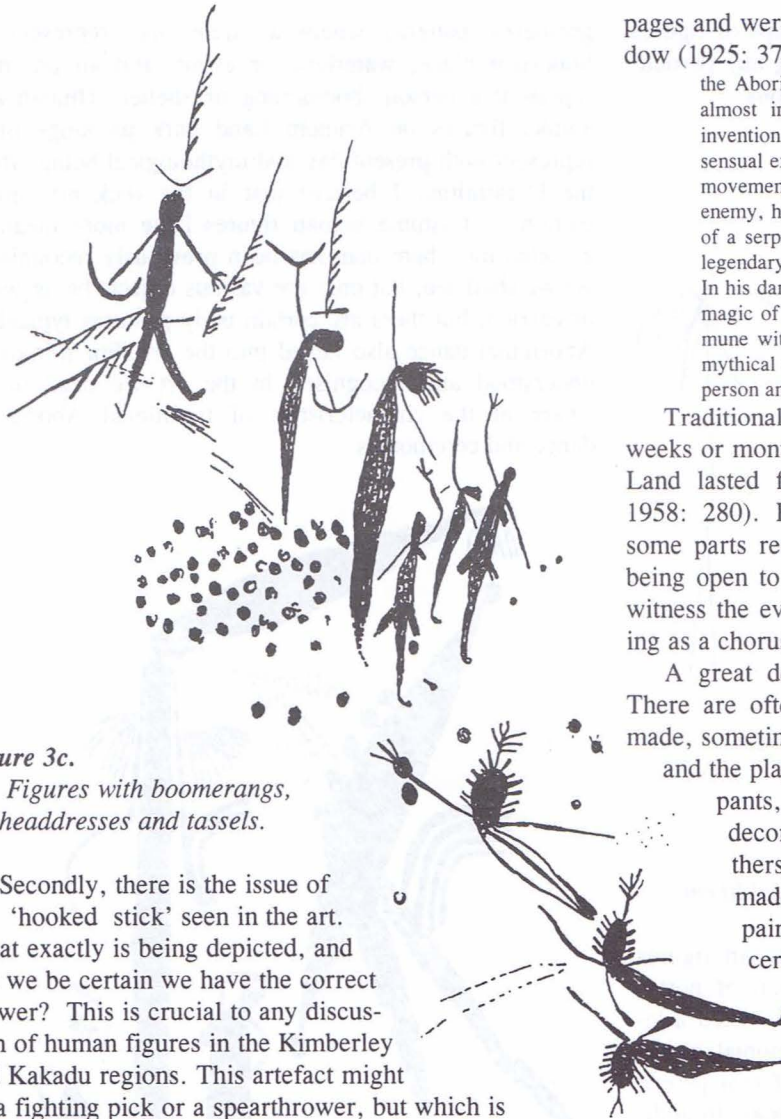


Figure 3c.

Figures with boomerangs, headdresses and tassels.

Secondly, there is the issue of the 'hooked stick' seen in the art. What exactly is being depicted, and can we be certain we have the correct answer? This is crucial to any discussion of human figures in the Kimberley and Kakadu regions. This artefact might be a fighting pick or a spearthrower, but which is correct? I believe the answer lies in our greater understanding of the role the spearthrower has to play in Aboriginal dance and ceremony. We have been able to identify this object as a spearthrower when we see a spear loaded into it or thrown from it (Figure 4), but we have become confused when we see it carried alone (Figures 2b and 3a). Hence, the second part of this paper reviews the importance of the Australian spearthrower in traditional Aboriginal life, and its depiction in the art.

Measurements given on the accompanying illustrations are the heights of the figures or panels unless specified otherwise.

The Aboriginal corroboree

Just as European culture has its opera, ballet, music and literature, so, too, does Aboriginal culture have important song, dance, ceremony and stories. 'Corroboree' is a New South Wales Aboriginal word now used to describe Aboriginal dance and ceremony. Curr (1886) collected many early descriptions of Aboriginal life from all over Australia and these often included details of corroborees. Elkin (1979: 304) reported that the Djanggawul stories of Arnhem Land contained 188 songs that translated to over 90 printed

pages and were all chanted in one great ceremony! Basedow (1925: 372) described how

the Aboriginal lives for his dances, of which he possesses an almost inexhaustible variety, the outcome of tradition and invention. He has learned to make his dance a medium of sensual expression, and to combine an instinctive impulse with movement. By his dancing he impersonates both friend and enemy, he copies the hopping of a marsupial, or the wriggling of a serpent, or the strutting of an emu, and he emulates the legendary practices and sacred ceremonials of his forefathers. In his dances lives the valour of his warriors, and dies the evil magic of his foes. Through his dances he endeavours to commune with the spirits of his dead, he hears the voices of his mythical demigods, and he beseeches his deities to protect his person and to bless his haunts with an abundance of game.

Traditional ceremonies lasted from several days to weeks or months. The Gunabibi ceremony from Arnhem Land lasted from two months to two years (Warner 1958: 280). Forms of this ceremony still take place, some parts restricted to the initiated males, other parts being open to all members of the tribe who may either witness the events or participate in the dancing or singing as a chorus.

A great deal of preparation goes into ceremonies. There are often special sacred objects that have to be made, sometimes large decorated poles or earth mounds, and the players are often elaborately dressed. Participants, their weapons and other objects may be decorated with feathered strings, ochres, or feathers and feather down. Sometimes effigies are made from bark, with string wound around and painted. Warner (1958: 311) notes that for one ceremony, 'the work of collecting the feathers and making the string is supposed to take a month or more and depends on the supply of feathers available and the amount desired by the men for the dance'. The more fragile objects need to

be made for each ceremony, while objects made from more resilient material such as hardwoods, bone or stone are hidden or buried after each ceremony and kept for future use.

A guide to recognising dance and ceremony in the rock art

Contained in the rock art of Kakadu/Arnhem Land and the Kimberley are many scenes of people holding various objects resembling spears, spearthrowers, boomerangs and bags. These figures have been described as having certain 'tool kits' or 'weapons' and deductions have been made about the chronology of invention of certain weapons based on what items these figures carry. For example, it is argued that the appearance of the spearthrower in the art matches the invention of the spearthrower, and changes in the shape of the spearthrower reflect changes in technology through time.

In our understanding of the meaning behind this older art we have been limited to general, descriptive terms, such as a 'hunting scene' when a human figure throws a spear at an animal (Figure 4), or a 'ceremonial scene' when we see a number of human figures with dancing poses or there are clapsticks and a didjeridoo present

(Figure 1). Single figures and smaller groups of figures have generally not been described as doing any particular activity as their purpose seemed ambiguous.



Figure 4. Spearthrower and spear, Kakadu, 120 cm.

My research on elaborately dressed human figures (Bradshaw figures) in the Kimberley region of north-west Australia matched their dress and associated artefacts with contemporary Aboriginal ceremonial attire, indicating those paintings are depictions of real people dressed for dance or ceremony (Welch 1996a). In addition to the elaborately dressed figures I also found that, because of the nature of the headdresses and features such as boomerangs carried in each hand, Aboriginal people identify many simple human figures in the Kimberley rock art as taking part in ceremonies (Welch 1996b). Brandl (1973: 173) made similar observations in the Kakadu/Arnhem Land regions, noting that many early human figures had ceremonial paraphernalia, in particular headdresses, armlets, waist ornaments and dancing skirts identified by Aboriginal informants as being items worn during ceremonies.

Within the rock art are unidentifiable objects which may represent ceremonial objects or paraphernalia (Welch 1996a: 121). An example of this is found at the top left of Figure 5 where an object has bulbous shapes protruding from its ends and one side. At other times, naturalistic shapes of plants and animals may have been intended to represent either actual plants or animals or models of plants and animals used in ceremony.

In Aboriginal philosophy, each aspect of the environment, people, objects and places, is encoded with several levels of meaning. People existed in previous lives, plants and landforms were people and animals in the Dreamtime and so on. Central Australian art features

geometric patterns where a circle may represent an important place, waterhole or event, and an arc may represent a person, boomerang or shelter. Human and animal figures on Arnhem Land bark paintings often represent both present-day and mythological beings from the Dreamtime. I believe that in the rock art, many paintings of simple human figures have more meaning encoded into them than has been previously recognised. As we shall see, not only are various objects being worn or carried, but there are certain body postures typical of Aboriginal dance also keyed into the art. For this to be understood and recognised in the art we need to be aware of the characteristics of traditional Aboriginal dance and ceremonies.

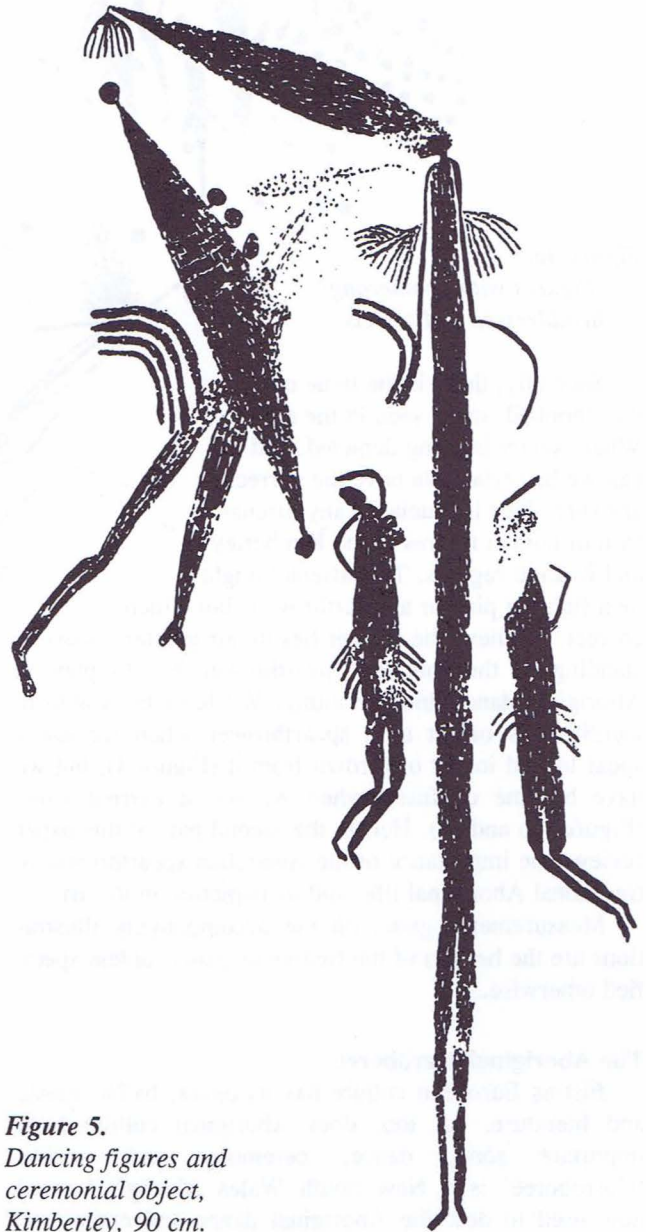


Figure 5. Dancing figures and ceremonial object, Kimberley, 90 cm.

Across the central and northern half of Australia, traditional dances still take place, many associated with initiation and mourning ceremonies, while others are presented at open Aboriginal cultural festivals. There are

many written accounts of dances and ceremonies, and some libraries hold limited video material for viewing. It appears there are many features of Australian dance depicted in the rock art of northern Australia which have not been noted as such by Australian rock art researchers. The following lists those elements allowing us to recognise scenes depicting dance or ceremony in the rock art.

(1) Larger scenes hold more information

Traditional Aboriginal artists from Arnhem Land painting on bark will often paint part of a story with a few motifs on the smaller barks, and only use the largest barks to paint an entire story with all the relevant motifs and details shown. Similarly, with contemporary dot painting art on canvas or wooden board from central Australia, when traditional Aboriginal artists paint, the smaller paintings may contain only part of a more detailed, larger story which is only shown in its entirety on the larger works.

With relation to the rock art, many paintings show only single or small groups of human figures and it is not obvious at first whether they are depicted doing any specific activity. Larger groups of human figures reveal more information about the intended activity of the people portrayed, showing more interaction between the figures involved and presenting more clues. Sometimes the same style of human figure appearing in the smaller groups is found within a large scene that may include various animals and objects. For example, in the Kimberley, when a rock panel is large enough to provide a suitable surface, the combination of some large naturalistic animals associated with bent knee figures appears to be part of one story panel. However, most bent knee figures are depicted without the large animals and at first one would not see the association.

The fact that larger scenes give more information is typified by the example in Figure 1, from Kakadu, because the same figures with spearthrowers having a rectangular section and spears appear frequently in the art of this area. Yet, when smaller groups of these figures are shown we might interpret them as hunters or warriors and suppose that the artist has painted them with this action in mind. Perhaps other paintings of similar human figures with rectangular spearthrowers in that area were also intended to depict people acting out their part in a dance or ceremony.

Figure 5, from the Kimberley, has a central figure with a large headdress and holding boomerangs in each hand, a common theme in rock art throughout Australia. However, in this example two smaller human figures, possibly both females, appear in the same pigment on each side in a dance position. It appears as though the scene represents two people dancing beside the central figure.

Similarly, Figure 6 shows part of a larger 'scene' previously illustrated (Welch 1996b: Fig. 16). The top human figure with the curved back belongs to a style unique to the East Alligator river area and termed a

'Mountford figure' by Chaloupka (1993: 132-7). The lower stick-figures have a completely different style and, in isolation, we would be unable to attribute these to the same artist. However, the full panel shows a top row of at least four figures, one seen here holding a spear-thrower and dance wand, and about 60 stick figures below, drawn as if forming a mass of people. A similar scene appears in Chaloupka (1993: 134-5). Although single and small group examples of these figures are found, it is the existence of these two large panels which puts the human figures into context.

