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Henry Ling Roth, Marion E. Butler, James Backhouse Walker, J. G. Garson and Edward B. Tylor
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Aborigines of Tasmania

First published in 1890 in a run of just 200 copies, anthropologist Henry Ling Roth's *The Aborigines of Tasmania* provides a comprehensive account of native Tasmanians' life and culture. Roth, writing in the wake of the Tasmanian Aborigines' extinction, produces 'an approach to absolute completeness' that relies on the accounts of the explorers, colonisers, and anthropologists who preceded him. His work covers an exhaustive range of detail, from the Tasmanians' mannerisms to their psychology, origin, and language. Compiling his predecessors' observations and arguments, Roth often sets opinions in opposition to highlight the lack of consensus amongst those who encountered the Tasmanians. Roth's book is additionally valuable for the 'vocabularies' included in his appendices. The 1899 edition (225 copies) revises and expands the first, adding photographs to the first edition's illustrations as well as new appendices. It made an innovative and lasting contribution to an established research tradition.

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Frontispiece.

H. LING ROTH.—ABORIGINES OF TASMANIA.



WYBALENA, THE SETTLEMENT OF THE TASMANIAN ABORIGINAL EXILES ON FLINDERS' ISLAND.

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THE

ABORIGINES OF TASMANIA

BY

H. LING ROTH,

*Fellow of the Anthropological Institute ; Author of “The Agriculture and Peasantry of
Eastern Russia ;” The Natives of Sarawak and British North Borneo,” &c., &c.*

ASSISTED BY
MARION E. BUTLER ; AND JAS. BACKHOUSE WALKER,
OF HOBART, TASMANIA, WITH A CHAPTER ON THE OSTEOLOGY BY
J. G. GARSON, M.D.

PREFACE

BY

EDWARD B. TYLOR, D.C.L., F.R.S.

*Professor of Anthropology at the University of Oxford ; Vice-President
of the Anthropological Institute, &c., &c., &c.*

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PREFACE

TO FIRST EDITION (1890)

BY

EDWARD B. TYLOR, ESQ., D.C.L., F.R.S.,

*Professor of Anthropology at the University of Oxford, Vice-President of the Anthropological Institute
of Great Britain and Ireland, etc., etc.*

IN the present work, the recorded knowledge as to the extinct native race of Tasmania has been brought together with, I think, an approach to absolute completeness.

If there have remained anywhere up to modern times men whose condition has changed little since the early Stone Age, the Tasmanians seem to have been such a people. They stand before us as a branch of the Negroid race illustrating the condition of man near his lowest known level of culture. Tribes who like them knew no agriculture nor pastoral life are common enough, indeed this is the most convenient definition of savages. Many tribes in the late Stone Age have lasted on into modern times, but it appears that the aborigines of Tasmania, whose last survivors have but just died out, by the workmanship of their stone implements rather represented the condition of Palæolithic Man. Years ago, the evidence already pointed towards this important point in the history of civilization. In 1865, in comparing the implements of the Drift with those found elsewhere, I put on record as follows:—"The Tasmanians sometimes used for cutting or notching wood a very rude instrument. Eye-witnesses describe how they would pick up a suitable flat stone, knock off chips from one side, partly or all round the edge, and use it without more ado; and there is a specimen corresponding exactly to this description in the Taunton Museum." *

The information here given is on excellent authority, having been obtained in answer to my inquiries of Dr. Joseph Milligan and other representatives of Tasmania at the International Exhibition of 1862. But it would not have been safe to assume without further information

* "Early History of Mankind," London, 1865, p. 195.

that the Tasmanians were not in the habit of making stone implements of higher types for other purposes. Now, however, further evidence has come in, showing that the implement in question (see Plate facing p. 137) is typical, and the description of the making fully to the purpose. In the present work, the excellent dissertation published by Mr. R. Brough Smyth in his "Aborigines of Victoria" is condensed, and beside his results is placed a statement of the evidence of Mr. James Scott, Mr. Morton Allport, and other competent authorities, all agreeing that the stone implements were shaped and edged not by grinding but merely by striking off flakes, this being generally if not invariably done on one side only. The implements thus bear a resemblance to those flakes trimmed on one side, which are known to archæologists as scrapers. It is thus apparent that the Tasmanians were at a somewhat less advanced stage in the art of stone implement making than the Palæolithic men of Europe, who habitually shaped many of their flint implements into more regular and effective forms by skilful alternate flaking on either side. Moreover, it will be seen that these descriptions of the Stone Age in modern Tasmania contribute evidence bearing on the interesting problem, how the men of the Quaternary Mammoth-period used their rude stone tools and weapons. Careful study of these Palæolithic implements, while clearly illustrating the practice of holding them grasped in the hand (possibly often with a piece of hide or other coating as a hand-guard), has not shown that they were ever fixed in wooden handles. The question thus arises whether the art of hafting a hatchet, which to us moderns seems so obvious, may have been unknown to the primitive savages of Europe, and only have arisen toward the Neolithic age. We are now able to say that such ignorance in tool-craft was quite possible among the prehistoric Drift-men, for it actually prevailed among the natives of Tasmania. According to the testimony of numerous observers, they grasped their stone implements in the hand, but never fixed them in a handle, unless where foreigners, whether savage or civilized, had introduced this improvement. On the whole, the life of the Tasmanians may give some idea of the conditions of the earliest prehistoric tribes of the Old World, allowing for a milder climate on the one hand, but a want of the great animals on the other, and remembering that the modern savage was in some arts below the ancient, for there is no record of the Tasmanian having made a needle for sewing his skin garments with his sinew thread, nor did he in drawing or carving show anything of the artistic skill of the Cave Men of Central France.

