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Into the Desert: The Horn Expedition of 1894

Sean K. Zimmer

Trinity College, Sean.Zimmer@trincoll.edu

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**Into the Desert:
The Horn Expedition of 1894**

**Sean Zimmer
History Senior Thesis
Advisor: Sean Cocco
Spring, 2011**

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Introduction

In 1894, a scientific expedition comprised of numerous scientists set off into the Australian outback. Organized and financed by the wealthy businessman and pastoralist William Austin Horn, the expedition bore his name. The Horn Expedition was designed to “thoroughly explore”¹ central Australia, and in so doing offer a scientific account of the interior desert. Unlike many previous expeditions into the outback, the Horn Expedition suffered no catastrophic accidents or epic feats of exploratory heroics. Furthermore, the Expedition was not designed to increase the material wealth of its participants. The scientists who made up the Expedition were by no means seeking personal glory – in keeping with the interests of their eponymous sponsor, they were seeking to gather data in order to publish a comprehensive scientific report on Australia’s interior. The results were published under the title “Report on the Work of the Horn Expedition to Central Australia”, a four-volume work that depicts the zoology, botany, geology, and anthropology of the outback.

However there is more to this story than that of a group of scientists conducting a scientific survey of a geographical locale. A close reading of the “Report” reveals many contradictory issues, and the personalities of the Expedition members begin to come through. This is evident, for example, when examining the anthropological work of the Expedition. Just as they were busy conducting an exhaustive survey of the Aboriginal groups of central Australia, the scientists were condemning these indigenous groups as being mere savages, doomed to extinction at the hands of a ‘superior’ white civilization. The narrative of the Expedition, written by Baldwin Spencer, offers many episodes that

¹ *Report on the Work of the Horn Expedition to Central Australia*, ed. Baldwin Spencer. Melbourne: Melville, Mullen and Slade, 1896. Vol. 1, v.

also hint of greater issues and forces at work beneath the surface. For a relatively short undertaking, the legacy of the Horn Expedition is significant, and begs closer study.

In examining the Horn Expedition, several questions arise. What was the significance of the Expedition, and why did it occur when it did? Who were the men who undertook the journey? In what ways were they products of their time, and in what ways were they indicative of changing trends in science? Most importantly, what can the Horn Expedition tell us about the development of Australian national identity and the relationship between Australians and their landscape?

I will attempt to answer these questions over the course of this thesis, and in the process attempt to shed light on this relatively unheard of moment in Australian cultural and scientific history. The first chapter serves as an introduction to the Expedition, offering an overview of how it came to be and who made up its core membership. From there, I examine Baldwin's Spencer's narrative of the Expedition, which is then contrasted with the competing narrative of Charles Winnecke, a member of the Expedition party. Chapter 2 examines the Expedition more closely, through the lens of anthropology. After investigating Spencer's interactions with the Aborigines as told in his narrative, I study one particular episode involving the collection of sacred ceremonial objects by members of the Expedition. The second chapter concludes with a close analysis of the anthropological photography of the Expedition, and what this can tell us about perceptions of Aboriginal culture at the time. Chapter 3 takes a broader view by placing the Horn Expedition within the context of the 1890's in Australia and its role in the rise of Australian national identity. I offer an analysis of Australian literature and art produced at the time before examining the conflict between Horn and Spencer in regards

to where the “Report” should be published, revealing an underlying tension between Australia and the Empire. I conclude with reflections on the significance of the Expedition and the ways in which it changed its members.

Chapter 1

“A Body of Scientific Gentlemen”

Introduction

The scientific exploration of Central Australia, more particularly that portion known as the McDonnell Ranges, had for many years been desired by the leading scientific men in Australia, some of whom hold the opinion that when the rest of the continent was submerged the elevated portions of the McDonnell Range existed as an island, and that consequently older forms of life might be found in the more inaccessible parts. Travelers' tales also of the manners and customs of the natives, and the varieties of plants and animal life in these remote regions, had aroused a widespread interest, and at the solicitation of a few scientific friends I resolved to organize and equip a party, composed of scientific men, to thoroughly explore this belt of the country...²
-William Austin Horn

The Horn Expedition of 1894 lasted fourteen weeks and covered some 2,000 miles of the Australian interior.³ Beginning at Oodnadatta, the Expedition moved north, traveling on camelback and covering ground with remarkable speed while pressing deeper into the desert. Instead of traveling as a single unit for the entire length of the journey, smaller groups would break off from the main party to make more thorough examinations of the environment that they were passing through. The Expedition's course wove throughout the MacDonnell Ranges, going as far west as Ayers Rock (now referred to as Uluru⁴) and out to the eastern extent of the Ranges. The Expedition was a tightly organized and effective operation, working together to gather data and specimens. William Austin Horn (**Figure 1**), the creator and financial backer of the Expedition, organized the Expedition as a democratic unit, which enabled them (he claimed) to work “in perfect harmony from the start.”⁵ What distinguishes the Horn Expedition from

² Spencer, *Report*,. Vol. 1, v.

³ D.J. Mulvaney and J.H. Calaby. *'So Much That Is New': Baldwin Spencer 1860-1929, A Biography*. (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1985) 117.

⁴<http://www.environment.gov.au/parks/uluru/culture-history/heritage/index.html> (accessed Nov. 6, 2010)

⁵ William Austin Horn. *Notes By A Nomad*. (London and Melbourne: Mellville & Mullen, 1906), 59. This is partly true. While the Expedition did function well, the competing egos of Horn and the scientists would lead to much dispute over the publication of the “Report”.

previous forays into central Australia was not its democratic operation, but rather its purely scientific nature – no material gain or personal glory was sought in its undertaking. Despite the fact that the Expedition’s eponymous financier was a wealthy businessman, or even that two prospectors accompanied the scientific corps, economic gain did not factor into the work of the Expedition.⁶ This was an Expedition of scientific exploration, not adventurism or prospecting.

The men who made up the body of the Expedition were some of the finest scientific minds to be found in Australia at the time. Their expertise covered a wide range of subjects, including biology, botany, geology, meteorology, and paleontology. The Expedition made important discoveries in all of these areas, adding new information about Australia’s center. Despite its significant contributions to science, the Horn Expedition is most important for being “a landmark in anthropological history.”⁷ Baldwin Spencer (**Figure 2**), the Expedition’s biologist and photographer, would experience a complete restructuring of his career because of his participation with the Horn Expedition. Spencer would go on to become perhaps the foremost anthropologist to study the Australian Aborigines during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. After the Expedition disbanded, Spencer found himself taking on the role of editor of the report in which the Expedition’s results were published. Although the “Report on the Work of the Horn Expedition to Central Australia” is a scientific work, Spencer prefaces the “Report” with a narrative of the Expedition, entitled “Through Larapinta Land”. Drawn from his field journals and notebooks, Spencer’s narrative serves as a way of

⁶ Philip Jones, “The Horn Expedition’s place among nineteenth-century inland expeditions” in *Exploring Central Australia: Society, the Environment, and the 1894 Horn Expedition*, ed. S.R. Morton and D.J. Mulvaney, 19-28. (Surrey Beatty & Sons: Chipping Norton, 1996), 26.

⁷ Mulvaney and Calaby, ‘*So Much That Is New*’, 117.

introducing the scientific sections of the “Report”. His narrative gives us a glimpse not only into the journey undertaken by the Expedition, but also into the heart of colonial science and cultural perceptions. Spencer’s narrative is instantly engaging, suggesting a readership that went beyond academic circles. Spencer’s narrative becomes particularly interesting when compared and contrasted with the competing account published by Charles Winnecke, the Expedition’s chief surveyor and (according to his account) leader. His poor relationship with Horn led to his withholding certain materials from publication in the “Report” and the separate publication of his own account. While Spencer presents his readers with a narrative, Winnecke’s account is in journal format, and is filled with short, simple entries. There are several instances in which Spencer will devote an entire page to describing a particular episode while Winnecke might write only one sentence encompassing the entire event. Although quite different, both accounts offer a sense of the Australian interior and the people who inhabited it. In this chapter, we will compare Spencer and Winnecke’s accounts, and in doing so gain a glimpse into the clash of personalities of the Expedition, as well see the differences in how they each interacted with the landscape and viewed exploratory intent.

Organizing the Expedition

William Austin Horn could be defined by his “brash individualism”⁸ and overbearing pomposity. Born into the lower classes, Horn was a self-made man who over the course of his life established himself as a man of wealth and influence. He owed

⁸ Ibid, 116.

his great fortune to his mining and pastoral interests. Horn entered the mining world quite literally on horseback by riding 164 miles in just twenty-two hours to Adelaide in order to lodge a mining claim before a rival syndicate could make the same claim for themselves.⁹ Horn also pursued politics as a member of the South Australian Assembly, believing that men with a stake in Australia ought to play an active role in its government.¹⁰ Horn also exhibited a strong streak of colonial pride, as evidenced by his claim that “An Australian is an Englishman born in the sun.”¹¹ Horn’s overbearing pomposity and sense of self-importance could get the better of him. He accompanied the Expedition that bore his name for a short while, during which time he managed to insult virtually every scientist he had recruited.¹² This behavior would result in the scientists of the Expedition being very reluctant to participate in the publication of the “Report”, most notably Charles Winnecke.

In his memoir “Notes By A Nomad”, published twelve years after the Expedition took place, Horn offers some explanation as to why he wanted to organize and Expedition to Australia’s center. There was a great deal of speculation among scientists of the time (based on fossil evidence) that the MacDonnell Ranges had at one time been an island, and thus might contain unusual forms of life. Horn explains that he was persuaded to “fit out an expedition...for the purpose of investigating the animal and plant life and geology of this practically unknown region.”¹³

Here it is worth speculating as to what Horn was really seeking to accomplish by funding a scientific expedition. As Horn himself noted, central Australia was largely

⁹ Judith M. Brown, “Horn, William Austin (1841 - 1922)”, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 9, [Melbourne University Press](http://adbonline.anu.edu.au/biogs/A090368b.htm), 1983 pp 367-369 <http://adbonline.anu.edu.au/biogs/A090368b.htm> (accessed Nov. 8, 2010).

¹⁰ Judith M. Brown, “Horn, William Austin (1841 - 1922)”, 367-369.

¹¹ Horn, *Notes By A Nomad*, 50.

¹² Mulvaney and Calaby, ‘*So Much That Is New*’, 132.

¹³ Horn, *Notes By A Nomad*, 58.

unexplored, a land unknown to the vast majority of Australians. It was possible that the discovery of mineral resources or the expansion of pastoral lands might be a direct result of the Expedition's work. Material gain as an economic factor seems even more possible when considering Horn's position as a businessman known for his aggressiveness.

Despite the possibility of an economic incentive for Horn, there is evidence against this idea. Looking to previous examples of inland exploration, Horn sought to recruit selectively. In doing so he assembled a team of qualified scientists. In his introduction to the "Report", Horn addresses the suspicion that the Expedition was simply a moneymaking venture by summarizing the public's views:

The general public were for some time under the impression that the Expedition was going out in search of gold. They could not understand a body of scientific gentlemen going into a desert country, giving up their time and services, and submitting to all the dangers, discomforts and hardships attendant upon the life for any other reason.¹⁴

Horn makes it clear that such speculation was the opinion of the general public, who were not easily convinced that a team of men would go into the interior just to gather interesting specimens. If the Expedition was a vehicle for personal glory, it was not for the kind exemplified by great physical feats usually associated with exploration (i.e., surviving extraordinarily harsh conditions or fighting off hostile "natives"). In fact, despite his own personal history of going to physical extremes (such as his ride to Adelaide), Horn had a "lack of interest in epic feats of exploration."¹⁵ If a quest for personal glory did play a role for Horn, it is possible that he may have been seeking recognition for his contributions in the form of honors from either the colonial Australian or British governments. Such a goal would be in keeping with his overbearing and self-

¹⁴Spencer, *Report*, Vol. 1, v.

¹⁵ Jones, "The Horn Expedition's Place Among Nineteenth-Century Expeditions", 27.

important character. If this was indeed the case, as Mulvaney and Calaby claim, then the Horn Expedition could only be described as a disappointment.¹⁶

In recruiting the scientists who would make up the Expedition party, Horn sought the help of the colonial Australian governments. He wanted only “the best scientific men”¹⁷, and the various governments could recommend their best representatives from the universities. With the help of the governments, Horn was able to raise interest among the scientific community, and soon had assembled a team that “positively glittered with scientists.”¹⁸ The most “prestigious ornament”¹⁹ of the Expedition was Dr. E.C. Stirling, an anthropologist, surgeon, and director of the South Australia museum. At the time of the Expedition Stirling was known for his paleontological work, specifically his excavations of *Diprotodon* fossils.²⁰ Professor Ralph Tate was responsible for geology, paleontology, and botany. The recently graduated geologist J.A. Watt provided additional expertise in the field of geology. Charles Winnecke joined the Expedition as surveyor and meteorologist. Of all the men of the Expedition, Winnecke was the closest to being a career explorer, having traveled in central Australia before. In the days immediately leading up to the Expedition, Winnecke was in Oodnadatta ahead of the other members, where he was occupied “purchasing additional rations, arranging camel loads, making boxes, and attending to a variety of other matters.”²¹ Winnecke fancied himself leader of the Expedition, just one of many disputed factors that led him to publish his own account of the Expedition.

¹⁶ Mulvaney and Calaby, ‘*So Much That Is New*’, 116.

¹⁷ Horn, *Notes By A Nomad*, 59.

¹⁸ Ann Moyal, *A Bright and Savage Land*. (Penguin Books Australia: 1993), 53.

¹⁹ Mulvaney and Calaby, ‘*So Much That Is New*’, 118.

²⁰ Hans Mincham, “Stirling, Sir Edward Charles (1848 - 1919)”, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 6, [Melbourne University Press](http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A060217b.htm), 1976, pp 200-201. <http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A060217b.htm> (accessed Nov. 8, 2010). The *Diprotodon* was a massive prehistoric marsupial.

²¹ Charles Winnecke, *Journal of the Horn Scientific Exploring Expedition, 1894*. (South Australia: C.E. Bristow, Government Printer, North-Terrace, Adelaide, 1897), 5.

Finally, there was Baldwin Spencer, zoologist and photographer. Spencer was also a talented artist who made several drawings and color-plates that were published along with his photographs in the “Report”. In 1894 Spencer was still relatively new to Australia, having arrived only seven years earlier when he took up the post of biology chair at the University of Melbourne.²² Though he had some experience with trips into the bush through his activities with The Field Club of Victoria²³, the journey he undertook as a member of the Horn Expedition was unlike anything he had experienced before. After the Expedition Spencer would completely change the focus of his career from zoology to anthropology, and change the field in the process.²⁴ His interactions with the Aborigines on this voyage would prove to be a series of first encounters that gripped his professional attention for the remainder of his life. It was during the Horn Expedition that Spencer met Frank Gillen, the postmaster of the remote town of Alice Springs.²⁵ Spencer and Gillen became regular collaborators, working together to publish some of the foundational anthropological works on the Aborigines of Australia.

