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BEFORE FREEMASONRY

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Introduction

Some Freemasons who ventured beyond the early Australian frontier penetrated the veil of secrecy surrounding the time-honoured Aboriginal religion and its initiation rites. They believed that they found ancient connections between Masonic and Aboriginal initiation rites, such as degrees of initiation, solemn obligations, secret men's temples, sacred symbols, investiture of aprons and the Masonic-style penalties. These and other things were witnessed by different Freemasons amongst the 'Myalls', the so called 'wild Aborigines' beyond the white settlements. Around a century ago, Freemasons in Sydney listened to lectures in lodges and discussed Aboriginal 'freemasonry' and its connections. At that time, the belief that humanity was only a few thousand years old had not been entirely superseded, and wild conjectures about the discovery of early Egyptian boomerangs and their ancient Aboriginal roots abounded. Today such ideas are discarded. However, traditional Myall ceremonies and rites still offer modern Masons an insight into why the tenets of Freemasonry provide such wide appeal to men around the world. Before Freemasonry, and before European civilisation and modern religions, ancient men's rites and ceremonies were the glue that held together hunter-gatherer societies. This paper discusses those practices and their Masonic parallels.

The rise of civilisation

People of the Middle Ages in England shaped their ideas and institutions from drawing on the cultural legacies of the ancient world. They didn't see the break between themselves and their predecessors that today's observers see; they saw continuity with themselves and the ancient world using allegory to bring together the gaps.

Freemasonry shaped much of its ideas in the Middle Ages. *Anno Lucis* was a dating system used by Freemasonry in ceremonial or commemorative proceedings. Freemasons added 4000 years to the current *Anno Domini* calendar year and appended *Anno Lucis* ('Year of Light') to the Gregorian calendar year (for example, AD 2013 becomes 6013 AL). References in the Old Testament about the beginning of the world and the stories of King Solomon are allegorical, rather than literal truths.

Allegory has been used by earliest man as a rhetorical device in which characters and events represent and symbolise ideas and concepts. Allegory has immense power to illustrate complex ideas and concepts in ways that are easily digestible and tangible to its listeners. While science today can prove the world to be billions of years old and the rise of Western Civilisation to have been created in the Middle East, a modern Freemason may see as allegory some apparently literal passages in the Old Testament. The term *Civilisation* contrasts with Stone Age hunter-gatherers, who are looked upon as primitive people. This is not really true. Civilisations, with their more densely populated settlements divided into social classes with a ruling elite and subordinate urban and rural populations, have used their division of labour to engage in intensive agriculture, mining, small-scale manufacture and trade. Civilisations have concentrated power to extend human control over both nature and over other human beings. The possession of better weapons and armaments has helped them overcome weaker nations and people.

For modern anthropologists studying the beginnings of western civilisation it began with the Neolithic revolution.¹

The Neolithic Era, or New Stone Age, was a period in the development of human technology, beginning about 10,200 BC, in some parts of the Middle East, and later in other parts of the world, and ending between 4500 and 2000 BC. There, in the Middle East, farming and herding

¹ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ASPRO_chronology for current ideas on Neolithic dates.

replaced the hunter-gatherer lifestyle that had previously sustained human existence. Permanent residence led to the founding of villages, then cities and civilisation. Modern scholars typically view the stories of Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel to be about the development of civilisation, during the age of agriculture—not the beginnings of man, but when people first learned agriculture, and replaced the ways of the hunter-gatherer.² Cain represents the first crop farmer, and his younger brother Abel the first shepherd. Cain founded the first city, a place where eventual worship would be for worldly possessions rather than religion. The story of Genesis is an allegory of the beginnings of civilisation and the development of the Bronze Age.

Masonic rituals and dramas are based, in part, around the Bible and the building surrounding King Solomon's temple. The invention of architecture and stone building around 3000 BC occurred some two thousand years before the time of Solomon. Imhotep, the Egyptian builder, is regarded as the inventor of architecture. His building of a limestone post-and-lintel wall still stands today, surrounding his mud brick pyramid built for Pharaoh Zoser. Imhotep is said to be responsible for the first known use of columns to support a building. He is also credited as the 'Father of Medicine', and his name literally means 'the one who comes in peace'.³ An ancient papyrus ascribed to Imhotep is a medical treatise of 48 cases, of which 27 relate to head injuries. Why so much about head trauma? Because the first Pharaoh to unite upper and lower Egypt was Pharaoh Narmer, and he is preserved in a stone carving showing him holding a symbol of power around this time; which was a mace, not a sword! The mace is a weapon similar to the Australian Aboriginal hafted axe or club, a weapon perfectly suited to crushing another man's skull. Trepanning of the skull, an early form of brain surgery, was perfected by the Egyptians at that time for dealing with head trauma caused by effects of the mace. The invention of the helmet, which deflected much of the impact force of the mace, limited its efficiency in warfare against helmeted enemies.

The craft of Tubal-cain

Worldly possessions coveted in ancient times changed hands when armies of men pillaged and plundered their neighbours' land. Metallurgy and artificers in metal related to crafting the weapons of war and the spread of civilisation, just as stone masons later related to the craft of building temples and houses for the worship of God.

The importance of the invention of metal swords cannot be underestimated, as it altered the scale of warfare. Stone knives had existed amongst hunter-gatherers from the time of man's primacy. The sword was new. It developed from the dagger when the construction of longer blades became possible, in the late third millennium BC in the Middle East. The first arsenic-copper Egyptian *khopesh*, a sickle-shaped sword, was used in the fashion of an axe; and it was brutal in tearing shields from hands, while its reversed angle allowed a point to smash through helmets. But these heavy weapons were easy to bend, dent and break. Adding ten percent tin to copper created bronze metal three times the strength. Around 1600 BC the smelting of iron allowed for hard hammered iron swords. Three hundred years later, the addition of charcoal and other elements allowed for the creation of steel.

Swords and long, metal-tipped lances assisted Alexander the Great to conquer and extend the known world into the jungles of India. In time his Hellenistic world fell to Roman legionnaires, who relied on sword and shield. Their sword, the *gladius* (from whom gladiators get their name) morphed into the longer *spatha* which was also widely adopted by Rome's enemies. It became the *viking* sword and grew into the two-handed *broadsword*. The Roman Empire fell and the Dark Ages reigned. Artificers in metal were always looking for improvements, and chain mail protection soon became widespread. Broadwords became pointier, to pierce through chain mail,

2 Kugel, James L: *Traditions of the Bible: a guide to the Bible as it was at the start of the common era*, Cambridge, Mass 1998, pp54–57.

3 Shehata, Mostafa MD: 'The Father of Medicine: A Historical Reconsideration' in *J Med Ethics* 2004, 12(3):171–176.

so flat sheet armour was formed around the knights of the day. A chink in the armour was all that was needed to insert a sword. A lighter and faster sword soon became mandatory when the introduction of firearms into warfare could knock holes through armour. Armour become outdated over night.

As Christian and Jewish Freemasons know, Tubal-cain is identified in the Old Testament as the first artificer in metals. Tubal-cain was of the seventh generation born of Cain and, figuratively, father of the Bronze Age. In the Bible, God extended Cain's curse to his descendants, and all of Cain's descendants died in the Great Deluge. Rashi, a medieval authority on the Jewish Bible, says of Tubal-cain: 'He refined the craft of Cain. Tubal is related to the word "spiced" and he "refined" Cain's craft to make weapons for murderers.'⁴ Harry Carr's analysis in his book *The Freemason at Work* noted that Tubal-cain foreshadows Hiram Abif, who is also declared to have the same skills as Tubal-cain. Tubal-cain was the founder of the craft in which Hiram Abif above all, excelled, as the direct link between the two earliest pillars and those of Solomon's Temple demonstrates.⁵ In *Mackey's Revised Encyclopedia of Masonry*, we read that the T and Baal are combined, hence possibly indicating Tubal-cain meaning 'the lord Cain'.⁶

Artificers in metal were masters of metallurgy and these early metal craftsmen were regarded as magicians. For their art they needed to master the secrets of the elements and control over earth, fire, air and water. Their craft was guarded from outsiders and their secrets often passed on from father to son. The secrets were:

- Earth: they needed to be able to identify which earth contained the right ore;
- Fire: they needed to heat the ore to release the metal;
- Air: they needed to fan the charcoal fire to the right colours between white, yellow and red to create the perfect blades; and
- Water: they needed to quench the blades through rapid cooling and to provide the right strength and hardness desired.

