CHAPTER I

THE LAND AND ITS PEOPLE BEFORE EUROPEAN INTRUSION

Definition and Description of the Bowen District

The area studied has been called the Bowen District but no exact geographic area is intended by this term. It is a horse-shoe shaped area of land which roughly encompasses the Burdekin delta on the north coast, Cape Gloucester on the south coast, and the eastern foothills of the Great Divide to the west. Today Bowen, Collinsville, Ayr, and Home Hill are the main centres of population, with Giru on the northern extremity and Proserpine on the southern. As small an area as possible was chosen to illustrate the historic process of frontier contact in the first district settled in North Queensland. The source material indicated that the Europeans living in the defined area had a community interest in the Aborigines in that they were aware of actions being taken within the region, and the actions taken by one European group in the region could, and sometimes did, influence the
Fig. 1. The bed of the Burdekin River in the gorge, about four miles downstream from the dam site. The surrounding country is rugged and the bed of the river has many small rock bars.

Fig. 2. Rugged hilly country and nearly flat alluvial plain south of Townsville. About one-third of the region surveyed is rough, hilly country.

actions taken by other groups. Obviously, closer to
the boundaries of this region other influences were
exerted upon European-Aboriginal relations from more
remote areas. Occasionally, events outside of this
area are mentioned when they impinge upon the thinking
or action of those within the area.

One important factor in producing and reflecting
this community interest in Aboriginal-European relations
was the Bowen newspaper, the *Port Denison Times* which
commenced publication on 5 March 1864.¹ This newspaper
gave a very thorough coverage of frontier contact, and,
through editorial comment and a very generous opening
of its pages to correspondents of all manner of opinion,
well depicted the problems, challenges, and state of
mind of the settler.

The region consists mainly of low uplands of
between 500 and 1,000 feet, a less extensive highland

---

¹ *P.D.T.*, 5 March, 1864. Frederick Rayner (1834–1900),
editor of this newspaper from the first issue until
his death in 1900, was born in London. His obituary
reported that he was well respected in the town, a
good classical scholar, and a speaker of several
languages. His biographer E.M. Barker, 'a Pioneer
Editor' in *Newspaper History at Bowen 1864–1962*,
(Bowen Historical Society, 1969), p.11, reported
him high principled, courageous, and a political
moderate. In the same pamphlet G. Kelly, 'Pioneer
Editor: Frederick Rayner's Writings', p.21, main-
tained that his attitude to the Aborigines and the
Native Police was 'typical of his time and station'.

Open forest covers large areas of undulating country and is characteristic of most hilly country.

Such dense forest is not common.

area of between 1,000 and 2,000 feet, and a fairly extensive coastal plain of between ten and twenty miles width. The Leichardt Range, running parallel to the coast, roughly bisects the region although more dramatically on a map than in reality. The nearly flat coastal lowlands also contain scattered, high, rugged, mountainous residuals while the elevated lands inland consist of maturely dissected hills and ranges with extensive undulating country.  

The area is drained by the Burdekin and its tributaries and by short coastal streams like the Don and the Elliott. On a map the river systems look very impressive and in and just after the wet season, generally from January to March, they are; but, with the low winter rainfall, they dry up to become a string of permanent and semi-permanent waterholes. There are, thus, two seasons: the first, a hot, wet, summer when the rainfall varies greatly in duration and intensity mainly because of the intrusion of unpredictable tropical influences, generally cyclonic in nature;

and the second, a warm, dry winter which shows relatively little deviation from the norm. Although this region is one of the driest sections of the Queensland east coast, it has an annual average rainfall of about forty inches. The rainfall decreases with distance from the coast until in the west of the region the annual average is about twenty-five inches.  

Most of the area carries a eucalypt open forest vegetation but it is difficult to tell to what extent the present practice of burning the pastures, or, indeed, the previous Aboriginal practice of burning to catch game, has modified the ground flora. There are small patches of softwood forests on the mountain slopes and along the coast.

The resources needed by modern primary industry are not the same as those needed for the nomadic, food gathering economy of the Aborigines. An advanced agricultural economy needs heavily watered country or country where the rainfall, if moderate, must be

5.

reliable or can be supplemented by irrigation. Heavily timbered areas are generally an economic asset. However, the most attractive areas for the Aborigines are often open, grassy plains which will support a wealth of game but have only sufficient water resources to tide them over the dry season. Dense, wet forests are the refuges for tribes whose physical and material inferiority cause them to seek out the least desirable areas of Aboriginal man’s environment. 5

As will be seen later in this chapter, the Aborigines seem to have found abundant food and, no doubt, the very extensive river systems provided them with reserves of surface and underground water even when the streams had ceased to run. In the driest season, for example, the Burdekin contains a considerable amount of water although it looks insignificant in the huge river bed. Moreover, much land that today is useless for sheep and cattle will

5. N.B. Tindale, 'Distribution of Australian Aboriginal Tribes: a Field Survey' in Transactions of the Royal Society of South Australia, 64 (1), 26 July 1940, p.149.
THE IMAGES ON THIS PAGE HAVE BEEN REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS

James Merrill lived for many years at Mt. Elliott which is in background of picture below.
From The Story of James Merrill, p. 1.
support native animal and bird life of some sort. Apparently the mangrove swamps and saline plains provided such a food supply that Morrill thought that these alone would support all of the Aborigines in the region. Although he was mistaken, his statement does indicate the value to the Aborigines of much land that today is uneconomic. The coastal Aborigines probably derived a much larger proportion of their food from the sea, the estuaries, and the rivers than do Europeans in this area today. There is, however, an extensive area of rugged uplands which was probably of as low productivity for the Aborigines as for the Europeans today. The 'spin-off' of having such an extensive river system in the area, the mildness of the climate, the reasonable rainfall, and the proximity to the sea were probably the main beneficial influences on the life of the Aborigines; the long dry season the main adverse


7. C.S.I.R.O. Report, op.cit., Plate 1, Figure 2.
influence, but probably not often a very serious one.

Although the modern scientist may write of this region with cautious reserve, the first Europeans who saw it were uncritically enthusiastic. They had yet to learn of the deceptive appearance of tropical pastures. In the time of this study the region was given over almost entirely to pastoral pursuits, and the small town of Bowen grew up to service the area. At first Bowen was the frontier but as soon as development took place, it attracted various 'service industries' of civilization: public servants, stores, hotels, a church, a photographer, and a newspaper etc. Through the Port Denison Times the townsfolk were made aware of conditions on the receding frontier and inevitably those who were not faced with the problems of pioneering commented on those who were. It was never, however, a simple town-country dialogue on Aboriginal-European relations. Most townsfolk apparently were unconcerned about the conflict on the frontier, and some squatters were as concerned about the Aborigines as the humanitarians of the town. The town seems to have acted both as a
A Bardekin Aboriginal, approximately 1870.