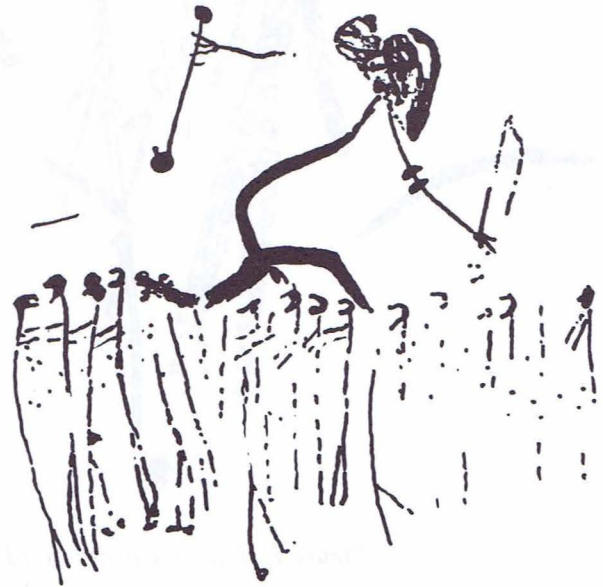


Figure 6. Figure with spearthrower, wand, arm and head decoration, Kakadu.

(2) The presence of clap sticks and the didgeridoo

These were discussed in the introduction. The didgeridoo was only known across the very north of Australia, in the Northern Territory and the Kimberley region at the time of European contact (Bowden 1994: 1). It is now a popular symbol of Aboriginal music throughout Australia and has become almost as well known as the boomerang and kangaroo as symbols of Australia. Traditionally, several sizes of didgeridoos were made from either bamboo or the hollow limb or trunk of a tree, usually one of the Eucalyptus species. Large stands of bamboo grow along coastal river systems between the Daly River and the South Alligator River in the Northern Territory and this, or other wood, is further hollowed out using a burning stick. During one of the boys' initiation ceremonies in Arnhem Land a large, decorated didgeridoo became a totemic emblem representing the ancestral python, Yurlunggur (Warner 1958: 260).

Clapsticks are made from hardwoods such as iron wood (*Erythrophleum chlorostachys*) or Acacia species. Two lengths of wood are struck together to create the beat or rhythm for song and dance. During Aboriginal corroborees often one or more people will stand or sit at the edge of the dance ground and use clapsticks. In this



Figure 7. Elaborately decorated straight part figures, Kimberley, 32 cm.

way, they are held in front of the body, as depicted in Figure 1. However, sometimes one of the dancers will use clapsticks while performing, and in this situation he may hit them together held above his head (Blitner tapes; Poignant and Poignant 1996: 123).

(3) The presence of large headdresses

Very little head ornamentation was worn by Aborigines during day to day life and it was only during ceremonies that large headdresses were seen. Human figures with large headdresses appearing in the art are usually identified by traditional Aborigines as being either a specific known ancestral figure, such as a Wandjina in the Kimberley, or a person dressed for a dance or ceremony.

(4) The presence of elaborate costume

Nowhere in Australia did Aborigines traditionally wear elaborate costume as everyday dress. Whether they lived in sparse desert regions or in thick rainforest jungles, the Aborigines were essentially naked. The only clothes worn were cloaks made from animal skins and worn during winter in parts of southern Australia.

During the wet season of northern Australia, two-metre-high spear grass grows throughout the savannah and woodland of the far north, including the Kimberley and Kakadu regions, only to dry and collapse or burn during the dry season. Again, elaborate body decoration

such as feather tassels, long 'skirts', or other protruding ornamentation was not of practical use in day to day living but was reserved for ceremonies, when corroboree areas were cleared of scrub and grass. In terms of Australian rock art, the most elaborate costumes are seen on the early Kimberley figures where about twenty artefacts have been identified as part of Aboriginal dance and ceremony (Welch 1996a).

(5) The presence of body paint and decoration

When Aborigines dress for a ceremony they decorate their bodies by either painting with ochre, clay or charcoal pigments or by gluing feathers, bird down, or native cotton to the skin with human blood. In general, painting is used more in the far north whilst gluing material to the skin is employed more in central Australia. Both these practices are carried out in some communities to this day. Traditionally, specific body designs were used generally symbolising ancestral totems or narratives.

Some rock paintings show human figures with patterns across the limbs or torso that may illustrate actual body designs used during such ceremonies. Figure 7 shows Kimberley straight part figures with traces of zig-zag or chevron pattern discernible on the body and limbs. Figure 8, on Nourlangie rock in Kakadu National Park, has similar body patterns and fine lines, possibly representing attached body decoration, drawn from the upper arms. These figures are painted nearly one thou-

sand kilometres apart, yet each is associated with multi-barbed, upright spears, a spearthrower, hanging body decoration, stick-like headdress projections and they are shown in the frontal stance with straight body lines and missing gaps where a less stable pigment such as white clay has been used. Such similarities may reflect the existence of a common, widespread event entailing specific dressing and carriage of those items. Whether the ages of these two different paintings are the same or not, it could show that a similar dress style probably associated with dance or ceremony has occurred in both areas.

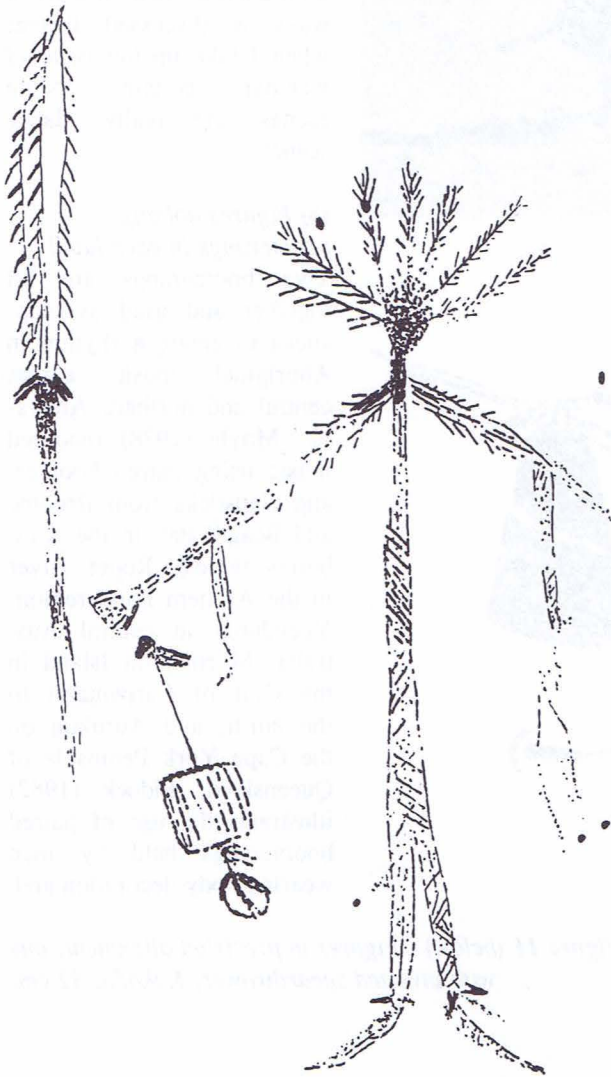


Figure 8. Figure with decorated spears, spearthrower and body, Kakadu, 52 cm.

Common body designs seen in Aboriginal dance include dots, straight lines and parallel lines and sometimes these are also found on human figures in the rock art.

(6) Figures associated with unusual items

In Aboriginal dance, various items are often held or waved about. These may be lengths of string, sticks, dance wands, bunches of leaves, bunches of feathers, feathers on sticks, or bags, many of which appear in

Arnhem Land and Kimberley rock art. Some of these items may appear unusual at first, but we can understand their association with human figures seen in the art once we understand their use and function in Aboriginal dance and ceremony.

In Arnhem Land rock art the roughly rectangular spearthrower, seen in Figures 1 and 8, has such an unusual shape that one wonders whether the rectangular portion was a non-functional, decorative attachment made for ceremonies. This would be similar to the human hair string fringe added to the spearthrower for ceremonies in Historic times, and discussed later. The fact that many human figures holding these rectangular spearthrowers are shown poised with loaded spears does not rule out the possibility they may be dancing. Most appear to be shown aiming at nothing, and this stance is very common in Aboriginal dance when the spear is pointing at an imaginary quarry. Another item considered unusual for people to be carrying around when they are already weighed down by spears and spearthrowers is the goose wing fan in the Kakadu/Arnhem Land region and the feathered fly whisk in the Kimberley region. Again, this may indicate the artist has portrayed a person during a dance when these items are carried, rather than going out to hunt or fight.

The short lines protruding from the upper arms of Figure 8 appear unusual, but as previously mentioned, may represent body decoration such as attached feather down worn during ceremonies.

(7) Figures holding items in unusual ways

Figure 9 shows two spearthrowers being held in unusual ways. Elcho Island dancers from Arnhem Land are performing a public dance, and the story includes a section about women digging for yams with their digging sticks. The left hand dancer is using the handle end of his spearthrower to dig in the ground and mimic the actions of a woman digging with her digging stick. The right hand dancer, in a semi-crouched position, wears tassels from his waist and holds his spearthrower close to the ground.

Figure 10 shows a Kakadu male figure with outstretched arms and legs, holding a wide bag and two sticks or spears in one hand. He has another object which may be a smaller bag with its contents shown hanging from his neck. Some head, arm and wrist decoration can be seen and small lines appear near his feet. In his other hand he holds a simple spearthrower at its hooked end. This is opposite to the handle end and the artist has carefully shown the fingers on this hand and the detail of the spearthrower being held the wrong way round. Clearly, the spearthrower is being held in a non-functional manner and yet the human figure is full of action.

In Figure 11, five human figures from Kakadu are each associated with two spears and one spearthrower. From the left, the first three appear to hold their spearthrowers at or near the handle ends. The fourth one, however, holds the spearthrower upside down at the



Figure 9. The spearthrower used to mimic a digging stick, Arnhem Land.

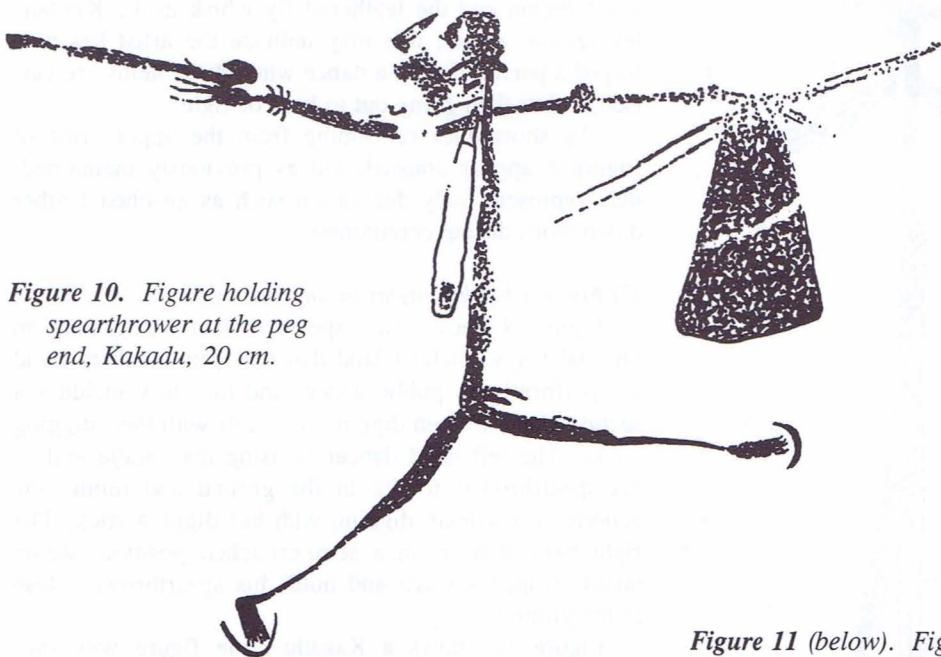


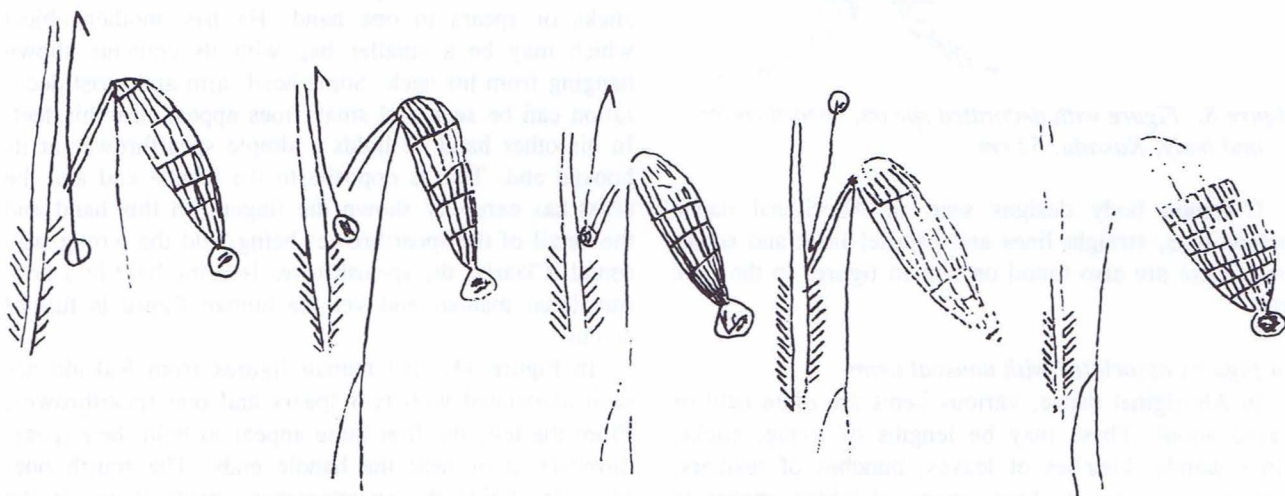
Figure 10. Figure holding spearthrower at the peg end, Kakadu, 20 cm.

hooked end. The fifth figure is weathered, obliterating this section of the drawing. Each figure has a large headdress. If these figures were going out to fight or hunt, would they have such large headdresses and why would one be holding his spearthrower upside down?