As the demand for bronze grew among dominant civilisations in the Middle East, the local supplies of tin ore began to disappear. Searches were made all over the known world for new supplies. Control of the tin trade was in Phoenician hands, and they kept their sources secret. From ports such as Tyre, the home city of Hiram Abif, the Phoenicians set sail and traded for the tin from mines as far away as Cornwall in the British Isles. To appreciate the power of allegory we can look at the legend of King Arthur of Southern Britain. Archaeologists today look for a factual basis to behind myths and are often surprised. The Arthurian legend seems to be one such surprising myth. They know Bronze Age Britain was visited by Phoenician ships wanting tin and the alloy bronze.⁷ If we can imagine a visiting Phoenician ship demonstrating an iron sword cutting through a bronze sword, we can imagine the impact amongst the ruling elite. Bronze is heavy but soft, and cast bronze bends and breaks much more easily than iron. We can imagine these first Britons to witness an iron sword realising that whichever Briton could learn to draw such a sword from stone (to smelt iron) could potentially conquer and rule a kingdom armed with bronze weapons. The likely background to the source of the Arthurian legend, that whoever could draw the sword from the stone would become king, is apparent.

The idea of *antediluvian*, referring to 'before the deluge' in the biblical cosmology, found its way into early geology and lingered in science until the late Victorian era. While Tubal-cain and

4 Shlomo Yitzchaki, known as Rashi, was a medieval Jewish Bible commentator whose works remain a centrepiece of contemporary Jewish study. These are his comments which relate to Genesis 4:22, as found in the Torah. See online at http://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/8168#showrashi=true.

5 Carr, Harry: *The Freemason at Work*, privately printed, London 1976, 170.

6 Vol 2, 1060.

7 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mining_in_Cornwall_and_Devon#Stone_Age_and_early_Bronze_Age.

his kin were said to have died in the flood, his instruments of war and his secrets in making them did not. For greedy men who would kill to enslave and rule over their brothers only the best armaments would do. Only threat of war could preserve their empires and protect their wealth of worldly possessions. Rulers ignored the Bible and the words in 1 John 2:15-17 where he says:⁸

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Ever since man has tried to create societies of democracy and freedom, others have sought to become tyrants. Just as the great age of Greek culture with its art and philosophy collapsed under Roman rule, Rome likewise fell. As those who lived by the sword died by the sword, a new dark age set in.

According to H L Haywood, the values of Freemasonry grew from the common working man, not from the warlord or the ruling elite. The world has been transformed by many eras of hardship and war and enslavement of men. The Renaissance and Age of Enlightenment came from men who could think—and men who could work. As Haywood puts it:⁹

In this philosophy of work the Freemasons stood in sharpest contrast, and even in contradiction, to the Medieval world in which they lived and probably they surrounded themselves with secrecy for that reason. England was stratified into a system of castes. At the top was a hierarchy of the king and his nobles, the pope and his prelates, the lords of the army, and the great landlords, a ruling class which in theory owned the whole of England, including the men and women in it.

At the bottom was a caste of slaves, above them was one of cotters; above the latter was one of serfs; and above them was one of freed men and yeomen; above them were the skilled workmen and the small merchants; next above them, and closest to the unapproachable hem of the aristocracy, were the professional men, country squires, and holders of small public offices. This feudal system rested on the doctrine that God had created man in these castes and therefore it was impious for any man to rebel against his position, and this doctrine was a cornerstone of the Church and was presupposed and supported by the law; a man in one caste could not marry or associate with the caste above him and he disdained the caste beneath him. The Freemasons, being working class men, were held to belong to the lower classes.

Binding this whole barbaric system into a unit with bands tougher than cement was the dogma that work is degrading and disgraceful; a lady was expected to have lily white hands and a gentlemen would prefer to catch the plague rather than be found be doing a piece of labor; priests idled, the aristocracy busied itself with games, war was not waged but was played at like a sport; Adam delved and Eve span and the 'upper classes' spent the money they earned or consumed it in conspicuous waste. Work was a curse; a penalty for the 'Fall of Man'; and it was for workers to bear that curse in their own bodies.

The Freemasons themselves knew otherwise. It came, they said, from God.

Building rather than destroying; the Masons who raised houses to the worship of God gained much from it, but still kept part of their knowledge secret. Haywood says that for two centuries the Freemasons were the best and ablest minds in Europe. In their circles they were able to think for themselves, as they helped reinvent a better society. The architecture and art of the builder helped rebuild more worthy men. Their art included a whole body of art and sciences; the designing of buildings, geometry, engineering, chemistry, carving, statuary, painting, stained glass and a knowledge of such special sciences as perspective and proportion. Alongside this were the ideas of charity and a philosophy about the brotherhood a man which would help to lead to equality, fraternity and liberty for masses of humanity, and a reformation of religious thought. Many of those beliefs of the earlier Masons and their Masonic arts and sciences are still practised today.

Myalls and Freemasonry

A century ago, Bro Robert Etheridge's lecture to the Sydney Lodge of Research in 1915, *Some Customs of the Australian Aborigines Singularly Akin to those Practiced by Freemasons*, tried to

8 *The Holy Bible*, English Standard Version.

9 Haywood, H L: *Freemasonry and the Bible*, Masonic History Co, Chicago, 22.

reconcile similarities between Freemasonry and traditional Aboriginal culture. He and others looked to Masonic ritual and the passage ‘the usages and customs amongst Freemasons have ever borne an affinity to those of Ancient Egyptians’ to raise the possibility that ‘our black forefathers derived their ceremonies singularly akin to the rites practised by Freemasons from them’. He cited others in his paper who came to the same opinion that Australia’s Aboriginal people had migrated out of Egypt. Etheridge’s ‘like minded’ thinkers, Bro Dr Albert Churchward and the Revd Dr John Fraser also posited an ‘out of Egypt’ theory for the arrival of Australia’s Myall peoples some 4000 years earlier. Research by these men was intelligent for the time, but was based on a wrongly assumed earlier Masonic thought, that the world was only 6000 years old. Bro Etheridge, as the former palaeontologist to the Department of Mines and Director and Curator of the Australian Museum, Sydney, was well qualified as a speaker.

Gaining access to pristine Aboriginal beliefs before European colonisation was difficult. People on the frontier spoke unintelligible languages, and cultural differences and initial warfare often made communication impossible. Prof W E H Stanner, the anthropologist, coined the term ‘High Culture’ to refer to the traditional Aboriginal Australian culture before it was influenced by European ideas. To separate confusion between more modern Aboriginal people and old traditional Aboriginal culture, we will use the Aboriginal word *Myall* to replace the word *Aborigine* (except in direct quotation) when referring to the *High Culture* practitioners. Myall was a word first used at Sydney Cove by Aboriginal allies to describe the Aboriginal strangers beyond the frontier.

Why would Freemasons consider Masonic links with Myalls? It was partly because of reports from explorers. Fraser, quoting from a private letter written by a staff surveyor in Northern Queensland in the early 1880s, recorded:¹⁰

‘One Sunday when we were resting in camp on Settlement Creek my horses began to gallop about furiously, a proof to me that the blacks were among them. The fight which ensued was short, sharp and decisive; at the end of it only one black was left, a very tall and powerful specimen, evidently a chief. I had just covered him with my rifle, and in another instant he would have dropped, when, to my utter astonishment, he gave me in rapid succession, three or four times, the P.S. of a M.M., and thereupon stood to order. I instantly answered him and, going nearer, I gave the Ss. of the E.A., F.C., and M.M., which he appeared to understand.’ The Staff Surveyor stated that in the subsequent confusion, the native escaped. Continuing, he said: ‘Some weeks thereafter, as I was returning along a creek where I had completed a survey, I turned aside to look at a spot where we had a fight with a few natives three days before when on our way down. I saw the body of one man laid out, and covered with bark; on the chalky ground round him numerous emblems were carved, some of them undoubtedly Masonic signs, while others were representations of snakes, iguanas, alligators, and the like.’ He further added: ‘Our Rt. Wor. D.G.M., the Hon Chas. Augustus Gregory, formerly Survey-General of Queensland, one of our early explorers, told me that he also found traces of Freemasonry amongst the blacks of the North-West Queensland, although not as unmistakeable as those I have now narrated.’

Previous experiences among explorers and frontiersmen who were Masons were also documented. In 1860 Bro John McDouall Stuart wrote in his *Journals* of an encounter where an old man ‘surprised me by giving one of the Masonic signs. . . . he repeated it, so did his two sons’. They parted in peace but with local Myall warriors resisting Stuart and his men trespassing across their lands, Stuart was unwilling to trust his newly perceived Masonic brethren.¹¹

With such as these for enemies in our rear, and, most probably, far worse in advance, it would be destruction to all my party for me to attempt to go on. . . . Seeing the signal fires around, and dreading lest our black friends at Kekwick Ponds might have been playing a double part with us, in spite of their Masonic signs, I gave them a wide berth, and steered for Bishop Creek.