From Bolton, Richard Jaintree.
forum and as a catalyst for change and provided the Europeans with the opportunity of re-asserting the values of their civilization which the challenge of racial contact had undermined.

The Original Inhabitants.

'Credible witnesses show that they are addicted to cannibalism; that they have no idea of a future state; and are sunk in the lowest depths of barbarism'.


Estimates of the Aboriginal population of certain areas based on nineteenth century observers like Morrill, Dalrymple, and Chatfield cannot be confidently accepted. After considering the views of various anthropologists, Abbie concludes that on the favoured coastal areas a density of one Aborigine to five square miles is a conservative estimate. If a square of country, with one side stretching from Bowen to Ayr, is taken as an example, then in this

area of approximately 4,000 square miles, an Aboriginal population of between 800 and 1,000 could have been expected. This was a formidable number to oppose the first handful of squatters pushing out into this area. The number, however, is quite deceptive as the nomadic hunting and food gathering economy could never have allowed a formidable force to be exerted consistently for any length of time against the invaders. Nor did the political structure and leadership allow for combination and organization so that the large numbers living in the area could be used.

The destruction of Aboriginal organizations was very rapid in the Bowen District because of the dramatic expansion of settlement, and contemporary commentators and later nineteenth century writers have not described them with any certainty. Consequently, in this thesis, the actual observations of the Aborigines have been grouped according to the geographic location of the Europeans observing them not according to the distribution of tribes. Although this is known with some degree of accuracy from the research of Tindale and others, it has not always been possible to identify
with certainty the Aborigines referred to by earlier observers. This thesis, then, does not attempt to describe individual tribes nor the differences between them. Nor is it claimed that the first European observers were describing only one tribe even when they thought they were.⁹

European commentators have described Aborigines living in the following areas:

(a) From Port Denison north to Cleveland Bay

(b) From Port Denison south to the headwaters of the Proserpine River

(c) Inland from Port Denison around the Cape River.

After considering the primary sources, it has been decided to deal as fully as possible with the Aborigines living in area (a), only briefly examining

---

⁹ Most Europeans applied terms familiar to themselves to describe the unfamiliar in Aboriginal life. Thus the term 'tribe' was used by most nineteenth century Europeans to refer to any group of Aborigines. It could have referred to a family group, a horde, a clan, a phratry, a moiety, a tribe, or a supra-tribal assemblage. Some authorities have even doubted whether the concept, 'tribe', has any reality when applied to Aboriginal life; although Abbie, Elkin, and the Berndts accept it as useful and valid. See Abbie, The Original Australians, Ch.10 for a description of social organization.
Map Showing Tribal Distribution.
From Timaeis, Trans. Royal Society, 3.4, 641.
the very limited evidence available in areas (b) and (c) for purposes of comparison.

According to Tindale's investigations, three tribal areas impinged upon area (a): the southern section of Wulgurukaba, taking in the Palm Islands, Magnetic Island, Ross River, east nearly to Cape Cleveland and inland about twenty miles;¹⁰ all of Bindal from Cape Cleveland south to the mouth of the Burdekin River and inland to the Leichhardt Range;¹¹ and all of Juru from the Burdekin River south to Bowen and west to the Bogie River.¹²

Possibly two tribes impinged on area (b): certainly the northern section of Gia, taking in the Bowen to Cape Gloucester area, Proserpine, and inland to the Clarke Range,¹³ and possibly the

¹⁰ N.B. Tindale, 'Distribution of Australian Aboriginal Tribes' in Transactions of the Royal Society of South Australia, 64; 1; 26 July 1940, p.175.
¹¹ ibid., p.156.
¹² ibid., p.177.
¹³ ibid., p.157.
¹⁴ ibid., p.156.
eastern section of Biria which occupied the area between the Clarke and Leichhardt Ranges.\textsuperscript{14} Area (c) was occupied by the Ilba tribe which inhabited a large area on the Cape River west to the Great Dividing Range and east to about the Suttor River, north to Goldsborough and south to about Lake Buchanan.\textsuperscript{15}

The accounts of area (a) give no indication of the tribal distribution and mention only hordes (or local groups) while in area (b) the tribe was thought to be the Bumbarra which was a place name and probably indicated a horde of the Gia tribe. In area (c), the informant refers to the Yukkaburra, a horde, as a tribe and listed five other tribes which were possibly hordes, sub-sections, or clans.\textsuperscript{16} In the description of Aboriginal-European conflict in the Bowen District, it will be seen from the accompanying map that other tribes, or parts of other tribes, could have been involved: namely, the

\textsuperscript{15} ibid., p.158.

\textsuperscript{16} ibid. See also Chatfield's description later in this chapter.
Jangga whose northern boundary is not known; the remainder of the Biria; and the Ngaro which encompassed the Whitsunday and Cumberland Islands. Who then are the informants for the three regions and how trustworthy is their evidence?

(a) From Port Denison north to Cleveland Bay. The best contemporary commentators on the Aborigines in this district are Beete Jukes, the naturalist of the surveying voyage of the H.M.S. Fly, and James Morrill, a poorly educated English sailor who lived for approximately two years with the Port Denison Aborigines, an indefinite time with a group at the Burdekin, and for approximately thirteen or fourteen years with the Mt. Elliott Aborigines. As Morrill described generally the 'Aborigines among whom I have been living', it is not possible to focus any more closely. Presumably he did not feel the need to draw attention to marked differences among the

18. ibid., p.168.
Aboriginal groups of the area.

Jukes had various, prolonged friendly encounters with the Aborigines at Cape Cleveland, Cape Upstart, and at the mouth of the Burdekin River between 30 March and 17 May 1843. His description of Aboriginal life accords with the findings of modern anthropologists and does not conflict with Morrill's account.

James Morrill was an Essex seaman who had been shipwrecked on the Great Barrier Reef in 1846. After forty-two days adrift on a raft, seven survivors were washed ashore at Cape Cleveland. Three died after landing, the remaining four being befriended by the Aborigines who regarded them as deceased relatives returned as whites to their previous state of existence. Whether or not such destitute whites were received kindly or regarded

as possibly dangerous aliens seems to have often depended upon whether individual Aborigines would claim them as recently deceased relatives. In this case, Morrill and a boy were claimed by relatives of the group occupying an area around Mt. Elliott while the Captain and his wife were similarly claimed by the Cape Cleveland Aborigines. The Europeans moved south to the Port Denison district, hoping for rescue, and lived there for about two years. After the other three died from natural causes, Morrill moved back to his Mt. Elliott friends for the next twelve or thirteen years. When news reached him of strange white beings coming from the south, he made his way in this direction and, at last, fearfully made himself known to some employees of Inverman station.21

Morrill's appearance caused quite a sensation. The Bowen citizens took him to their hearts and he had so many invitations to tell his story that, at length, while in Brisbane, he dictated his

reminiscences to journalist R.E. Johns. These were printed in 1863.