In addition to the professional scientists, two naturalists and specimen collectors, F.W. Belt and G.A. Keartland, accompanied the Expedition party. Keartland was a field ornithologist specifically engaged in the collection of birds. Although he was not a trained professional, his skill and expertise as an ornithologist earned him the respect of the scientific men of the Expedition.²⁶ Finally, there were the “usual camp men”²⁷: a cook, and an assortment of camel drivers, some of whom were of Afghani origin. The

²² Mulvaney and Calaby, ‘*So Much That Is New*’, 70.

²³ Ibid, 101.

²⁴ D.J. Mulvaney, “Spencer, Sir (Walter) Baldwin (1860-1929).” In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H.C.G. Matthew & Brian Harrison, Vol. 51, 819-821. (Oxford University Press: 2004), 820.

²⁵ Mulvaney and Calaby, ‘*So Much That Is New*’, 117.

²⁶ Ibid, 120.

²⁷ Spencer, *Report*, Vol. 1, 2.

Expedition also made use of Aboriginal guides, referred casually in the “Report” as the “black boys.”²⁸ In his “Journal”, Winnecke goes into much more detail concerning the Expedition’s support staff (no doubt due to the fact that he was directly involved in the preparation and outfitting of the Expedition). Winnecke’s list of personnel includes “H. Edgar and R. Taylor, camel-drivers; C. Laycock, cook; C. Pritchard and W. Russel, Government prospectors, Trooper Williams, of the mounted police; Moosha and Guzzie Boolooch, Afghan camel-drivers; and Harry, a black tracker of the native mounted police.”²⁹ This roster is worth noting not only for its more complete listing of members, but also because it shows the wide range of backgrounds and professions of the Expedition’s members. Scientists (both professional and amateur), trackers, animal drivers, and experienced explorers all worked together, lending unique talents and skills to the Expedition’s progress. Horn himself even accompanied the Expedition for a brief period, taking on a more active role than might be expected of a patron.

All in all, a total of fourteen men set out together from Oodnadatta on Saturday, the 5th of May in 1894. The vast and virtually unexplored Australian interior lay before them. In his narrative of the Expedition, Baldwin Spencer provides an account of his experiences on the Expedition, blending scientific information with remarkably vivid descriptive writing in a distinctive piece of travel literature.

Spencer’s Narrative: “Through Larapinta Land”

²⁸ Ibid 1, 2.

²⁹ Winnecke, “*Journal*”, 5-6.

“Through Larapinta Land” stands out from the “Report” to which it is attached in that it is not a work of purely scientific analysis. Although Spencer was a highly trained scientist, his narrative is unencumbered by technical or academic jargon. Spencer relies instead on his ability to describe people, places, and events with exacting attention to detail. Given his ability to capture detail as an artist, perhaps it is no surprise that Spencer should exhibit similar tendencies in his writing. By devoting attention to the details of the Expedition – be it describing a new species or relating an anecdote of an encounter with the Aborigines – Spencer purported to offer his readers an autoptic narrative that would be engaging to the common reader. At the opening of the narrative, Spencer remarks that he wrote the narrative in order to summarize the Expedition “in a more or less popular form.”³⁰ He achieves this goal beyond what might normally be expected. Despite writing in a ‘popular form’, Spencer never sacrifices his professional integrity as a scientist – “Through Larapinta Land” was by no means over-simplified for the sake of its readers. Spencer is able to depict science in a compelling way while conveying important information about the actual scientific work conducted by the Expedition.

Spencer’s work occupies a unique place in the body of Australian expeditionary narrative. The scholar Derek Mulvaney has argued that “Through Larapinta Land” “merits a niche as an Australian classic.”³¹ This argument is well founded, as Spencer’s narrative is rich and engrossing piece of work. More than the simple summary that Spencer humbly claims it to be, “Through Larapinta Land” was a rich and engrossing work of travel literature. His narrative stands as a significant contribution to literature

³⁰Spencer, *Report*, Vol. 1, 1.

³¹ Mulvaney and Calaby, ‘*So Much That Is New*’, 134-135.

surrounding Australia's central desert. Unlike Winnecke's account, which was published as a day-by-day journal, Spencer's narrative expands on his field journals, allowing him to dwell longer on certain episodes or delve into more detailed descriptions of a particular specimen than a rough field notebook. The narrative is defined by the sense of movement that Spencer conveys, describing a physical journey that transports the reader along with Spencer as he learns the rhythms of life in the bush. Spencer's ability to depict the landscape through which the Expedition travels creates a strong sense of place, allowing readers to familiarize themselves with central Australia in a way that is both compelling and informative. Spencer's narrative depicts the interior as it is, without resorting to dramatic or otherwise sensational methods.

From the beginning of his narrative, Spencer draws the reader directly into the routines of life on the trail. The Expedition traveled by camel, a fact that seemed to be a source of endless frustration for Spencer. Spencer reflects on the unique challenges of working from a camel's back, observing that although he might see "a lizard or an insect which you are anxious to secure, but long before you can persuade your camel to sit down the animal is far away and safely hidden."³² His frustrations with these capricious beasts of burden led him to try any means necessary to improve their performance, as when he named his personal camel after the prominent Australian scientist Baron von Mueller, in the hopes that "as the bearer of such a distinguished name, he would behave himself accordingly, but I was disappointed in him."³³ In these interactions, Spencer portrays himself in a comical light, quickly doing away with any assumptions of

³²Spencer, *Report*, Vol. 1, 3.

³³*Ibid*, 7.

grandiose importance. Spencer further established the routines of camp life by describing the daily routines of the Expedition:

Whilst on the march our daily programme was much the same. Usually just before sunrise we were up and dressed. Very shortly after sunrise we had breakfast. Our camp cook, Laycock, was an old hand at the work, his experience dating back to the building of the overland telegraph line; and thanks to him, so long as we remained in the main camp we lived in comparative luxury.³⁴

Even in the depths of the desert, a proper breakfast was an important daily ritual for the members of the Expedition. Establishing the routines of camp life was an important strategy for Spencer, as it linked his readers to the daily experiences of the Expedition party. Most importantly, it helped establish the pace of the Expedition, furthering the sense that the reader was experiencing the journey in real time.

Some of Spencer's best writing comes from his descriptions of the desert landscape itself. He invoked a strong sense of place, portraying the desert in a compelling yet accurate way. For example, when Spencer describes a desert sunset, he makes great use of language that is vivid while clearly showing his readers exactly what he experienced:

In the desolate county near to Macumba the effect was really beautiful. Away to the east the land rose to flat-topped, terraced ranges. In the foreground were white-blue salt bushes, with pale, light blue patches of low herbage and still lighter tufts of grass amongst them, standing out in strong contrast to the purple-brown gibbers. The country was crossed by dark lines of mulga, marking the creek beds and streaking away up to the hills, which stood out sharply against a cold steel-blue sky, melting above into salmon pink and this into deep ultra marine. In the west was a rich after-glow, against which the stony plains and hills looked dark purple, with the mulga branches standing out sharp and thin against the sky. The colours of the Central Australian landscape at sunrise and sunset are just those which at morning and evening light up the barren ranges of Arabia—everything is soft and brilliant, but very thin.³⁵

³⁴Ibid, 7.

³⁵ Ibid, 17.

Spencer achieves a great deal through this passage. He recreates the environment of the central Australia with stunning detail, focusing attention on the quality of light during sunsets. Spencer combines many elements to create the larger picture. He offers careful description to the colors and arrangement of vegetation in this scene, noting how they play into the composition of the larger scene.

Specific elements of Spencer's attention were directed specifically the distant at the geomorphologies he traversed and encountered on the course of the expedition. He noted geological features, specifically the distant ridge-tops and the stony gibber plains that provide the framework for the sunset. Spencer made effective use of colors, noting shades of blue, purple, white, and pink. In his later description of Ayers Rock, Spencer makes similar use of color, painting the rock in "brilliant venetian red"³⁶ against a sea of dull green mulga. Perhaps the most compelling element in Spencer's description is the interaction between all of these different elements – for example, the way in which the mulga branches are 'sharp and thin' against the sky, or how the creek bed is 'streaking away' to the distant hills, implying movement and action in an otherwise still composition. As an author Spencer exhibits the same artistic skills expressed in his drawings and photographs. Spencer's pen guides the reader's imagination to an accurate description of the desert at sunset. This depiction celebrates the desert through which the Expedition is passing as a place both unfamiliar yet worthy of respect and study.

In one of his first extended encounters with the Aborigines, Spencer again makes use of his descriptive writing capabilities to depict a compelling scene. From the following passage, we can see the beginning of Spencer's fascination with the Aborigines. While passing through Tempe Downs in the southern edge MacDonnell

³⁶ Ibid, 85.

Ranges, the members of the Expedition had the opportunity to witness a nighttime ceremony (referred to as a corroboree). Spencer recorded the ceremony in particularly vivid detail:

A place was cleared in the scrub and fires lighted at either end. At one end sat the audience, whilst the performers danced up and down the open space keeping time to the chanting of the audience, who also beat upon the ground with sticks. The fitful light shining on the white trunks of the gum trees and on the decorated bodies of the performers and the low monotonous chanting, at one time breaking away into a louder refrain and then dying away into a murmur, produced a curiously weird effect...³⁷

This was an important encounter for Spencer, as it allowed him to begin focusing his skills on describing the Aborigines, who would become his primary subject in subsequent years. This is also a significant passage in the narrative in that it places the reader directly in the world of the Aborigines. In the already unfamiliar environment of the central Australian desert, the ceremonies and practices of the Aborigines were particularly alien to a European audience, including the scientific staff of the Expedition. The ceremony seems even more otherworldly when considering that its nocturnal setting. Yet Spencer's description of this ceremony does not paint the Aborigines in barbaric colors. Indeed, his account is decidedly factual. He takes care to establish the physical space, a clearing in the middle of the bush. Lit by a fire casting 'fitful light', Spencer remarks on the interplay between the bodies of the dancers, the sparse lighting, and the low chanting that provides a rhythmic foundation for the ceremony. By commenting on the way in which the light shines on the trees, the reader can imagine how small and insular this event must seem against the dark of night in the central Australian bush. One

³⁷ Ibid, 72-73.

interesting element of this scene is that Spencer does not indicate from where he and his companions observed the ceremony. He establishes that an audience is seated at one end of the clearing; however, this group is participating in the ceremony by chanting. We can assume that Spencer and the other scientists sat apart from the others, further isolating the ceremony in Spencer's description. This allows the reader to feel completely drawn into the world of the ceremony, as though experiencing it individually. As with his description of a desert sunset, Spencer guides the imagination of his readers through a vivid yet factual account.

Spencer further explores the world of the Aborigines by relating one of their myths surrounding a distinctive landmark. The scientists of the Expedition visited Chambers Pillar, a large column standing alone in the desert. Spencer includes an Aboriginal explanation for its existence:

The blacks have a rather curious myth to account for the origin of the pillar. They say that in what they call the Alcheringa (or as Mr. Gillen appropriately renders it the "dream times"), a certain noted warrior journeyed to the east and, killing with his big stone knife all the men, he seized the women and brought them back with him to his own country. Camping for the night on this spot he and the women were transformed into stone, and it is his body which now forms the pillar, whilst the women were fashioned into the fantastic peaks grouped together to form what is now known as Castle Hill, a mile away to the north.³⁸

Spencer's inclusion of this story is an important addition to the narrative as a whole. By using an Aboriginal myth when describing Chambers Pillar, Spencer is creating a greater sense of the Aboriginal presence in central Australia. Also of note is Spencer's use of the term 'dream times', as this is the first time this term appears in the literature of the

³⁸ Ibid, 50.

Australia desert.³⁹ The fact that Spencer took the time to record an Aboriginal myth is significant. This indicates his developing interest in Aboriginal culture, as well as providing his readers with a sense of what that culture's mythology is like.

Throughout the narrative, Spencer provides examples of the Expedition's scientific progress. Even within the first few days of their journey, Spencer remarked that the majority of plants, animals, and landscapes encountered were "more or less novel to us and already a good many new forms had been collected, facts noted and we had begun our work in earnest."⁴⁰ As a zoologist, Spencer consistently takes stock of the animals encountered along the way. Far from being dry and academics when discussing his particular field of expertise, Spencer was able to convey scientific information in a concise, informative, and engaging narrative. The log of the Expedition noted, for example, the discovery of a new marsupial species, the Sandhill Dunnart. Spencer wrote:

Whilst we were riding along...our attention was drawn by Mr. Cowle [a constable who assisted the Expedition] to a small rat-like creature which was running about, and dismounting we captured it after a smart chase, during which it ran from tussock to tussock. It turned out to be one of the most interesting of the new animals found during the Expedition. It is a new species of the genus *Sminthopsis*, which includes pouched mice...The little animal now captured for the first time has from its living amongst the sandhills been called *Sminthopsis psammophilus*. It must evidently be able to exist without any supply of water other than what it gets either from the moisture in its food or perhaps from the heavy dews which fall during certain seasons of the year, and it was the only small marsupial we saw running about during the day time, for most of them are strictly nocturnal.⁴¹

This passage demonstrates the way in which explorers like Spencer took advantage of favorable encounters. A chance sighting during the progress of a day's ride led to the

³⁹ Barry Hill, "Through Larapinta Land: Baldwin Spencer's Glass Case" in *Exploring Central Australia: Society, the Environment, and the 1894 Horn Expedition*, ed. S.R. Morton and D.J. Mulvaney, 31-41. (Surrey Beatty & Sons, Chipping Norton, 1996), 32.

⁴⁰ Spencer, *Report*, Vol. 1, 23.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 84.

discovery of a species new to science. By including the process by which the marsupial was captured (chasing it between tussocks of grass), Spencer shows readers the realities of conducting scientific work while in the desert – this is the science of discovery through direct experience. Spencer neatly sums up the life history of this little animal without weighing down the text with unnecessary technical details. He places it into a particular family, names it according to its habitat, and then relates interesting facts concerning its habits and survival. The accessibility of this kind of descriptive science allows non-academic readers to understand the new information gathered by the Expedition, within a larger narrative, providing a tangible context.

The modern response to “Through Larapinta Land” has been mixed. In his article “Through Larapinta Land: Baldwin Spencer’s Glass Case”, the writer Barry Hill argues that Spencer’s narrative is “impersonal”⁴² and fails to truly capture the Australian Outback. According to Hill, “Through Larapinta Land” is too formal, stiff, and disengaged to merit event merit being called a narrative. Hill maintains that Spencer’s use of description as a literary mechanism is alienating, a style that “sets up few expectations of engagement with the landscape.”⁴³ To Hill, Spencer is a Victorian through and through, too lacking in personality to create any kind of response among his readers.

While Hill does offer some valuable criticism of Spencer’s work, he judges it too harshly. As a writer of the late twentieth century, Hill reads “Through Larapinta Land” through a modern lens, without attempting to contextualize or understand Spencer’s writing as an example of late nineteenth century natural history narrative. Hill condemns

⁴² Barry Hill, “Glass Case” 38.