10 Quoted by R Etheridge in ‘Some Customs of the Australian Aborigines Singularly Akin to those Practiced by Freemasons’ in *Transactions of the Sydney Lodge of Research* No 290, vol II, 1915, 24–25.

11 Extract from: ‘Journal of Mr Stuart’s Fourth Expedition—Fixing the Centre of the Continent, from March to September, 1860’ in *Stuart, John McDouall: Explorations In Australia. The Journals of John McDouall Stuart during the Years 1858, 1859, 1860, 1861, and 1862*, ed William Hardman, 2edn, Saunders, Otley, London 1865.

Another reason why Freemasons would consider Masonic links with Myalls was because of discoveries of their secret ceremonies. The initiation practices were performed at the sacred ground, variously called porrobung, bulbung, bungbul, bora, and so on. Like Freemasonry, according to the Revd Dr John Fraser, an ethnologist and linguist residing in the Hunter Valley, the 'old blackfellow culture' was a progressive science, and he wrote in 1883:¹²

In the Bora, as in Freemasonry, the novice does not become a full member all at once, but must pass through several grades, and these are obtained by a certain number of Boras; thus the process of qualifying for full membership may occur over two or three years.

The next step in the process of initiation is interesting; the boombat [initiate] is shown a sacred wand, and gets a new name, and certain white stones are given to him.

The white stones. I am inclined to believe that the boombat receives only one of these at a time, and that number of them increases accordingly according to the number of Boras he attends, until he becomes a full and accepted master of the craft.

Fraser's publication, almost 30 years before Etheridge's paper, explained through biblical and other sources the supposed links between Myall culture and the Egyptian exodus. As a Director and Curator of the Australian Museum in Sydney, Etheridge had access to almost everything written on the subject since settlement. In 1918, Etheridge published *The Dendroglyphs, or 'Carved Trees' of New South Wales*. This work was mainly about the men's initiation centres in New South Wales which used the general name *Bora* to describe where men performed their secret business. Etheridge followed Fraser's lead (see Figure 3, p103 below) in using the term *Bora* to describe 'the great national institution of the Australian Aborigines', from the Kamilaroi word derived from 'bor' or 'boor', signifying the belt of manhood.¹³ Etheridge would have been well aware that strips hanging at the front of the belt covering the genitalia were described by some as an apron, and it was presented to a successful Myall upon his initiation. The obvious similarities with Freemasonry must have created an intriguing coincidence for Freemasons of that day. Today we see it for what it was, a coincidence.

Other Freemasons of that era, out in the field, who tried to find proof of a connection with Freemasonry were unsuccessful. In the *Brisbane Courier* of Monday 29 November 1897, Dr Walter Roth, an English anthropologist and physician active in Australia, published his negative finding on Masonic signs:

It may be mentioned that it was in these districts (N.W.C. Queensland), some fifty years ago, that Captain Sturt (sic) made mention of the discovery of certain Masonic signs among the aborigines. So far as my limited knowledge of the craft allows, I have tested these people over and over again, repeatedly submitting them even to strict cross-examination, but have never succeeded in corroborating the gallant explorer's statement. I can only conclude that what he conscientiously believed to be aboriginal Masonic signs are really the ideagrams which I am now about to describe . . .

Furthermore, in the scientific report, anthropological section, of the late Horn Expedition to Central Australia, I find a vindication of my disbelief in the opinion therein expressed as to the identity of alleged aboriginal Masonic signs and sign-language.

In 1924, George Aiston and Dr George Horne published a fascinating book called *Savage life in Central Australia*. George Aiston was a Mounted Police Constable and Protector of the Aborigines at Mungeranie between 1912 and 1923. In 1923 Horne told how Aiston had confidants aged in their 80s and 90s who were boys when the first explorers arrived. Aiston did not write of Masonic signs in that book, but he did in the *South Australian Freemason* on 10 September 1924, as Bro George Aiston. In an in-depth article, he dismissed Masonic signs as 'more probable that when Captain Sturt (sic) gave a Masonic sign to the Aborigines whom he met, they, not understanding what he meant, repeated it, and he in turn made the sign again'.

One of the earliest mentions of Freemasonry amongst the tribes of Australia was from the Revd L E Threlkeld, a missionary to the Aborigines north of Sydney, and an outspoken detester

12 Fraser, John: in *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of New South Wales*, XVI (1883), 208–217.

13 Etheridge, R, jr: *The Dendroglyphs, or 'Carved Trees' of New South Wales*, (Memoirs of the Geological Survey of New South Wales, ethnological series no 3), Govt Printer, Sydney 1918, p59.

of Freemasonry. He arrived in Sydney in 1824, in the company of the Revd Daniel Tyerman and George Bennet, and it was they who organised Threlkeld's Mission at Lake Macquarie, which he took up in 1825. He knew of the existence of *Bora* ceremonial grounds and he was invited by his 'missionary blacks' at Lake Macquarie to visit their 'secret men's ceremonies', but he refused the offer. He was happy to say:¹⁴

There is amongst all people a sort of reverence for remarkable places . . . The Aborigines have a few consecrated places, temporally used as occasion serves. Into such places no woman may enter under pain of death, during the period in which certain mysteries are celebrated therein. The bark of the trees are marked for a certain space around the spot chosen for the ceremonies and none but the initiated Males dare venture therein. I never had the opportunity of seeing any one of the places described, nor had I ever any intimation given of the assembling of their lodge, or of the secret of their free-masonry, which was pretended to be concealed in the breast of the Brotherhood, like many shams to impose upon the credulity of Mankind.

The travels of Tyerman and Bennet, including their stay in Sydney, were recorded by James Montgomery. He includes a fascinating, and somewhat gruesome, account of Aboriginal initiation, as told to him by 'an informant', which includes one of the earliest direct references to a deity later identified as Daramulan, Cohen, Koun, etc:¹⁵

[T]hey cut a path through the grass as though it had been finely mown, nearly two hundred yards long, following a line perfectly straight. At the further end of this, in an arena, were displayed (in like manner cut amidst the thick grass) figures, which, though rude in shape, were easily recognised, to be the kangaroo, emu, opossum, and every other animal which they are accustomed to kill for food. Beyond this hieroglyphic table (if such it may be called) the path was continued forward to a large tree, in the stem of which notches were made like those by which they ascend to gather fruit. The evil spirit, they said climbed up and down that tree. This labour being accomplished, the women were assembled under the boughs, but were not permitted to look up on the pain of death. A man who represented the devil then came down from the top of the tree by the notches and walked off; where-upon the females retired, and boys went through the same ceremony, but not until each had one of his front teeth knocked out. The girls did the same, but though, on such occasions, they are not condemned to lose a tooth, they are more barbarously mutilated by having the first joint of the forefinger of the left hand chopped off at a certain age.

In what would later become Queensland, the earliest known plan of a *Bora* ceremonial ground was made by Surveyor-General John Oxley in 1824 at Moreton Bay. It was a puzzle to him and he believed the two circular areas, one at least 20 yards in diameter, separated by a sinuous passage about 70 yards long, was . . . 'Where the Natives meet after a war with adverse tribes, to make peace.'¹⁶ His notes were published in 1920 by Bro Etheridge's friend, R H Cambage, the Under Secretary for Mines.

Etheridge, in his 1918 publication, was able to map 28 historical Myall sacred circular tree sites or temples in New South Wales and across the border into Queensland. In 1918 he acknowledged the map did not do justice to the number that existed since European arrival, as so many sites were destroyed without record, through agricultural and pastoral operations, to say nothing of bush fires, wanton destruction, or natural decay.¹⁷ In this publication for the general public no reference to Freemasonry was made. Etheridge published many drawings and illustrations of what Capt John Henderson called their 'Sylvan Temples'.

14 *Australian Reminiscences & Papers of L. E. Threlkeld, Missionary to the Aborigines 1824–1859*, ed Niel Gunson (Australian Aboriginal Studies no 40) Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra 1974, 65–66.

15 Etheridge, R, jr: *The Dendroglyphs, or 'Carved Trees' of New South Wales*, (Memoirs of the Geological Survey of New South Wales, ethnological series no 3), Govt Printer, Sydney 1918, 61, quoting from *Voyages And Travels By The Rev. Daniel Tyerman And George Bennet, Esq. Deputed From The London Missionary Society, To Visit Their Various Stations In The South Sea Islands, China, India, &C. Between The Years 1821 And 1829*, 3 vols, compiled from original documents by James Montgomery, Crocker & Brewster, New York 1832 (vol II, ch XXXVI).

16 Cambage, R H and Selkirk, Henry: 'Early Drawings of an Aboriginal Ceremonial Ground' in *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales for 1920*, vol LIV, Sydney, p74.