It is difficult to determine how much embellishment the account owes to Johns. There are passages containing Victorian prudery and sentimentality that seem strange coming from a man who had lived for so long with an Aboriginal tribe; and a reader could well believe that Johns is giving a dignity to the death of the Captain and his wife that Dickens would have been proud of. Although the sentence structure and vocabulary is often obviously Johns', throughout the narrative there is a naive candour which gives the reader confidence that the narrator is telling the truth as he knows it. Most of what he says accords with such modern authorities as the Berndts, Elkin, and Abbie, but sometimes it is just as obvious that Morrill did not understand, or could not communicate, the spiritual and social complexity of Aboriginal life. One wonders how much is lost because Johns had to convert Morrill's, perhaps

22. ibid., pp.14; 15.
clumsy description into a journalist's Victorian English which would inevitably be unscientific, imprecise, and, sometimes, misleading.

'The Australian Race' as an Authority: for area (b) from Port Denison south to Cape Gloucester; and for area (c) on the Cape River inland from Port Denison around Natal Downs Station.

The only descriptions found of the Aborigines in these areas are in E.M. Curr's *The Australian Race*. The accounts were supplied to Curr in response to requests for information and for vocabularies for certain words. Curr was at the mercy of his informants but edited their material in the light of his more comprehensive knowledge of Aborigines throughout Australia. As the full title of his book indicates, he was vitally interested in the ethnic origins of the Aborigines and their dispersal across the continent and was looking for links of vocabulary and customs that would reveal this.

---

Consequently, one does not expect a comprehensive picture of tribal life in each area dealt with. Nor does one get it. Indeed, there is very little information about the Aborigines in Area (b), but this fact should not be taken to indicate that one area is culturally richer than the other. Each account, then, is compiled by two Europeans, both untrained researchers with no anthropological knowledge to help them interpret their observations, and a Christian-European culture to hinder them.

A further limitation must be added. The accounts were written only after lengthy contact with Europeans and may not be accurate for the pre-European era. As well, when one considers the studious care of modern researchers to win the confidence of the Aborigines, to crosscheck their information, to observe the life of the Aborigines in the field while disturbing them as little as possible, and to treat them with the greatest respect, one must be aware of the unpromising nature of Curr's material.

On the credit side must be placed Curr's
sympathetic interest in the Aborigines. For his time he was one of the most knowledgeable Europeans on this subject and appreciated the intimate tie of the Aborigines with the land. Very often his accounts are all that are left and the recorded detail is important even if the interpretation is sometimes doubtful.

Bearing in mind these qualifications which must be placed upon the commentators, an attempt will be made to reconstruct Aboriginal life from these primary sources.

**Politico-Economic Organization.**

A tribe may be defined as an entity of people bound together, often very loosely, by language, beliefs, customs, ownership of territory, and a common name. Very often this distinction of the tribe as a separate and unique group is given strong emotional support, descent is claimed from common spirit ancestors who have consecrated certain geographical area, and ritual and ceremonies confirm the tribe as a spiritual entity throughout eternity.
From Morrill's account, however, it becomes clear that the effective economic and social units of day to day life were sub-tribal groups of varying size which will be referred to henceforth by Elkin's term, 'local group'. Morrill estimated that there were fifty or sixty Aborigines at one such camp.²⁴ He described how this sub-tribal group assembled a different sub-tribal group on six or eight consecutive nights to observe the Europeans. Thus, some indication is given of the ease with which large numbers of Aborigines could be assembled for a brief period in this comparatively favoured area. The reader receives the impression of local groups coming together co-operatively with other local groups at various times and then parting again to return to their own areas of the tribal land. Occasionally there were large ceremonial gatherings which encompassed the whole tribe or even many tribes.

²⁴ The Story of James Morrill, p. 13. The pamphlet calls this group a tribe.
At one ceremony, tribes assembled from, at least as far north as Cape Cleveland, to farther south than Port Denison. 25 Morrill vaguely estimated that there were well over a thousand Aborigines present. He believed that the Aborigines assembled to see the white strangers but this was certainly only of peripheral importance. As happened elsewhere in Aboriginal Australia, this large gathering occurred in the dry season when travelling was much easier and the disappearance of much surface water was conducive to larger social groupings. In addition, Morrill indicated that the tribes had accumulated over several years large numbers of adolescents to be initiated into manhood - fifty in Morrill's tribe - which implies that a great deal of planning and preparation was involved over a vast area.

There is no indication that such large-scale co-operation could be implemented for political and

military purposes to meet the sudden emergency that the coming of the Europeans would pose. Such prolonged aggression for territorial aggrandizement was alien to the tradition-bound thinking of the Aborigines and they could not assemble a large, united force in any one area for long. They were not geared technologically or strategically to undertake combat with Europeans who could combine, organize, undertake prolonged aggression or use a force, the Native Police, which could devote its whole time to suppressing the Aborigines. For various reasons, Aborigines speared other Aborigines but large scale fighting generally followed traditional patterns and was not 'of a very sanguinary nature'. Such combat was not prolonged 'for many hours' as food could not be stored and the Aborigines had to eat.\textsuperscript{26}

The Aborigines could only harrass the settlers in small parties, feuding with the whites and avenging themselves on their white enemies and all who were racially 'related' to them, in much the same way as

\textsuperscript{26} ibid., p.25.
they feuded with their black enemies and their relations. Such methods would be no answer for the superior fire power, mobility, and racial esprit de corps of the European invaders. 27

Morrill had very little to say of the Aborigines' political organization. On one occasion he implied the leadership was in the hands of the 'old men' of the tribe. 28 Elsewhere he said that there were 'no chiefs - the strongest is the best man'. 29 It is likely that government of tribal and sub-tribal groups was a quasi-gerontocracy but that often one of the mature males exerted greater influence and authority within his horde (local group) and, perhaps, at the tribal councils. The fact that Morrill refers so little to tribal and sub-tribal government indicates that the strong pressure to conformity within Aboriginal society had made an elaborate governmental structure

29. ibid., p.20.
unnecessary. The commonest decisions that had to be made were the movements of the local group.

Even in this coastal area the local group ranged over a large area of land in their quest for food. The Mt. Elliott Aborigines apparently travelled to the coast visiting, among other places Cape Cleveland where one of Morrill's friends was shot, probably by a sailor from the Government Schooner, *Spitfire*, in 1860.30 As well, the Mt. Elliott 'horde' could travel as far south as the Burdekin although it seems they did not frequently forage there.31 The Port Denison local group travelled at least as far north as Cape Upstart.32 Morrill pointed out that such a group never stayed long in one locality. As food became harder to obtain, the Aborigines would move on to new areas decided upon, no doubt, by the elders' past experience. Although Morrill

30. ibid., p.15.
31. ibid., p.16.
32. ibid.
mentioned little of the regular ceremonial life of the local group, it is probable that the clan core (discussed later) had its regular rituals to perform and these were associated with geographic areas which in turn were associated with the totemic spirit ancestor of the clan.\footnote{33} Elkin has pointed out that the most important aspect of the local group is spiritual in nature. The members who are born into it own a subdivision of tribal territory.