The fact that items in the art are shown held in unusual ways is discussed further when I take up the issue of whether certain 'battle scenes' are really 'dance scenes'.

(8) *Figures holding boomerangs in each hand*
Two boomerangs are hit together and used as clapsticks to create a rhythm in Aboriginal music across central and northern Australia. Moyle (1978) recorded music using paired boomerang clapsticks from Broome and Beagle Bay in the Kimberley region, Roper River in the Arnhem Land region, Yuendumu in central Australia, Mornington Island in the Gulf of Carpentaria to the north, and Aurukun on the Cape York Peninsula of Queensland. Fidock (1982) illustrates the use of paired boomerangs held by men wearing body decoration and

Figure 11 (below). Figures in precision alignment, one with inverted spearthrower, Kakadu, 32 cm.



tall, conical headdresses with feathers at the end, taking part in *Mandiyala*, a boys' initiation ceremony of north-eastern Arnhem Land. In the Kimberley, Stanton (1989: 34) illustrates a contemporary Aboriginal painting where a human figure carries a boomerang in each hand. It is one of four human figures with tall headdresses, pubic pearlshell coverings and body designs said to represent a group of four men dancing, each decorated with designs and headdresses associated with a mythic being, Wildji. The figure with the two boomerangs is said to be the leader of the group carrying clapping boomerangs.

Accounts from the last century show that the practice of holding a boomerang in each hand during ceremonies was also carried out in south-eastern Australia into Historic times. For example, pen and ink drawings by Tommy McCrae, an Aboriginal artist in the 1860s, show images of rows of people holding a boomerang in each hand, said to be dancing or war dancing (Rowlison 1981: 111-4).

An often-repeated fact is that boomerangs were not used for hunting or fighting in Historic times in parts of far northern Australia, yet they appear in the art of that area. However, boomerangs were traded to these areas in Historic times and were held and waved during ceremonies. Northern Australian rock art contains thousands of human figures with boomerangs in each hand and no signs of fighting or hunting. They are found amongst the earliest paintings from both the Kimberley and Kakadu areas and such figures often have large headdresses or other paraphernalia associated with ceremonial dress. What could have been the incentive for so many different artists to create so many paintings? Traditional Aborigines identify many of these figures as being depicted in a corroboree, and with the widespread use of boomerangs being held during dance, it appears most likely the artists have recorded important cultural events of their

day.

(9) *Figures holding a spearthrower without a spear*

Figures 9 and 12 shows Elcho Island dancers holding just a spearthrower in one hand. The carrying of a single spearthrower is commonly seen in northern Australian dancing (Blitner 1970s) and this is reflected in the rock art (Figures 2b and 3a), although some prefer the description 'hooked stick' (I will address this distinction in the second part of this paper).

Lewis (1988: Figure 157) illustrates an example of a broad spearthrower being held by a human figure with tassels from the neck and holding a tasselled object in the other hand. It is one of four human figures with open mouths, possibly indicating singing or shouting.

(10) *Figures holding a spearthrower in one hand and a boomerang in the other*

Sometimes northern Australian Aboriginal dancers hold a spearthrower in one hand and a boomerang in the other. For example, during *Ningkushun*, the freshwater shark dance (AIAS: 1962), seven male dancers circle a shark totem and appear to attack it. Two dancers carry spears in one hand and a spearthrower in the other. Three dancers carry one boomerang in each hand, and two dancers carry a spearthrower in one hand and a boomerang in the other.

This holding of only a spearthrower in one hand and a boomerang in the other is simply one of many combinations of holding objects seen in Aboriginal dance. However, it is important to our understanding of north Australian rock art because there are paintings in both the Kakadu (Figures 2a, 2b and 17) and Kimberley regions showing human figures with this combination and which have caused confusion in our interpretation of the art. This point is discussed later.

Figure 12.
*Waving
spearthrowers
in dance,
Arnhem Land.*



(11) An absence of spears, shields and clubs

In day to day life the Aborigines were rarely without their spears. Early photographs show people around their shelters and campsites with the inevitable bundle of spears close by. Spears were used in hunting, fighting, warfare, ritual 'pay back', dance and ceremony. Because spears were used for so many different activities their presence in the rock art should not be seen as an indication that fighting or hunting is necessarily being depicted. However, the absence of spears amongst a large group of people seen in the art makes a hunting, fighting or day to day scene the less likely subject for the artist.

In some areas of Australia ritual fights took place without spears, but instead with parrying shields and clubs. These were usually one to one fights and narrow, hardwood shields used for this purpose were best known from central and south-east Australia. Similar duels took place in parts of northern Queensland where the wooden club was large and sword shaped and the shield was correspondingly broader and larger. In Arnhem Land there was a large, paddle-shaped club used in some duels, but shields were neither made nor used there.

In larger-scale fights, when spears were thrown, shields could obviously be used to deflect spears thrown by the opposition. However, shields were not always carried and sometimes people simply dodged sideways to avoid spears. In Arnhem Land, where shields did not exist, people used their spearthrower to deflect spears thrown at them (Warner 1958: 484 and Blitner, pers. comm.).

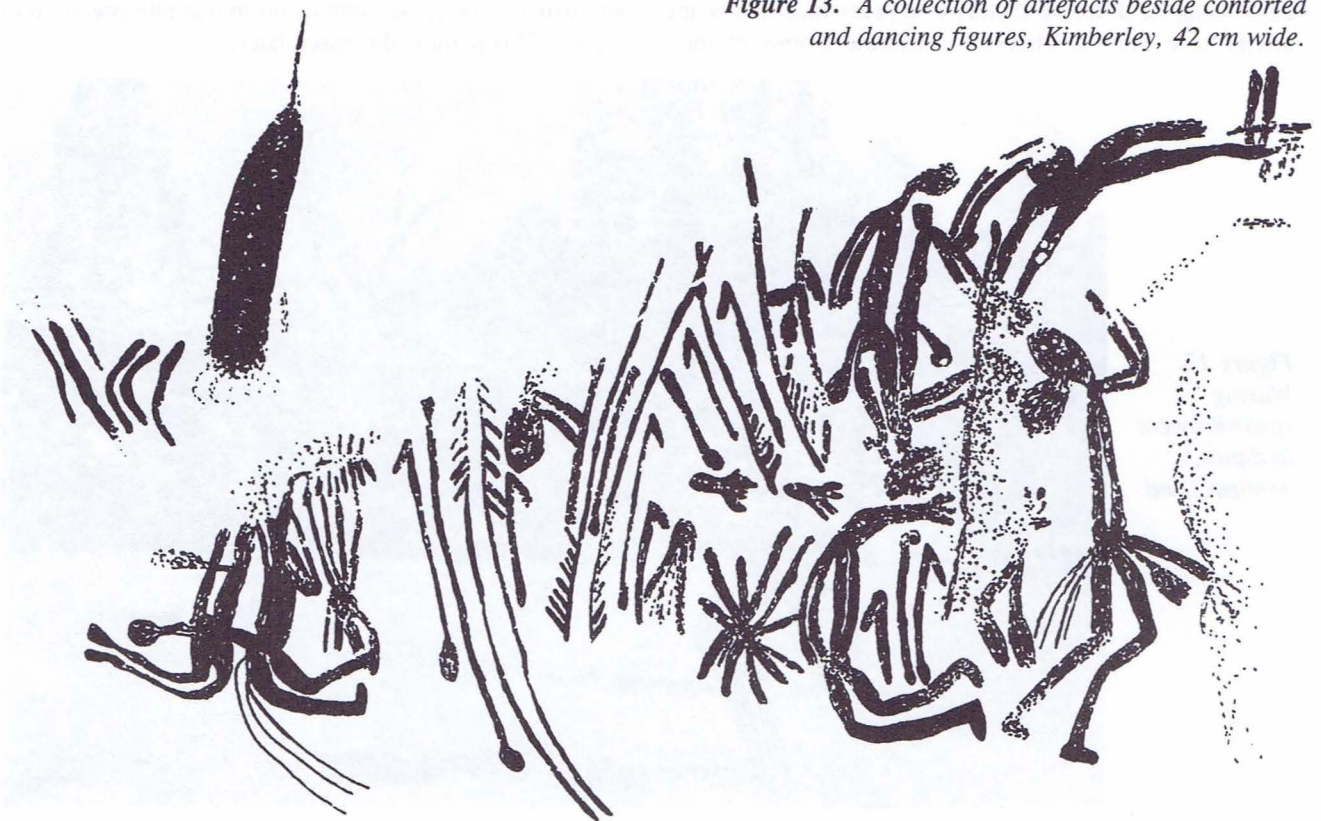
To put this into the context of rock art depictions of human figures, it would be safe to say that the absence of all three, spears, shields and clubs, make a scene unlikely to represent a fight or hunt.

(12) Decorated spears

Spears play an important role in many ceremonies still held in northern Australia. While spears have mainly been replaced by firearms for hunting birds and land animals, they are still required for ceremonies and sometimes have to be made specifically for this reason. For example, metal pointed 'shovel nose' spears are manufactured and painted for certain Arnhem Land mortuary ceremonies (Welch collection). Sometimes, spears with long, delicate stone points are hidden in shelters and produced only for ceremonial occasion. On the Tiwi Islands north of Darwin and on Groote Eylandt, off the Arnhem Land coast in the Gulf of Carpentaria, elaborately carved, multibarbed spears are made specifically for ceremonies. The barbs on these spears are sometimes very long and delicate and the total length of the spears varies from full-length to shortened spears only a metre long. Although they are mostly held or waved during the ceremonies, some are thrown as part of acting out a story. Two human figures in Figure 2c appear to hold short spears by their ends. These may represent short ceremonial spears of this nature.

Spears for everyday use were normally painted or marked for decoration or individual identification. While Warner (1958: 489) noted that 'all fighting and hunting spears are used without alteration in the various ceremonies' of eastern Arnhem Land, Aborigines from western Arnhem Land have shown me how spears are decorated with feathers or tassels for their ceremonies. Such decoration appears in the rock art of the Kakadu/east Arnhem Land region, one example being the spears in Figure 8 having small projections at the base of the barbed section, consistent with a feather or tassel decoration. This

Figure 13. A collection of artefacts beside contorted and dancing figures, Kimberley, 42 cm wide.



decoration is occasionally seen on other multibarbed spears in Kakadu/Arnhem Land rock art (e.g. Brandl 1973: Fig. 107; Lewis 1988: Fig. 232 and Chaloupka 1993: 216-9). Short lines may represent feather attachments while some longer lines are depicted as definite tassels. On the ceiling of a rockshelter near Ubirr (Obiri rock) is a red ochre painting of several life-sized spear points. One of these is a multi-pronged, multibarbed spear point, 76 cm long, with a very detailed tassel attached.

(13) *The laying down of weapons and artefacts*

When spears or other weapons are not being held they naturally have to be leant against a tree or placed on the ground. Ceremonial grounds may be devoid of trees and chosen for their soft, sandy soil, so when spears are not used they can be either poked into the ground or laid down.

Some rock art depictions of human figures surrounded by artefacts may be representing items left on the ground. In Figure 13, from the King George River in the northern Kimberley, it appears as though at least eight spearthrowers, six spears, four clubs, boomerangs and other objects have been spread out while two people sit at the left and at least six human figures are engaged in some activity at the right. Two human footprints are painted amongst the weapons and a lower figure with a headdress appears to be kneeling on the ground, bending its body backwards. Two adjacent figures above have waist appendages, and the figure at the right has its head cocked backwards, arms raised, and knees bent as if performing a dance. In this unusual scene, it appears as though the artist has placed the emphasis on portraying the laying down of weapons accompanying people dressed for, and performing, a dance or ceremony.

Certain Kakadu simple human figures often carry a boomerang in one hand and a spearthrower in the other. In one scene (Lewis 1988: Fig. 77) the 'missing' spears are depicted on either side of the two human figures.

(14) *Figures with bent knees*

The knees are bent during many human activities including running and jumping, which of course may be part of hunting and fighting. However, there are certain poses in Aboriginal dance which are reflected in the rock art.

One pose seen during dance is when both knees are bent and held together. It is best seen from a lateral view, as in Figure 12, and is similar to the Kimberley bent knee figures I have described (Welch 1993, 1996a). This dance pose is also very common in central Australian Aboriginal women's dance, where one style, known as *mili-mili* or *wintimi* to the Walbiri people, 'consists of a small, regular jumping up and down with both legs synchronised, legs slightly bent at the knees, arms held in front of the body and parallel to each other, elbows bent and pointing toward the ground, and hands and forearms pointing upward Jumping is synchronised with the metre of the singing which accompanies it'

(Wild 1975: 76).

A second pose with bent knees is when they are held apart, best shown from the frontal view, as in Figure 14. Here, each figure wears a large headdress, but is empty handed. In some dances this leg position is maintained while in others the knees are wobbled together-apart-together-apart. This dance position was also recorded on pen and ink drawings by Tommy McCrae and paintings by William Barak in the 1800s (Rowlison 1981: 111-6). The position is common amongst simple human figures in rock art throughout Australia and such figures often hold boomerangs and clubs or sticks of some kind, consistent with dancing.