17 Etheridge, op cit, 2.

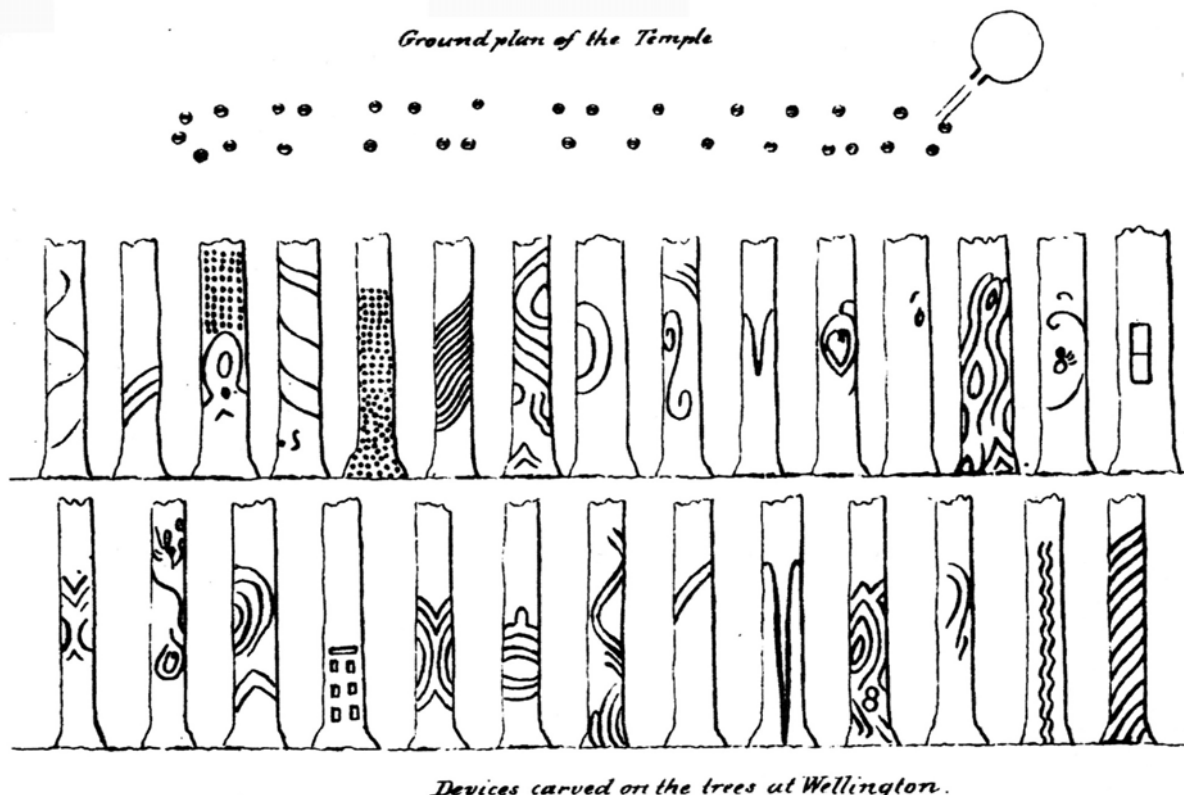


Figure 1: Ground plan of the Sylvan Temple with secret symbols marked on trees as recorded in 1830 by John Henderson: *Observations on the Colonies of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land*, Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta 1832, (Illustrations opposite page 146, plate III, fig 1).

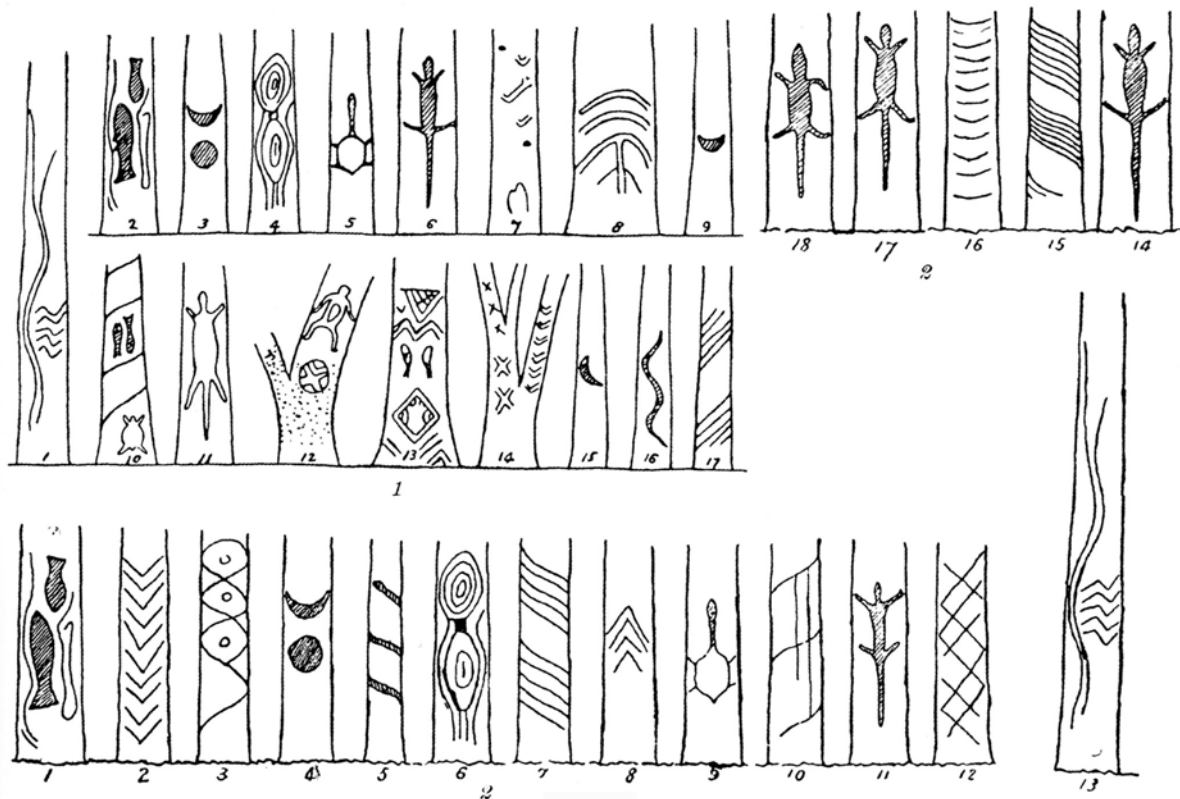


Figure 2: Compilation of some of the 59 marked trees found at the Bulgeraga Creek Ground, Lower Macquarie River, NSW, from three separate papers by R H Mathews: 'The Burbung of the Wiradthuri Tribes' (1896) in *Journal of the Anthropological Institute* XXV, 299, 302; 'Aboriginal Ground and Tree Drawings' (1898) in *Science of Man*, i:8, 186-7; and 'The Burbung of the Wiradthuri Tribes' (1901) in *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Queensland*, xvi:35.