But it is truer to say that the country owns them and that they cannot remain away from it indefinitely and still live ... they believe that the spirits of the members of the local group (or clan) pre-existed usually in definite sites in the country of the group until incarnation, and that after death they will return to those spirit homes, there possibly to await reincarnation. ...they desire to revisit it from time to time to be near the home of their spirits as well as to see some of the places in it sanctified by mythological 'history'; and finally they like to die in it so that their spirits will not be lost when they sever their connexion with the body.\footnote{34}

Morrill made no mention of this essential

\footnote{33. A.P. Elkin, \textit{The Australian Aborigines: How to Understand Them}. pp. 44-48.}
\footnote{34. ibid., pp. 47; 48.}
spiritual continuum, either because he did not understand it or because he could not communicate it to Johns.

As noted previously, Curr's informant for area (b) claimed that the area from Port Denison south to Cape Gloucester and inland to the head of the Proserpine River was occupied by the Bumbarra 'tribe'.\textsuperscript{35} It is possible, but by no means certain, that he was describing the foraging territory of the Bumbarra local group. The main informant for area (c) was William Chatfield of Natal Downs, a sympathetic squatter, who knew the district from its first occupation in 1863. He maintained that six 'tribes' - the Yukkaburra, Pegulloburra, Wokkulburra (i.e. People of the Eel Totem) Mungooburra, Mungullaburra (i.e. People of the Spinnifex Totem), Goondoolooburra (i.e. People of the Emu Totem) - occupied the 10,000 square miles

\textsuperscript{35} Curr, op.cit., Volume III, p.4. Clem Lack, \textit{The Pale Invader and the Dark Avenger}, (Unpublished Manuscript lent to the writer) refers to them as the 'Bumburra'.
that made up the Cape River watershed. There is very real doubt as to whether the groups, in this area of Queensland, designated with the suffix 'burra', 'barra', or 'bara', were tribes. Chatfield's various population estimates and his claim that the Cape tribes all spoke a 'language' which they recognised as the 'Eneby language' makes suspect his claim that all these groups were discrete tribes and supports Tindale's description of them as one tribe. (See map of tribal areas.) Elsewhere, however, Tindale laments the lack of surviving authorities who could clarify this type of problem.

The only indication given of the movements of the Aborigines in areas (b) and (c) came from Chatfield:

(a) that one group of the Cape River Aborigines occasionally visited the coast; and

(b) that, at least, some Cape River Aborigines moved as far as Peak Downs for intertribal gatherings.

These considerable journeys indicate friendly relations with Aborigines in these areas and possible interdependence in economies and intertribal ritual. For example, a regular system of barter existed between the Cape River and the seacoast, sea-shells being one item in the exchange.38

**Physical Characteristics and Material Culture.**

Morrill described the Aborigines he had been living with as 'a fine race of people, as to strength, size and general appearance'. He affirmed that the Aborigines were not black but 'more of the colour of half-castes', thus describing the typical dark-brown pigmentation. He accurately recorded that the new-born Aborigines were 'nearly white' (which is true of all known non-white peoples) but mistakenly believed that the natural darkening of the skin was caused, or aided, by the gins' squeezing their own milk on three day old babies.

and rubbing charcoal into their skin. Morrill also believed that the naturally broad Aboriginal nose was made broader in infancy by the parents.39

Jukes gave a fairly detailed description of a group of Aborigines he met at the mouth of the Burdekin.40 He was surprised to notice that many of the men were much shorter and of less impressive physique than the ones he had encountered at Port Bowen (near Broad Sound), although just as 'well made, active, lively, and good tempered'. Another Burdekin Aboriginal he described as a 'fine young man, with a different cast of countenance from the rest, his features being Nubian rather than Australian'.41 Thus, Jukes indicated the physical diversity found among Australian Aborigines.

Jukes noted that ceremonial mutiliation was universal among adult males and females. All had lost one front tooth and all had permanent raised

41. ibid., p. 78; 79.
scars on their bodies. Some of these were very pronounced, one man having 'a double fold across his back, from his shoulder to his loins, raised fully half an inch above his skin, and each half an inch wide'.\textsuperscript{42} The women were scarred especially over the hips.

As the significance and importance of tooth evulsion varies greatly throughout Australia, it is pointless to guess as to its nature here.\textsuperscript{43} The absence of circumcision and sub-incision from this area possibly meant that both tooth evulsion and the extensive scarrification had important initiatory significance.\textsuperscript{44} Morrill mentioned how incisions were made on the arms of boys who were undergoing their first initiation into manhood. It is possible that, as the men were admitted more into the mysteries of tribal life, further incisions were made. Elsewhere in Australia the weals are considered

\textsuperscript{42} ibid., p.72.
\textsuperscript{44} ibid., p.139.
both as an adornment and as a sexual lure while the men consider them evidence of fortitude and virility.\textsuperscript{45}

Although the Aborigines were naked, a few had some adornment. Some Aborigines, both at Cape Cleveland and at the Burdekin, wore grass necklaces while others wore armlets made of plaited grass. The only clothing Jukes saw were small rugs, each made of two or three possum skins, and a possum skin flap which one Aborigine wore as a penis cover. The Aborigines made string out of tough grass and out of hair and wore string necklaces, string girdles, and string headbands often supporting further adornments such as knots and tassels. Jukes also saw a neck ornament cut out of the shell of a nautilus pompilius.\textsuperscript{46} A kind of network skull cap, probably made out of twisted hair, was fairly common. (See illustration, p. 7\textsuperscript{a})

\textsuperscript{45} Abbie, op.cit., p. 145.
\textsuperscript{46} Jukes, op.cit., pp. 58-62; 68; 83.
Jukes described how he had met two different groups of Aborigines at the Burdekin. As the members of one group wore cockatoo feathers in their hair and some were adorned with bands of red or white 'paint' it is probable that the arrival of the Europeans caused some ceremony to be interrupted. The ensuing shouting and uproar certainly indicated that the normal propriety, associated with one Aboriginal group's encountering another, was absent. 47

Morrill has given a good impression of the hunting and food gathering subsistence economy that the Aborigines enjoyed. It is clear that in this area, at least, food was abundant and the life a fairly easy one: 'There is plenty to eat if they are not too lazy to fetch it'. 48 His charge of 'laziness' itself attests to the ease of food gathering and indicates that the Aborigines made no attempt to obtain more

47. ibid., p. 82.
food than they needed, a condition forced on them by their nomadic life and their inability to preserve food. They used spears, stone axes, boomerangs, throwing sticks, and clubs to kill animals and birds, and snared all manner of animal and bird life with nets and nooses.\(^49\) The Aborigines used nets to catch fish and Jukes described two 'weirs' they built at the Burdekin to trap fish. On one branch of the delta three women were netting fish at a weir made of sticks when the Europeans surprised them. Baskets were used widely to carry food and other small articles.\(^50\)