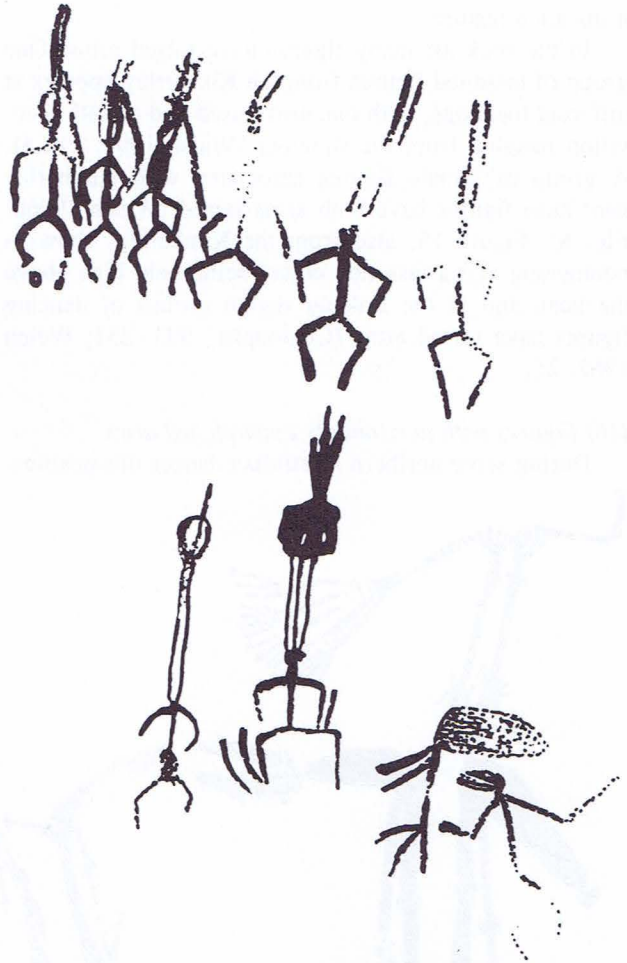


Figure 14. Bent-legged figures with large headdresses, Kakadu, 50 cm.

(15) *Figures with arms raised above their heads*

In some paintings figures have their arms raised above their heads. During routine human activities we rarely raise our hands above our heads except in order to put on our clothes, to reach upward and to climb. It is also something we do at rallies, public meetings, demonstrations, and in the classroom. It is interesting to think about raising one's arms in relation to fighting. In that situation, the arms are not raised above the head because it exposes the body to danger, so they are usually only raised to head height. When throwing a spear by hand or

with the aid of a spearthrower the hand is only raised to head height. However, in dance, ballet and gymnastic pursuits we often see the arms raised higher.

In northern Australian Aboriginal dance, raising an arm above the head is common both for male and female dancers (Blitner tapes etc.). Male dancers often raise one hand while female dancers in a chorus tend to raise both together, sometimes holding string between their hands (Poignant and Poignant 1996: 91, 111). As previously mentioned, clapsticks may be hit together with both arms raised above the head. In dance, a raised arm may hold any object such as a spear, spearthrower, or bunch of feathers or leaves. Mountford (1958: Pl. 30) illustrates three totemic dances from the Tiwi Islands where raised arms are a feature.

In the rock art many figures have raised arms. One group of tasselled figures from the Kimberley appears at different locations, with one arm raised and a 'net' decoration hanging from the shoulder (Walsh 1994: 112-5). A group of female figures associated with Kimberley bent knee figures have both arms raised (Welch 1996b: Fig. 8). Figure 15, also from the Kimberley, shows a boomerang and a tasselled object being held high above the head and in the Kakadu region groups of dancing figures have raised arms (Chaloupka 1993: 231; Welch 1982: 25).

(16) Figures with horizontally outstretched arms

During some northern Australian dances this position

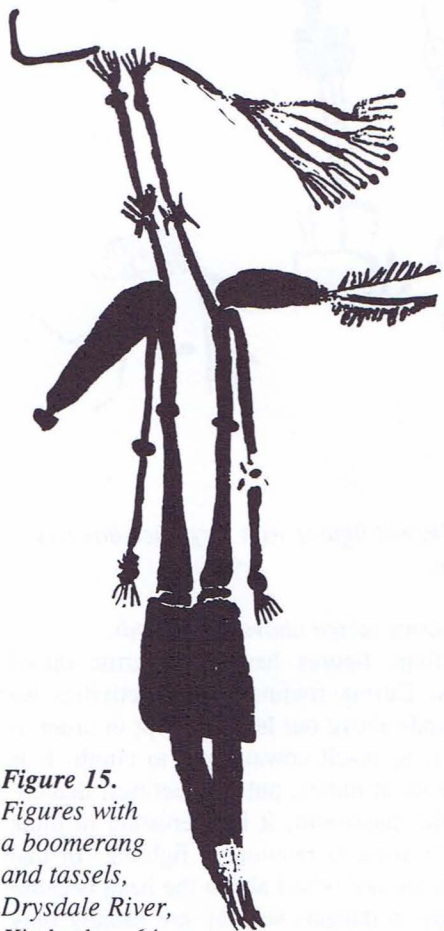


Figure 15. Figures with a boomerang and tassels, Drysdale River, Kimberley, 64 cm.

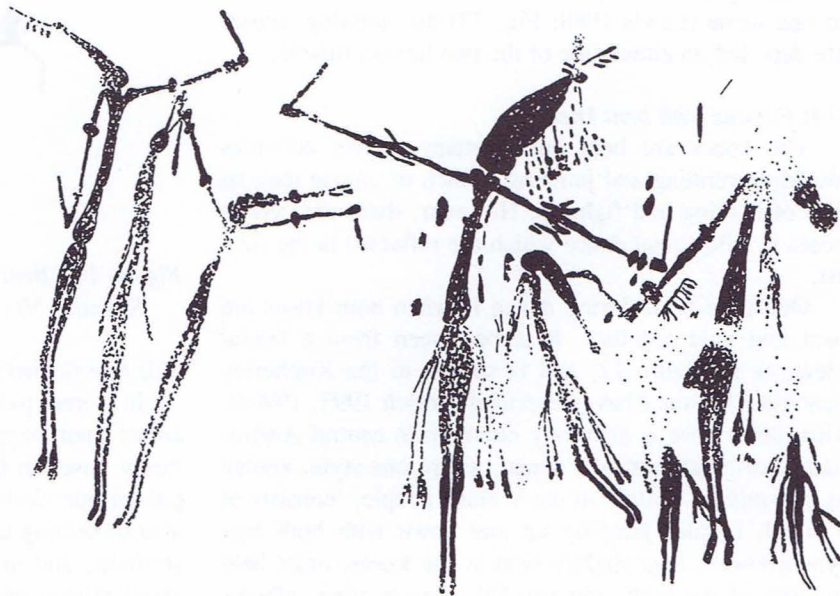


Figure 16. Figure with outstretched arms holding dance wands, Drysdale River, Kimberley, 45 cm.

is seen held for a few seconds as part of the performance (Blitner tapes). At the end of the Arnhem Land Rom ceremony, a performer holds his arms outstretched, holding a bunch of bound cockatoo feathers in one hand and his spirit bag in the other (Poignant and Poignant 1996: 134), and on the Tiwi Islands such a dance position represents the sea-eagle ancestral totem (Mountford 1958: Pl. 30).

Figure 16, from the Drysdale River in the Kimberley, shows a human figure with arms horizontally outstretched, holding a stick in each hand typical of a dance wand or baton. The pose is unlike any fighting or hunting posture and is also encountered in rock art from the Kakadu area (Figures 2b and 10).

(17) Figures with synchronised, choreographed alignment

Synchronised, choreographed or ritual movements are a feature of many Aboriginal dances found across Australia. This occurs in both men's and women's dances and is seen amongst the women when singing and dancing choruses to male dances (Blitner tapes etc). Children often join in the open dances, learning the dance steps and songs. The synchronised body movements are co-ordinated by the beat of clapsticks, clapstick boomerangs, hand clapping or buttock clapping. Whilst some segments of a dance may have many people moving together, other segments appear unco-ordinated, or have solo or duet dance performers.

Much of Australian rock art consists of groups of human figures shown together in similar stances. For example in the Kimberley, bent knee figures hold boomerangs in each hand and straight part figures are shown with a rigid, frontal alignment. Figure 7 shows just three figures from a panel with about 20 similar straight part figures. Their headdresses, hanging strings, decoration at

the sides of their heads, faded remains of a zigzag or chevron design over their bodies, and gaps at the waists where belts were originally painted in a less stable pigment indicate they are dressed for dance.

Many panels in Kakadu show a row of human figures in profile view with their two arms out in front. Each human figure in Figure 11 carries two spears and a spearthrower and wears a large headdress. While some Aboriginal informants have identified these figures as being prepared to fight (because of the presence of spears), others have said they were unsure, or that the large headdresses were consistent with ceremonial dress.

In Figure 17 weathering obscures some detail, but it appears that each human figure carries a boomerang. Obviously, one does not need to use two hands to carry an artefact as light as a wooden boomerang, and therefore this position must be a pre-planned or choreographed movement.



Figure 17. Figures aligned, some with headdresses, using two hands to hold a boomerang, Kakadu, 24 cm.

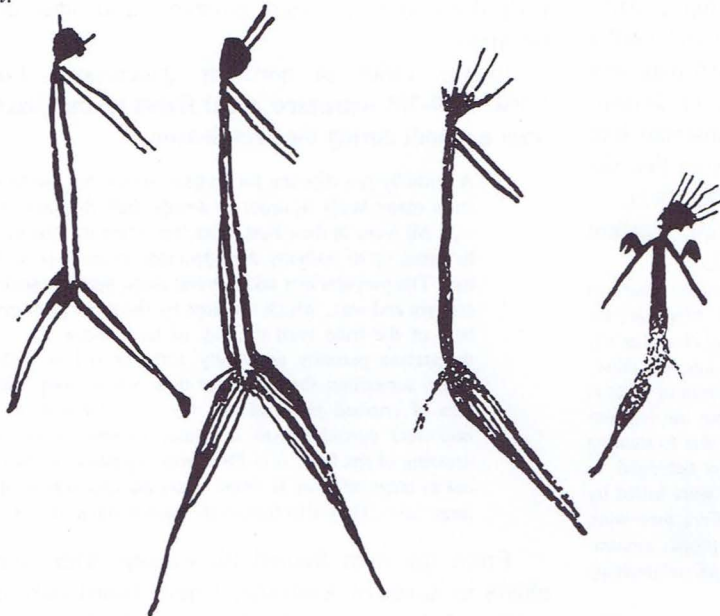


Figure 18. Part of 20 figures facing to the right. Smaller figure with arm band decoration and open mouth, Kakadu, 34 cm.

Figure 18, from the same creek valley as Figures 2, 11, 14 and 17, shows only the right-hand portion of a row of 20 human figures, all facing to the right in an identical alignment, except for the far right figure seen here facing left with its mouth open and wearing protruding upper arm decoration similar to that seen on the bent knee figures of the Kimberley. An open mouth is seen on many Kakadu figures and I believe in some cases it may have been an indication of singing.

As well as for ceremony and dance, synchronised movements also occurred when Aborigines gathered for a fight or inter-tribal war, particularly as so many fights were ritualised. Certainly, the *preparation* for a fight or battle showed these characteristics, but the fight or battle itself would have been chaotic and we could expect this to be depicted in the art.

(18) Figures in 'dancing pose'

By the term 'dancing pose' I refer to certain body positions which most people would immediately recognise as representing a person dancing. This usually involves a figure with one leg raised high and one or both arms raised. Several figures together in a similar pose make this interpretation easier. The right-hand figure in Figure

13 and the top figure in Figure 19 can be placed in this group. In this last 'scene' the lower figure adopts an unusual stance and both may be associated with a macropod to the right and other figures not shown here. These two figures appear as one composition but are actually spaced further apart than I have shown them.

The two smaller figures in Figure 5 appear with an 'Irish jig' pose, also an unequivocal dance position.

Dressed for a fight?

One might argue that the Aborigines did dress for fighting, and so how can we really know what is being depicted in the art. The answer lies in looking at the ethnographic details of what was actually worn and carried during such fights. It appears that generally the level of dress was not as elaborate as seen on many figures in the art. The following examples are offered for illustration.

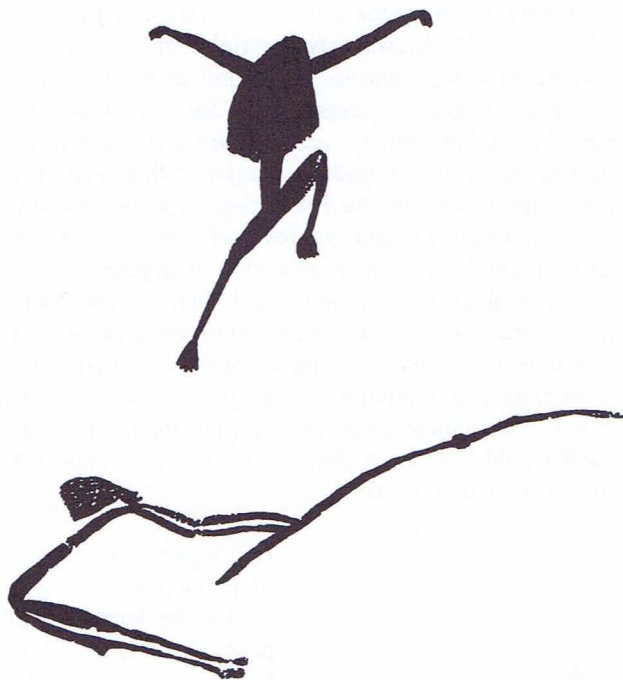


Figure 19. Dancing figure with headdress, Kakadu.

Spencer recorded an intertribal meeting of the central Australian Aranda tribe in 1901 where one group of about thirty Aborigines approached another tribe for a meeting but were dressed ready for a potential fight. Their dress consisted of 'great bunches of eagle hawk feathers stuck into their waist belts in the small of their backs, flaked sticks in their hair and each man carrying spears, boomerangs and spearthrowers'. The photographs Spencer took of this encounter show that every man also held a shield (Vanderwal 1982: 42-9).

Another description and photograph of the Aranda by Spencer shows men returning from an avenging party after travelling one hundred and sixty kilometres to kill a man from another tribe. On their return, 'each man was painted black with charcoal, and had twigs of *Eremophila* hanging down over his forehead and inserted into the hole through the nasal septum — a sure sign that the *atninga* had been successful' (Vanderwal 1982: 50-1).