Looking at the vestiges of a people so representative of the rudest type of man, anthropologists must join with philanthropists in regretting their unhappy fate, which fills a dismal page of our colonial history. We are now beginning to see what scientific value there would have been in such a minute careful portraiture of their thoughts and customs as Mr. Howitt is drawing up of the Australian tribes just across Bass' Straits. As this cannot be, at least it is necessary that the existing information should be diligently collected and critically sifted. To this task Mr. H. Ling Roth has devoted long and conscientious labour, examining in all likely quarters so as to gather together the notices scattered through voyages, histories, colonial documents, and other sources from which first-hand information, however fragmentary, could be obtained. Anthropologists, who have so often had to complain of the scantiness of materials as to the native Tasmanians, will find with surprise that much more is really known than was supposed, and will be glad to possess this book, the more so that its object being technical rather than popular, only a small number of copies has been printed.

SUPPLEMENTARY NOTE

TO SECOND EDITION, 1899.

During the nine years which have elapsed since the publication of the first edition, I may observe that Mr. Ling Roth's diligent search for new evidence bearing on the history, language, arts, and habits of the Tasmanians, has been, as a comparison of the two editions will show, by no means barren of result. Particular attention has to be called to the progress lately made in the anthropological study of the Tasmanians. That these rude savages remained within the present century representatives of the immensely ancient Palæolithic period, has become an admitted fact. There may now be seen in the Pitt-Rivers Museum, in Oxford, a collection of Tasmanian stone implements, illustrating the principal types found on the surface of the fields, or in shell-heaps, which are mostly shown by the evidence of eye-witnesses to be such as were made and used by the natives up to colonial times. Some of the best of these were sent by Mr. Alexander Morton of the Hobart Museum, and my own collection, containing numerous formed implements and chips of varied quality, was mostly procured for me by Mr. Williamson of Brown's River. That the workmanship of the Tasmanians may be generally taken as below that of the Palæolithic Drift and Cave men, is apparent

from the absence of any native Tasmanian implement comparable to the symmetrical pointed picks worked on both sides, characteristic of the Mammoth Period in Europe. The typical tool of the Tasmanian, a flat flake trimmed by striking off secondary flakes or chips on one side only, may be classed with the so-called scrapers which hold their place as efficient tools even into the early metal age. At the same time, the shaping which gives these tools a hand-grip on one side belongs to the early stage of implement-making which preceded the introduction of the wooden haft. Rude as the native Tasmanian tools are, they are not devoid of skill, and within the last year or two some forms have come under view which are even remarkable for delicacy, such as is seen in neolithic work. Concave scrapers suited for such work as smoothing spears appear in Tasmanian collections, and Mr. J. Paxton Moir, of the Shot Tower, Hobart, has made especial study of these, as well as the gravers to which he gives the descriptive name "duck-bills." We thus see among the Tasmanian stone tools signs of special development where needful. But judged by general character, their nearest Old World relatives seem to be those oldest and rudest palæolithic implements, the plateau-flints of Kent. To enforce this comparison, I may add that it agrees with the opinions of the late Sir J. Prestwich, and of General Pitt-Rivers. The reader will find in the present volume some additional figures of implements, illustrative of these new points of argument, and I may add that the short remarks here made on them have been carefully tested by me in conjunction with the Curator of the Pitt-Rivers Museum, Mr. H. Balfour.

The view stated in the foregoing Preface that Palæolithic Man survived in Tasmania within human memory, has since received wider extension. It is now many years since I called attention to the probability of the ground stone hatchets of the Australians having been derived from the islands beyond Torres Straits. This was a theoretical inference, but it now appears that an older state of things comparable to that of Tasmania has survived in West Australia. Half a century ago Mr. W. Ayshford Sanford brought home from the Perth District mounted stone hatchets of Tasmanian type, and lately Mr. Alex. Morton found natives on the Murchison River using unground implements of similar nature, so that in this region the connexion with palæolithic natives has continued till now. It may be added that stone implements from New Zealand make it probable, that found with bones of the Moa, palæolithic conditions there prevailed among the race which

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PREFACE. ix

preceded the Maori settlement. It is thus becoming clearer and clearer that the anthropology of this remote district can give us clues to the earliest state of civilization of which traces have reached us and which has been thought to be lost in a past of almost incalculable antiquity. Man of the Lower Stone Age ceases to be a creature of philosophic inference, but becomes a known reality.

In the preparation of this second edition, Mr. Ling Roth has been greatly assisted by Mr. James Backhouse Walker, the son of the late George W. Walker, the companion of the late James Backhouse in their joint mission to Australia and Tasmania, more than sixty years ago. Mr. J. B. Walker's local knowledge of Tasmania, and his unwearying labour, have been invaluable in the augmentation and revision of the work.

E. B. T.

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PATTY.
FROM PHOTOGRAPHS BY WOOLLEY IN POSSESSION OF MR. J. W. BEATTIE, HOBART.
WM. LANNEY.

