

Josephine Flood, *Archaeology of the Dreamtime*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983. Pp. 288, illustrated. \$19.95.

This is an interesting and well-written book that incorporates many of the recent developments in Australian prehistory. It is both informed and informative.

Much has happened since 1975 when the last major synthesis on Australian prehistory, John Mulvaney's *Prehistory of Australia*, was published, and Flood manages to touch on most major issues now current. Together with White and O'Connell's recently released *A Prehistory of Australia, New Guinea and Sahul* (1982), I imagine that this book will be standard fare for any course dealing with Australian prehistory.

Despite some structural problems, *Archaeology of the Dreamtime* is very readable. As Flood notes in her preface, she has attempted to avoid jargon and unnecessary technical terms. As a result, it is a book for the general public as well as the specialists; I know that it is being used very successfully by teachers in local high schools. In contrast White and O'Connell's work is drier and more difficult--the type of book anyone interested in Australia must have on their shelf but definitely not recommended for light reading,

The real strength of Flood's writing is her intimate knowledge of the Australian "scene" and her ability to give background details to many of the discoveries. She conveys well the chance factor inherent in all archaeological work, the excitement of discovery and near misses, in a way uncharacteristic of other general syntheses of Australian prehistory.

Some of the details have not appeared in print before. For instance, here you will find out the “true story” of how Roger Luebber first heard of the wooden artifacts being excavated from Wylie Swamp and how this led to the recovery of the world’s oldest boomerangs. Here you will also learn how the Upper Swan Site, dated to 38,000 B.P., was discovered and almost lost, the significance of John Mulvaney’s suitcase at Mungo, and so on. These tales of interesting finds/events/people from the annals of Australian archaeology demystify the discipline for the general public. They make it clear that archaeology is a social science carried out in a social context by (sometimes) sociable people.

The book is divided into five major “topics” incorporating eighteen chapters. These are said to be in a chronological framework organized by topic and region but in some sections structural continuity is overruled by the urge to provide yet another interesting example--the text becomes a series of case studies which are only loosely connected. This is a reasonable approach if done in moderation. For instance, chapter 1 begins with a general description of what archaeologists do and how they work; this is illustrated with an account of Flood’s own fieldwork involving the discovery and excavation at Clogg’s Cave. Here the strategy works quite well but elsewhere it does not. Chapter 3, a description of discoveries made at Lake Mungo in southwest New South Wales, is given as an example of a significant site in Australia’s semiarid area. However, there is no attempt to relate this information to some of the issues raised later concerning colonization models, or to relate it to other sites in the semiarid zone. The chapter is well written but just seems intrusive at this point in the book.

This element of intrusiveness is more apparent in later sections. Chapter 10, for instance, is mainly about the massive Kartan assemblages of Kangaroo Island and the adjacent South Australian mainland, but there is a sudden switch to a discussion of Koonalda and Allen’s Caves on the Nullarbor Plain and the Roonka site on the lower Murray River. These latter sites are not particularly relevant to the “Kartan question” and the only connection is that they are all in South Australia. The concluding section, however, is not a general assessment of all South Australian sites; it reverts instead to the Kartan question, leaving the impression that Allen’s Cave and Roonka have only been sandwiched into this chapter because Flood had to mention these important sites and could not easily fit them in anywhere else.

In fact, some sections of the book definitely have a rushed feel about them, as if Flood had collected a quantity of data/stories about broadly defined aspects of Australian archaeology but had not assimilated the information properly before writing, Chapter 16, entitled “Harvesters,

engineers and fire-stick farmers,” paraphrases the work of a number of researchers including Beaton, Bowdler, Flood, Lourandos, Coutts, McBryde, Lampert, and Jones. Each “report” is inherently interesting and together they offer insight into the development of large-scale gatherings, more intensive use of a wider range of resources, changes in settlement patterns, and so on. However, Floods introductory and concluding remarks are surprisingly brief and offer little guidance as to the significance of these changes, even though Lourandos’ “social” interpretations of the same data base represent one of the most exciting developments in Australian archaeology (Lourandos 1983).

In contrast, some of the explanations Flood does offer for aspects of Australian prehistory would not be supported by many Australian prehistorians. For instance, the appearance of dingos and specialized small tools in Australia from ca. 4,000 B.P. is explained in terms of migrations between India and Australia. Differences in the distribution of traits within Australia are also explained in terms of mass movements of people:

The different distributions of backed blade and point industries in Australia can be neatly explained by two main migration routes: one through Australia’s north in the region of Arnhem Land by people using stone projectile points and the other via the north-west coast by people using backed blades. (198)

This is a peculiarly idiosyncratic viewpoint but will probably be accepted uncritically as “fact” by most readers from the general public.

Returning to more mundane matters, the book is well produced, illustrated, and edited. Mistakes of scholarship or “typos” are few. To mention two examples, Flood states (198) that Pacific voyages had reached Tonga and Samoa by 5,000 B.P., adding 2,000 years to the known occupational sequence. Later she claims that “Dozens of rock-shelters have now been excavated in the Carnarvon Ranges” (201-202) when eleven is the actual number. But these are minor lapses in an otherwise excellent book.

REFERENCE

- Lourandos, H. 1983. Intensification: A Late Pleistocene-Holocene Archaeological Sequence from Southwestern Victoria. *Archaeology in Oceania* 18 (2): 81-94.

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