Warner (1958: 159) described in detail warfare amongst the Arnhem Land people in the 1930s:

Of seventy-two recorded battles of the last twenty years in which members of Murngin factions were killed, fifty were for blood revenge — the desire to avenge the killing of a relative, usually a clansman, by members of another clan. Of these, fifteen were deliberate killings, against the tradition of what is fair cause for a war, and because it was felt that the enemies had killed the wrong people. Ten killings were due to stealing or obtaining by illegal means a woman who belonged to another clan. Five supposedly guilty magicians were killed by the clan members of victims of black magic. Five men were slain for looking at a totemic emblem under improper circumstances and thereby insulting the owning clan and endangering the clan's spiritual strength.

The only dress described by Warner for the six varieties of warfare is that 'in all fights except the *nirimaoui yolno* and the *narrup*, the people coat themselves with war paint of white clay'.

The spear is the chief weapon, although in camp fights clubs play a prominent part. The stone axe, which is primarily utilised as an implement, also serves as a weapon. No shield is found here. The Murngin depend on the spear thrower to ward off spears and on their well-developed agility to avoid thrusts. Spears and clubs are used in every encounter. In that part of Australia the shield was not used as a weapon (Warner 1958: 167).

In south-eastern Australia ritualised fights between individuals and larger fights between groups may not have involved a great deal of body decoration beyond simply painting the body. Detailed water colour paintings are amongst the earliest images recorded by Europeans of Aborigines fighting. A painting by S. T. Gill (Mitchell Library, Sydney) in about 1845 shows a fight between two Aboriginal groups. Over forty people are shown fighting with spears, shields and clubs. The painting shows details of artwork on the shields, but the people are naked and undecorated. Another watercolour painting by W. A. Cawthorne (Mitchell Library) in about 1844 shows an individual Aborigine defending himself against a volley of spears. He has white pigment dots over his trunk and limbs and a white line painted around his eyes as body decoration. There is red pigment on his head (blood?) and he is naked except for a very small extension from his hair, probably representing a small decoration such as a twig or feather. He holds a spear in his right hand and a broad shield to deflect spears in his left. On the ground at his feet are a club and a spearthrower and in the background scene other fights are taking place. To the distant left are two large groups of people throwing spears at each other, showing no obvious body decoration. To the distant right two people face each other waving clubs, while each of them has a group of onlookers standing further back. None of these people are shown dressed with elaborate body decoration, yet there is attention to other detail by the artist.

In the 1880s in northern Queensland, Lumholtz (1980: 129-30) witnessed ritual fights taking place about once a month during the Wet Season:

A borboby is a meeting for contest, where the blacks assemble from many lands in order to decide their disputes by combat ... All were in their best toilet, for when the blacks are to go to dance or to borboby they decorate themselves as best they can. The preparations take several days, spent in seeking earth colours and wax, which are kept by the most prominent members of the tribe until the day of the contest ... They rub themselves partially or wholly with the red or yellow earth paint; sometimes they besmear their whole body with a mixture of crushed charcoal and fat ... But one of the most important considerations on these solemn occasions is the dressing of the hair. It is filled with beeswax, so that it stands out in large tufts, or at times it has the appearance of a single large cake. They also frequently stick feathers into it.

From my own limited discussions with Aboriginal elders in northern Australia, I have heard only of body paint and the tying of feathers into the hair as being a preparation for fights or 'battles' that took place in the past. One elder in the Kimberley said a few feathers at the front of the hair were used to stop the sun shining in

the person's eyes. Another elder from Arnhem Land explained that too much decoration on a man would attract unnecessary attention.

In summary, the features of being dressed for a fight were:

- (i) The wearing of body paint.
- (ii) Modest body decoration such as small sticks or feathers in the hair or bird feathers tied at the back.
- (iii) The absence of elaborate dress such as large head-dresses or trailing body decoration.
- (iv) The carrying of spears, shields or clubs.

I will return to this discussion of the elements of dance and ceremony later when specific presumed scenes in rock art are examined. A crucial point in determining whether some 'scenes' depict battles or ceremonies also lies in the identification of the 'hooked stick' artefact which has been named both as a 'spearthrower' and a 'fighting pick'. The following section deals with the issue of this 'hooked stick'. The problem of its identification can be resolved once we understand the role of the spearthrower in traditional Aboriginal life.

The Australian spearthrower (*woomera*)

The Australian spearthrower, often called a 'woomera' after the early name given to it by an Aboriginal tribe near Sydney, has a hooked end which fits into a small recess or hollow made in the end of the spear. There is a wide variation in the shapes of the spearthrower across Australia and these have been described by writers such as Davidson (1936) and Gould (1970). Figure 20 shows different examples: from left to right, a central Australian *miru*, a northern Queensland type with baler shell and resin handle, two cylindrical or stick-like forms, the smaller from western Arnhem Land collected about 1950, the larger from south-east Arnhem Land collected in the 1930s, a 'goose' spearthrower, and a notched lath spearthrower from Arnhem Land.

The Australian Aborigines specialised in keeping their weapon and tool kits compact and portable for a generally nomadic existence. As such, some artefacts had multiple functions. The spearthrower has a wide range of uses apart from its major function of propelling spears at a greater velocity and further distance than can be achieved by throwing spears by hand. In some regions of Australia the spearthrower was developed as a multi-use implement. For example, in the harsh desert environment of central Australia, the bowl-shaped spearthrower, *miru*, has at least seven other functions:

- (i) A bowl to carry grain and other bush foods in.
- (ii) A palette to mix ochres or blood with bird down to apply to objects such as shields or the human body for ceremony.
- (iii) The handle contains a stone adze used to chisel wood when shaping boomerangs, spears, coolamons and other spearthrowers.
- (iv) The handle includes a blob of spinifex resin, used to hold the stone adze, which can also act as a reservoir of spare resin for other repairs and joining.

- (v) One side of the spearthrower is rubbed with another piece of wood and used as a fire making stick.
- (vi) It can be used as a shield to deflect spears in a fight.
- (vii) It can be painted or carved with designs recording Dreamtime stories.

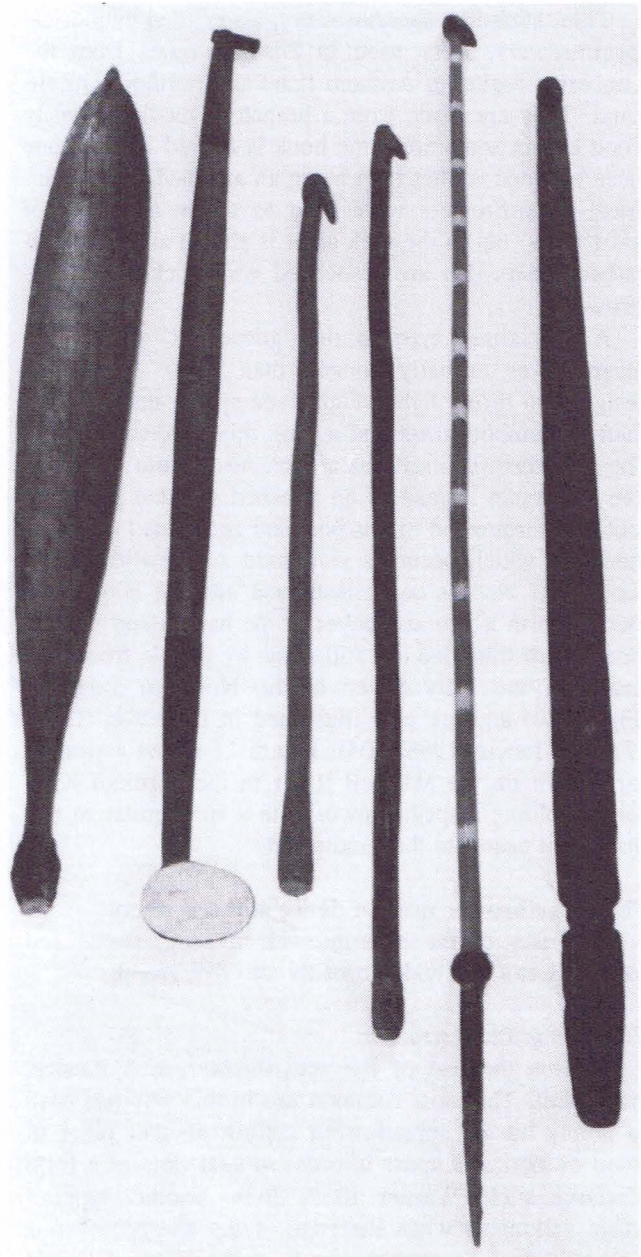


Figure 20. Central and northern Australian spearthrowers. Longest 113 cm.

The use of the spearthrower is often associated with the use of lighter, composite spears, whereas hand-thrown spears tend to be heavy, single piece spears. For example, in central Australia the hand-thrown spear, *winta*, is made from a single piece of wood with a flattened, pointed end and is used against another person as a fighting spear. In the same area, the spear thrown with the aid of a spearthrower is the hunting spear, *kulata*, made with a shaft of light *Tecoma* bush (*Pandorea doratoxylon*) and a single-barbed point made from hard

mulga wood (*Acacia* sp.). Spears made to be thrown by a spearthrower are usually lighter because of the advantage of greater spear propulsion, speed and distance achieved.

The cylindrical, stick-like spearthrower

Thin, stick-like spearthrowers, also called cylindrical spearthrowers, were used in Historic times from the Kimberley region to Arnhem Land and northern Queensland. They are made from a branch of medium-density wood and in some areas the hook is carved into the one piece of wood, rather than being an attached peg. Cylindrical spearthrowers were used to throw a variety of spear types, but in the rock art it is almost always multi-barbed spears that are associated with stick-like spearthrowers.

A specialised type is the 'gooseneck' or 'goose' spearthrower, usually longer than other types and designed to throw light-weight reed spears made with a shaft of bamboo grass and a long thin hardwood point. The spearthrower itself has a hook made from ironwood tree root resin instead of an attached wooden peg. The root of an ironwood tree is pounded and heated to obtain this resin which becomes very hard and resilient when cooled. As well as being fashioned into the hook, it is used to form a rim and cover at the handle end. Spearthrowers of this kind are still made by people from Port Keats on the Daly River in the Northern Territory (Figure 20) and are also illustrated in Davidson (1936: 477) and Lewis (1988: 304). Figure 21 shows a straight part figure on the Mitchell River in the northern Kimberley holding a spearthrower with a rim similar to this shape, but nearer to the handle end.

The spearthrower used in dance and ceremony

The uses of the spearthrower in song, dance and ceremony can be divided broadly into five groups.

(i) As a musical instrument.

First is the use of the spearthrower as a musical instrument. The most common use in this way has been to simply hit the spearthrower against another piece of wood or against a spear in order to beat time as a form of music stick (Warner 1958: 263). Another type of music making is when the edge of the spearthrower is used as a rasp. Spearthrowers from the Western Desert region may have a notched edge over which a piece of wood can be scraped (Western Australian Museum, Perth).

(ii) As a baton or symbolic object

The second way a spearthrower was used in dance and ceremony was as a baton or object held in various poses and waved around on its own. I believe this point is most important to our understanding of what we are seeing in the rock art, and Figures 9 and 12 show Elcho Island (Arnhem Land) dancers using spearthrowers in this way. Figure 9 shows part of a 'yam dance' where the spearthrower is used to symbolise a woman's digging

stick and the action of digging for yams. In Figure 12 three dancers each hold only their spearthrowers in one hand as they slowly glide over the corroboree ground.

An early reference to the use of the spearthrower being the sole item held in one hand is found for a South Australian coastal tribe recorded as having a corroboree danced by both the men and women. This dance consisted of

shaking the legs and wriggling the feet along the ground, performing at the same time a number of little jumps and knocking the knees together in that curious manner which prevails everywhere. The men wave their hands whilst performing, and the women flourish a wommera (spearthrower) in their right hands (Curr 1886[Vol. 1]: 403).

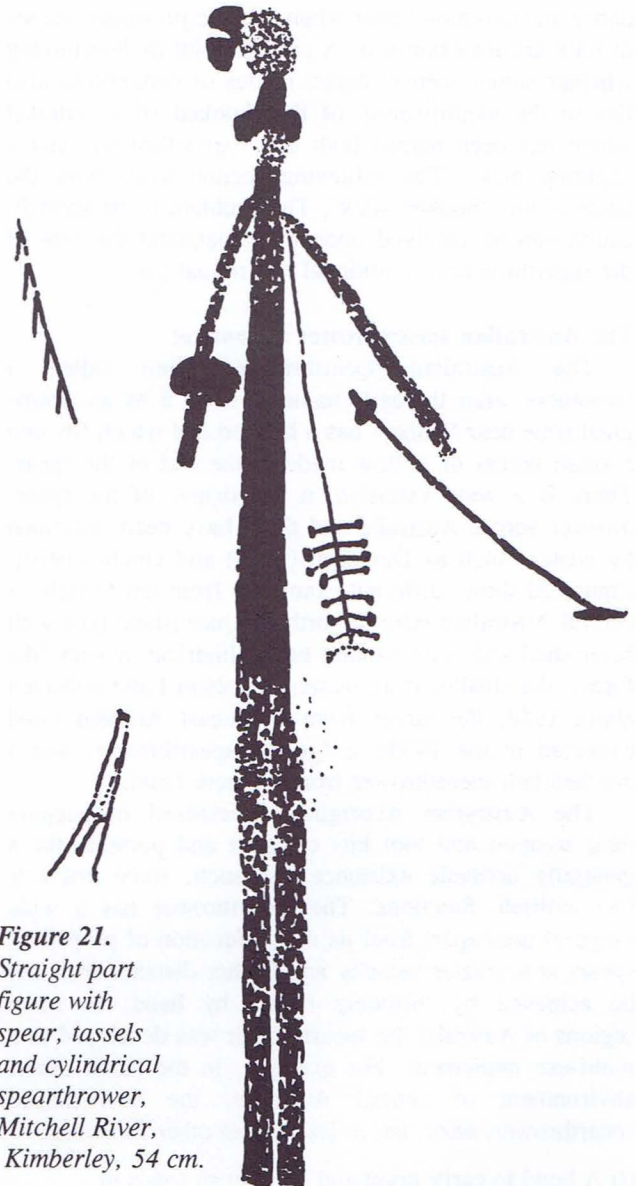


Figure 21.
Straight part figure with spear, tassels and cylindrical spearthrower, Mitchell River, Kimberley, 54 cm.