⁴³ Ibid, 33.

Spencer by holding him to a completely modern standard. This is an effective method of making Spencer appear dated; however, that Spencer's narrative is so rooted in its time is part of what makes it a fascinating and revealing document.

Hill analyzes Spencer's description of the desert sunset as an example of Spencer's failing as a writer. He notes that immediately before the intricate description of the scene, Spencer wrote:

Travelling over this country during daytime, with its dried up creeks and stony gibber, there is little which looks picturesque; but at sundown the scene becomes quite changed, and it is hard to believe that the picturesque appearance is due simply to atmospheric conditions.⁴⁴

Hill points to this passage as being indicative of Spencer's feelings about the central Australian desert. In his opinion Spencer can only see beauty in the desert when the light lends it a romantic appearance. As convincing as this may sound, Hill is overlooking Spencer's actual intent. Spencer is not saying 'if not for the light, this landscape would be ugly'. By comparing the desolate gibbers plain during the daytime and at sunset. Spencer is simply showing the ways in which light can dramatically change the composition of the desert. As the light changes, the desert comes alive with new colors and interactions between its features. Light is an essential element for Spencer as a naturalist and artist. The sunset scene that Spencer recreates for his readers relies on light to unite the many different components of the larger picture.

Hill would have us believe that Spencer is an uncomfortable academic whose narrative is a dry piece of description that lacks the sense of wonder expressed by the accounts of earlier explorers.⁴⁵ Here Hill is lamenting the fact that Spencer (and the members of the Horn Expedition as a whole) does not engage in the kind of exploration

⁴⁴ Spencer, *Report*, Vol. 1, 17.

⁴⁵ Hill, "Glass Case", 34.

heroics that defined an earlier generation of travelers in Australia's arid center. Hill seems to forget that the Horn Expedition was designed to be a purely scientific expedition, its members chosen not for their bravado but for their expertise and ability as professional scientists. Spencer is not a poet, thus his narrative does not engage his readers in a poetic way. By using description as a means of relating the Expedition's journey, Spencer engaged with his readers by conveying scientific information about central Australia with ekphrastic richness.

As a narrative, "Through Larapinta Land" takes its readers on a scientific journey through the desert, guided by Spencer's precise descriptions. Rather than romanticize the Expedition, Spencer instead relies on the use of fact and careful observation as a means of capturing the attention of his readers. His narrative is in many ways an immersive experience, plunging deep into the desert alongside the scientists of the Expedition. More than anything else, the landscape of central Australia is what lingers on after the narrative's end. Through description, Spencer was able to depict an obscure part of the world in remarkable detail, showing his readers such sights as "Ayers Rock glowing bright red in the sunset; the group of graceful palm trees by the side of the rock pools in Palm Creek and the wonderful gorges amongst the McDonnell Range."⁴⁶ Such scenes remain embedded in the mind's eye.

"Through Larapinta Land" is not the only narrative of the Horn Expedition. Charles Winnecke, the self-styled leader of the Horn Expedition, published his journal in 1897 to provide his own version of events. The resulting text provides a fascinating comparison to Spencer's narrative, and reveals something of the clash of egos and power

⁴⁶ Spencer, Report, Vol. 1, 136.

dynamics at play between Winnecke and other members of the Expedition, specifically with Horn.

Winnecke's Journal

Before analyzing Winnecke's account of the Horn Expedition, we must first understand why he felt the need to have his journal published separately from the official "Report" edited by Spencer. As previously established, when Horn accompanied the Expedition for a brief period, he managed to personally insult virtually every member of the team he had assembled. As the "most experienced bushman in the expedition,"⁴⁷ who had traveled in central Australia before, Winnecke was an individualist in much the same vein as Horn. His negative experiences with Horn during the Expedition undoubtedly left an impression that would contribute to their later conflict. The final straw for Winnecke came after the Expedition, as the "Report" was being compiled and edited by Spencer. Horn refused to give Winnecke's journal highest preference in the final version of the "Report" because it claimed that Winnecke was the leader of the Expedition.⁴⁸ Outraged at Horn's refusal to publish his journal or even his detailed maps, Winnecke had his version published by the South Australian Government, only to see Horn use his own influence to have Winnecke's journal pulled from circulation after having been in print for less than a year.⁴⁹ In the introduction to his journal, Winnecke did not shy away from addressing his dispute with Horn. Instead, he explained that although his work should

⁴⁷ Mulvaney and Calaby, *So Much That Is New*, 118.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 134.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 134.

have appeared in the official “Report”, Horn “for reasons not given”⁵⁰ decided not to include his contributions, going so far as to decline reimbursing Winnecke for the cost of preparing his materials.

While it is difficult to criticize Winnecke for deciding to publish his account separately, it is easy to sympathize with Horn for wanting to exclude Winnecke’s materials entirely. Winnecke makes very bold claims as to his role on the Expedition, chief among them his claim to have been the leader of the Expedition: “Tuesday, May 15th...Mr. Horn to-day formally transferred the leadership and supreme control of the expedition to myself.”⁵¹ Related as a simple matter of fact, this claim alone accounted for a great deal of his conflict with Horn. Throughout his journal, Winnecke refers to his role as leader, making sure that all decisions concerning the Expedition were direct orders given by him. Unfortunately, this cannot be confirmed or denied by Spencer’s narrative, which never addresses the question of the Expedition’s leadership.

In addition to claiming direct leadership of the Expedition, Winnecke downplays the roles of the actual scientists of the Expedition. At the end of his introduction, he extends his thanks to “those scientific members of the party who aided me in our hurried ramble through the yet unmastered wilds of Central Australia.”⁵² This rather condescending sentence establishes that not only was Winnecke the leader of the Expedition, the scientists ‘aided’ him, implying their subservient roles and less important overall contributions to the success of the Expedition. Winnecke further downplays the other members of the Expedition by rarely referring to anyone by name, identifying them instead by their areas of expertise: Stirling becomes “the Anthropologist”, Keartland “the

⁵⁰ Winnecke, *Journal*, 3.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 9.

⁵² *Ibid*, 4.

Ornithologist” and so on.⁵³ He rarely remarks on the work of his colleagues, and when he does it is with a certain sense of disinterest. Winnecke also refers back to his previous experience as an explorer of central Australia to give himself greater prestige. On a solo excursion, he reaches “a post erected by me in 1878.”⁵⁴ This firmly establishes Winnecke as the most experienced member of the Expedition, as they are passing through territory previously explored by Winnecke himself.

Stylistically, there are several key features that differentiate Winnecke’s journal from Spencer’s narrative, the most obvious of which is format. Spencer kept several field journal and sketchbooks, and expanded upon his entries in those notebooks to create his narrative. There are no breaks in the text to differentiate certain days from each other or isolate a digression on a particular topic. The entire text flows as one continuous story. By contrast, Winnecke’s account is simply his own journal from the Expedition, supposedly presented in its original form. It adheres very strictly to a day-by day format, with sharp, concise summaries of the Expedition party’s daily activities. In a typical entry, lush descriptions (such as those found in Spencer’s narrative) are completely absent:

Camp No. 1; bar 29-80in., ther. 32°, wind S.E. Carried out my decision with regard to Trooper Williams and the two horses. A few interesting botanical and biological specimens were obtained here by the Professors Tate and Spencer. We commenced packing the camels at 7 a.m., but did not resume the journey till two hours afterwards. Excepting a short midday halt at Storm Creek, we travelled all day at the highest speed the camels were capable of. At 6:30 p.m., having covered a distance of twenty-one miles, we camped near a dry swamp. The country traversed was dreary and desolate, utterly destitute of grass, and without any traces of water.⁵⁵

⁵³ Ibid, 25, 28.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 19.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 6.

Here we see several elements that define Winnecke's journal. Ever the meticulous meteorologist, Winnecke begins each entry by noting measurements of weather. Here we also see him acting the role of leader by 'carrying out' his decision concerning Williams and a pair of horses. Concerned largely with practical concerns of the Expedition, he notes the pace of travel by camel, keeping track of exact distances covered. His description of the landscape is sparse, making no note of any of the scientific work that was being undertaken on a daily basis.

Just as his daily entries are exceedingly brief, significant events and episodes merit little or no discussion by Winnecke's pen. This is a particularly revealing way to compare his account with Spencer's narrative. In a lengthy episode, Spencer describes the capture of several young emus by the Aborigines:

Whilst at reedy creek I had good opportunity to witness the tracking powers of the blacks. I was out in the scrub with three of them when suddenly they came to a standstill and after carefully examining the hard ground they became very excited. On asking what was the matter they told me that there was an emu about with six young ones. The three of them separated and commenced to track it up. They went on a trot the whole time; not a word was spoken but where the scrub was thin they communicated with each other by signs. After two mile's run, during which it was quite enough for me to do to keep with them and to look after my collecting material without troubling to look after tracks which I could not detect, they came to a sudden halt, and there in the open patch in front of us was the mother emu with its six young ones. The mother at once made off, but, shouting and laughing, the blacks soon caught the young ones and we brought them back to camp and carried them alive for some hundreds of miles on camel back. The ground was so hard that only an experienced white man would have detected the tracks of the old bird, but it did not take the blacks more than a minute's careful examination of the very faint tracks to come to the conclusion as to the correct number of young ones.⁵⁶

This passage finds Spencer touching on several themes simultaneously. We see how the Aborigines played a significant role in the work of the Expedition as specimen gatherers, exhibiting uncanny knowledge of the desert environment in which they live. This

⁵⁶ Spencer, *Report*, 17.

episode intertwines the landscape with the fauna, flora, and humans that inhabit it. Spencer's descriptive style is well suited to conveying this incident, sparing no detail of this remarkable feat of animal tracking. By comparison, Winnecke relates the same event in a completely different manner. He mentions the episode in passing, simply noting "...six young emus were captured alive by the black boys and handed over to the ornithologist for his collection."⁵⁷ Winnecke covers the entire event within one sentence, whereas Spencer took almost an entire page.

Winnecke further distinguishes his account from Spencer's narrative by his constant naming of geographical features. In entry after entry he names mountains, streams, and hills in honor of prominent members of Australian society. In one entry he comes across a prominent hill, and names it "Mount Holder, after the Hon. F. W. Holder, Treasurer of South Australia and Minister Controlling the Northern Territory."⁵⁸ In naming this hill, Winnecke makes a point of listing Holder's importance within Australian government. In all other cases of his bestowing names, Winnecke's follows a similar pattern. Perhaps he dealt out names with such frequency to recognize previous patrons or solicit new patronage from those who might read his journal.

Winnecke's habit of bestowing names is a behavior that might be expected of an explorer. The comparison of both accounts comes down to the distinction between scientist and explorer, with Spencer in the role of the former and Winnecke the latter. In his narrative, Spencer devotes careful attention to describing central Australia scientifically, making note of the landscape, new species of plants and animals, as well as delving into the Expedition's encounters with the Aborigines. By contrast Winnecke's journal is that

⁵⁷ Winnecke, *Journal*, 28.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

of an experienced explorer leading a team of gentlemen scientists into the wilderness. In this dichotomy, scientist and explorer fulfill two very different roles, with little overlap. While Spencer's aim is to convey new information about central Australia in an engaging and accurate manner, Winnecke is attempting to establish his role within the Horn Expedition as part of his continuing legacy as a bushman. Both accounts examine the same events through distinct lenses. However in the end Spencer's is the most effective, as it creates a sense of place that Winnecke's journal cannot convey.

Conclusion

The scientific results of the Horn Expedition were significant, and played "an important part in formulating knowledge of central Australia."⁵⁹ Eight new plant species and 171 new animal species were recorded, in addition to the geological data gathered over the course of the Expedition.⁶⁰ The anthropological work of the Expedition was also of great importance. Although Stirling was the official anthropologist, Spencer valued the work of the amateur ethnographer Gillen enough to devote an entire chapter to his work.⁶¹ The partnership between Spencer and Gillen began with the Horn Expedition, and would result in some of the foundational studies of the Australian Aborigines. One of the most immediately significant results of the Expedition were Spencer's conclusions in biogeography. Based on the data gathered during the

⁵⁹ D.J. Mulvaney, " 'A splendid lot of fellows': achievements and consequences of the Horn Expedition," in *Exploring Central Australia: Society, the Environment, and the 1894 Horn Expedition*, ed. S.R. Morton & D.J. Mulvaney, 3-12. (Surrey Beatty & Sons: Chipping Norton, 1996), 6.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 6.

⁶¹ Mulvaney and Calaby, 'So Much That Is New', 135.

Expedition, Spencer was able to divide Australia into three regions: Bassian, Eyrean, and Torresian.⁶² These distinctions allowed for a greater understanding of species distribution across Australia. As a scientific expedition, the Horn Expedition was a true success.

Spencer's narrative, "Through Larapinta Land", was a travel narrative that offered readers something more substantial than previous expedition narratives of Australia. As a scientist, Spencer strove to write an account that would recapture the central Australian desert with accurate data and an engaging narrative. With its lush descriptive passages, "Through Larapinta Land" stands out against Winnecke's competing account for its immersive qualities. Spencer's narrative is written in a manner that allows readers to understand the scientific information contained within it while simultaneously gaining a sense of what life was like in the central Australian desert. By reading "Through Larapinta Land" a nineteenth century audience could begin to comprehend the vast and unfamiliar interior of Australia.

In this chapter I have touched briefly on the Expedition's interactions with the Aborigines. These interactions and their representation in the "Report" rank as the most complex aspect of the Expedition party's experiences in the desert, and are far too intricate to dissect here. Because of this, the issues surrounding the Expedition and the Aborigines deserve center stage in the following chapter.

⁶² Spencer, *Report*, Vol.1, 196-199.

Chapter 2

Encountering the Aborigines

Introduction

The Central Australian Aborigine is the living representative of the stone age, who still fashions his spear-heads from flint or sandstone and performs the most daring surgical operations with them. His origin and history are lost in the gloomy mists of the past. He has no written record and few oral traditions. In appearance he is a naked, hirsute savage, with a type and features occasionally pronouncedly Jewish...he is...as treacherous as Judas...He has no traditions, and yet continues to practise with scrupulous exactness a number of hideous customs... After an experience of many years I say without hesitation that he is absolutely untamable...Thanks to the untiring efforts of the missionary and the stockman, he is being rapidly "civilised" off the face of the earth, and in another hundred years the sole remaining evidence of his existence will be the fragments of flint which he has fashioned so rudely. It was for this reason that I thought it desirable to get some reliable information, supplemented by photography, of this race while there were any of them remaining in primitive condition.⁶³

-William Austin Horn

In order to understand the significance of the Horn Expedition and contextualize the efforts of its scientists, we must consider the anthropological work of the Expedition. Perhaps no other scientific subject offers such a clear window into the minds of Baldwin Spencer, William Austin Horn, and the society in which they existed. Horn identified ethnography as a central part of the Expedition's mission. When considering the Aborigines, Social Darwinism was the rule of the day. This attitude reflected the belief that Australia "had been cut off from the process of continuous improvement...and constituted a living museum of relic forms...its original people were incapable of adaptation and therefore doomed to extinction."⁶⁴ To believe that Australia could be placed within a spectrum of continuous development required a belief in Darwin's theory of evolution. In Australia, the scientific climate was "unfavourable to Darwinian

⁶³ Spencer. *Report*, Part 1, ix.