Morrill reported that the Aborigines could 'eat anything', listing not only animals, birds, fish, but also alligators, shellfish, prawns, snakes, grubs, snails, and 'all kinds of creeping things'. His list of vegetable food, however, is even more impressive. Roots, wild fruits, berries, water lilies, bulbs, and a host of vegetable products are listed. (See Appendix A). It is clear that


\(^{50}\) Jukes, op.cit., pp. 86; 87; 65; 67; 68.
the abundant vegetable growth constituted a very important part of Aboriginal diet and the collection and preparation of it occupied a great deal of time. Much of this vegetable growth would be denied the Aborigines as the squatters' flocks and herds foraged in ever increasing numbers. Abbie has estimated that in fertile areas 'where plant food is plentiful the Aboriginal dietary ratio is roughly 20% meat: 80% vegetable, much as with ourselves'. 51 Such a ratio would probably apply to this district. Abbie has pointed out that dietary deficiencies are rare in the Aboriginal diet, the survival of the Aborigines for so long with the same dietary habits attesting to this. 52

Morrill's pamphlet illustrates the intimate knowledge the Aborigines had of their environment and their ability to make use of it. Thus he could state on what part of a mountain or river-bank etc. an edible root grew, near what other vegetation certain edible vegetables were found,

51. Abbie, op.cit., p.81.
52. ibid., p. 83.
and the different uses to which various parts of the one plant could be put. Morrill records that a poisonous root was used by the Aborigines as a food after a peculiar and lengthy preparation. He also recorded that various plants were used medicinally, singly and in combination. Finally, Morrill described how one plant (possibly the Barringtonia Careya) not only provided a pleasant fruit but was also used by the Aborigines to stupefy fish. He claimed that the bark of the stem was used in fresh water and the bark of the root in salt. 53

No doubt, as elsewhere in Aboriginal Australia, the women mainly gathered the vegetable products and small animal life while the men were occupied with the large scale hunting and fishing expeditions. There does not seem, however, to have been a sharp division of labour. Morrill indicated that men were also expected to dig up roots and make string and nets while, as noted above, Jukes encountered women netting fish. 54

53. The Story of James Morrill, pp. 20; 21; 22.
54. ibid., p. 14.
The Family.

Morrill reported that each man had several wives, in some instances as many as eight or nine, but that each woman had few children—seldom more than four. This indicates a high infant mortality rate, which has been found among other Aborigines. Abbie has estimated that 25% of all children die before the age of five, 13% within their first year.\footnote{Morrill reported one case of infanticide—the killing of a twin—and maintained that this greatly upset the adults at the camp, apparently implying that the custom was not common.\footnote{This would accord with the Berndts' claim (although not with Abbie's) that infanticide occurs only occasionally among tribal Aborigines.\footnote{Morrill made no mention of abortive or contraceptive measures that were practised with questionable success elsewhere among Aboriginal tribes.\footnote{Abbie considers infanticide the normal means of population control.}}}}
also described the ease with which the Aboriginal women gave birth. 59

The subservient status of Aboriginal women should not conceal their importance. They had to continue breast-feeding their children for a great deal longer than European women because the Aboriginal diet was unsuitable for very young children. 60 Morrill recorded that breast-feeding could be continued past the birth of another child until the first child was, perhaps, over four years old. 61 The women collected most of the food to sustain the tribe, 62 were the only 'beasts of burden', and produced the young who alone could guarantee the tribe's continuance. Morrill indicated that they were treated as property by the males who would 'steal them from each other and frequently lend them, or sell them for a time, for a slight consideration'. 63

59. The Story of James Morrill, p. 20. They went back to their normal work the day after the birth.
60. Abbie, op.cit., p. 84.
63. The Story of James Morrill, p. 20.
Jukes, himself, was offered an Aboriginal's wife, probably to cement friendly relations between the Aborigines and the powerful white aliens. The importance of the interchange of women and the gift of the services of women in contact situations was obviously very great. When Morrill maintained that 'it is about their wives that all their wars, fights and feuds occur' he was exaggerating, as we know other causes for such conflict e.g. avenging a death thought to be caused by sorcery. Modern researchers, however, claim that women were, and are, the most common cause of fighting, thus agreeing with Morrill as to their central significance in Aboriginal life.

There is no indication given by Morrill, or anyone else, that the Aborigines lived a less nomadic life than has been found typical elsewhere in Australia. Sub-tribal groups were associated frequently with a prominent geographical feature

64. Jukes, op.cit., p. 70.
65. Abbie, op.cit., p. 199.
e.g. Cape Cleveland or Mt. Elliott, but movement within their own area was constant and into the areas of other friendly groups common. They built small, temporary 'gunyahs' when forced to by cold or wet weather but placed no great value on them unlike some Aborigines of Western Victoria. As soon as one area's food supply became 'a little exhausted', the Aborigines moved on, thus practising a primitive conservation policy. Their 'fire-drill' method of producing fire by the friction resulting from rubbing two soft pieces of wood together was suited to their nomadic living. (See Appendix A for a description of this process.)

In areas (b) and (c) typical Aboriginal ornamentation was reported. Shells and possum skin rugs were mentioned in both areas while Chatfield recorded waist-belts of possum fur, chaplets of animal teeth, plumes, cobweb head-

67. P. Corris, Aborigines and Europeans in Western Victoria (Canberra, 1968), pp. 26, 27.
68. The Story of James Morrill, p. 20.
bands, spun fur waistbands, and fringe aprons worn around the body on festive occasions by the women. He also mentioned that the Cape Aborigines painted their bodies for rituals.69

From a description of their food and artefacts it is apparent that the generalization of Aboriginal economic life can be accepted as true for the Aborigines in Areas (b) and (c). Spears, clubs, boomerangs (both returning and non-returning), and the strange, large wooden sword were reported in both areas. It was stated that the woomera was used by the Cape River Aborigines, although not by those in Area (b) who, however, were acquainted with it. Chatfield mentioned clubs, wooden shields, stone axes, flint knives, flint chisels with wooden handles, and hunting and fishing nets made from bark. The Cape River Aborigines produced a decoy 'emu call' from a skilfully fashioned wooden implement. Chatfield also described wooden water vessels and bark and grass bags. Shea described the bark canoes used in Area (b). Both mentioned

notched message sticks as being used.70

Chatfield and Shea stated that the girls married at twelve years of age and under traditional circumstances had an average of three children but that, after contact with the Europeans, fewer children were reared. Chatfield claimed that infanticide was originally rare but that it had increased greatly after contact. He mentioned that marriage occurred both by interchange of women with other tribes and by capture, as elsewhere in Australia. He maintained that, before contact, the married men commonly had two wives but some had as many as six. His claim that most men had been unmarried when first contacted perhaps indicated that a dearth of female marriage partners was caused by polygamy and the preference given to the older men. Abbie believed this to be a common disadvantage of

70. ibid., Volume II, pp. 471; 472; 473; 477; Volume III, pp. 4; 5.
Aboriginal life. There is also the possibility that marriage partners had become unavailable because of the disturbed frontier situation.