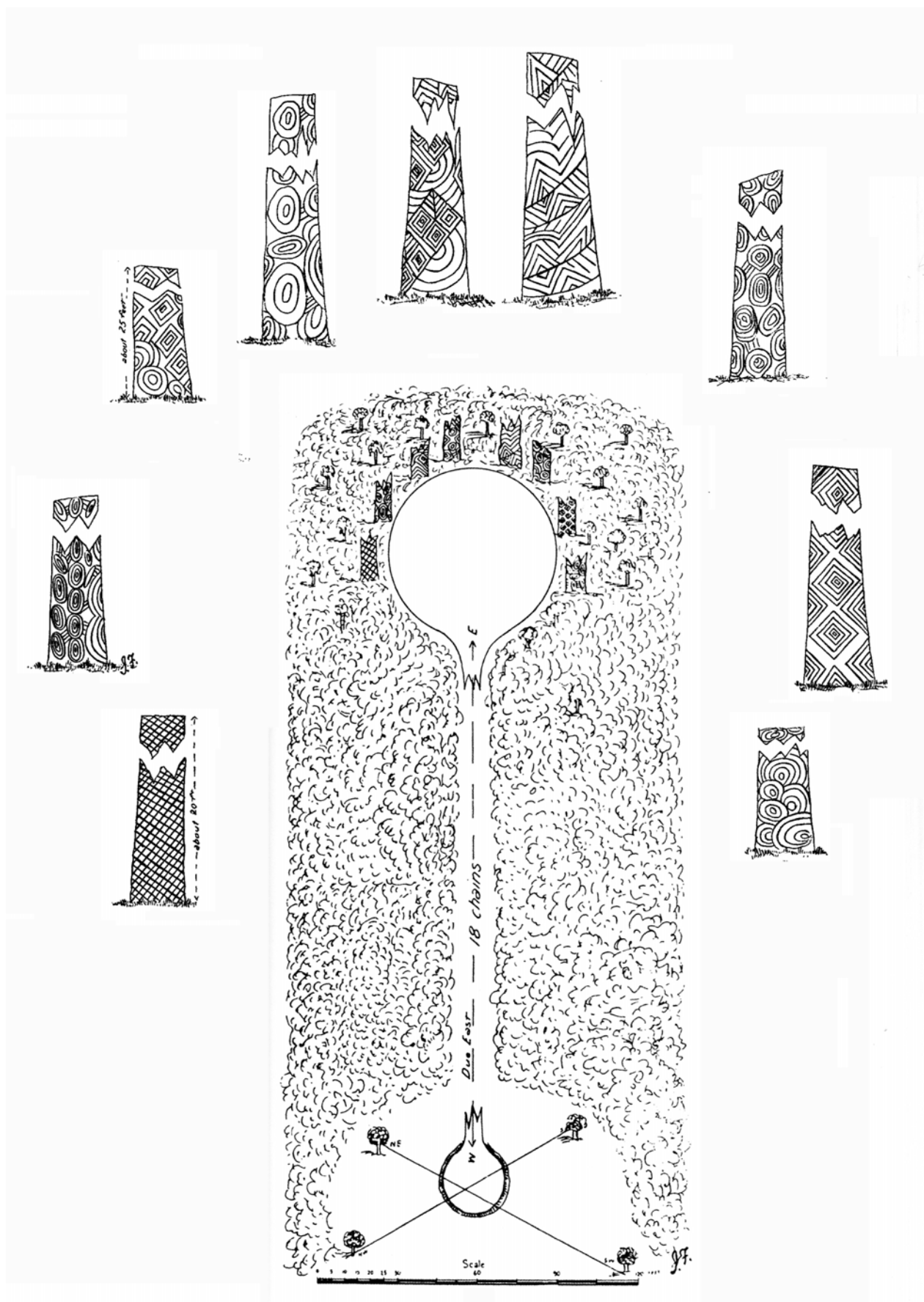


Figure 3: A men's secret Bora site near Gloucester, NSW, visited by the Revd Dr John Fraser around 1887. He noted that the young men refused to be initiated at that time and the last ceremony had been held there some twenty years earlier. See Fraser, John: *The Aborigines of New South Wales*, published Sydney 1892, for the New South Wales Commissioners for the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893 (plate opposite p11).

Henderson came to Australia in 1829, visiting Tasmania and then New South Wales, before returning to India, where he wrote an account of his travels. He told how, after crossing the Blue Mountains near Bathurst, he gained the trust of a local tribe. This was after the Wiradjuri war of the 1820s had been settled. Henderson was obviously a Freemason, as he innocuously included in his report: ‘The candidate . . . is made to promise, never to disclose the secrets which are about to be communicated’. He also stressed the secrecy surrounding their men’s business, and how it took some time to visit the ‘Sylvan Temple’. His drawing, published in 1832, was the first recorded (*see Figure 1, p102 above*).

Henderson wrote:¹⁸

Upon promise on our parts of secrecy, as far as the other natives of that part of the country were concerned, he [his informant] agreed to accompany us next day to the place, for the purpose of explaining the interpretation of the symbols; assuring us, that should the neighbouring tribes discover, that he or any of his people had disclosed their secrets to the uninitiated, they would immediately combine and probably extirpate his whole race.

Previous to performing the ceremony of initiating the young men, the various devices are carefully renewed, and all the women and children are removed to a considerable distance; indeed they do not appear to be ever permitted to approach the vicinity of this consecrated temple. The candidate is first conducted to the upper extremity of this, where while the points of spears are directed towards him, he is made to promise, never to disclose the secrets which are about to be communicated. He is then instructed in their mythology, I believe, by the koree; and while conducting down the long line of trees, the meaning of all the various symbols are particularly detailed. During the whole of this ceremony, the spears continue to be poised at him; and the strongest imprecations are employed against the individual who shall dare to break his vows. At the same time, certain dramatic representations would appear to be performed, although we could neither comprehend their manner of acting nor their allusion; the principal one however is emblematic of the destruction of the eagle-hawk by Piamé.

This is the first recording of the All Father’s sacred and secret name of *Biaime*, as now known to exist over a large region of New South Wales. The secrets that Henderson related have been verified and corroborated elsewhere across various region of New South Wales at different times by a number of authors.

The Revd William Ridley wrote in 1875 that *Baia-me* (in Kamilaroi, from *baia*: to make or build) is the one Maker of all things in heaven and earth, who sustains and provides for us all. Ridley wrote that the Revd James Günther, of Mudgee, who was for many years engaged in the mission to the Wiradhuri, had conclude *Baia-mai* had attributes to the God of the Bible: ‘eternity, omnipotence and goodness’, and that [some thoughtful Aborigines] believed ‘good natives will go to Baia-mai when they die.’¹⁹ Amongst the Hunter River people near the coast, Threlkeld recorded the word for the father as *Biyung-bai*, pronounced with a soft ‘g’.²⁰ K Langloh Parker noted the name amongst the Euahlayi, Kamilaroi and Wir Dhuri. She spelled it as *Byamee* or *Biaime* and wrote:²¹

in Euahlayi, the word Byamee means ‘great one’. In its sense as the name of the All Father it is not supposed to be used by women or by the uninitiated. If it is necessary to speak to them of Byamee, he is called Boyjerh, which means Father . . .

Boyjehr, written as *Bidyur* in Wiradhuri, is also written as *Bedia* and *Bidja*. Boyjerh’s earliest recording in English literature is as *Bench*, in the *Sydney Gazette*, 18 December 1803:

A visitor from Hawkesbury mentions the death of Bench, an ancient Native, who we believe was but little known at Sydney. This veteran had for many years past presided with supreme authority over his tribe, from whom he received a species of homage which approached to adoration. In fact, the straggling subjects

18 Henderson, John: *Observations on the Colonies of New South Wales and Van Diemen’s Land*, Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta 1832, 146–148.

19 Ridley, Revd William: *Traditions*, Govt Printer, Sydney 1875, 135.

20 Threlkeld, L E: *A Key to the structure of the Aboriginal Language*, Kemp & Fairfax, Sydney 1850, p51.

21 Parker, K Langloh: *The Euahlayi Tribe: A study of Aboriginal life in Australia*, Archibald Constable, London 1905, ch2.

of this sooty Chieftain, have been frequently heard by the Settlers resident nearest the foot of those inaccessible Mountains, to ascribe to him the power of agitating the elements, and of causing floods, rains, &c.&c, a finesse probably constructed purposely to impress us with awe and reverence for a being possessed of such extensive qualifications. That the Mythology may in some degree owe its existence to similar causes, we shall not argue, but had this inky venerable been known to those imaginary existences, little doubt can be entertained but his complexion would at least have recommended him to a seat in the infernal regions, where, in the course of time, he might have become a compeer with the august Pluto.

Bench, Boyjerh and Byamee are but a few names of the Creator Father. It was not until the 1920s that Radcliffe-Brown realised the Rainbow Serpent goes under different names all across the continent.²²

Etheridge had access to many of the papers of Robert Hamilton Mathews, the most prolific writer of Myall initiation practices of his day (see Figure 2, p102 above). The following narrative compiled from many of Mathew's papers on East Coast initiation rites would have been very familiar to Etheridge. Here is the essence of the East Coast first degree—and it is absolutely independent of Freemasonry.²³

In boyhood and youth, boys accompanied their clans on journeys into strange lands for great celebrations – a coming together to see older boys of the clan taken away – to become skilled in the law. They would be returned men. After initiation ceremonies were completed the business of arranging future marriages and creating new kinship alliances would begin. It is likely a boy's tribe at times held the great ceremonies and had people from other countries travel long distances to his land. These great coming together occurred within their great marrying circles – from way south to way north, and far inland.

A boy would understand that the deity known the 'great master' or 'All Father' had summoned the people to attend a great ceremony. Amid the fun and excitement of the gathering and nightly celebrations and corroborees, would come the frightening time when every one would be called to the mystic ring and the great shiny black beast – 'Debbil-Debbil' – would come down from a tree to walk the earth and steal away the young men. He would first be heard a long way off – his low droning humming voice slowly announcing his approach. He would be coming to kill these boys – so as to remake them as men. Boys who failed the test, or were considered idiots, would not return home. This was to maintain the high standards and integrity necessary amongst their warrior elite. The women and children would be hidden under possum-skin and koala-skin rugs and cut bushes, to screen them from seeing or being seen by the great beast coming for the boys. To look upon the beast meant death, as he would tear any offending child or woman apart. For the women's and children's protection, a few old men stood vigilant with clubs to brain any rising head. Those hiding would soon hear the huge and heavy thuds of the beast's footsteps approaching. They would be unaware he had only one leg. As the initiated men shouted warnings at the beast to stay away from those hiding under the rugs, the noise of wailing and terror emanating from under the rugs would become overwhelming. Suddenly the commotion would cease and all would fall quiet. Upon emerging from the heat and sweat of the coverings of rugs, the women and children would behold through smoke that the boys were now missing and that burning debris from the campfire had been scattered about.