⁶⁴ Macintyre, *History of Australia*, 145.

thought.”⁶⁵ However, by the late 19th century, applying evolutionary science to the aborigines provided an opportunity to explain these strange and ‘relic’ natives. The concept of Australia as a continent full of ‘relic forms’ extended beyond flora and fauna to include “even the human inhabitants”⁶⁶. According to the Social Darwinist approach to anthropology, the natives of the continent represented the very lowest form of human existence. Social Darwinism offered scientific “proof” of the Aborigines inferiority to white European settlers, thus providing legitimacy to the ongoing displacement of native groups. The scientists of the Horn Expedition readily adopted a Social Darwinist mindset, as evidenced by their ethnographical work in the “Report”.

One of the major goals of the Expedition was to study the natives of Central Australia through a scientific lens. Although interactions between Aborigines and Europeans had been a regular feature of Australian life since the discovery of the continent, the Horn Expedition was in a privileged to evaluate the Aborigines in explicitly scientific terms. As an expedition that was created with the explicit intention of exploring the interior scientifically, the Horn Expedition was poised to capture a purportedly accurate assessment of the Aborigines. Part of what makes the Horn Expedition so fascinating is the contradictory ways in which the scientists engaged with the Aborigines. Although they were undoubtedly Social Darwinists, there is a tone of remorse in some of their writings, suggesting a sense of loss at the continuous destruction of the Aboriginal lifestyle. In Horn’s introductory passage at the beginning of this chapter, he hinted that something will be lost in the process of ‘civilizing’ the Aborigines. This attitude was reflected by Stirling (the Expedition’s anthropologist) when he

⁶⁵ Ann Moyal, *A Bright and Savage Land*. (Penguin Books Australia: 1993), 140.

⁶⁶ Macintyre, *History of Australia*, 2.

remarked that “The vices and diseases of Europeans have already borne their evil fruit, and the native population, never a large one, has diminished with painful rapidity”⁶⁷.

Although they hold openly Social Darwinist and racist opinions of the Aborigines, the scientists of the Expedition recognize that they are seeing some of the last Aborigines that live according to traditional modes.

One particularly remarkable and revealing incident from the Expedition involves the theft of sacred stones and other objects by the Expedition scientists Stirling and Winnecke. We see three different accounts of this: Stirling’s report, Spencer’s narrative, and Winnecke’s journal. Winnecke offers the most detailed record of the incident, in one of his longest and most in-depth entries, a departure from his typically concise style. This incident is key to understanding the ways in which the Aborigines were regarded, and how scientific fieldwork was conducted. Despite the fact that these objects were sacred and held high importance among the Aborigines, the members of the Horn Expedition felt justified in taking these objects to further scientific understanding of the Aborigines. This incident, seemingly small to a European audience, had “destructive and immediate”⁶⁸ consequences for the Aboriginal community, who had just lost a significant deposit of sacred knowledge.

Although Stirling was the official anthropologist of the Expedition, his analysis of the Aborigines was by no means as dynamic or wide-ranging as Spencer’s more anecdotal observations found throughout his narrative. Spencer constantly remarks on Aboriginal knowledge of the desert, and offers many episodes in which we see Aborigines gathering specimens for the Spencer and the Expedition. These episodes are

⁶⁷ Spencer, *Report*, Part 3, 3-4.

⁶⁸ Mulvaney and Calaby, 127.

fascinating moments of cultural exchange that reveal the ways in which the Horn Expedition was the first “in which Europeans focused their attention upon the structures and details of Aboriginal life, and upon its means of sustenance, the bush itself.”⁶⁹ The scientists of the Horn Expedition also had an effective tool with which to document the Aborigines of Central Australia: the camera. At the time of the Horn Expedition, the camera was “a new tool for ethnographic exploration”⁷⁰ that allowed the scientists of the Expedition to recreate their experiences with unprecedented detail. Spencer, who was recruited as Expedition photographer in addition to his expertise as a biologist, used his camera to capture scenes of Aboriginal life in the Central Australian desert. His photographs capture the Aborigines in a variety of settings, mostly in ceremonial settings against the landscape which they inhabited. His photographs are published in the “Report” along with those of Frank Gillen, the Alice Springs stationmaster whose firsthand observations of the Aborigines proved so invaluable to the Expedition. In contrast to Spencer’s photography, which typically frame the subjects within the greater landscape, Gillen took posed portraits, placing Aboriginal subjects front and center for the viewer.

Spencer and the Aborigines

⁶⁹ Jones, “The Horn Expedition’s Place Among Nineteenth Century Expedition’s”, 27.

⁷⁰ Moyal, *Bright & Savage Land*, 54

Through his role as Expedition biologist, Spencer had several unique opportunities to interact with the Aborigines encountered during the course of the Expedition. Spencer consistently used Aborigines as specimen collectors. Their extensive knowledge of the desert and its animal inhabitants proved invaluable to him, helping to successfully gather examples of fauna both classified and not. Using natives to gather specimens was a shrewd decision on Spencer's part. In his description of working from the back of a camel, Spencer noted that one might see "a lizard or an insect which you are anxious to secure, but long before you can persuade your camel to sit down the animal is far away and safely hidden."⁷¹ Despite some experience from camping trips with the Field Naturalists' Club of Victoria⁷², Spencer was still largely unaccustomed to life in the bush and the rigors of collecting in the field. Working in the desert of the interior was by no means the genteel science of the Field Club. In this environment, Spencer had to work quickly to adjust and work effectively while on the move. As residents of the desert, the Aborigines were situated to be of assistance to Spencer. In his narrative, Spencer remarked that the "aid of blacks is simply indispensable in procuring specimens"⁷³. When Spencer called upon his native guides and the Aborigines he met while traveling through the desert to assist him, he was engaging with them in a new way. In this relationship, they possessed the upper hand in that they knew how to interact with the harsh desert environment effectively to their benefit. By using Aborigines as specimen collectors, Spencer was doing more than just taking advantage of their desert knowledge. By observing the Aborigines at work in the desert and relating episodes of collaboration within his narrative, Spencer was

⁷¹ Spencer, *Report*, Part 1, 3.

⁷² Mulvaney and Calaby, *So Much That Is New*, 101.

⁷³ Spencer, *Report*, Part 1, 29.

highlighting and also inventing the ways in which the Aborigines were connected to the desert landscape.

In one example, Spencer mentions that Water-Holding Frogs (which burrow to escape the heat of the desert) may be used as a water supply in times of scarcity. While a white settler might think himself in a place devoid of water, “A native will tell you at once where to dig for a frog, being guided by faint tracks often indistinguishable to the unpractised eye of the white man”⁷⁴. To survive in the desert, it would seem that one must possess an intimate knowledge of the environment and its inhabitants both plant and animal. Spencer’s narrative holds several examples and episodes that present the Aborigines in a positive light, showing moments of cross-cultural collaboration. These moments in which the Aborigines were able to assist Spencer highlight the contact between learned and vernacular empiricism. Spencer, the learned scientist, relied on the exhaustive practical knowledge of the Aborigines in order to successfully explore the desert and gather specimens.

The practical knowledge of the Aborigines was often revealed in unexpected ways. Although Spencer was using the Aborigines as collectors, they interacted with the desert in a distinctly different manner than would a late Victorian scientist like Spencer. The Aborigines often collected specimens with seemingly novel methods, as mentioned in the following excerpt:

One day in Summer...the blacks came up with a number of lizards...Having my hands full of specimens, I asked a blackfellow to look after it and not to let it escape, when to my surprise he simply put it down on the hot sand...when placed on the ground it began to travel at some rate, but after going five yards its movements became slower and before ten yards had been traversed

⁷⁴ Ibid., 22.

they ceased and the animal was quite dead—simply apparently baked to death by contact with the hot sand.⁷⁵

This excerpt is a particularly prominent example of the ways in which Spencer interacted with the Aborigines. This kind of collaborative work is an example of positive interaction between the Aborigines and the Expedition. Here we see how the Aborigines use their practical knowledge of the desert to assist the Expedition. While Spencer was initially surprised that the collectors released their recently captured lizards, they are confident of the fact that the hot sand would halt the lizards. This kind of practical experience was outside of Spencer's realm, thus highlighting his need for Aboriginal assistance in conducting his scientific work.

As with his lush analysis of a desert sunset, Spencer also turns his descriptive eye to Aboriginal ritual and ceremony. When describing his encounters with the Aborigines, Spencer was beginning to develop as an anthropologist, shifting his focus from biology to the indigenous people who captured his professional attention. Spencer spares no details, recreating his encounters with precision in order to place his readers directly in the moment he is describing. In keeping with his style, his descriptions are also informative and accessible. A good example of this can be found in the following excerpt, in which Spencer describes the preparation for a ceremony:

Once when wandering through the scrub at Tempe Downs I came across a party of some twelve men preparing for a corroboree to be held in the evening...they sat down in pairs, two men opposite to each other, with the requisite amount of coloured down in little heaps close at hand. Blood was drawn into the concavity of a spear thrower to serve, when congealed, as a gum with which to attach the down. As a general rule the blood is obtained by cutting a vein in the arm with a sharp flint or a piece of glass if such can be secured, but in this instance it was all obtained by probing the sub-incised urethra with a sharp, pointed stick. Then each man took a short stick with a little opossum fur string twisted round one end so as to form a brush, dipped this into the

⁷⁵ Ibid., 28.

blood and smeared it over the place to which he wished to attach the grass down on to the helmet, face, or body of his friend sitting opposite him...While this preparation is going on, and it may last for hours, a low humming of a corroboree tune is kept up, though, every now and again they burst forth into a louder refrain and the gradually sink back into a subdued and monotonous repetition of the notes as if the music were dying away in the distance.⁷⁶

As with his descriptions of the desert, this passage exemplifies Spencer's ability to place his reader's directly in the scene, bringing attention to the important details. This particular passage is elegantly composed, subtly drawing the reader into the scene. Spencer begins by placing this group of men in relation to the landscape – he was 'wandering through the bush' when he encountered the men. This creates a sense of shared discovery between Spencer and his readers, especially because Spencer is inviting his readers into a moment as intimate as the preparation for a ceremony. Even though this is the preparation for a ceremony, the actions of the men are as serious as those of any ceremony. Describing the bloodletting is of vital importance to this moment in the narrative. Linking physical pain to a native ceremony invokes its exoticism, although Spencer seems careful not to sensationalize. His description is deliberate, and seeks to inform rather than add to mythology or misconception. Spencer also makes mention of the sounds heard during this scene, the 'monotonous repetition' of the corroboree song. This completes the recreation of the scene, having drawn the reader into the world of Aboriginal ritual.

Of course, we must not assume Spencer to be free of the Social Darwinist biases of his time. Despite the fact that Spencer acknowledged the practical knowledge of the Aborigines, he upholds the idea that they are human beings at an inferior stage of development. At certain intervals, Spencer establishes that the Aborigines are incapable

⁷⁶ Ibid., 37-38.

of being sophisticated thinkers. When describing the typical appearance of Aborigine men, he makes several remarks that serve to maintain the racial hierarchy of the nineteenth century:

The men, with their long, flowing beards and hair cut off their foreheads and the rest tied back with a white band, often looked very patriarchal, an appearance frequently enhanced by their dignified bearing, though at times the presence of a bone perhaps a foot in length is stuck through a hole in the nasal septum and ornamented at one end with a Pergale tail, detracted, to a certain extent, from the dignified appearance of the wearer. So long as food is plentiful they are perfectly happy and contented, their disposition being just like that of light-hearted children who have no idea of anything beyond the enjoyment of the present moment.⁷⁷

Although brief, Spencer achieves a great deal in this passage. He initially describes the Aborigines as having a ‘dignified bearing’, suggesting a patriarchal, or perhaps Biblical image. However, he quickly undoes any prestige that this may endow by bringing attention to their nasal piercing and ornamentation, which in his words ‘detract’ from their potentially dignified appearance. He similarly places the Aborigines at the bottom of the human spectrum by remarking that they are child-like, and desire nothing more than to be well fed.

Furthermore, Spencer puts forth the idea that the Aborigines cannot think beyond the present, thus accounting for their lack of a history (as Spencer would have known it) and their bleak future. Spencer reinforces the connection between Aborigines and children when describing the tracking prowess of a group of men who had hunted down an emu, noting that “Their keenness and suppressed excitement when on the track was worth seeing, as well as their childish glee when they were successful.”⁷⁸ By equating the Aborigines with children within the narrative, Spencer is reinforcing his own status as

⁷⁷ Ibid., 39-40.

⁷⁸ 76.

the 'adult' in this dichotomy, thus making him superior within the setting and reassuring his readers of the inferiority of the Aborigines.

Theft of Sacred Stones

One of the most significant episodes of interaction between the Aborigines and the Expedition involves the theft of sacred stones and other objects from a hidden cache in a small cave. After learning of the existence of this hidden cache, Winnecke and Stirling coerced their Aboriginal guide into revealing its location. Despite knowing “the fear expressed by the Aborigines of approaching the spot”⁷⁹, Winnecke and Stirling entered the cave and found “sixty carved wooden boards and fifteen incised stones of deeply ritual significance.”⁸⁰ The men took all of the stones and over half of the boards, leaving behind axes and knives in their place. This exchange of manufactured products for the sacred objects of the Aborigines was far from equitable. However, Winnecke, Stirling, and the other scientists of the Expedition felt these objects were of “interest and value to the ethnological department”⁸¹, thus justifying their removal. This attitude of scientific justification was in keeping with Social Darwinist thought, and reflected the idea that Aboriginal customs were, as Horn phrased it in his introduction to the “Report”, ‘hideous’, and thus merited no respect from the scientists in terms of the objects’ value within Aboriginal culture. The stones were of great interest to the Expedition scientists

⁷⁹ Mulvaney and Calaby, *So Much That Is New*, 126.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁸¹ Winnecke, *Journal*, 41.

as object of scientific curiosity, but could not be truly ‘valued’ within the framework of European society.

This episode is particularly interesting because there are three different accounts of the events that transpired. Stirling, Spencer, and Winnecke all offer versions of what happened, and of what was gained by taking the objects. Stirling’s account is by far the shortest, and reveals few if any details about the event. Spencer (in keeping with his informative style) attempts to explain their significance, although as he was not part of the group that actually found the cache, he cannot delve into details. In a significant departure from his typically concise entries, Winnecke’s journal offers the most comprehensive account of the entire episode.