In Arnhem Land, Warner (1958: 259-334) gives about fourteen instances where spearthrowers are used in dances and ceremonies. In six instances the spearthrower is used alone in a dance. Before a major initiation ceremony, the boys are given presents such as spears, hair belts, spearthrowers and are dressed with new armlets, white cockatoo feather headdresses, and a bark forehead band. Later, the men dance a variety of animal dances.

In one of these, 'they carry under each armpit green bushes or paper bark which they shake in imitation of hawks flying, and they carry their spearthrowers to represent the birds' tails while they dance between the fires' (Warner 1958: 272). In another instance, after people representing catfish have finished their dance, 'one man comes in dancing, carrying his spearthrower and shaking it as if he were a bird's tail. He is a willy-wagtail. He pretends to pick flies off the branches of the trees and acts generally in imitation of this bird' (Warner 1958: 282-3). Yet another account describes the spearthrower used to tap a person from the chorus on the shoulder in order to designate them as the next dancer. They carry out a solo dance and then tap the next person (Warner 1958: 313). For part of Arnhem Land, Warner observed that

The cylindrical type of spear-thrower is not a hunting weapon, and is supposed to be carried only by old men, although young men have been observed using it. Its chief use is ceremonial. The leader of a totemic dance frequently directs the dances with it, using it as a baton as he keeps time to the rhythm. Sometimes this spear-thrower baton has red parrot feathers tied to the end of each piece of human hair string (Warner 1958: 485).

In the Kimberley region the spearthrower is again used as a baton when it is held and waved during boys' initiation ceremonies (Ngarinyin people, pers. comm.). It also appears in the mythology as one of the features of the Milky Way (Hernandez 1961: 124).

(iii) Ceremonially decorated spearthrowers

When ceremonies are held there is usually decoration applied to the bodies of the participants, to sacred objects or poles and to certain everyday items. Sometimes everyday items have highly ornate substitutes. For example, in boys' initiation ceremonies across eastern Arnhem Land special bags worn by the initiates are made with colourful bird feathers woven into the string. For some Arnhem Land ceremonies ordinary spears are painted or may have feather tassels added to them. I have mentioned that on Groote Eylandt and Bathurst and Melville Islands, highly ornate, carved spears are made only for ceremonies.

There were a number of ways in which the spearthrower was decorated for ceremony:

- (a) Painting is the most common decoration, usually done with coloured ochres and white clay. In one dance in Arnhem Land the spearthrowers were first painted with red ochre, some native honey and white pigment. This made the spearthrowers taboo and consequently this dance was only per-

formed and witnessed by the older men. Its dancers formed a line whereby the first man held a spearthrower, the second a feather headdress, the third a spearthrower and so on, alternately holding a spearthrower and a feather headdress (Warner 1958: 326-7).

- (b) Another way of decorating the spearthrower was to convert it into a rattle. This was done by collecting dry snail shells, decorating them with paint, tying them together with bush string, and attaching them to a spearthrower (Warner 1958: 318).
- (c) Sometimes protruding feathers were incorporated with the peg when it was attached to the spearthrower (specimen in Welch collection). This decoration appears in the rock art as short lines protruding from the peg on spearthrowers held by simple human figures surrounding a snake figure (Chaloupka 1993: 130), and another Kakadu example shows this decoration just below the hook (Welch 1982: 19).
- (d) A fringe of human hair string was sometimes tied to the handle of the cylindrical spearthrower (Davidson 1936: 477; Warner 1958: 484, Pl. 29; Lewis 1988: 304). This decoration was used across Arnhem Land and northern Queensland and is depicted in the rock art of the Kakadu region. Figure 22, a single composition painted in red and yellow, depicts a goanna or similar large lizard with forked tongue, and a human figure carrying a fringe-decorated spearthrower and two multibarbed spears. Another rock art example of this decorated spearthrower has been illustrated by Brandl (1973: Fig. 108) and Lewis (1988: 336).
- (e) A string tassel was sometimes attached at the peg end of spearthrowers used in Arnhem Land ceremonies (Blitner, pers. comm.). Earlier, I described in the Kimberley a 'hooked stick' with an attachment near the handle end appearing to be tied on with string (Welch 1990: 116). This may represent a spear-

thrower with a decorative tassel. Figure 8, from Kakadu, shows a spearthrower with a

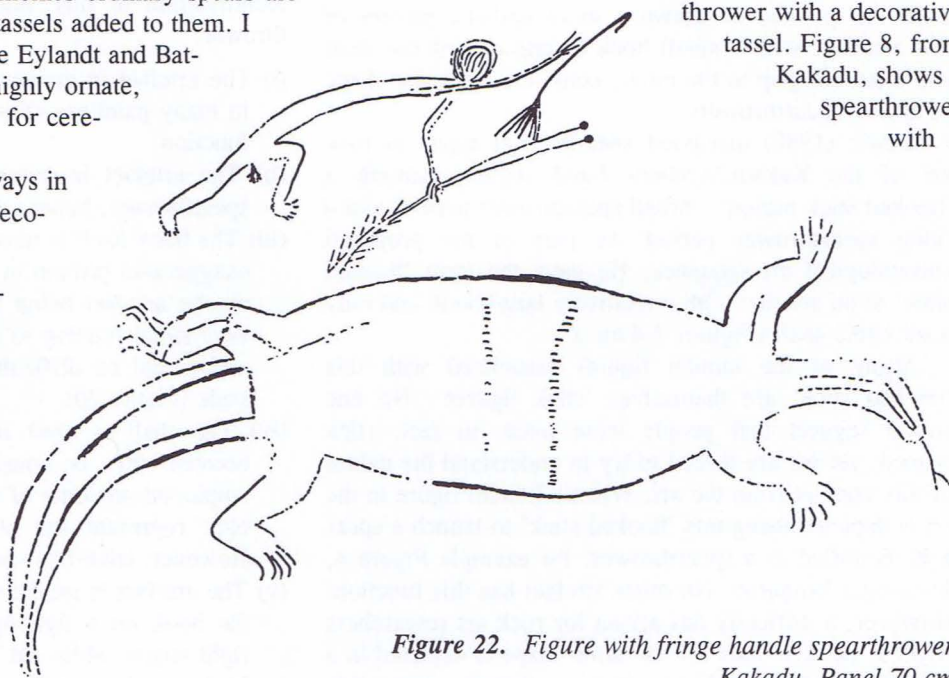


Figure 22. Figure with fringe handle spearthrower, Kakadu. Panel 70 cm.

rectangular form and with short lines near the handle end, possibly representing tassels or feathers.

(iv) Mock fights and battles as part of a ceremony

The spearthrower is used in mock fighting and battles in ceremony. Warner gives eight examples in Arnhem Land where the spearthrower is used in conjunction with a spear to mimic a fight or to scare initiates. As a preliminary to one of the male initiation ceremonies in Arnhem Land, 'all the female relatives grab up spears and spearthrowers and pretend to fight the men to prevent them from removing the boys' (Warner 1958: 261). Later, during the same ceremony,

two men run in with their spears fixed to their spearthrowers and point them straight at the boys as if they were going to throw them. The men have their baskets in their mouths as they often do when fighting. They return to the bush and rush in a second and third time (Warner 1958: 282).

(v) Mock hunting scenes

These are very commonly depicted in Aboriginal dances when individuals or groups of dancers perform with their spears loaded in their spearthrowers, poised and taking aim as if about to throw their spears (Blitner tapes etc.). In some dances men prance about, making thrusting movements at an imaginary quarry, while in other dances they thrust toward an effigy or an actual person representing their victim. Many human figures in the Kakadu region are depicted with a spear poised above the head as if about to be thrown, but with no quarry in sight. I believe one likely explanation for this is that the artist has drawn a performer from a dance carrying out one of these mock hunts.

The spearthrower in northern Australian rock art

We can identify an artefact in the art as being a spearthrower based on two factors. Firstly, its shape and secondly, its apparent function. In some examples the artist has painted or drawn a more realistic picture of this artefact, with a small hook at one end of the shaft and a handle grip at the other, consistent with the shape of known spearthrowers.

Lewis (1988) discussed spearthrower types in rock art of the Kakadu/Arnhem Land region, naming a 'hooked stick period', 'broad spearthrower period' and a 'long spearthrower period' as part of his proposed chronological art sequence. He gave the term 'hooked stick' to an artefact with a relatively large hook and only a stick-like shaft (Figures 2-4 etc.).

Many of the human figures associated with this 'hooked stick' are themselves 'stick figures'. No one would suggest that people were once, in fact, stick shaped, yet we are forced to try to understand the nature of this artefact from the art. When a human figure in the art is depicted using this 'hooked stick' to launch a spear it is identified as a spearthrower, for example Figure 4, spearing a kangaroo. No other artefact has this function. However, a difficulty has arisen for rock art researchers when a 'hooked stick' of the same shape is depicted in a different situation. Many human figures carry this

'hooked stick' without any spears. Some carry it above their heads while others carry it in one hand with a boomerang in the other. In these scenes the function of this object is obviously something other than for the launching of spears. Two rock art researchers have analysed this problem in the Kakadu/Arnhem Land region and based their final conclusions, in part, on the evidence seen in the panel of Figure 2. Because some of the figures appear to confront each other, Chaloupka (1984: 34; 1993: 125-30) concluded that the artefact was a 'fighting pick'. Lewis (1988: 15-38) discussed the artefact at length and concluded that

The fact is that the 'hooked stick' cannot be identified with certainty. It could represent a form of fighting pick or hooked club, or it could represent the earliest form of spearthrower. Until this dilemma can be resolved, I will continue to refer to this artefact as a 'hooked stick' (Lewis 1988: 29).

In the Kimberley region, faced with a similar dilemma where some human figures had a hooked artefact and no spears, I also used the term 'hooked stick' to describe this artefact (Welch 1990: 121-3).

In recent discussions with both Chaloupka and Lewis, both researchers still hold these views. However, whilst still preferring the term 'hooked stick', Lewis (1996: 17) notes his belief 'that most and possibly all of the 'hooked sticks' associated with boomerangs represent a prototype spearthrower'. I believe the evidence presented here suggests that rather than being a prototype spearthrower, this hooked stick artefact seen in the art is a fully developed spearthrower.

Evidence that the 'fighting pick'/'hooked stick' identified in the art is really a spearthrower

This artefact is associated with many human figures in the rock art of the Kakadu region ('simple figures with boomerangs' etc.) and with the 'straight part figures' (previously called 'bichrome figures') from the Kimberley region. The following argues the case for the identification of this 'hooked stick' as being a spearthrower.

- (i) The artefact in question is depicted launching spears in many paintings (Figure 4). No other item has this function.
- (ii) The artefact in question has the basic shape of a spearthrower, being a stick with a hooked end.
- (iii) The hook itself is most likely painted or drawn in an exaggerated fashion in order to illustrate its existence on the artefact being held. In real life, the hook is very small relative to the length of the spearthrower and would be difficult to see if drawn correctly to scale (Figure 20).
- (iv) The shaft is most likely drawn as a simple line because this is consistent with the artistic style employed on some of these human figures. This line may represent the shaft of wider spearthrowers. However, stick-like spearthrowers do exist.
- (v) The artefact is unlikely to be a fighting pick because the hook on a fighting pick is positioned closer to right angles while the hook on the presumed artefact in the art is acutely angled. Fighting picks are best

known from the Tennant Creek area of the Northern Territory. They are made from a blade of quartzite attached to a wooden handle with spinifex grass (*Triodia* sp.) resin and examples are illustrated in Spencer and Gillen (1904: 653-4) and Lewis (1988: 246-7). An artefact resembling this is found in the Kakadu/Arnhem Land rock art (Lewis 1988: Fig. 160; Chaloupka 1993: 131).

- (vi) If the artefact in question were a fighting pick or a club with an acutely angled blade or hook, it was likely to be unstable because the angle would result in a weaker implement being more likely to break on impact. For example, the bird-headed club used in Arnhem Land had a 'beak' angled almost at right angles (Warner 1958: 489). On the other hand, a bird-headed club used on the Tiwi Islands north of Darwin has an acute angle for the beak but is made for use in ceremony.
- (vii) Sometimes the artefact in question is not depicted held at its end as one would expect it to be if one was gaining maximum thrust to inflict a blow. Rather, it is shown held in the middle as if balanced in the hand (Lewis 1988: 27, Figs 71, 75, 76 and 77). If it were a fighting pick used in a fight it would more likely be held at the base. However, holding it at the centre of the shaft is consistent with waving the object about, sometimes above the head, in a dance or ceremony.
- (viii) Sometimes the artefact in question is held back to front, again indicating a non-functional use. In many cases the hooked section faces the holder (Fig. 2b).

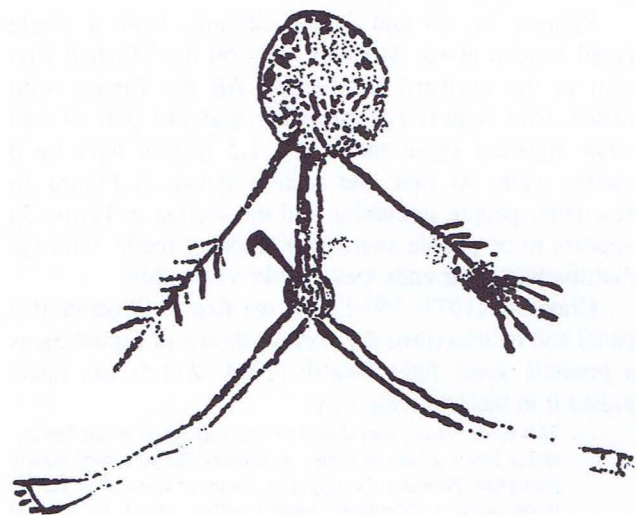


Figure 23. Figure with arm decoration and spearthrower in belt, Kimberley, 27 cm.