Until the boys taken had concluded the many days of various rites of passage, they would be in dread of Daramulan. Rugs placed over the boy's heads blocked all views but for their own feet, and shiny black creatures, assistants of Daramulan, accompanied them. Only upon completion of this first degree would each young man discover the truth, and be forever in awe of it.

Jeremy Beckett, in his foreword to Professor Elkin's book *Aboriginal Men of High Degree, Initiation and Sorcery in the World's Oldest Tradition*, puts it thus:²⁴

some of the medicine man's marvels are deceptions, not in the fraudulent sense but the religious, what W.E.H. Stanner has called the 'noble fiction'. Lower-degree initiations are often conducted in this way: a boy is told that the roaring noise he hears is Daramulan coming to burn him to ashes before re-forming him. But when his eyes are unveiled, he discovers the bull-roarer; now he learns a more precious truth, that

22 Radcliffe-Brown, Alfred Reginald: 'The Rainbow-Serpent Myth of Australia' in *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 56: 19–25 (1926).

23 The ceremony herein described is made from a compilation of various initiation ceremonies among the Myall tribes, as taken from R H Mathews' papers on the Wiradjuri, Kamilaroi and Kuringai. Mathews included Daruk, Darkinyung and Khuttung amongst the Kuringai.

24 Elkin, Adolphus Peter: *Aboriginal Men of High Degree: Initiation and Sorcery in the World's Oldest Tradition*, 2nd US edn, Inner Traditions, Rochester 1994, xix.

Daramulan's voice is 'in the wood.' The fiction is a secular screen for truths too sacred to be revealed to the uninitiated. As Kenneth Maddock puts it, the novices are deceived only to be enlightened, and the outcome is not skepticism but faith. Alternatively, many anthropologists, while allowing for dramatic elements of deception, do not dismiss the possibility of some Elders understanding and being adept in their application of the hidden mysteries of nature and science.

It would hard to exaggerate the cleverness which the Initiated men put into the ceremonies, which were highly educative, the work of teachers who were masters of their craft. The older men had much insight into the elements of human psychology. They worked on the boys' imaginations. They built up the sense of being prepared for an unknown and mysterious climax: discipline and kindness, fear and reassurance, gravity and jollity, danger and protection, mystery and the mundane. The old men made the boys feel at all times they were in good hands as long as they relied on them. Of the terrifying climax witnessed by W E H Stanner, in which some men had transformed themselves into horrendous, brute-like creatures, he said: 'The first time I saw them my own heart stood still'. Afterwards, marvellously, familiar faces appeared and the boys were calmed with real tenderness, reassurance and praise. Made to feel they had passed the ordeal triumphantly, and they had acquitted themselves well, they were painted in secret signs which would be explained in later initiations.

Once traditional culture began to disintegrate, what was left amounted to a low culture: some secular ceremonies, magical practices, mundane institutions and a prosaic rule of thumb. When Stanner arrived on the Daly River in Northern Australia in the early 1930s, he witnessed a culture that was struggling. There was a widespread conviction that had grown up on the Daly River in the 1920s that the All-Father, Angamunggi, the local variant of the universal Rainbow Serpent, had deserted them. Stanner was told evidence of Angamunggi's departure was the infertility of the women (riddled with gonorrhoea), the dwindling game among them, and the spread of sickness. The cult of Kunabibi, the All Mother, had been known in the days of the All Father, and it emerged in what Stanner termed 'the new High Culture'.²⁵

Stanner observed that the so-called tribes were not self-sufficing entities but interdependent in many important ways upon their neighbours. Interconnections between marriage, economy, trade, friendship, ceremonial intercourse and patterned conflict were fundamental features of life.²⁶

To quote from Stanner:²⁷

The arrival of Europeans here and there in the region of which I speak – a vast region, never fully explored or occupied by the newcomers – was sufficient to unsettle Aborigines still long distances away. The repercussions spread, evidently with great rapidity, along the network of structural interconnections. Eventually, for every Aboriginal who, so to speak, had Europeans thrust upon him, at least one other had sought them out. More would have gone to European centres sooner had it not been barred by hostile Aborigines. As late as the 1930's I was able to see for myself the battles between the encroaching myalls and weakening, now sedentary groups who had monopolised European sources of supply and work. The encroachers used every claim of right they had – kinship, affinity, friendship, namesake-relationship, trade partnership – to get a toehold.

The Myalls believed a boy could not grow up by himself and make him self into a man, the men in the society in which he lived must do that for him.²⁸

Initiation into the laws and the ways of the men in the Myall hunter-gatherer society was a way of saying 'man is truly man within the companionship and society of his fellows. Without them he is not human'.²⁹

Boys, once they reached a stage where they were more muscle and animal spirit than sense, were known in traditional society as 'wild dogs'. Their name was no longer used, and they were

25 Stanner, W E H: *The Dreaming and other Essays*, intro by Robert Manne, Black Inc, Collingwood 2009, p34.

26 *ibid*, 151.

27 *ibid*, 152.

28 *ibid*, 252.

29 *ibid*, 257.

looked upon as ‘non-human creatures of the wild’ and outside of human society.

Without the calmness, self possession and dignity which were marks of the well-socialised initiated male in the Myall world, the traditional structures which had existed since time immemorial began to collapse. Once the old men began to lose their authority, young men would deride the secret life and look to form new coalitions.³⁰

Traditional Myall society no longer exists in the same form as before the arrival of the European, but initiation ceremonies still remain among some Aboriginal groups.

In 1960, Wadjeri-Wadjeri of the Bungadi Skin of the Alawa people of the Northern Territory was the High Djungayi in the Kunabibi rites. In what he called his Aboriginal Freemasonry he described his role as the High Djungayi as a Keeper of the Laws. He was also a Judge and a Priest, and an Inspector-General of the Ritual. He learned the Laws of Kunabibi, as did his ancestors, through their ancient secret initiation. And he said: ‘The laws of the Alawa were brought into the mouth of the Roper [river] by Kunabibi long before the God of Israel spoke: “Behold, I am the Lord. I do not change”.’ Wadjeri-Wadjeri added, ‘Nor do we’.³¹

Long, long before Freemasonry, boys were being grown up as men in Australia through initiation into a men’s society. Where those rites have ceased to exist, Freemasonry may offer an alternative.

A snake in the Garden of Eden

This paper began with a suggestion that an allegory of the Neolithic/Bronze Age changes, according to Western civilisation, is found in a section of Genesis in the Old Testament. According to the Myall beliefs in South East Australia, they carried out their rites of man-making ceremonies in sacred parts of the forest, and a special tree was at times the sacred conduit or road between the great father in the sky [aka Rainbow Serpent] and earth. A sacred tree or a mountain-top linking the father in the sky and the earth was a popular theme in Myall myths.

It is interesting that when the inheritors of Cain’s legacy, civilisation, eventually reached Australia, they commenced war upon those who looked in awe upon the great serpent—known by many names, including Father and Biaime.

Could Myall traditions connect to the snake in the Garden of Eden? What at first appears preposterous and more in line with Fraser’s earlier arguments is not so strange in reality.

In 1833 John Bathurst Deane published his work, *The Worship of the Serpent*.³² He found snake worship in the background of most every old religion known to the world. Of course he made no mention of Australia, one of the last pristine realms of the old hunter-gatherer serpent religion, as nobody had ‘discovered’ it at that time. Later, colonisers would make maps of Australia with snakelike lines marking the great continent’s rivers. In fact, many were dry river beds which only rose and flooded once every few decades, sweeping away all in their path. Myths in Australia associated with the All-Father creator are often about waterholes and river beds, and how and where water may be found.

The occurrence of rain proved to early man that a great river in the sky existed; where else could water, which flowed downhill, come from? For hunter-gatherers, the most important task every day was finding clean drinking water, and thus the ancient knowledge and myths alluded to it. The sacred circle was seen in a drop of water on a still pond, and water tipped from a Coolamon quickly turned into a snake before disappearing underground. The serpent is an allegory about water. Deane found later ideas of religion tied to agricultural communities worshipping the reliance of the sun in relation to crop plantings, and nomads and hunters praying

30 Stanner, W E H: *The Dreaming and other Essays*, intro by Robert Manne, Black Inc, Collingwood 2009, p51.

31 Lockwood, Douglas: *I, the Aboriginal*, Readers Book Club edn, London & Australia 1964; (1edn Rigby, Adelaide 1962). Biography of Waipuldanya or Wadjeri-Wadjeri, English name Phillip Roberts, Bungadi group, Alawa tribe, as detailed by Waipuldanya to Lockwood in over 100 hours of interviews, and with many more long hours of criticism, checking and rewriting by Waipuldanya. Last page.