Stirling’s remarks about the cache are very brief. In very concise language he comments that:

we received information that a collection of sticks and stones were concealed in a cave at a remote place called Kundunga, about ten miles due east of Mount Francis, and with some difficulty we persuaded our local guide to take us to the locality...A ledge at the entrance had been made with a row of stones, and just within this were laid about 70 of these wooden and stone articles.⁸²

This account is a summary more than anything else. It neatly touches on many different elements of the episode – coercing their guide, finding the cache, what was inside – without telling readers any details. If one were to rely on this account, the significance of these events would pass by completely unnoticed.

Spencer’s account is similarly distant. Given that Spencer did not accompany Winnecke and Stirling to the cache, it comes as no surprise that he does not relate any details of how the cache was located. However, given his attention to the details of

⁸² Spencer, *Report*, Part 3, 77-78.

Aboriginal ritual, we might expect him to have some understanding as to the significance of these events. Instead, he carefully explains to his readers what sacred objects are, and what role they play in Aboriginal lore:

These implements, which, according to Mr. Gillen, are known as “churiña”, are very highly prized and regarded as sacred. Stone ones are still more valuable and sacred than wooden ones, which are usually spoken of as “Irula”, the patterns on which are copied from the older stones, the history and origin of which are lost to the dim past.

Each division of the tribe has a certain number of Churiña, which are stored up in spots known only to the elder men, or, if the locality of the store be known to the women, the latter are very careful, on penalty of severe punishment, not to go anywhere near them. Sometimes an elderly man will carry about on his person, concealed from view, one of these Churiña. It was evidently one of these stores the finding and contents of which have been described by Dr. Stirling in the Anthropological section.⁸³

In this excerpt, Spencer successfully describes what these sacred objects are, what their significance is, and the fact that they are routinely hidden. In regards to the collection obtained by his colleagues, Spencer only mentions that it was found by Stirling, and that readers should refer to his writing on the subject.

While the accounts of both Stirling and Spencer are brief and even removed, Winnecke’s account is full of detail, taking on a narrative quality that is absent elsewhere in his journal. Given Winnecke’s identification with the explorer persona, we can begin to understand the close attention he pays to this episode. More than any other member of the Expedition (with the exception of Horn himself), Winnecke was an adventurer, an explorer who sought challenges to overcome. The difficulty in determining the location of a hidden cache of sacred objects (“treasures”⁸⁴ as he calls them) would have appealed

⁸³ Ibid., 35.

⁸⁴ Winnecke, *Journal*, 41.

to him, giving him the opportunity to test his will against an Aborigine guide as well as test his ability to physically locate the cache.

In his journal, Winnecke relates that they first learned of the cache from one R. Coulthard, of the Tempe Downs Station. Although Coulthard gives them directions to find the cache, Winnecke and Stirling were unsuccessful. They then turned their attention to their native guide, who they called Racehorse. Winnecke proceeds to question Racehorse, and “after a vast amount of evasion, elicited the information that a large number of corroboree stones were hidden in a cave in the ranges to the eastward. I obtained...the exact position of this cave”⁸⁵. The next day, Winnecke and Stirling set off to find the, armed with their new knowledge of its location. Winnecke comments that Racehorse is very reluctant to accompany them. However, the Aborigine guide’s “objections were futile, and fortunately the information I secured from him...rendered his further assistance of little importance.”⁸⁶ Here Winnecke is boldly asserting himself as the victor in the contest of wills between himself and Racehorse by demeaning his contribution to Winnecke’s ultimate success in finding the cache. Winnecke relates the actual finding of the cache with unreserved pride:

I found a small opening...The entrance to the cavern was partly filled up with loose fragments of rocks and the interior with gum and wattle boughs. On removing these and enormous number of wooden corroboree sticks, varying in size and shape, were first exposed...Many expeditions have started in search of this cave, but hitherto all have failed to find it, as nothing would induce the natives to betray its whereabouts...we obtained fifteen stone tablets...this discovery is the most important yet made of these rare specimens of native skill, and will materially enhance the value of the ethnological collection.⁸⁷

This passage shows Winnecke at his most triumphant. Winnecke was very careful to assert that it was he who actually found the cache, in addition to being the one to remove

⁸⁵ Ibid., 41.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 41.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 42.

the disguises blocking the entrance. By describing the discovery in these physical terms, Winnecke asserted himself as the master of the situation, in complete control of events. To highlight the significance of this discovery, Winnecke mentions that while others have failed to find the cache, he succeeded in overcoming the resistance of the natives by outwitting them. When assessing the actual collection of objects, Winnecke notes the material value of the objects, placing them within the context of European economic worth. This is echoed when Winnecke notes that to replace the objects taken by the expedition, he left “a number of tomahawks, large knives, and other things in their place, sufficient commercially to make the transaction an equitable exchange.”⁸⁸ By placing sacred Aboriginal objects within an economic framework, Winnecke further destroys their traditional significance while establishing the superiority of European and Colonial systems.

The theft of sacred stones by the Horn Expedition was, in the words of Mulvaney and Calaby “a rape of tribal lore...insensitive to the Aboriginal mind”⁸⁹. The forced removal of these objects in the name of science reveals exactly how the Aborigines were perceived. They were ultimately a race of curiosities, and their sacred objects would be added to the greater list seemingly curious characteristics used to define and categorize the Aborigines in relation to Europeans. Because of his insensitive and triumphant attitude, Winnecke offers the most frank and honest look into the mind of the Horn Expedition’s scientists in regards to the Aborigines and their culture.

Photography of the Horn Expedition

⁸⁸ Ibid., 42.

⁸⁹ Mulvaney and Calaby, *So Much That Is New*, 126-127.

One of the most interesting aspects of the Horn Expedition was the fact that photography was central to its scientific mission. The photograph could convey a sense of visual authority lacking in illustrations of written description. In order to capture the world of the Aborigines in as much detail as possible, two cameras were part of the Expedition's equipment. Spencer acted as the official photographer, and thanks to his efforts we have today a rich photographic record of the Horn Expedition. Photography in the desert was no easy task, particularly because of the camels by which the Expedition traveled. Spencer's equipment and patience were tested when his camel "side-swiped trees or threw his baggage to the ground...his camel smashed two dozen photographic plates"⁹⁰. The damaged plates included the majority of his Aboriginal photographs, although some still remain. In spite of these frustrations, Spencer produced a series of remarkable photographs that show his artistic abilities. Just as in his writing, Spencer creates complete scenes within his photographs, rich with detail and directly connected to the landscape of the Central Australian desert. Frank Gillen, an avid amateur photographer, contributed significantly from his personal collection to the Expedition's collection. While Spencer places his Aboriginal subjects within the context of the landscape, Gillen focuses his lens directly on his subjects, creating intimate portraits that document individuals in stunning detail. Paired together, Spencer and Gillen's photographs of the Aborigines represent perhaps the best anthropological work of the Expedition.

One photograph in particular neatly showcases Spencer's abilities as a photographer (**Figure 3**). As with Spencer's written work, this photograph captures the

⁹⁰ Ibid., 120.

essence of the moment, inviting the reader to a shared discovery. Showing a ceremony in full swing, this photograph blends Spencer's eye for the landscape with the humans who interact with that same landscape. The scene is framed by a distant ridgeline, which dominates the background and provides a top frame for the human drama unfolding below it. Pale eucalyptus trees tower behind the performers, providing a background against which the drama of the ceremony unfolds. The performers stand in a diagonal line, in the midst of dancing by stamping their feet against the ground. The audience sits with their back to the camera, seemingly oblivious to its presence. All focus is directed towards the performers. A small child stands apart from the group, entranced by the activities he sees before him. In his caption for this photograph, Spencer directs the viewer to "Observe the figure of the child standing to the left of the seated group."⁹¹ More than anything else, this photograph reveals Spencer's eye for the "whole picture". Just as in his lush descriptions of the desert, his photograph brings many elements together. As viewers we feel as though we are unique witnesses to this ceremony. No attention is given to the camera, creating the sense that we have stumbled across this group in the desert, busy conducting their ceremonial activities. Spencer is ever attentive to the quality of desert light, an element that bathes this scene with its presence.

By contrast, Gillen creates a more intimate setting with his portraiture (**Figure 4**). These figures show aboriginal men dressed in ceremonial gear. On the left, two men stand close together, facing the camera head-on. The man on the right is marked with an intricate pattern of white dots that originates on his headdress and spills down the sides of his neck, continuing in two lines down the front of his chest and torso, with each line then following a leg down. His headdress is conical, with what appears to be a top-knot of

⁹¹ Spencer, *Report*, Part 3, 194.

hair or feathers bursting from the top. His right arm rests on his hip in a relaxed pose, suggesting confidence. Standing next to him is a man with less elaborate dress. He has the same point pattern on his legs, though it does not extend to his head. His headdress is more conical, and displays a parabolic stripe that crosses his nose before reaching back up to the top of his headdress. To the right is another dual portrait in which both men have conical headdresses with alternating black and white stripes reaching down to the face. The man on the left is marked with white dots that form an upturned Y, with the trail reaching towards his left shoulder. The man on the right is painted with white circles from shoulder to shoulder, with circles continuing down his torso as well. Both portraits are very posed, their appearance entirely for the benefit of the scientists observing their rituals. This is in contrast with Spencer's photography, which feels more natural (however, the ritual Spencer observed and photographed was undoubtedly as 'framed' as the portraits of Gillen). All the men exhibit horizontal scars stretching across their chests and torsos. The man from the portrait on the left with his arm akimbo is the most eye-catching of the group; something in his pose suggests defiance, confidence, and even cold disinterest in whoever is behind the camera. Gillen's portraits invite the viewer to do more than just observe – rather, these photographs encourage the viewer to directly engage with the Aborigines.

Although the photography of the Horn Expedition could offer snapshots of Aborigines in their own landscape, this visual record was subject to significant editing. When examining the Expedition photographs, one stands out as looking rather odd (**Figure 5**). In this photograph, we see several Aboriginal men gathered together in a large pile, with their limbs twisted in and out of each others, interlocking to form a tight

cluster. At first glance, this scene appears to be some kind of wrestling match. Upon closer examination it becomes clear that in the center, a single male torso in the focus of attention, as evidenced by the figure in the center, whose attention is turned to it. To the right stands a lone figure observing the ceremony, perhaps officiating it. This is in fact a circumcision ritual, and the mass of men is holding down the individual upon whom the procedure is being performed. However, what makes this photograph unusual is not its subject matter but its presentation: the Aboriginal men are floating in front of a white background. The entire framework of the scene has been removed, leaving all attention on the ritual being performed. The missing background invites speculation as to what is missing from this picture. Was it taken in the bush, or in an Aboriginal camp? Were there other figures present?

The mystery of this photograph is revealed in the correspondence between Horn and Spencer. After receiving plates of the Expedition's photographs, Horn comments specifically that "Unfortunately the Circumcision plate is very indistinct & then it is taken against a stone wall with a white man in the group. Could you not get Gillen to do a more natural group not like a 'put up job'."⁹² This passage is evidence of a larger editorial concern for Horn. He noted several issues with the photograph, naming it 'indistinct', and more importantly, commented on the presence of a white man in the group. The presence of a European observer in this Aboriginal ceremony would have detracted from the potential exotic appeal of such an image. Horn's request for another, more 'natural' photograph is echoed in a later letter to Spencer:

It is a pity that Circumcision group was not thought out a little as the first remark everyone makes is "I always thought they only operated on boys" Whereas the victim is

⁹² Horn to Spencer, April 2, 1895, Pitt Rivers Museum, Manuscript Collection, Box 1.

so evidently a wrinkled old man that...spoils the value. Could you not get Gillen to send one of a group in some rock sport without any white men & with the operation, painted and operating on a boy of 14?⁹³

This passage further illustrates Horn's concerns and editorial impulses. Although Horn wanted an image of an Aboriginal circumcision ritual, the actual ceremony clearly did not add to a preconceived notion of indigenous practices. The presence of older men in the image was not satisfactory to Horn – ever concerned with how his Expedition's results would be received, Horn took the comments regarding the age of the 'victim' to heart. His request for Gillen to secure another photograph of the same ritual being performed on an adolescent is significant in that by attempting to find an image that is more 'natural', he is in fact attempting to create the perfect image. Ironically, Horn's first impression of the image as a 'put-up job' is reflected in his own attempts to doctor the photograph to more suitably convey Aboriginal ceremony. The last mention of this photograph finds Horn resigned to the fact that he must edit the image to his satisfaction: "I have had the stone wall taken out and also the white man."⁹⁴ This adjustment resulted in the final version as seen in the "Report".

The photographs of the Expedition offer a striking visual element for readers to engage with. Photography added a new layer by which readers could experience the desert interior. When added to Spencer's descriptive narrative, a fuller sense of the Expedition and the landscape through which it traveled is created. Already a talented artist, photography was the logical next step for Spencer. Photography allowed him to further his descriptive abilities and enhance his understanding of the desert and its people.

⁹³ Horn to Spencer, May 29, 1895, Pitt Rivers Museum, Manuscript Collection, Box 1.

⁹⁴ Spencer to Horn, February 15, 1896, Pitt Rivers Museum, Manuscript Collection, Box 1.

Traveling with the Horn Expedition “schooled Spencer in outback photography”⁹⁵, an education that would prove invaluable for his later work. Through the photographs of the Expedition, we can see his growing fascination with the Aborigines and their world. In a greater sense, his photographs showcase his descriptive abilities through an exciting new medium.

Conclusion

The encounters and interactions between the members of the Horn Expedition and the Aborigines of Central Australia were significant. By examining the experiences of the Expedition members and the ways in which they evaluate the Aborigines, we can gain a clearer picture of late nineteenth century ethnological investigation and cultural assumptions. Although Social Darwinist thought shaped how the scientists would assess the Aborigines, there were instances of positive cultural exchange. Spencer readily acknowledged the Aborigines’ practical knowledge of the desert, which proved invaluable to him when collecting biological specimens. His descriptions of the Aborigines, paired with his photography, reveals an attempt to at least understand what the world of the Aborigines was like. Despite his seemingly sympathetic approach, it must be noted that Spencer’s image of the Aborigines was very much an invention, in which he projected beliefs and assumptions on their culture. As seen in Spencer’s narrative, the carefully arranged ceremonies to which he was witness were quickly given significance within a European context, failing to make any genuine attempts to truly understand them. Any humanitarian leanings on Spencer’s part are short-lived, as he

⁹⁵ Mulvaney and Calaby, *So Much The is New*, 120.

takes a removed stance to incidents such as the theft of sacred stones. It falls to Winnecke to provide us with the most accurate picture or relations between the Aborigines and white Colonial Australians. Triumphant in his mastery over the natives, and by extension the landscape, Winnecke's attitude shows the kind of "value" placed on Aboriginal culture. However, to paint the Horn Expedition as a racist endeavor would be inaccurate. The anthropological work of the Expedition was an important step in the process of trying to assess the Aborigines and who they were in relation to Colonial Australia. In this sense, the Expedition reveals the cultural values of its time. These values, assumptions, and ideas will take center stage in the following chapter.