Beliefs, Ceremonies, and Tribal Groups.

Only glimpses of the religious life of the Aborigines emerge from the European commentators, and these in no way that would enable a reader to see a comprehensive system. It would be foolish to expect more. Enough emerges, however, for the reader to conclude that the beliefs of the Aborigines in the Bowen district accorded generally with the beliefs of Aborigines elsewhere in Australia and that they shared a typical Aboriginal vision of life. This will be briefly described before the comments of the European witnesses are examined.

The European reluctance to dignify the spiritual aspects of Aboriginal culture with

the name of religion sprang basically from the cultural blindness of the European, who, wittingly or unwittingly, judged from his European experience. Certainly, the Aborigines' belief in the super-natural controls their mode of thinking and their way of life; indeed, it is often very difficult to distinguish between the sacred and the secular.

The Aborigines attributed the origin of life to the 'dreamtime' activities of supernatural beings who possessed extraordinary powers. The spirit beings originally seemed human, often had human form, but then frequently embodied the essence of a natural species, such that goanna man was at the same time man, goanna, and spirit. In their travels the ancestors performed marvels which produced some features of the landscape, animals, plants, other aspects of the environment, and the Aborigines themselves. In this 'dreamtime', the Aboriginal law, religion, customs, rites, songs, and dances were established. In their travels along known paths, ancestral spirits
by their actions consecrated certain sites. Eventually the physical element of the spirits went into physical aspects of the environment such as the ground, the sky, waterholes, rocks, or trees, but their spirit elements eternally lived on to sustain their world. The Aborigines believed they could draw on the power of these spirits and perpetuate the fertile pattern of the 'dreamtime' by adhering to their teachings and by re-enacting the ceremonies and rites associated with their creative impulse. The 'dreamtime' then was eternal. It was not only the sacred time of the creation, but also extended vitally into the present and the future.

The Aborigines had a rich mythology which enshrined the deeds of the spirit ancestors and was associated with a vast body of ritual through which the power of the ancestral spirits became effective. Thus, the Aborigines believed that the performance of these ceremonies was necessary to the very existence of man and nature; if the rituals were not performed, the creative impulse
originating in the 'dreamtime' would dwindle away.

In this way, the Aborigines believed that man shared a common life principle with other forms of life and that this was associated with their tribal land and often linked with the lands of other friendly tribes. Animal, bird, and plant life were thus included in the social and religious life of the Aborigines by means of totemic relationships.72 One person might have several totems associated with various sub-tribal groups he belonged to or the cults he participated in, as well as a personal totem. All of these totems were part of the acting, thinking, and feeling of the Aborigine and linked him sacredly, creatively, and securely with his environment.

72. Elkin, The Australian Aborigines, p.134, defines totemism 'as a relationship between an individual or group of individuals on the one hand and a natural object or species on the other - a relationship which is denoted by the bearing of the name of the latter, the totem, by the individual or group'.

The sharing of a totem by a group indicated the ordering of society and human relationships. Elkin emphasises the feature of totemism that distinguishes it from a generalized nature religion. It is a relationship between an individual, or group of individuals, and a natural species, or several species. In other words, the relationship between man and nature is segmentary rather than comprehensive.\footnote{73}

The classificatory kinship system was ultimately bound up with totemism. It extended family-type relationships throughout the whole tribe and even beyond into neighbouring tribes. Thus a number of relationship terms (between fourteen and thirty-two) related all of these Aborigines, e.g. all fathers' brothers were called 'fathers' and all of their children were classified as 'brothers' or 'sisters'.\footnote{74}

\footnote{73} Elkin, op. cit., p. 134. Most of this section on totemism is based on Elkin.

\footnote{74} Department of Territories, \textit{The Australian Aborigines}, (Sydney, 1967), p. 17. Elkin contributed the anthropological material.
A prescribed code of behaviour was expected between one kinship class and each other which was different from the code of behaviour expected between the first class and any other.

There were other forms of social grouping associated with the kinship system. Many tribes were divided into two descent groups or 'moieties'. A person was born into either his father's or his mother's moiety, depending on whether descent was patrilineal or matrilineal. A person born into one moiety had to marry into the other. Yet the prime purpose of moiety organization was ceremonial, not to regulate marriage, and very often, certain animals, plants, birds etc. were totemically associated with the Aborigines of a moiety. Each moiety, thus, had its own myths, rites, symbols, sacred signs, songs, and dances binding its members in a sacred fellowship. Moieties were also important in the organization of fighting, and settlement of grievances, and even the playing of games.

Many tribes were divided into either four
or eight kinship groups or subsections, sometimes as subdivisions of the moieties, sometimes instead of the moieties. These, like the moieties, were structural divisions of the tribe not separate and distinct social groups. They indicated (with or without the moiety division) marriage, descent, and totems and were, like moieties, associated with certain myths, ritual, songs, dances, symbols etc. A man in one group ideally, should have chosen a wife from a corresponding group and from no other group. Their children automatically belonged to yet another group linked with the father's line in some areas and the mother's line in other areas, as shall be seen below when referring to the Aborigines of the Bowen district.

A tribe or moiety may be subdivided into several clans, each of which will lay claim to a certain section of tribal territory. It is often this clan which comprises the core of the local group, which is, as has been seen, the
effective economic and political unit of the tribe. Each clan had its own ceremonies and often had a distinctive dialectal variant of the tribal language. The members of the clan core of the local group claimed descent from the same ancestor, often a mythological being. This clan was thus the most important social group and was part of the most important economic and political unit, the local group.

Abbie has represented this tribal organization very clearly in the simplified diagram reproduced in this thesis, but it must be remembered that variations of this schema are very common.

Thus, all Aborigines were connected through the kinship system with all the Aborigines they were likely to meet. The rules of behaviour associated with this system ensured mainly secure, confident, and co-operative relations within the various sub-tribal groups, and the territorial and structural divisions indicated general patterns of behaviour between the sub-tribal groups. There was still, of course, much scope for individual
A simple schema of tribal organization and marriage groups. In this particular instance the group of an individual ("Own Group", hatched) is shown in its relationship to the other groups in both the patrilineal and matrilineal systems.

Simplified diagram to illustrate the principles of tribal organization and the marriage groups.

Taken from: Abbie, *The Original Australians*, Fig. 19.
responses and even for failure to conform to the less important behavioural expectations.

Elkin has well summed up the importance of totemism in Aboriginal life, and indicated how serious the disruption of any aspect of this all-encompassing view of life would be.