- (ix) When the artefact in the art is shown worn in the belt of a person the hooked end projects upwards from the waist. This occurs in both the Kakadu (Figures 2b and 2c) and Kimberley (Figure 23) examples, and is consistent with the hooked end of a spearthrower being small and light weight. If this hook was sharp stone or wood and being worn, it would be safer wrapped up first in paper bark or tied

into the belt so that the hooked section was firmly secured at the waist level, not higher, and could not move easily.

- (x) There is the body of ethnographic material described in this paper showing the spearthrower's wide use in dance and ceremony. The fact that the artefact in question is often held by a figure with a large head-dress or other body decoration is consistent with a person holding a spearthrower in a dance.

Figures with a spearthrower in one hand and a boomerang in the other

These figures are found in both the Kimberley (Welch 1990: 116; 1996: 85 with incorrect caption) and Kakadu regions (Figures. 2a, 2b and 17), and have been an enigma for some of us until now (Lewis 1988: 15-8, 33-8; Welch 1990: 121-3). They have caused confusion because the spearthrower is seen without accompanying spears. This has been part of the reason why the spearthrower associated with these figures has been identified as a possible fighting pick or prototype spearthrower, but not as a fully developed spearthrower.

We have tended to associate the use of the boomerang in the art with hunting and fighting and with this in mind, trying to explain the presence of a boomerang in one hand and a hooked artefact without any spears in the other has been difficult. Human figures with their 'tool kits' have been assumed to be dressed for fighting or hunting, and little consideration has been given to the possibility of depiction purely in dance. Yet in Historic times the boomerang was not used for hunting or fighting in far northern Australia where this art occurs. Rather, boomerangs were traded from the south and used in ceremonies. As previously noted, some dances have performers holding a spearthrower in one hand and a boomerang in the other and from evidence in the rock art, this appears to have been a key feature of dance and ceremony for both the Kimberley and Arnhem Land regions in the past.

A reappraisal of certain 'battle scenes' as being 'dance scenes'

1. Kakadu/Arnhem Land 'battle scene'

Figure 2b represents part of the now-famous 'battle scene' located on the Mount Brockman massif in Kakadu National Park. On first looking at this 'scene' it appears that various people are hitting each other over the head with implements. In other parts of the panel they face each other as if in conflict.

Chaloupka has called these figures 'simple figures with boomerangs' and described how 'the fighting pick becomes an integral part of the weaponry, and its use is shown in several scenes of conflict' (Chaloupka 1984: 34, 36). Later, he describes how 'it is the fighting pick, in several different forms, together with the boomerangs which are the dominant weapons in the many scenes of conflict depicted in this style. The use of the fighting pick in hand-to-hand combat is unambiguous' (Chaloupka 1993: 127 and frontispiece). Walsh (1988:

228-9) illustrated this panel, calling it a 'battle scene', it was mentioned by Taçon and Chippindale (1994: 221) in their discussion of depictions of fighting in rock art, and I also accepted this interpretation (Welch 1990: 122). Lewis discussed in detail possible interpretations of the art. Accompanying the illustrations, he described the figures as having headdresses and 'dancing skirts' (Lewis 1988: 230-1). However, in his final analysis of the art, he stated that 'among "hooked stick" figures there are a few compositions highly suggestive of confrontation or dispute resolution rituals. In these scenes figures are paired and stand face to face with their "hooked sticks" opposed or held high over each others head'.

The initial approach taken by many of us has been the same. We have looked at this rock art scene and decided that the people might be fighting. Then we have been faced with the dilemma as to what actually is the hooked implement being used to inflict the damage. Chaloupka concluded that this hooked implement represented an early form of fighting pick, Lewis (and I for the Kimberley region) remaining undecided as to whether it represented a spearthrower, hooked club or fighting pick, and so opting for the neutral term 'hooked stick'.

Let us now look at Figure 2b in detail. Human figures appear in various headdresses and some have large waist appendages. Upheld, rigid arms carry boomerangs or spearthrowers all facing to the right. From the left, the first three figures with this attitude are drawn as if they have their heads leaning back and have placed one leg behind themselves to balance. The third figure from the left holds a spearthrower with the point facing the carrier. The fourth figure has both arms outstretched and holds a boomerang in a most unusual position. Two figures hold both a spearthrower and a boomerang and yet another three have tucked their spearthrowers into their belts and hold only one boomerang.

Figure 2b represents the portion most shown, but the complete panel is six metres wide, with over 45 human figures and at least one animal figure appearing to form a single composition. Figure 2a shows the left and Figure 2c the right portions of this large panel. The figures in the left and right halves of Figure 2c are actually separated by an irregularity of the rock surface, but I have placed them together for the purpose of this illustration.

The following are the main points that help us to now make the better informed interpretation of this 'scene' as being a ceremony or dance and the 'hooked stick' as being a spearthrower:

- (a) Some figures are dressed in elaborate costumes with headdresses and skirts consistent with dress known to be worn during ceremonies.
- (b) Spears and shields are lacking amongst the majority of characters in the scene, yet the presence of one or the other of these has been an essential part of any fight in Aboriginal society.
- (c) No one is actually shown hitting another person or

falling. The nearly horizontal figures in Figure 2a are drawn in the same positions as standing figures, consistent with the artist depicting small groups of people standing together in semicircles. These people have not fallen.

- (d) A triangular-shaped object is held by one figure (possibly strings, tassels or a bag) and others hold boomerangs, spears and spearthrowers in unusual ways, consistent with dance.
- (e) Seven figures hold a boomerang and spearthrower in each hand, consistent with dance, while five figures holding boomerangs have their spearthrowers tucked into their belts.
- (f) At least four positions appear to be choreographed. First is the holding of an implement with the arms rigid, together, and facing to the right. This position is used to hold either one boomerang, one spearthrower, or two spears. Second is holding the arms outstretched high above the head. Third is holding the arms horizontally outstretched with either a boomerang or spearthrower, and fourth is where pairs formed crossing over each other.

When the above evidence is analysed it appears quite possible that the figures are engaged purely in a dance, waving their spearthrowers and boomerangs about, without any concern of confrontation or dispute resolution.

2. A Kimberley 'battle scene' reinterpreted as a 'ceremonial scene'

Figures 3a, 3b and 3c are sections from a single panel located above Mitchell Falls on the Mitchell Plateau in the northern Kimberley. All the figures with raised arms appear contemporary and are part of one large apparent scene measuring 1.5 metres high by 6 metres wide. At first, the section shown in Figure 3b resembles people swimming and the section in Figure 3a appears to be people swimming amongst reeds, with the multibarbed spear ends looking like vegetation.

Crawford (1977: 360-1) was the first to illustrate this panel and he described the portion shown in Figure 3a as a possible spear fight. Walsh (1994: 274-5) has interpreted it in the following way:

This battle scene panel shows an upper group of seven figures, and a lower group of eight. A solitary figure conspicuously positioned between the opposing factions appears to be the lower group's unfortunate ninth member, struck by a Multi Barb Spear and a boomerang. The extended arm on all figures presumably indicates missile launching actions, with their spears and boomerangs shown passing to the rear of the opposing group. Earlier Kimberley art appears passive, with aggressive stances and obvious conflict appearing only in the Clothes Peg Figure Period. This may reflect inevitable conflict resulting from increased competition for diminishing resources, leading to the apparent lengthy period of discontinuity following this late Erudite Epoch.

Again, I believe we now have the information needed to make a correct interpretation for the scene in Figure 3a. Some of the salient features are quite subtle, but were included by the artist. All the surviving pigment on this panel is red. Note that only the barbed ends of

spears are shown indicating they may have had shafts painted in a less stable pigment such as white, yellow or charcoal. If this were the case, other parts of the original painting might now be missing.

- (a) It is important to analyse the exact position of the spears in Figure 3a. They are approximately evenly spaced and some point to the right, which may indicate they have been placed on the ground rather than representing a volley of thrown spears. Amongst the top row of spears, those third from the left and at far right have their barbs pointing in the *opposite direction* to the others. Hence, rather than being spears thrown from the lower figures, some of these spears are pointing as if thrown from above. This scene is at the top of the panel and there are no other human figures above it. Consequently, it is more likely they are spears placed on the ground around the figures. Both Crawford's and Walsh's illustrations omit the barbs on these two spears, though the detail can be seen in Walsh's accompanying photograph.
- (b) The second point about this scene is that the central figure has a small 'skirt', similar to other figures from the same panel. Again, this is omitted from Crawford's and Walsh's drawings but visible in Walsh's photograph. Part of another painting crosses this figure and blurs this detail.
- (c) The section of opposing figures shows them all in the same position, consistent with a choreographed dance or ritual. In a battle scene we would expect uncoordinated movement and chaos.
- (d) When we look at other parts of this panel we see many other figures with their arms in a similar position with one raised and one lowered arm. In total, the panel contains about 70 figures in this position and Figure 3b shows a section of the panel where a row of these figures are painted horizontally. No spears or other artefacts can be seen, although it is possible they were painted originally in a less stable pigment. This section is consistent with the depiction of people walking in a line, though it is possible they are lying down, a practice certainly done in ceremonies.
- (e) In another section of the panel, Figure 3c, some figures have small, branch-like headdresses and one holds a boomerang in each hand. The left-hand figure in Figure 3a holds a spearthrower in one hand consistent with a dancing position, rather than launching a spear. Another figure further to the left, not shown here, carries just one boomerang in one hand and one spearthrower in the other. It is not clear, however, whether it was part of this scene.

In summary, we have what may be interpreted as people holding their arms up, sometimes holding spearthrowers and boomerangs, aligned facing each other in one scene, and following each other in another. I believe this is consistent with the depiction of a ceremony or dance where the artist has used a large rock face to depict people dancing in various alignments and passing

in different directions over the dance ground.

The reader will also note the presence of dots across this panel. They survive in a similar red pigment to the other figures, but their meaning is not apparent. They may have been part of another painting since weathered, or perhaps represent stone arrangements or something now unknown. Similar dots appear in the Kakadu/Arnhem Land region (e.g. Figure 8). The dots on Figure 3 are finger tip size but may have been painted with brushes (rather than applied with the fingers) because there are splash marks around some of them consistent with a brush application. At other sites groups of definite finger prints have been painted.

Discussion

My previous analysis of the regalia seen on elaborate human figures in the Kimberley region pointed towards dance and ceremony as the dominant theme in that rock art (Welch 1996a) and an analysis of many human stick figures and simple figures came to a similar conclusion (Welch 1996b). Here I have provided ethnographic evidence that many body positions seen in the rock art are also dance positions. By depicting certain body decoration, body positions and artefacts held in non-primary function positions, early Aboriginal artists have encoded their meaning of dance and ceremony into some of their art. This paper has revealed this, describing a list of key elements in recognising dance and ceremony in northern Australian rock art.

Many of the key elements described here may apply to other areas. For example, a common motif in rock art across Australia is a human figure with a large headdress of some kind. This occurs not just in painted and drawn art, but amongst petroglyphs in central Australia as well. It seems most likely that these figures are also portrayals of people during times of ceremony.

Some researchers may have had their minds set on hunting, fighting and conflict rather than ceremony and dance. Yet it would be natural for the art of dressing up, performing, dancing, acting, and singing to be recorded by the artists of the day. Ceremonies brought people together and after they had painted and decorated their own bodies and various objects with pigments there may even have been a time to create rock art with any surplus pigment.

Incorrect premises lead to incorrect conclusions

We have seen how the premise that people are shown fighting in some scenes has led to confusion over the interpretation of the spearthrower in the art. In the Kimberley, the supposition that elaborately dressed human figures are wearing everyday dress has allowed some writers to speculate that these were painted by people from a culture different to the Aborigines (Walsh 1994). Yet if we accept this dress was worn only at times of ceremony it fits exactly with what has occurred in Historic times amongst the Aborigines. The following briefly discusses three aspects of rock art interpretation where previous conclusions about the past may be incorrect.

1. Opposing figures may not indicate conflict

Figure 2a shows paired, opposed figures and this stance is one reason why they were interpreted as being in conflict and their spearthrowers were named 'hooked sticks' or interpreted as 'fighting picks'. Figure 24, from the Kimberley, shows two human figures in similar body alignment; note how these and the pair at the right of Figure 2a have their heads bent back to some degree. The Kimberley figures appear to have three boomerangs positioned behind one figure with the second one wearing three hanging, bag-like objects. They survive as rock-bonded dark-red pigment and appear to be of the same age as bent knee figures. The similarity of such body positions over such a vast distance, and the presence of headdresses and hanging objects suggests this may be another body position common to dance and ceremony in the past. In fact, Warner (1958 frontispiece) illustrated two men facing each other, each with one arm raised, hand beside the mouth and head cocked back, similar to that in Figure 24, who were 'crying out to the python' as part of the Gunabibi ceremony in Arnhem Land.



Figure 24. Figures with bags and boomerangs face each other, Kimberley, 52 cm.

In one Kimberley dance, two performers wear tall paperbark headdresses, leaves attached to their legs, and hold large woven ceremonial decorations in each hand (Blitner 1970s). At the completion of their short dance they raise their arms to the horizontal position and face each other. This marks the end of their dance and in no way indicates any conflict.

In Figure 15, of tasselled figures from the Kimberley, the left-hand figure holds a boomerang and the right hand figure holds tassels similar to those worn by other figures in the rock art. They each hold their other arm down by their side and there is really no suggestion of violence to the left-hand figure. The figures are more likely to be simply waving their items about as they face

each other.