Chapter 3

The Horn Expedition and Australian Identity

Introduction

You thank God that you are...an Englishman, I thank God than I am not. I have no ambition to belong to such a ~~nation~~ race of Hypocrites...The British Lion shows his teeth but everyone...know that those teeth are only decayed stumps and the poor old brute cannot bite.⁹⁶
-F.J. Gillen

The Horn Expedition took place during one of the most important decades in Australian history. The 1890's opened with a crushing global depression in which unemployment rose to unprecedented highs and the Australian economy shrank by 30 percent.⁹⁷ To make matters worse, a series of droughts plagued the continent, adding further disruption to the colonial abundance to which Australians had become accustomed. However, from such dark times arose a "national legend"⁹⁸ that would define what it was to be an Australian. This nationalistic legend sought to define Australians as completely unique and original, separating them from the decaying Empire referred to in the excerpt from Frank Gillen's letter, written to Spencer from Alice Springs in 1896.

During the 1890's, Australians were becoming increasingly aware that they had "developed a society and a human type marked by their own character"⁹⁹. This new 'Australian character' was personified by the itinerant bush workers, transient working-class men who in the popular imagination exemplified "fierce independence, fortitude,

⁹⁶ F.J Gillen, *My Dear Spencer: The Letters of F.J. Gillen to Baldwin Spencer*, ed. John Mulvaney, Howard Morphy, and Alison Petch (Melbourne: Hyland House, 1997), 94.

⁹⁷ Macintyre, *History of Australia*, 129.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁹⁹ A.A. Phillips, *Henry Lawson*, (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1970), 11.

irreverence for authority, egalitarianism and mateship”.¹⁰⁰ Living a nomadic existence, the bushmen were directly associated with the landscape through which they moved. Nowhere else on earth, it would seem, could have created the bushmen. The harshness of the Australian outback molded men into fiercely independent and tough individuals, always pushing against the edges of polite, ‘civilized’ society. In a rather elegant turn of phrase, the scholar Stuart Macintyre states, “Nature in Australia has a dark side that defies ordinary logic and eventually drives its human victims mad.”¹⁰¹ In this landscape of madness, the Australian national legend was born. The development of Australian identity was directly tied to the desert landscape of the interior. The demands of the outback molded the character of those who ventured into it and attempted to make a life there. Indeed, the outback was seen as the “ ‘Real Australia’, the environment in which the special qualities of the Australian as a human type were evolving.”¹⁰² From the adversity of nomadic life in a dry climate came the true Australians, according to the nationalist mythmakers of the 1890’s.

This new Australian identity was expressed through a variety of mediums, most notably through literature and art. When comparing Australian literature and art from the 1890’s, we see that the writers and painters creating new works were attempting to capture their continent. This inevitably resulted in their work contributing as much to the creation of Australian identity as it did take its inspiration from it. More importantly, we see that Australia’s developing national identity had many faces and interpreters.

In terms of literature, the 1890’s saw the rise of a distinct Australian style, which found its first expressions in the pages of *The Sydney Bulletin*, a weekly newspaper that

¹⁰⁰ Macintyre, *History of Australia*, 131.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 132.

¹⁰² Phillips, *Lawson*, 12.

“championed republicanism, secularism, democracy and masculine licence.”¹⁰³ The fierceness with which the *Bulletin* championed the cause of the working class and Australian nationalism earned it the nickname “The Bushmans’ Bible.”¹⁰⁴ Apart from attacking all that smacked of the aristocratic British establishment, the *Bulletin* offered writers and poets the opportunity to make “the rural interior a focus of Australian ideals”¹⁰⁵. One of the most notable of these writers was Henry Lawson. What distinguished Lawson from many other Australian writers at the time was that in idealizing the bushmen, he simultaneously sought to portray the landscape as it was, a harsh and unforgiving environment.¹⁰⁶ In doing so, he helped create a cultural trope in which the rugged bushmen were shaped by their landscape - and by allowing their environment mold them, overcome its hardships. Lawson’s desire to depict the outback realistically stemmed directly from his background. The son of Norwegian immigrants¹⁰⁷, Lawson was himself a product of the rural interior. His stories and poetry draw on his personal experiences and sentiments. In doing so, Lawson’s stories captured the ‘can-do’ spirit of the 1890’s in Australia, contributing greatly to the growing national identity of the continent, as we will see below.

The 1890’s also saw a nascent Australian sense of particularity being expressed through art. The city of Melbourne gave rise of the Heidelberg School, a collection of painters who sought to paint Australian subjects (such as bushmen) in idealized rural landscapes. These artists “made a conscious effort to reveal an Australian national

¹⁰³ Macintyre, *History of Australia*, 131.

¹⁰⁴ Phillips, *Lawson*, 21.

¹⁰⁵ Tom Griffiths, “The social and intellectual context of the 1890s” in *Exploring Central Australia: Society, the Environment and the 1894 Horn Expedition*, ed. S.R. Morton and D. J. Mulvaney, 13-18. (Surrey Beatty & Sons, Chipping Norton, 1996), 14.

¹⁰⁶ Griffiths, “Context of the 1890’s”, 14.

¹⁰⁷ Phillips, *Lawson*, 27.

identity”¹⁰⁸, contributing a striking visual element to the national myth-making that defined the 1890’s. Through art, rural workers, pioneers, and bushmen were placed in the center of nationalist myth-making. The artists of the Heidelberg School were also fascinated by the rural landscape, and in their paintings the land itself is as much as focus as the people that inhabit it. These artists portrayed Australia as a “landscape of dazzling light”¹⁰⁹. In the brilliant (if not stark) light of the interior, these painters helped create the national myth. Here it is worth noting that Spencer was also fascinated by the quality of Australian light, as we have seen in his narrative of the Expedition and in his photographs.

The tensions created by the rising sense of Australian nationalism were played out in the aftermath of the Expedition. During the ordeal of editing and publishing the “Report”, Spencer and Horn clashed as to where the work should be published. In an unusual twist, the native-born Horn insisted that the entire work be finished in England, while the British born and educated Spencer was of the opinion that an Australian printer would be more desirable. This smaller argument within the greater drama of publishing the “Report” highlights the generational gap between Horn and Spencer. A man of the Empire, Horn felt a strong affinity for Great Britain, while Spencer represented a new way of thinking – one that took greater pride in what could be accomplished in a colony.

The nationalist themes of contemporary literature and art were also reflected in how the public considered the Australian landscape. The 1890’s saw the rise of a “strong sentiment for local nature”¹¹⁰. Urban-dwellers developed a keen interest in the natural

¹⁰⁸ Leigh Astbury, *City Bushmen: The Heidelberg School and the Rural Mythology* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1985), 2.

¹⁰⁹ Macintyre, *History of Australia*, 131.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

history of their continent. This gave rise to numerous naturalist and field science clubs, which fostered a deep sense of appreciation for the unique qualities of Australian plants and animals. Upon first arriving in Australia, Spencer himself had been an active member of one such club, the Field Naturalists' Club of Victoria.¹¹¹ Clubs such as these offered citizens the opportunity to participate in "expeditions" into the bush, while also contributing to their interest in the sciences. The existence of these popular organizations coincides directly with the Expedition, suggesting that a broad popular and specifically Australian audience was eager to learn more about the interior through a scientific lens.

Just as the Horn Expedition was setting off into the desert, the "national imagination had ballooned inland"¹¹². Literature, art, politics, and popular science all came together to create a new Australian sense of particularity. The Australians could now lay claim to qualities and characteristics that set them apart from their English origins. The Horn Expedition was examining the interior, and perhaps even discerning what made it unique, at a time when the interior became the focus of Australian national identity.

Henry Lawson: Giving Voice to the National Myth

By the time he was in his early twenties, Henry Lawson (1867-1922)¹¹³ would be "regarded as a national figure"¹¹⁴. A regular contributor to the *Bulletin*, Lawson came to be seen as the literary voice of his generation. His poems and stories perfectly captured

¹¹¹ Mulvaney and Calaby. *So Much That Is New*, 100.

¹¹² Griffiths, "Social Context of the 1890's", 17.

¹¹³ Phillips, *Lawson*, 9.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.

the nationalistic attitudes of the 1890's, while simultaneously expressing personal distress at the hardships of life in the bush. Lawson was an effective storyteller in that he could depict the severity of life in the rural interior in a way that still managed to add to the growing national myth. His background as an immigrant's son growing up in the rural interior, in addition to having worked as a manual laborer, certainly added a degree of authenticity to his work.

Lawson's first published work, a ballad entitled "*The Song of the Republic*", appeared in the Bulletin in October 1887¹¹⁵. This ballad was by no means as complex as his later work. However, despite being a conventional expression of "nationalistic and radical sentiment"¹¹⁶, the work does reveal a great deal about the rising Australian nationalist sentiment. In the rousing opening stanza, Lawson proclaimed:

Sons of the South, awake! arise!
Sons of the South, and do.
Banish from under your bonny skies
Those old-world errors and wrongs and lies.
Making a hell in a Paradise
That belongs to your sons and you.¹¹⁷

This passage is quite telling. Lawson called upon the "Sons of the South", the Australians, to wake up to the possibilities of nationhood. This could only be accomplished by banishing "old-world errors, wrongs, and lies" permanently, relying instead upon their own abilities and ingenuity as Australians. Failure to do so would only result in the "Paradise" of Australia becoming a hell subject to the aristocratic establishment. Should there be any confusion as to the origin of the "old-world errors",

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 35.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 35.

¹¹⁷ Henry Lawson, "The Song of the Republic." (3/21/11) <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/a-song-of-the-republic/>

in the next stanza Lawson tells his countrymen that they must choose between “The Land that belongs to the lord and the Queen / And the Land that belongs to you.”¹¹⁸ These lines clearly associate the British crown with the “hell” previously mentioned. As an inaugural poem, “*The Song of the Republic*” positioned Lawson directly alongside the nationalist cause, and in the years following its publication he became a regular contributor who was regarded with affection by the readership of the *Bulletin*.¹¹⁹

Lawson’s later work exhibits a deeper complexity that hints at his own mixed feelings about Australia and how it should be portrayed in literature. Despite the nationalistic bravado of much of his work, Lawson once asked (in reference to how his contemporaries were portraying the Outback) “What’s the good of making a heaven of a hell when by describing it as it really is, we might do some good for the lost souls out there?”¹²⁰ By referring to the interior as “out there”, we get the sense that Lawson was attempting to distance himself from his past, perhaps even giving himself that status of a refugee from the very interior that was the setting of his work. Lawson’s working-class upbringing and years of experience as a manual laborer no doubt informed his anxiety about how the interior was portrayed. Rather than glorify the landscape, Lawson depicted the hardships of bush life, and the “battle with the land”¹²¹ undertaken by settlers and bushmen. This contributed to the trope of the tough settler or bushman engaged in bitter struggle that led to a new, Australian identity. Lawson’s characters lead existences much like those of his working-class audience. However, Lawson never questioned the integrity of the bushmen and other working-class characters. He was

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, (3/21/11).

¹¹⁹ Phillips, *Lawson*, 57.

¹²⁰ Quoted in Griffiths, “Social Context of the 1890’s”, 14.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

“more concerned with character than with passion or event or landscape.”¹²² Indeed, his work contributed significantly to the idea that the bushmen were “true” Australians possessed of “superior virility, independence, wholesomeness and sense of reality.”¹²³ It is interesting to note that while Lawson was concerned with correctly representing the struggle of rural inhabitants, Spencer was attempting to describe the interior desert by similarly wielding starkness with rhetorical force. However, the significant difference here is one of approach – Lawson was a writer, and Spencer a scientist.

In his short story “*His Country - After All*”, Lawson showed just how complex the relationship between an Australian and his native country had become. More than anything, it reveals some of his own conflicting views about his native land. In the story, a native Australian is riding by coach through the New Zealand countryside. As they pass through the country, the coach driver strikes up a conversation with his passenger, prompting the Australian to express his disgust for his native continent. When the coach driver asks what sort of country Australia is, the passenger replies, “Why, it’s only a mongrel desert, except some bits round the coast. The worst dried-up and God-forsaken country I was ever in.”¹²⁴ The Australian continues his tirade, proclaiming that he has “nothing to thank Australia for – except getting out of it. It’s the best country to get out of that I was ever in.”¹²⁵ Such condemnations are just the beginning of the Australian’s speech, however. His disgust reaches a fever pitch when he poses the question

What’s Australia? A big, thirsty, hungry wilderness, with one or two cities for the convenience of foreign speculators...and populated mostly by mongrel sheep, and partly by fools, who live

¹²² Phillips, *Lawson*, 65.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹²⁴ Henry Lawson, *While the Billy Boils: 87 Stories from the Prose Works of Henry Lawson* (London: Robert Hale & Company, 1972), 32.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

like European slaves in the towns, and like dingoes in the bush...Why, the Australians haven't even got enough grit to claim enough of their own money to throw a few dams across their watercourses, and so make some of the interior fit to live in...Bah! The curse of Australia is sheep, and the Australian war cry is Baa!

Such a venomous description of Australia seems surprising coming from one of the most iconic nationalist writers of the age. However, these selections are quite telling. In the above passages, Lawson is expressing a deeply Australian anxiety as to the worth of their country. Australia's status as a colony of the British Empire resulted in some feelings of inferiority, and indeed decades of looking back to Great Britain as "home" certainly had a lasting impression on Australians. Lawson's reference to "foreign speculators" suggests anger at the numerous business interests seeking to exploit Australia's mineral and agricultural resources. Even British business might be seen as "foreign" in that they did not fully appreciate the realities of life in the interior. Also buried within the above lines are some of Lawson's personal frustrations. The description of Australia as a "mongrel desert" populated by "fools" suggests some personal resentment at his own upbringing, perhaps even at the overly-confident zeal of radical nationalists who championed Australia's uniqueness.

However, Lawson does not complete the story without a redeeming gesture to Australia. Upon passing through a grove of Australian gum trees, the Australian's attitude begins to change, and he becomes quiet and contemplative. His nostalgic mood deepens when the coach passes a rabbit trapper in the gum trees, and the two exchange greetings. The transformation is complete when a British passenger in the coach remarks in a condescending tone:

"Well, for my part...I can't see much in Australia. The bally colonies are –

“Oh, that be damned!” snarled the Australian born...“What do you Britishers know about Australia? She’s as good as England, anyway.”¹²⁶

And thus the story concludes, with the Australian rising to the defense of his native land. It would seem that, no matter how much one might try to leave the continent, the Australian spirit would be present for life. This message appealed deeply to nationalists, and even Lawson cannot resist imparting it. The tone of the Australian’s retort is made all the more significant in that he is answering a remark made by an Englishman, who sees no worth in the colonies. Lawson seems to be implying that a native-born Australian might recognize the severity of his homeland while also acknowledging the inherent worth of the continent.