Totemism is more than a mechanism for regulating marriage. It is a view of nature and life, of the universe and man, which colours and influences the Aborigines' social groupings and mythologies, inspires their rituals and links them to the past. It unites them with nature's activities and species in a bond of mutual life-giving, and imparts confidence amidst the vicissitudes of life. 75

If their animistic religion gave them confidence, the unforeseen or chance hostility of the environment, disease, and accident caused the Aborigines to believe the world teemed also with malignant and capricious spirits. Obviously, with this view of life, it is difficult to differentiate between magic and religion. 76

75. Elkin, op. cit., p. 133.
76. "...religion is man's belief in spiritual beings whom he tries to propitiate and to whom he thereby concedes freedom of action... "...magic is his belief that he can control occult forces by ritual." P. Lawrence in Road Belong Cargo (Melbourne, 1964), p. 12, quotes Tylor and Frazer's definition.
All people were thought to have some magical power but specialised magic, such as curing illnesses, was thought to be possessed only by a few. Deaths, accidents, and illnesses were generally regarded as the result of sorcery and magic resorted to to counter the spell or to discover the culprit. Ensuing vengeance feuds were a very common source of conflict in Aboriginal life.

Naturally enough this animistic view of life interested Europeans. Morrill related that the moon was a 'human being', sometimes encountered upon fishing expeditions, who had created an inexplicably unvegetated area on Mt Elliott with a boomerang. Elsewhere he described how the Aborigines believed that day and night were caused by one tribe's throwing up the sun (or moon) and another's catching it. This seems a good example of how the Aborigines associated a mythological being with a part of their physical environment and described, in their own terms, the rotation of the earth. The mythological being at one and the same time had corresponding inanimate, geographic,
spirit, and human aspects. It can also be seen that the creative impulse of the 'dreamtime' was linked with their present life and that the continued existence of the natural order of things was guaranteed by this reassuring anthropomorphism. Similarly, the Aborigines believed that they controlled all the heavenly bodies. They even explained that an eclipse was caused by one Aborigine's hiding the sun with a sheet of bark. They believed, apparently, that thunder and lightning (of which they were very much afraid) were caused by malignant spirits. The clouds, however, were beneficent spirits pouring fish into the lagoons and roots on to the land. The occurrence was manifest in the rainbow. This typically anthropomorphic view of life, indicates, however sketchily, that their world picture was similar to that of Aborigines elsewhere in Australia.77

The Aborigines believed in the continued existence of the human spirit after death. Morrill

77. The Story of James Morrill, pp. 22, 23.
gave one illustration of this when he related that the Aborigines believed that 'comets' (probably he meant meteorites) were the spirits of tribal members returning from distant parts, to their local areas.\textsuperscript{78} Like most humans, however, they regarded death with awe and Morrill recorded two examples of ritual lamentation, pointing out how a ship's log recorded the noise as 'hideous yelling'.\textsuperscript{79} Abbie comments that the real grief is ostentatious to satisfy the expectations of other members of the tribe - and, of course, their own - as well as to assuage the spirit of the dead person which, the Aborigines believed, lingered nearby till after elaborate mortuary rites were performed.\textsuperscript{80} Morrill recorded only that the Aborigines burnt their dead and carried the remains about in a sheet of bark for about

\textsuperscript{78} ibid.
\textsuperscript{79} ibid., p.16. This coincidence is noted in Chapter III of this thesis.
\textsuperscript{80} Abbie, op.cit., p. 159.
twelve months.\textsuperscript{81}

The Cape River Aborigines' death ritual was in keeping with Aboriginal practice elsewhere. The corpse was disembowelled and buried. After about three weeks, it was disinterred and the bones cleaned and placed in a tree platform for about three months. Then female relatives removed them and carried them about until they were finally discarded. This drawn out process was apparently reserved for mature males as the bodies of women and children were buried or burnt with little ceremony.\textsuperscript{82}

Morrill linked the subject of death with cannibalism. He reported that human flesh was not part of the Aborigines' diet but that they sometimes ritually ate members of their own tribe, probably to absorb physically or symbolically their strength, skill, or virtue. Morrill stressed that

\textsuperscript{81} The Story of James Morrill, p.14.
\textsuperscript{82} Curr, op.cit., Volume II, p.476.
they sometimes ate young men killed in battle or by accident, or young women and children. The emphasis on the 'young' perhaps implies that the Aborigines regarded their life-principle as strong and vigorous and a loss to the tribe. They did not eat their enemies but cut their flesh into strips and distributed it dried throughout the tribe so that the strength and skill of their enemies could be added to their own. It is likely that certain parts of the body only, were eaten or so distributed. In view of the later contempt which was levelled at the Aborigines for their 'cannibalism', it is salutary here to note that it could be compared, in many ways, with the Christian eucharist. Chatfield mentioned that cannibalism was rare among Cape River Aborigines but did not associate it with ritual.

In the study of Aborigines throughout the rest of Australia, the first male initiation

83. The Story of James Morrill, p.22.
84. Abbie, op.cit., pp. 162; 163.
ceremony has been shown to be a great event in the growing-up process. Previously the child has acquired, largely incidentally, a great deal of practical tribal knowledge. At about the age of puberty, he is ready to start his formal education into the mysteries and responsibilities of an adult. 86 Morrill described rather fully the mechanics of the ritual of making the lads young men which he said occurred about every six years but which was probably more frequent. The lads were excluded from the camp for eight or nine months prior to the initiation and had to provide for themselves. Then they were brought back to the camp and their arms bound tightly with cane rings. After a night of considerable pain, they were brought into the presence of their mothers, sisters, and relatives who cried and cut themselves liberally, probably to express a twofold joy: not only happiness to see the return of a loved one but also elation.

at his ritual death and ultimate rebirth as an adult. Then small incisions were made in his arms to let the blood flow. Although Morrill claimed that the blood was let from the arms to prevent inflammation, it probably also symbolised life and signified sacredness. It may also have been used sacramentally to link the initiates and the tribe with the blood of various mythical beings. Morrill was exasperatingly reticent about the significance of the process.

The initiates then slept the simulacrum of death and, on wakening, received various gifts and symbolic gestures to welcome them to their adult life, e.g. their 'female cousins', from whom their spouses would possibly be chosen, attended to their incisions. The next day the initiates adorned with shells and the down of birds, sought

out their 'sweethearts' and participated in a corroboree to close the ceremony. Tribal and inter-tribal quarrels were aired and settled to achieve the purification and harmony necessary, and intended, in such ritual, but new ones were probably started as the initiates stole wives and daughters to celebrate their sexual coming of age. Although Morrill described the lengthy exclusion from the tribe, the protracted pain of the initiation, the bloodletting, and the joyous birth into adulthood, he makes no mention of the instruction which would inevitably have been associated with this ritual. The process described was certainly meant to impress upon the minds of the lads the importance of the tribal mysteries that they were just starting to learn. 89

In areas (b) and (c) initiation ceremonies were briefly mentioned. Chatfield noted that all

89. The Story of James Morrill, pp. 24; 25.
adults were scarred but Curr believed, probably wrongly, that this was only for adornment. Similarly he mentioned tooth evulsion but apparently did not associate it with any ceremonial significance. He confirmed that circumcision and subincision were not practised by the Cape River Aborigines.  