32 Deane’s book is available online at <http://sacred-texts.com/etc/wos/index.htm>.

daily for help in locating accessible drinking water. The following extracts from chapter seven of his book, on the decline of serpent-worship, extend these ideas.

True religion being obscured, (as we have every reason to believe it was,) the worshippers of the sun would naturally arrogate to themselves the privilege of the truth: and the Fall of Man being remembered as the work of the SERPENT, they would as naturally regard the Ophites as worshippers of the *Devil*, and feel themselves under a bond of eternal enmity against them.

Hence the whole struggle, originating in the aggressions of the worshippers of the sun, and carried on by the retaliation of the worshippers of the serpent. Tradition is full of their perpetual feuds. They enter into almost every leading fable; are depicted upon some of the most ancient works of art, and recorded in some of the oldest histories of man. [page 419]

The prevalence of this idolatry [worship of the Serpent] has been proved to be *so* general, that we have a reasonable ground for considering it as at one time or other *universal*. The principal causes to which the decline of serpent-worship may be referred are *religious wars--hostile invasions--mental improvement--the progress of Christianity--and the Mohammedan conquests*. [page 414]

And to complete the picture of worldly ease and comfort, as enjoyed by the more godless of the sons of Adam, another brother, Tubalcain, became "an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron." So that probably in less than three hundred years from the creation of man civilization had arrived at such a degree of perfection, that not only the necessities, but even the luxuries of life were to be found in the family of the fugitive Cain. [page 416]

Could colonisers really be looked upon as the sons of Cain? Our western histories try to resist this idea. However, examples clearly exist.

One writer to the *Queenslander* newspaper on 1 May 1880 put it thus:

This, in plain language, is how we deal with the aborigines: On occupying new territory the aboriginal inhabitants are treated in exactly the same way as the wild beasts or birds the settlers may find there. Their lives and their property, the nets, canoes, and weapons which represent as much labor to them as the stock and buildings of the white settler, are held by the Europeans as being at their absolute disposal. Their goods are taken, their children forcibly stolen, their women carried away, entirely at the caprice of the white men. The least show of resistance is answered by a rifle bullet; in fact, the first introduction between blacks and whites is often marked by the unprovoked murder of some of the former—in order to make a commencement of the work of "civilising" them.

Another, writing under the name of NEVER NEVER, the following week, added:

Is there room for both of us here? No. Then the sooner the weaker is wiped out the better, as we may save some valuable lives by the process. If the blackfellow is right in murdering white men for invading and taking possession of his country, then every white man, woman, and child who sits at home at ease in our towns and townships is a murderer, for if they had the courage of their opinions they would not stop on in a colony built up on bloodshed and rapine. Do they do this? Do our black protectors—our philanthropists of to-day—go out and enquire into the truth of the many stories that are brought in from the back country, or do they rather sit in the high places, and partake of the corn and oil, leaving it to the sinful to go out and bear the heat and burden of the day? I rather think they do the last.

Jessica Harland-Jacobs noted that Freemasons who were heading to occupied lands to expand the Empire 'had to negotiate a disjuncture between their Universalist ideology . . . and their duties and assumptions as imperialists'.³³ How strong was the brotherhood of man, when one man eagerly coveted another man's possessions?

War on the Australian frontier was fought primarily over land, and the frontier was always out of sight of those moving into the growing towns and cities.

Promoting the idea of hunter-gatherer people as being less worthy than civilised people assisted in overcoming many of the ethical issues involved in exterminating them. Although all known peoples of the world are of the same species, *Homo sapiens*, in Australia the natives were looked on by some as beasts rather than men. Such attitudes made murder more conscionable, as the sons of Cain once again did their work.

33 Harland-Jacobs, Jessica L: *Builders of Empire: Freemasons and British Imperialism, 1717–1927*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2007, 239.

Among the migrants heading for the colonies in America and Australia during the nineteenth century many were Freemasons. As John Stephen, a police magistrate who arrived in New South Wales in 1827, wrote in a letter to the Grand Lodge of England: 'the greater part of the free community have been admitted as Masons in England from the prevailing notion of the necessity of being so on becoming Travellers.'³⁴

Membership in Freemasonry helped British migrants in countless ways:

- It gave them access to a network of lodges that could assist them as they moved around the world.
- It encouraged moral improvement.
- It offered opportunities for recreation and social networking.
- It conferred respectability.

Harland-Jacobs explains:³⁵

The primary mechanism responsible for the building of the expansive work of lodges was the regimental lodge. By the early nineteenth century, every regiment in the British army boasted at least one lodge that accompanied it on its imperial sojourns. Freemasons in the army helped plant permanent lodges among civilian populations in colonial of all types. Exposed to Freemasonry in the British Isles, nineteenth-century emigrants also directly exported the brotherhood by requesting warrants to set up their own lodges in their new homes in North America, Australasia, and Southern Africa. ... The three mechanisms—regimental lodges, the processes of migration, and provincial grand lodges—combined to effect the proliferation of a vast network of lodges that connected men across the formal and informal empires.

Especially remarkable, in this context, is a quotation by Lord Carnarvon, former secretary of state for the colonies and high-ranking Masonic official:³⁶

Following closely in the wake of colonisation, wherever the hut of the settler has been built, or the flag of conquest waved, there Masonry has soon equal dominion . . . It has reflected and consolidated the British Empire.

Often a Masonic lodge or hall was among the first community buildings constructed in colonial frontier settlements and became a centre of community life. It must be accepted that among those colonisers who dealt death during the wars against the Myalls, a large number were Freemasons. It should also be granted that part of the original culture of the Myalls is today preserved because of Freemasons.

In Australia, the traditional culture of the Myall people of South Eastern Australia eventually disappeared. Alfred Howitt wrote in his work published in 1904:³⁷

By far the greater part of the materials for this work was collected and recorded before 1889. Since then the native tribes have more or less died, and in the older settlements of South-East Australia the tribal remnants have now almost lost the knowledge of the beliefs and customs of their fathers.

In R H Mathew's publication in 1905 of tribes in New South Wales and Victoria, he complained that 'we must confess, with regret, that no systematic scientific study of aborigines at the Government expense has ever been attempted'. Furthermore, he knew that the 'old native men and women, who alone are able to furnish full and reliable information regarding the sociology, languages, ceremonies and general customs, will in a few years time have been carried off by death'. Regarding ceremonies and rites, he said: 'many of the customs have fallen into disuse and are now not practiced'.³⁸

34 John Stephen to the Grand Lodge of England, 1 September 1827, Grand Lodge of England, HC 21/C/1; Quoted in Harland-Jacobs, op cit, 1.

35 Harland-Jacobs, *ibid*, 2–3.

36 Harland-Jacobs, op cit, 4.

37 Howitt, A W: *The native tribes of South-East Australia*, Macmillan, London & New York 1904, preface xiii.

38 Mathews, R H: *Ethnological Notes on the Aboriginal Tribes of New South Wales and Victoria*, F W White, Sydney 1905, preface.

Why is this irreversible loss so lamentable? To quote from popular culture of today, *if you destroy an entire generation of people's culture, it is as if they never existed*.³⁹ In Tasmania, where all modern Aboriginal people are descended from Aboriginal women and white fathers, no knowledge of the men's rites survive. On the mainland, we are more fortunate, as records do exist.