Regardless of his personal feelings towards his past or his homeland, Lawson’s attempts to depict the bushmen as the ideal Australians was successful. Lawson’s work helped create the Australian identity by focusing on the bushmen as exemplary Australians. Lawson “admires them intensely”¹²⁷, and his characters stress the nobility of the rural Australians. Lawson’s anxieties were overcome by his desire to cultivate a “bush ideal”¹²⁸, which was to have a lasting impact on the national myth.

The Heidelberg School: Visualizing Australia

While Henry Lawson and other writers were immortalizing the Australian legend through the written word, a new generation of artists was depicting it on the canvas. The Heidelberg School of painters first emerged in the late 1880’s, their name an association

¹²⁶ Ibid., 35.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 65.

¹²⁸ Griffiths, “Context of the 1890’s”,14.

with a township near Melbourne.¹²⁹ The work of the Heidelberg School made the 1890's "a golden age of national idealism in painting."¹³⁰ The artists of the Heidelberg school sought to paint Australian subjects within Australian landscapes. Indeed, they answered the call of the art critic Sydney Dickinson, who challenged Australian artists "to present on canvas the earnestness, rigor, pathos, and heroism of the life about them."¹³¹ The paintings of the 1890's reflect the nationalistic attitudes of the times, with canvases overflowing with bushmen, prospectors, and hardy settlers in the wilderness of the Australian bush. Through the paintings of the Heidelberg school, the "green tones of pastoral romance gave way to the brown of the bush"¹³², instilling in Australians a new, more vigorous artistic vision of the interior.

It should be mentioned that although Australian artists of the 1890's were busy painting scenes of life in the bush, they did not engage in their work with the same nationalistic fervor that could be found in literature. The nationalism endorsed by writers and poets in the Bulletin could be seen as "local, if not parochial."¹³³ The artists of the Heidelberg school consciously "measured local achievements in art against a wider European culture."¹³⁴ This approach left them open to ridicule from the more radical nationalists, especially writers who were also pursuing artistic representations of Australia. Perhaps because they were attempting to place "nationalistic figure subjects within the realm of high art"¹³⁵, these artists were also concerned with placing themselves within a larger artistic continuum. This tension between art and literature hints at the idea

¹²⁹ John Rickard, *Australia: A Cultural History* (London: Longman, 1988), 69.

¹³⁰ Astbury, *City Bushmen*, 1.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹³² Macintyre, *History of Australia*, 131.

¹³³ Astbury, *City Bushmen*, 13.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

that Australian nationalism had more than one face, and certainly more than one form of expression.

While writers like Lawson were focused on depicting the nobility of the bushmen, the painters of the Heidelberg school were more interested in capturing another distinctly Australian quality: light. While rural inhabitants were certainly a common theme (and some of their most famous pieces would be depiction of rural life and work), it was the Australian sun that captivated their artistic interest. Their landscapes were “infused by a celebration of light”¹³⁶, and reflected a deep fascination with how that light played across the Australian landscape. This interest in light in their paintings served to demonstrate Australian particularity, by reflecting “a new sense of what constituted the Australian environment.”¹³⁷ Nowhere else did the sun interact with the landscape in such a way, or produce such colors as it did in the Australian bush. In his *Narrative*, Spencer reflected this sentiment, dwelling upon the beauty of the sunset in the desert. His description of the landscape being bathed in “a rich after-glow, against which the stony plains and hills looked dark purple, with the mulga branches standing out sharp and thin against the sky”¹³⁸ might well serve as a description of a painting. In later years, Spencer would go on to become a great patron of Australian art, especially of the Heidelberg artists.¹³⁹ Himself a skilled artist, Spencer undoubtedly felt an affinity for their work, through which he could see an “Australia unlimited”¹⁴⁰ on canvas.

Of the many artists in the Heidelberg school, the work of Tom Roberts offers many examples of Australian nationalistic myth building. His work exhibits a strong

¹³⁶ Rickard, *Australia: A Cultural History*, 69.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹³⁸ *Report on the Work of the Horn Expedition to Central Australia*, ed. Baldwin Spencer. Melbourne: Melville, Mullen and Slade, 1896. Vol. 1, 17.

¹³⁹ Griffiths, “Context of the 1890’s”, 14.

¹⁴⁰ Mulvaney and Calaby, *So Much That Is New*, 358.

sense of realism, depicting the landscape with great attention to detail. Simultaneously, his treatment of his subjects reflects a deep nostalgia for bush life at its most romantic. In two of his paintings in particular, *The Breakaway* and *The Golden Fleece: Shearing at Newstead*, we see representations of the heroic and hardworking bushmen, with the landscape playing an important role.

The Breakaway (**Figure 6**), painted in 1891¹⁴¹, depicts a bush herdsman in the midst of his flock of sheep. The sheep move together in a forceful collective sweep from the top left of the canvas to the bottom right, drawing the viewer's eye directly onto the herdsman atop his horse, seemingly caught in the middle of this wave of motion and energy. The herdsman is captured at an extreme angle, with his left leg stretching out to counterbalance himself while his right arm is raised, clutching his hat. A rustic clapboard fence separates the sheep from open bush, which stretches away and upwards to the horizon. The deep indigo of the sky creates a stark contrast to the rusty red of the earth, and the leaves of the trees are olive green or brown, lacking in lushness. Plumes of dust rise from the sheep herd, suggesting dryness and heat. The vibrant colors and brilliant sunlight of the scene further enforce the sense of heat.

For the simplicity of the subject, *The Breakaway* accomplishes much. Two strong elements are at work. First, there is the remarkable presence of light. The entire painting is washed in sunlight, dazzling in its intensity. The harsh light makes the sheep almost featureless in their white coats. The light also plays strongly on the trees, creating sharp shadows below the leaves that stand out against the bleached trunks. However, the light seems to shine strongest on the central figure, the herdsman. Despite being small in comparison to the herd around him, he dominates the action, commanding the herd while

¹⁴¹ Astbury, *City Bushmen*, 118.

also seeming to be off balance on his horse. After the light there is the presence of the landscape itself. By placing this scene towards the bottom of the hill, with the horizon well above the herdsman's head, the landscape plays a dominant role. Stretching off towards the sky, it seems as though beyond the crest of the hill the land may stretch on forever. In this painting, Roberts is immortalizing both the herdsman and the landscape through which he moves. *The Breakaway* may be said to "pay homage to an anonymous but heroic incident"¹⁴², but is an incident that may be expanded and applied to bushmen everywhere, and by extension, to Australians in general. In this painting we see the brilliant Australian sun shed light on a moment of honest labor, in which the bushman is the heroic figure.

In 1894 (the same year that the Horn Expedition took place) Roberts painted *The Golden Fleece: Shearing at Newstead* (**Figure 7**). In contrast to *The Breakaway*, this painting is a rural interior, depicting a shearing shed full of workers in the midst of shearing sheep. Although the environment depicted is contained, this painting still grapples with themes of Australian identity. The painting shows two rows of shearers on the left and right of the canvas, drawing the eye down the center of the shed. There is a heavy emphasis on human activity here: the majority of the men are bent over the sheep, hard at work shearing, while a woman sorts the fresh fleeces, and in the background a man rests his elbow against a low wall, watching the work unfold. Although this is an interior, light is still a key element. The open windows lining the shed are filled with almost blinding light, hinting at the hot, bright landscape outside. Light plays across the shoulders of the men at work, highlighting the strain in their muscles as they work.

¹⁴² Ibid., 118.

There is a subtle intensity to this scene. Each man seems intently focused on the task at hand; they are not merrily singing while they work. However, this could not be categorized as unending toil either. In effect, what *The Golden Fleece* depicts is bushmen hard at their honest work. In addition to this, given the importance of the sheep in the Australian economy, one has the sense that the fortunes of the continent are being made at the very moment captured by Roberts. Indeed, the title *The Golden Fleece* hints at the importance and value of the work undertaken in this humble shed. The men depicted here exemplify the kind of masculine labor that was so essential to the national myth. The actions of the rural workers provided a foundation on which Australia could be built. Here too there is message concerning the morality of the men at work: they are honest, committed to mate-ship, and wholeheartedly representative of the Australian type. This painting is very much in keeping with the poems, stories, and characters of Lawson. More importantly, it offers a romanticized vision of rural labor, enabling urban Australians to visualize the daily lives of their rural counterparts.

In both *The Breakaway* and *The Golden Fleece*, Roberts depicts life in the Australian interior. Both paintings offer subjects that are instantly recognizable as being Australian. They add strength to the national myth by indulging in the romanticizing of their human subjects. The landscape is portrayed in fairly stark and unadorned terms, especially in *The Breakaway*. However, it is the weight of their human actions and the value attached to them that stirs the emotions of the viewer.

Spencer, Horn, and Australia

The tension implicit in forging an Australian identity – part of the Empire, yet uniquely independent - plays out in the correspondence between Spencer and Horn. By the time the Expedition returned from the desert, Horn had left for “semi-permanent domicile in England, where he anticipated basking in the praises for his expedition’s findings.”¹⁴³ As the scientists of the Expedition dispersed, they were expected to write up the findings of their respective subjects and send their final reports to Horn. These reports would constitute the finished publication of the Expedition’s findings. However, the editing and publication of the “Report” quickly ground to a near-halt. Spencer was the only scientist of the Expedition to type up his findings and send them to Horn promptly. As the year ended with no official Report published, Horn became increasingly distressed that it should ever be published at all. Despite his repeated efforts, Horn simply could not get the Expedition’s members to provide any information. Spencer had to ultimately step in and act as a liaison between Horn and the others, and through his own efforts managed to secure the reports of his fellow scientists. The reason for the scientist’s group shunning of Horn is very straightforward. It would seem that Horn’s larger-than-life personality got the better of him. During the brief period in which he accompanied the Expedition, he had “insulted members, acted as though he owned them, and developed a total mistrust”¹⁴⁴ of the party members, most notably of Winnecke. His behavior clearly left a strong impression on the scientists, resulting in their reluctance to participate in publishing their findings.

However, as the months began to pass by, another major issue arose. Horn became determined to publish the “Report” in England, where he would be able to

¹⁴³ Mulvaney and Calaby, *So Much That Is New*, 132.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 132.

control every step of the publication process and play a direct role in promoting the work to the British scientific establishment. He first announced his intentions of having the work done in England, writing to Spencer “I have now decided that all reports when compiled must be sent to me here... if you then send the plates home I will get the whole thing done here and get a good man to edit it... I am sure the reproduction of photos will be very much better done here than in the colonies.”¹⁴⁵ The casual yet authoritative manner with which Horn announced his intentions reveals something of his general attitude. Used to being in charge, Horn expected his orders to be followed through completely. His use of the word “home” to describe England is also very telling. Despite the fact that he was a native-born Australian, England is clearly the “seat of empire”¹⁴⁶ in his worldview. His decision to live semi-permanently in England is also of great significance. Although his relocation put him halfway around the world from his business interests, his desire to be “home” was of greater importance. With the publication of the “Report” in England by English printers and an English editor, his homecoming would be made all the more complete. Horn was positioning himself to take on the role of a gentleman of Empire, a patron of science.

Back in Australia, Spencer was concerned at Horn’s insistence that the publication of the “Report” be a British endeavor. In a fascinating twist of fate, Spencer – the English-born, Oxford-educated academic – took up the issue of having the work done in Australia. Arguing against Horn’s notion of having the information edited in England, Spencer wrote “I trust that you will excuse my writing frankly what I fell but your decision to have the book edited at home with the result of reports for which we

¹⁴⁵ Horn to Spencer, January 6, 1895 – Pitt Rivers Museum, Manuscript Collection, Box 1.

¹⁴⁶ Mulvaney and Calaby, *So Much That Is New*, 132.

shall be individually responsible being more or less mangled without our having a say in the matter is at first sight rather disheartening.”¹⁴⁷ This rather polite (yet charged) disagreement with Horn belies Spencer’s greater concerns. Spencer was a careful and deliberate academic, and the thought of having someone else edit his work distressed him. By employing a British editor, Horn increased the chances that the information in the “Report” might become somehow misconstrued. Spencer expressed this sentiment by writing “I must confess to not liking the idea of anyone editing my work”¹⁴⁸. Should any false information become published at the fault of an inexperienced or simply removed editor, the work of Spencer and his colleagues would be of lesser value to the scientific audience reading the book.

However, there is more than mere reputation-defending at play here. Although he was an expatriate, arriving to a continent completely unknown to him, Australia had grown on Spencer enough to merit his defense of having the “Report” completed there. When Horn had several samples made from Spencer’s photographic negatives, he sent them on to Spencer for his review. Spencer rather forcefully replied, “Thank you for the specimen plate of the photo illustration but I must confess to being very much disappointed with it. We could have done better work than that out here.”¹⁴⁹ Here, Spencer is rising to the defense of the quality of work that might be enjoyed should the “Report” be published in Australia.

Spencer’s use of geographical language should also be noted. By referring to Australia as “out here”, Spencer is working within the Imperial worldview – despite his growing fondness for the continent and its growing importance in his work, Spencer still

¹⁴⁷ Spencer to Horn, February 23, 1895, Pitt Rivers Museum, Manuscript Collection, Box 1.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Spencer to Horn, February 18, 1896, Pitt Rivers Museum, Manuscript Collection, Box 1.

writes of Australia as a distant place. However, by expressing his dissatisfaction with the quality of the English work, he is taking ownership of his work and establishing himself more firmly as the editor of the “Report”.

Despite Spencer’s insistence on having an Australian publisher print the “Report”, Horn continued to hold on to the idea that it should be done in England. Upon receiving samples of Expedition photographs by an Australian he wrote to Spencer “With regard to the specimens of Melbourne work you sent home and which you say is so superior to the English I really can’t agree with you and I have shown this work & the work done by the Swan Co. to several experts and the unanimous opinion is that the Swan work is most excellent.”¹⁵⁰ Despite the fact that almost two full years had past since the Expedition had returned and there was still no official “Report”, Horn continued to insist that it be published in England. Although this argument between Horn and Spencer was minor compared to the greater challenge of convincing the other scientists to even produce their respective sections, it is nonetheless of great significance. Though this correspondence we see an example of the tensions being played out between Australia and Great Britain as the colony moved towards independence and a new sense of their independent identity.

The Horn Expedition was at the heart of this moment in Australia’s history. Horn was in many ways an example of the fiercely independent Australian type. His fortunes had been made in the interior, and his own tenacity had often helped him overcome adversity. However, he was deeply attached to the idea of the Empire, and identified with England as “home”. Spencer, on the other hand, was a stranger in Australia, and the Expedition was his first introduction to the vast interior of Australia that was becoming the focus of the national myth. Although he might have been expected to look upon

¹⁵⁰ Horn to Spencer, April 1, 1896, Pitt Rivers Museum, Manuscript Collection, Box 1.

Australia as merely a stepping-stone in his career, he instead made his life's work out of the continent. On some level, Spencer identified with the Australians, showing "an adaptability and lack of formality"¹⁵¹, especially in his interactions with men such as Frank Gillen. Rather than adopt the air of an academic, Spencer made an effort to move outside of his realm of knowledge and into the world of Australia. His insistence on having the "Report" published in Australia hints that Spencer not only felt it would be more accurate, but also that it might reach a greater Australian audience.