Figure 5 is a remarkable scene containing many of the elements I have listed as being keys to recognising dance and ceremony. The central figure wears a large headdress, arm decoration, and holds only boomerangs in each hand. On each side is a smaller human figure with waist decoration. These figures oppose each other with their arms raised, but their position seems identical to a traditional Scottish or Irish jig! At the top left are possibly a ceremonial object and boomerangs placed on the ground. It is difficult to determine whether the other two figures at top left were part of the original scene or were added later. One appears to be the lower part of a human figure and the other with the bifid, fish tail-like end, could represent a club or ceremonial object similar to types found in Arnhem Land in Historic times (Warner 1958: 490; Welch collection) and also seen in Arnhem Land rock art (Lewis 1988: Figs 159, 206, 225).

In summary, the fact that human figures oppose each other is not sufficient evidence that they are fighting or aggressive. They may be grouped for dance and ceremony, even when spears are involved. Spears appearing as 'volleys' may be spears placed beside the performers and in order to interpret a rock art scene as being a depiction of a battle, close attention to detail is needed.

2. Rising sea levels created land shortages and increasing stress, but is this conflict depicted in the art?

As sea levels rose thousands of years ago there was a loss of coastline and populations must have gradually retreated inland. It seemed reasonable to consider whether 'battle scenes' such as those discussed in this paper were a reflection of increased conflict between people at this time of land shortage, or whether they reflected some other competition for resources (Lewis 1988: 86-92; Chaloupka 1993: 127; Walsh 1994: 274; Taçon and Chippindale 1994: 224-7). With the reappraisal of some of these scenes as being ceremonies and dance, the evidence available now means that such considerations may no longer be valid and any thought of linking such paintings, chronologically, with the time of these rising seas is flawed.

One of the authors of the most recent paper on conflict and battles in rock art has described the panel that sparked his warfare hypothesis. It is a scene from the Mount Brockman massif in Kakadu where well-preserved dynamic figures have large, wide skirts, various headdresses, boomerang-shaped items tucked into their belts and carry only boomerangs (Taçon and Szalay 1995: 42, 49). No figure shows any interaction with another, but they overlap and two figures are painted sideways as if running down the rock face. One style of headdress worn by these figures is two projecting 'sticks' and this also appears on weathered, monochrome red dancing figures in the same valley system, Figure 14. Based purely on the 'tumbling' appearance of these last two figures, the scene is pronounced to be one of 'the world's earliest depictions of people at war'! Fur-

thermore, while its authors claim to have carried out 'the most detailed analysis of the chronology to date', the paper on fighting scenes (Taçon and Chippindale 1994) describes human figures holding boomerangs which overlap as 'clashing with boomerangs', a dynamic figure's large three-pointed skirt is described as a 'shield like object', and rising sea levels and changes in environment are once again discussed at length in relation to these imaginary scenes of conflict.

3. *Items missing in the art may not necessarily have been missing in the technology of the day*

Tasselled figures and bent knee figures are amongst the earliest surviving human figures in the Kimberley, but they lack both spears and spearthrowers. We might accept they could have been painted before the invention of the spearthrower, but could we believe they also predated spears? It appears the reason for the lack of spears, at least, is simply that the art depicts activities where spears are excluded. These are ceremonial activities and not day to day activities.

Multibarbed spears are the only spear type found amongst dynamic figures, post dynamic figures and simple figures with boomerangs in Kakadu/Arnhem Land art (Lewis 1988: 25-6; Chaloupka 1993: 110, 125, 146). The first two groups of figures have only single pronged spears with the barbs cut into one side, while the third group, the simple figures with boomerangs, sometimes have multi-pronged, multibarbed spears. The Kimberley straight part figures are another large group of human figures that are associated with only the single pronged multibarbed spear type. Why do none of these figures hold simpler spears? In the Kimberley, Kakadu and Arnhem Land regions spears with simple pointed wooden ends are still made and since these are the most basic kind of spear, one would assume they existed at the time Australia was first occupied. If these human figures were simply portrayals of ordinary people doing day to day activities, then we should see a wider range of spear types with certainly a few simple, non-barbed spears. Amongst early human figures in these art regions, not belonging to the above groups, there is the occasional simple, non-barbed spear. I believe the reason for the exclusive appearance of the multibarbed spear in certain rock art 'styles' lies in the fact that artists were depicting people in very specific ceremonial scenes when this spear type had greater significance than other types.

One spearthrower type appearing in Kakadu art has an approximately rectangular shape projecting over the shaft (Figures 1 and 8). Lewis (1988: Figs 204-207 etc.) called this a 'long-necked spearthrower' and placed it in his 'broad spearthrower period'. Another form is hexagonal (Lewis 1988: Fig. 201), bearing similarities with Aboriginal ceremonial decoration made from crossed sticks and string tied around the periphery (Welch 1996b: 81-3). Lewis found that in one time period, many different spearthrower types were contemporary and he placed some examples of 'hooked stick' spearthrowers (1988: Fig. 185 etc.), stick-like spearthrowers (1988:

Figs 172, 179 etc.), tasselled stick-like spearthrowers (1988: Fig. 190 etc.) and the rectangular shaped spearthrower all into his 'broad spearthrower period'. We can now appreciate how the rectangular and some other spearthrowers may have been decorative spearthrowers made for specific ceremonial use and hence might appear side by side with the others. Different spearthrowers for different spears, different artistic styles, and different activities and ceremonies being depicted have resulted in such diversity.

Acknowledgments

My thanks go to the many Aboriginal people from the Kimberley and Kakadu/Arnhem Land regions who have shared their knowledge with me over the years. In the 1980s George Chaloupka and Darrell Lewis both discussed with me their ideas about the 'fighting pick'/ 'hooked stick' in the art and made me aware of the problems of its interpretation. This remained an enigma until research in the Kimberley and into Aboriginal dance gave new insights into the art, part of which is presented here. I would also like to thank both George and Darrell for offering constructive comments on this paper prior to the final draft.

Gerry Blitner, once chairman of the Aboriginal Northern Lands Council, took movie film of Aboriginal dances in northern Australia in the 1970s. He was generous in sharing his knowledge and allowed me to arrange for ten of his films to be put on video and held in the Northern Territory State Reference Library.

Dr David M. Welch
2 Falcon Court
Wulagi, N.T. 0812
Australia

Final MS received 14 May 1997.

Résumé. *On détermine certains aspects des danses et des cérémonies aborigènes par rapport à leur apparence dans l'art rupestre du nord de l'Australie. Certaines peintures figurant des représentations humaines avec des armes tels que des boomerangs, des sagaies et des propulseurs étaient auparavant interprétées comme des scènes de chasse ou de combat. De plus grands assemblages de représentations humaines ont été interprétés comme des scènes de combat, qu'on penserait être liées à la concurrence pour des ressources décroissantes, en particulier une insuffisance de terre causée par l'élévation du niveau des mers il y a plus de 6000 ans. Les figures humaines parmi ces scènes tiennent un 'bâton crochu' qui semblait être un 'pic de combat' utilisé pour faire du mal. Cependant, on soutient que ce sont en fait des scènes de danses ou de cérémonies et que le 'bâton crochu' ou le 'pic de combat' est un propulseur tenu ou agité.*

Zusammenfassung. *Aspekte von Aboriginal Tanz und Zeremonie werden im Zusammenhang mit ihrem Erscheinen in nordaustralischer Felskunst erläutert. Manche Malereien, die menschliche Figuren mit Waffen wie Bumerange, Speere und Speerschleudern darstellen, sind als Jagd- oder Kampfszenen gedeutet worden. Manche größere Gruppen von Anthropomorphem wurden als Kriegsszenen interpretiert, im Zusammenhang mit schrumpfenden Lebensquellen, insbesondere dem Mangel von Landgebiet als Folge steigender Seehöhe vor über 6000 Jahren. Menschliche Figuren in diesen Szenen halten einen 'hakenförmigen Stock', der als 'Kampf-Spitzhacke' gedeutet wird. Es wird aber hier dargelegt, daß dies wirklich Tanz- und zeremonielle Szenen seien, und daß der 'hakenförmige Stock' oder die 'Spitzhacke' eine Speerschleuder sei, die dabei gehalten oder geschwungen worden sei.*

Resumen. Aspectos de danzas y ceremonias Aborígenes son definidos en relación a su presencia en el arte rupestre del Norte de Australia. Algunas pinturas representando figuras humanas con armas tales como bumerangs, lanzas y estólicas anteriormente fueron interpretadas como escenas de cacería o de combates. Algunos grupos más grandes de figuras humanas han sido interpretados como escenas de combate, que se piensa están asociadas con una rivalidad por los recursos menguantes, en particular una escasez de tierra causada por la elevación de los niveles del mar hace más de 6.000 años. Las figuras humanas en estas escenas están agarrando un 'palo enganchado' que se piensa ser un 'pico de pelea' usado para infligir daño. Sin embargo, se puede discutir que éstos son realmente escenas de danza o ceremonia y el 'palo enganchado' o 'pico de pelea' es una estólica siendo tenida o movida.

REFERENCES

- A.I.A.S. *Dances at Aurukun 1962*. Video film, Commonwealth Film Unit.
- BASEDOW, H. 1925. *The Australian Aboriginal*. F. W. Preece & Sons, Adelaide.
- BLITNER, G. 1970s. Collection of ten video tapes of northern Australian dance lodged with the Northern Territory State Reference Library, Darwin.
- BOWDEN, J. 1994. *Didgeridoo, a complete guide to this ancient Aboriginal instrument*. John P. Bowden, Kallangur, Queensland.
- BRANDL, E. J. 1973. *Australian Aboriginal paintings in western and central Arnhem Land*. Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra.
- CHALOUPKA, G. 1984. *From palaeoart to casual paintings*. Northern Territory Museum of Arts and Sciences, Darwin.
- CHALOUPKA, G. 1993. *Journey in time*. Reed, Chatswood.
- CRAWFORD, I. M. 1977. The relationship of Bradshaw and Wandjina art in north-west Kimberley. In P. J. Ucko (ed.), *Form in indigenous art*. Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra.
- CURR, E. M. 1886. *The Australian race*. John Ferres, Government Printer, Melbourne.
- DAVIDSON, D. S. 1936. The spearthrower in Australia. *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, pp 445-483.
- ELKIN, A. P. 1979. *The Australian Aborigines*. Angus & Robertson, Sydney.
- FIDOCK, A. 1982. *The Aboriginal Australian in north eastern Arnhem Land: introducing Aboriginal Australians*. The Curriculum Development Centre, Canberra.
- GOULD, R. A. 1970. Spears and spear-throwers of the Western Desert Aborigines of Australia. *American Museum Novitates* No. 2403. American Museum of Natural History, New York.
- HERNANDEZ, T. 1961. Myths and symbols of the Drysdale River Aborigines. *Oceania* 32(2): 113-27.
- KABERRY, P. M. 1939. *Aboriginal woman, sacred and profane*. George Routledge and Sons, Ltd, London.
- LEWIS, D. 1988. *The rock paintings of Arnhem Land, Australia*. BAR International Series 415, Oxford.
- LEWIS, D. 1996. In defence of Arnhem Land rock art research. *Australian Archaeology* 43: 12-20.
- LUMHOLTZ, C. 1980. *Among cannibals*. (Reprint of 1889 edition.) Australian National University Press, Canberra.
- MOUNTFORD, C. P. 1958. *The Tiwi. Their art, myth and ceremony*. Phoenix House, London.
- MOYLE, A. M. 1978. *Aboriginal sound instruments and companion booklet* (12 inch LP disc). Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra.
- POIGNANT, R., with A. POIGNANT 1996. *Encounter at Nagalaramba*. National Library of Australia, Canberra.
- ROWLISON, E. et al. 1981. *Aboriginal Australia*. Australian Gallery Directors Council, Sydney.
- SPENCER, W. B. and F. J. GILLEN 1904. *The northern tribes of central Australia*. Macmillan & Co. Ltd, London.
- STANTON, J. E. 1989. *Painting the country: contemporary Aboriginal art from the Kimberley region, Western Australia*. The University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands.
- TAÇON, P. and C. CHIPPINDALE 1994. Australia's ancient warriors. Changing depictions of fighting in the rock art of Arnhem Land, N.T.. *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 42: 211-48.
- TAÇON, P. and A. SZALAY 1995. Rock art warriors: world's earliest paintings of people at war. *Geo Australasia* 17(4): 40-52.
- VANDERWAL, R. (ed.) 1982. *The Aboriginal photographs of Baldwin Spencer*. John Currey, O'Neil Pty Ltd, South Yarra.
- WALSH, G. L. 1988. *Australia's greatest rock art*. E. J. Brill - Robert Brown & Associates, Bathurst.
- WALSH, G. L. 1994. *Bradshaws: ancient rock paintings of north-west Australia*. Edition Limitée, Switzerland.
- WARNER, W. L. 1958. *A black civilization*. Harper & Brothers, New York.
- WELCH, D. 1982. *Aboriginal rock art of Kakadu National Park*. Big Country Picture Company, Darwin.
- WELCH, D. 1990. The bichrome art period in the Kimberley, Australia. *Rock Art Research* 7: 110-24.
- WELCH, D. 1993. Early 'naturalistic' human figures in the Kimberley, Australia. *Rock Art Research* 10: 24-37.
- WELCH, D. M. 1996a. Material culture in Kimberley rock art, Australia. *Rock Art Research* 13: 104-23.
- WELCH, D. 1996b. Simple human figures in Kimberley rock art, Western Australia. *The Artefact* 19: 73-89.
- WILD, S. A. 1975. *Walbiri music and dance in their social and cultural nexus*. Unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, Indiana University.

RAR 14-425

Dr Alexander Gallus 15 November 1907 - 29 December 1996

Australian archaeology and rock art studies have lost one of their great pioneers in Alexander (Sándor) Gallus. Some of the most important archaeological work of Dr Gallus has been in Victoria, and he has been a President and a strong influence on what was then the Archaeological Society of Victoria. Therefore the Archaeological and Anthropological Society of Victoria, Inc. has decided to dedicate the 1998 issue of its journal, *The Artefact*, to the memory of Dr Gallus. This memorial issue, to be co-edited by Dr Ian McNiven and R. G. Bednarik, will comprise an obituary.