The European commentators were very disappointing in describing the kinship relationships. Morrill merely said the Aborigines were 'very strict', that brothers and sisters slept at separate fires as they neared puberty, and that a young man's intended mother-in-law was not allowed to look at him until after his first initiation. This avoidance relationship, if recorded accurately, was much less demanding than has been noted elsewhere in Australia. Chatfield recorded that each of the Aboriginal groups on the Cape River was divided into four kinship sections,

91. The Story of James Morrill, p.25.
each with its associated totem. Thus, the Yukkaburra Aborigines subdivided into Utheroo (Emu or Carpet Snake Totem), Multheroo (Goanna Totem), Yungaroo (Possum Totem), and Goorgilla (Scrub Turkey Totem). Chatfield realized that the kinship sections regulated marriage, but made no mention of moieties. From Shea’s mention of regulated marriages, Elkin’s generalization, and the investigations carried out by C. Tennant Kelly on detribalized Aborigines at Cherburg Aboriginal Settlement, it seems that those in area (b) were also divided into four sections. Kelly further states that there were exogamous moieties and matrilineal descent. Chatfield realized how widespread totemism was and its importance in marriage but not its pervasiveness as a view of life. He also mentioned food tabus and associated these with the age and sex groupings of the Aborigines - which could have been correct - but not with totemism.

The European observers have left us scant information about the rest of the culture. Morrill mentioned that each 'tribe' spoke a different dialect but it is uncertain whether he meant 'tribe' or 'local group', possibly the latter as he claimed he could speak eight different 'languages'. His comment, that the language was 'extremely limited in power of expression' is as misleading as his claim that the Aborigines 'had very little tradition' because they possessed no written language. 96 In both cases the European's cultural blindness was evident. His comment that the language was very irregular and impossible to systematise is also as misleading as it is expected, coming as it does from a poorly educated seaman. 97 Abbie's assessment should be set alongside of Morrill's: 'Certainly Aboriginal speech is highly expressive, precise, poetical and well suited to past Aboriginal

96. The Story of James Morrill, pp. 22; 23.
97. ibid., p.23.
needs ...' 98 Although Morrill stated that they could only count to five, referring to larger numbers as 'few' or 'plenty', he indicated that they had non-verbal ways of representing higher numbers, even measuring the passage of time in moons and wet and dry seasons. 99 The fact that Morrill was able to move from one tribe to another, between Cape Cleveland and Port Denison, indicated that the Aborigines could communicate with one another over considerable distances. Indeed, six of the sixty words Morrill gave in his vocabulary can be seen to be similar to words of the same or similar meaning in Shea's vocabulary for Aborigines south of Bowen, e.g. Morrill translated 'emu' as 'coondoola' while Shea translated it as 'goondooloo'. Similarly 'stomach' or 'belly' was translated as 'booloo' and 'buloo' respectively; 'kangaroo' ('oodra' and 'rooa') is possibly less certain. Common words can be found among the Cape River vocabularies, and those of other area. (See

99. ibid.)
Appendix B). More important, possibly, was the similarity in structure of the various 'languages' which made easier their understanding.

Chatfield, too, has given only brief glimpses of the rest of the culture of the Cape River Aborigines. His description of their concept of eternity, although obviously coloured by the nineteenth century Christian concept of heaven, gave tantalising hints of the importance of the belief in a sky culture-hero (or heroes) which Elkin explains exercised a deep influence in most of Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria.

Chatfield recorded two names, 'Borala' and 'Goin', both of which Elkin associates with the sky-hero. (Elkin: 'Goin' and 'Biral'). It is easy to see how 'Boorala', the Aboriginal 'Great All Father' could be interpreted by a European as 'God' and 'the Creator', and it can be thus seen that both Curr and Chatfield were willing to accord a respect to Aboriginal religion that was

---

atypical of contemporary European opinion. Yet they could both record the Aborigines' fear of the spirits of departed kinfolk and the typical shifting of the camp after a death without realizing that this was more than a fear of 'ghosts'. 101

Chatfield also described briefly the use of magic. He said it existed in Aboriginal medical treatment and associated the art of the Cape River Aborigines with their religious beliefs. In sandstone caves there were drawings of emus and kangaroos, while the location of hand silhouettes 'on the almost inaccessible faces of the white sandstone cliffs' suggest strongly that they represented more than 'pleasure' and an aesthetic 'love of art' as Curr maintained. Moreover, the Cape River Aborigines' painting of designs on weapons and implements was consistent with the art of north-eastern Queensland in which, according to Elkin, the stylized patterns symbolized

myths and sacred meaning. Finally, Chatfield showed his realization of the importance of magic in Aboriginal life when he declared that the belief in death from incantations was the chief cause of warfare although he admitted the stealing of women was also important. 102

Although the accounts of the Aborigines in the three designated areas are tragically inadequate and the interpretation of the data only suggestive, the impression is given that the people in the three areas had generally similar life patterns, and beliefs and ceremonies that had a great deal in common. What is more, the life patterns, beliefs, and ceremonies of the Aborigines in the three areas seem very similar

to those of other Aborigines whose lives have been studied closely by modern anthropologists. Their political, economic, social, and religious life indicated that they would pose similar problems to European settlers as the Aborigines had elsewhere and that their way of life would be in competition with the encroaching Europeans. Both opposing groups would find their separate needs for the unrestricted use of land and water incompatible. Consequently, the nomadic subsistence economy, loose political structure, weak military organization, religio-economic tie with a certain area of land, and the intricate web of religio-economic interdependence between sub-tribal and tribal groups determined to a large extent the nature and course of the conflict.

It was natural then in the first violent years of conflict for the tradition-bound Aborigines to attempt to maintain their ties with their land. Thus it is important to stress the significance of the suddenness and violence of the frontier conflict. The conservative Aboriginal
culture had accepted change before, but only if the changes were woven into the existing ideological framework. 103 C. Tennant Kelly's research among remnants of some of Queensland's Aboriginal tribes at Cherburg indicated that, given time and physical well being, the Aborigines could even reconstruct their individual societies to form a new, viable tribal society in an alien land. This was possible because of the vitality of totemism and the similarity of Aboriginal culture over vast areas. 104 The dramatic suddenness of the forced change resulting from the frontier conflict shook the very fabric of life of the Aborigines so that they could never wholly resume their old way of life for that would interfere with the economy of the Europeans. This was the unwritten condition of the peace.

104. C. Tennant Kelly, op.cit., passim.