Conclusion

The Horn Expedition occurred at a time when Australia was undergoing significant change. During the 1890's Australians were beginning to realize their potential as an independent nation. They had managed to develop a new and unique national identity, one that distinguished them from Great Britain and the Empire. The emergence of new national myths and symbols bolstered a sense of Australia having a distinct character, a character that thrived on independence. Symbols of nationhood were emerging, and those symbols had their origins in the vast, dry interior. The development of Australia's national identity relied heavily on the role of both literature and art. These mediums effectively explored what it meant to be Australian. Most importantly, when writers and artists engaged with the subject of their homeland, they "were coming to terms with themselves, whilst their perceptions of the landscape merged with their perceptions of the society which inhabited and, in a sense, created it."¹⁵² Just as writers

¹⁵¹ Mulvaney and Calaby, *So Much That Is New*, 129.

¹⁵² Rickard, *Australia: A Cultural History*, 73.

and artists were immortalizing the nobility of the bushmen or capturing the unique qualities of the Australian landscape, the Horn Expedition provided a scientific analysis of the interior that was the focus of so much myth-making. By exploring the interior, the Expedition was contributing to the Australians' knowledge of their continent, and gaining insight into what made it unique.

Conclusion

Discovering the Interior

Looking back upon our Expedition a few scenes stand out prominently – the gibber plains at sunset; the bare, upland stony path with the thin telegraph line streaking away to the horizon, on which through the heated airwaves the outline of the Charlotte Waters Station can be seen; the view of the great Finke Valley where at Crown Point the river breaks through the Desert Sandstone hills; Chambers Pillar rising solitary amongst the sandhills; the picturesque water-holes of the George Gill Range; the camp, weird and silent, by Lake Amadeus; Ayers Rock glowing bright red in the sunset; the group of graceful palm trees by the side of the rock pools in Palm Creek and the wonderful gorges amongst the McDonnell Range.¹⁵³
-Baldwin Spencer

When the Horn Expedition set off into the desert, it was with the intention of exploring the interior “as carefully as time permitted.”¹⁵⁴ The Expedition certainly succeeded in this pragmatic goal. The work of the scientists resulted in the exhaustively comprehensive “Report” that covered virtually every aspect of the Australian interior. In spite of the many personal differences between the members of the Expedition and the subsequent difficulties of preparing the “Report” for publication, in the end they had created a definitive work. The “Report” added significantly to the “increasing awareness of the... ‘red centre’.”¹⁵⁵ However, the Expedition is indicative of more than the simply pragmatic goal of this initial impulse.

At a fundamental level, the Horn Expedition was deeply representative of its time. As the 1890’s unfolded, Australia was turning inward, looking to its vast interior for the answers to their struggle for identity. In this context, the Horn Expedition takes on a new meaning. The Expedition entered to desert looking to gather data scientifically. By the time they returned, they had become a symbol for Australia’s search for a new identity.

¹⁵³ Spencer, *Report*, Part 1, 136.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁵⁵ Mulvaney and Calaby, *So Much That Is New*, 117.

Their exploration of the central Australian landscape was in many ways an expedition of cultural identity. Their journey into the interior desert was, on a deeper level, a journey into the interior of the Australian national self.

These changes can be distinctly seen in Spencer's work following the Expedition. Spencer entered the desert a contented and thoroughly British academic, and emerged a more dynamic and inquisitive scientist with an affinity for the landscape of his new home. In Spencer's narrative of the Expedition, we can see the process by which this change came about. During the Expedition, Spencer engaged with the landscape, and in so doing, was transformed. As he passed through the desert, from the stony gibber plains to the McDonnell Range, the harsh environment struck a chord within his mind. In the above excerpt from his narrative's conclusion, we see that Spencer had developed a real appreciation for and fascination with the Australian interior. More importantly, he had engaged with the inhabitants of the landscape. His encounters with the Aborigines left him desiring a greater understanding of their culture, reflecting a greater need for Australians of European to understand the indigenous population. Although Spencer worked within the Social Darwinist framework of his time, his curiosity was genuine and his methods were novel. His chance meeting with Gillen at Alice Springs was a significant outcome of the Expedition. Gillen's deep personal knowledge of the Aborigines benefited Spencer's work, and the two formed an unusual partnership – the Oxford-educated professor and the Australian-born desert postmaster, working together.

The Horn Expedition's physical journey can thus be linked to the larger journey to identity that the whole of Australia was undertaking. The Expedition's fact-finding mission to the outback could not have arrived at a more appropriate time. The

distinctiveness of the Australian desert, and the many challenges that it created, resulted in the creation of an Australian identity that resonated with and found expression in all disciplines, from science to art. The Horn Expedition engaged in more than the purely scientific work that was part of its mission. In the subsequent “Report”, the scientists of the Expedition were contributing to the national myth by providing an analysis of the landscape in which that myth was forged. Traveling into the desert, the Horn Expedition was a journey into the physical and mythical heart of Australia.

Images

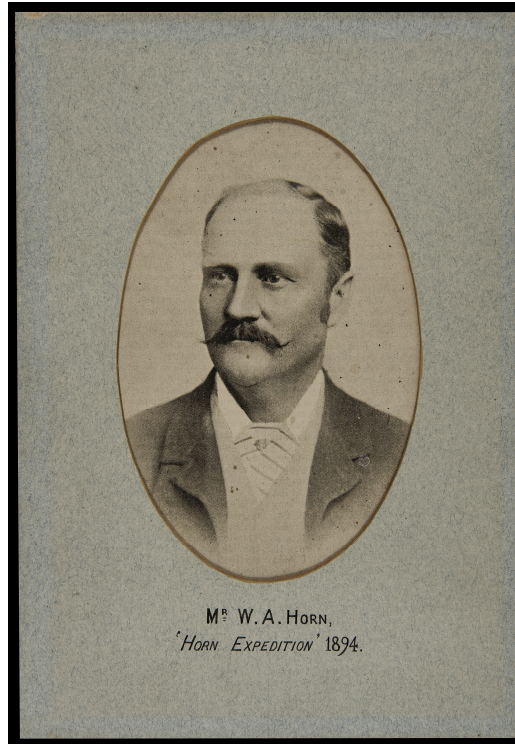


Figure 1: Willam Austin Horn (Courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum)



Figure 2: Baldwin Spencer

<http://museumvictoria.com.au/treasures/coldetails.aspx?Simg=4&PID=64>

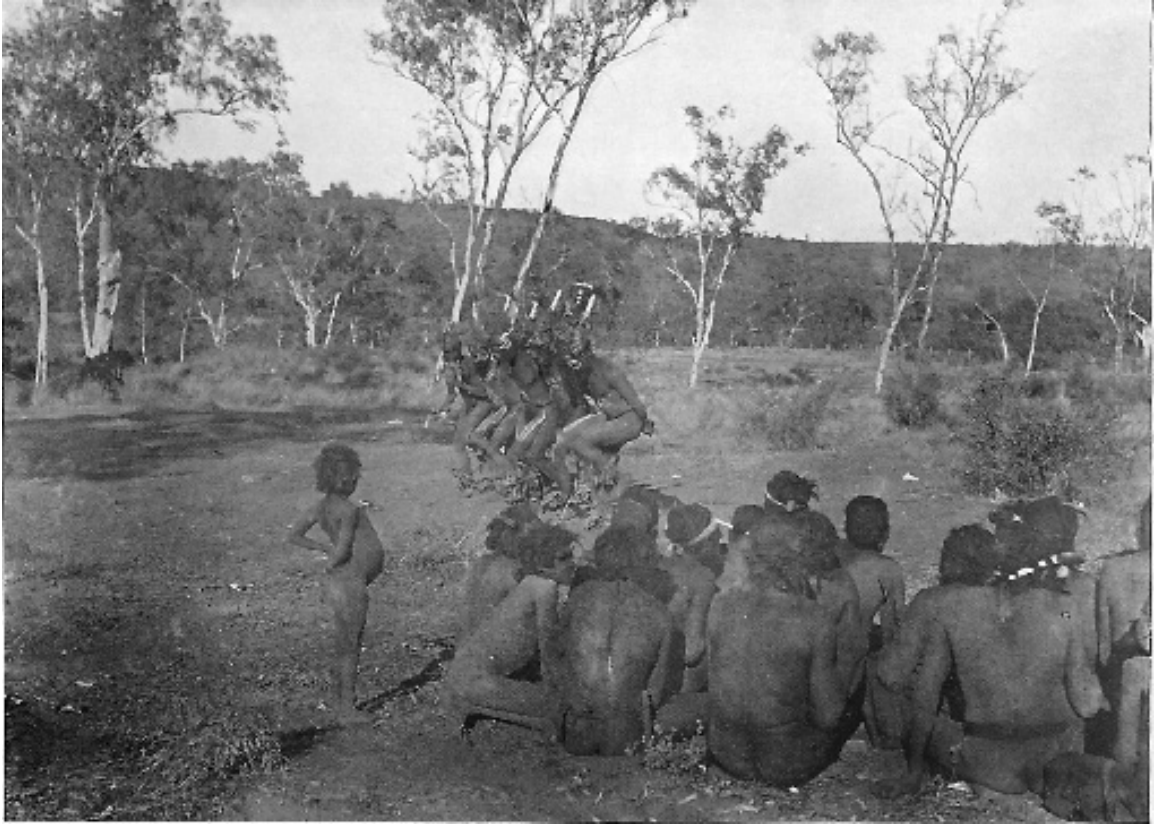


Figure 3: Photograph by Baldwin Spencer (Courtesy of Watkinson Library)

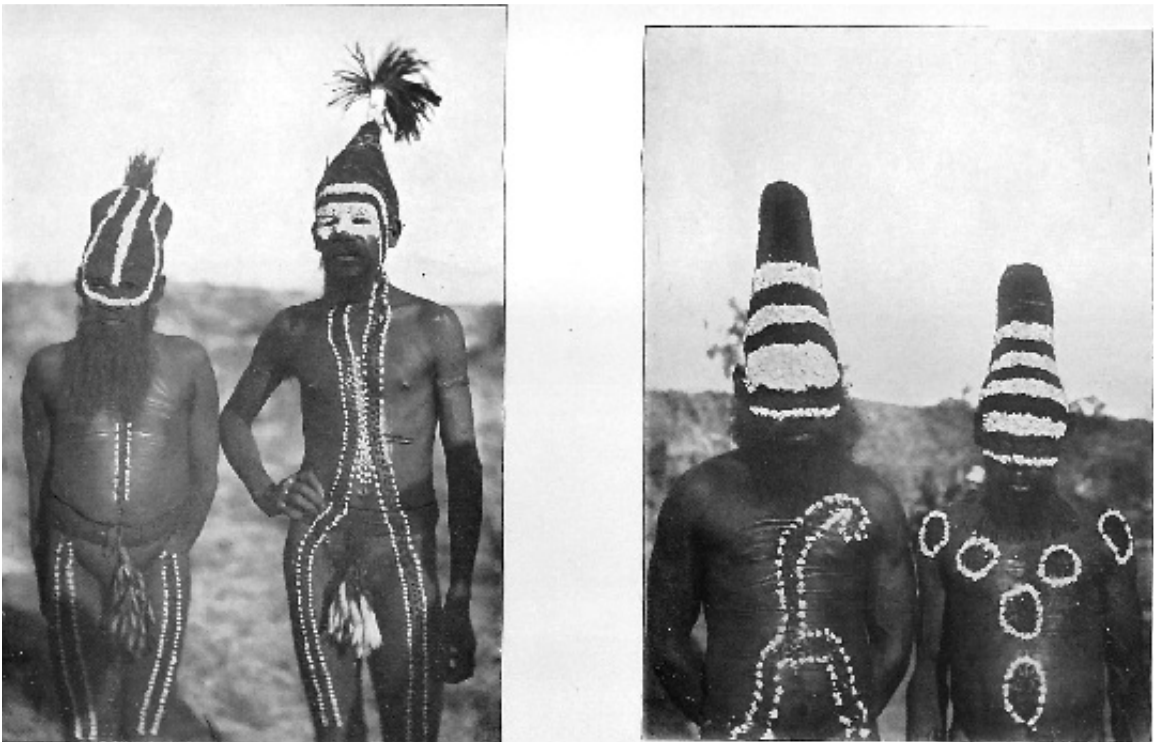
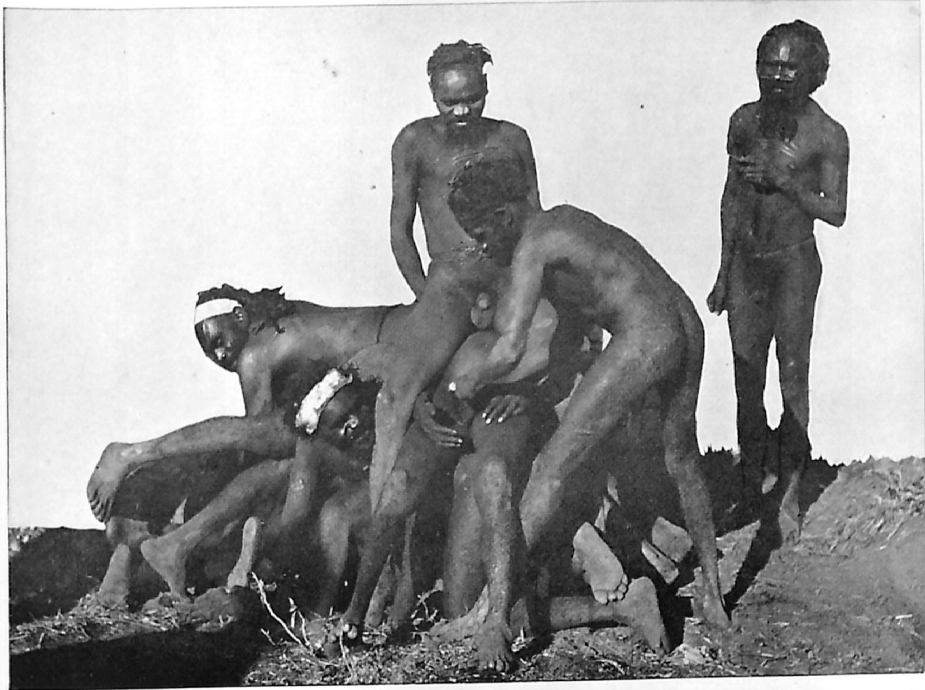


Figure 4: Photograph by F.J. Gillen (Courtesy of Watkinson Library)



F. J. Gillen, Photo.

Fig. 24.

Figure 5: Photograph by F.J. Gillen (Courtesy of Watkinson Library)



Figure 6: *The Breakaway* (1891) by Tom Roberts
(http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/australianimpressionism/education/insights_views.htm)



Figure 7: *The Golden Fleece: The Shearing at Newstead* (1894) by Tom Roberts
(<http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/work/648+the-golden-fleece>)

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