Many prominent men who feature in recording the old Myall culture and initiation rites were Freemasons. Robert Hamilton Mathews, the most prolific documenter of Myall initiation, in his diary in 1884 includes an entry of going off to lodge. An interest in secret societies and initiation seemed to run in his family. Robert Mathews' son, Hamilton Mathews, was a prominent New South Wales Freemason. R H Mathews' granddaughter-in-law, Janet Mathews, wrote on the subject and documented information from elderly Aboriginal people on the South Coast of New South Wales, who claimed that R H Mathews was himself initiated into the Aboriginal ceremonies. His initiated Aboriginal name was 'Miranen'. Martin Thomas, Mathew's biographer, argues that Mathews' refusal to write directly about some of these experiences show that his loyalty to the secret culture was 'more important than whatever kudos he might have won as an anthropologist in revealing these secrets to the world'.⁴⁰

Dr Lorimer Fison and his close friend Alfred Howitt, co-authors of *Kamilaroi and Kurnai*,⁴¹ were also interested in Myall initiation mysteries. Howitt orchestrated an initiation ceremony himself amongst South Coast Aborigines in the late 1800s after the practice had died out. Howitt pretended to have been initiated into the Myall rites elsewhere. Howitt helped officiate in the revised ceremonies and he attests to Fison's interest, saying Fison was consistently denied any information when he persistently questioned a white man who in his youth had been initiated into the Myall mysteries.⁴² In private correspondence in 1880, when writing to Professor Edward Burnett Tylor, the anthropologist at Oxford University, Fison confirmed his fascination with Aboriginal ceremony and Freemasonry.⁴³

I am afraid that I shall be laughed at about the Freemasonry statement. But I cannot explain away the facts that have come to my knowledge through trustworthy channels. Only by last mail I received a letter from a gentleman well-known to me, who assured me that he had lately seen a number of Queensland blacks who make "the master sign of wonder" to a friend who was leaving Brisbane for Sydney by the steamer in which my correspondent was a passenger. Unless Stuart published a deliberate & useless lie, & moreover unless several trustworthy gentlemen have told me lies which could do neither them nor anyone else any good, Australian blackfellows certainly use signs which are current among freemasons at the present day. And whatever may be the origin of freemasonry as we have it now, we cannot say that it was not founded upon something older still.

This fascination by Freemasons in other initiation rites is partly explained by an American Mason, Bro Dennis V Chornenky, who comments on Native American initiation rites. He notes that relatively little solid academic work has been done on the subject of Native American rites and initiatic practices, and their relationship to those of the West. He says one simple reason for this is because they are most concerned with that which is of the spirit, or essence, rather than what can be written down, measured or analysed. As a Freemason, he understands that tradition is transmission and the handing down of knowledge. Tradition, understood in this way, is the

39 Dialogue from the movie *The Monuments Men*, story by Robert M Edsel, Columbia Pictures, 2014.

40 Thomas, Martin: *The Many Worlds of R. H. Mathews: In Search of an Australian Anthropologist*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney 2011, 323; Thomas, Martin ed: *Culture in Translation: The anthropological legacy of R. H. Mathews*, Aboriginal History Monographs, Canberra 2007, 18 [refers to lodge reference in R.H.Mathew's papers, NLA MS 8006/1/1. Diary 22nd April 1884].

41 Fison, Lorimer & Howitt, A W: *Kamilaroi and Kurnai. Group-marriage and relationship, and marriage by elopement, drawn chiefly from the usage of the Australian aborigines. Also the Kurnai tribe, their customs in peace and war*, Robertson, Melbourne 1880.

42 Howitt, op cit, 511.

43 *University of Oxford, Pitt Rivers Museum manuscript collections*. Tylor papers Box 11a: Fison 5, Navuloa, Fiji, 16 January 1880, Lorimer Fison to Edward B. Tylor, LL.D.

transmission of spiritual influence inherent in any given rite or set of rites. A profane person who knew all the rites of a tradition by reading about them in a book, would still not be initiated in any way, for the spiritual influences attached to the rites would in no way have been transmitted to him.

Chornenky believes the similarities between Freemasonry and Native American traditions and the comfortable initiation of many famous Native Americans and tribal chiefs into the Masonic order over the last two hundred years is a testament to the traditional character of Freemasonry.⁴⁴

The Oklahoma Masonic Indian Degree Team has performed before thousands of Freemasons all across the USA, putting on the Third Degree in colourful Native American dress. Publications on analogies between Freemasonry and Indian societies, the Medicine Man and the Senior Deacon, and the development of Freemasonry and Masonic Lodges in the original Grand Lodge of Indian Territory, exist. They include explanations of the Indian 'Blood Brother' initiation, and a comparison between American Indian ideals and the tenets of Freemasonry.⁴⁵

In Canada, Freemasonry is appealing to First Nation men and there are many famous First Nation Freemasons in their history. Bro Gregory Hunter, a member of Richmond Lodge No 23 in Ontario, speaks on the Spirituality and History of Masonry & the First Nations, Native Americans, some famous Native Masons, and the symbolism of the Eagle Feather Volume of the Sacred Law. After explaining common symbols and meanings, he talks of First Nation secret societies and degrees. He shows that Charity is one of the most important virtues not only in Masonry but also for the First Nations, and the concept of First Nations brotherhood is expanded way beyond Masonic brotherhood. Like Freemasons, the First Nations are very much into oaths and they place importance on 'traditional penalties'. The Eagle Feather Volume of the Sacred Law teaches how the feather and the spirit of the Eagle can be incorporated into our lives and our Masonic development.⁴⁶

Native American similarities to Freemasonry has been known by the profane for some time. In 1856, the Revd L E Threlkeld wrote in private correspondence about similarities between Native American and Myall ceremonies.⁴⁷

Another curious coincidence has lately caught my attention in a re-published review taken from the Leader, Novr 17th inserted in the Empire, Sydney, Feby 29th 1856, of a work called *Minnesota and the Far West*, by Laurance Oliphant, &c. Blackwood and Sons. There are certain customs mentioned therein very similar to some in use amongst the Aborigines of this part of the world worthy of notice. The author says: 'in the centre of the Village stood the medicine pole . . . and near it a bower . . . in which are performed those singular rites which Free-Masons affirm connect the Winnebagoes to their fraternity. It is certain that there is a society in the tribe, the secret of which is kept most sacred . . . the members of the society, or medicine-men are held in very high estimation by the tribes'. So likewise have the Aborigines here a sacred Bower in the Bush, which none but the initiated may enter, and for a woman to presume to satisfy female curiosity would be most surely punished with death. A common member of this fraternity is discovered at once, not by the un-mentionable secret of Free-Masonry (sic), but by an ocular demonstration that he has been initiated when the front tooth was deliberately knocked out of his jaw by one of those, what-might-be-called, Medicine-men.

This is certainly not the end of the story of Aboriginality and Freemasonry. Prominent Australians of Aboriginal descent have contributed to Freemasonry as regular members for some time. Sir Douglas Nicholls, KCVO, OBE, (1906–1988) was an Aboriginal Australian from the

44 Chornenky, Denis V: 'Freemasonry and Native American Traditions', paper given at the annual California Masonic Symposium, San Diego 2004.

45 A publication of Freemasonry and its involvement with Native Americans is available in a 55-page illustrated digest. Contact Masonic Service Association, 8120 Fenton Street, Silver Spring, MD 20910. Phone: 301-588-4010; Fax: 301-608-3457; E-mail: msana@ix.netcom.com.

46 Report of the September 2011 meeting of Quinte St Alban's Lodge No 620 GRC in Thornhill, Ontario: <http://www.quintestalbans.com/regular-meeting-20110926.php>.

47 Threlkeld, L E: 'Australian Reminiscences & Papers of L. E. Threlkeld. Missionary to the Aborigines 1824–1859', 2 vols, Niel Gunson ed, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra 1974, 2:298, Letter to Richard Cull, 25 June 1856.

Yorta Yorta people. He was also a star Fitzroy footballer, a boxer and a prominent Freemason, a Churches of Christ pastor, ceremonial officer; he was also a pioneering campaigner for reconciliation. He was the first Aboriginal person to be knighted and the first appointed to a vice-regal office, serving as the Governor of South Australia.

When Professor A P Elkin of Sydney University received a letter from Melbourne Freemason F A Ray in 1936, inquiring about the advisability of admitting 'a full blooded aboriginal' who had enquired to join the organisation, Elkin recommended acceptance. He wrote: 'let us remember that no one can keep a secret or his membership of a secret society better than an Aborigine'.⁴⁸

In the historical war for Australia between western civilisation and the ancient Myall culture, western civilisation won. Today all Australians are classed as 'civilised'. In hindsight, parts of so-called civilisation have been found wanting: not least, social inequalities that civilisation brought with it. There is much to be learned from the past by modern Australians and we should look forward to a day when Aboriginal Freemasons will teach their non-indigenous brethren more about the ancient religion of this land we share. Just as the Eagle Feather is used in North America as a representative of Native American Volumes of the Sacred Law, in a few remote parts of Australia the Churinga still remains the Aboriginal equivalent of the VSL. In the South-East part of Australia, where traditions are ended, records kept in the western language by Freemasons are still in existence.

As quoted previously: *if you destroy an entire generation of people's culture, it is as if they never existed*. It may be time to re-examine the initiation rites of early Australia, and to help keep them alive, so that our Myall traditions may never be forgotten. Just as Aboriginal Art is today regarded of international importance, new generations of Australians may one day want to learn more about other aspects of our shared culture.

48 Elkin Papers, (unpub MSS), University of Sydney Archives, P.130/41/53, F.A. Ray to Elkin 26 August 1936, and Elkin to F.A. Ray 10 September 1936.