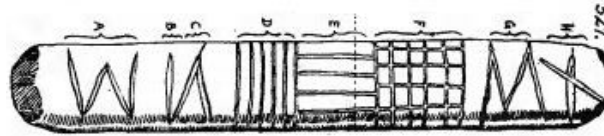


Australian message sticks

A database of artefacts and commentaries



Axis I: Labs to Libraries

Alberto Acerbi



External
collaborations

Big data

Nicolas Baumard



Quantitative history



James Winters (post-doc)

Language evolution

Using laboratory experiments to simulate the rise of complex codes for efficient communication.

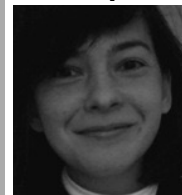


Thomas Müller (PhD student)

Using laboratory experiments to study the evolution of graphic codes and asynchronic communication

Axis II: Origins of Writing

Tiffany Morisseau



External
collaborations

Experimental pragmatics

Pierre Délégé



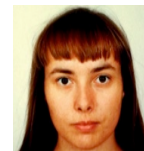
Ethnographies of writing



Piers Kelly (post-doc)

Grassroots literacy

What do invented scripts in today's small-scale societies tell us about the evolution of writing?



Barbara Pavlek (PhD student)

Evolution and transmission of graphic codes: where do our symbols come from and how do they change?

Group leader:
Olivier Morin

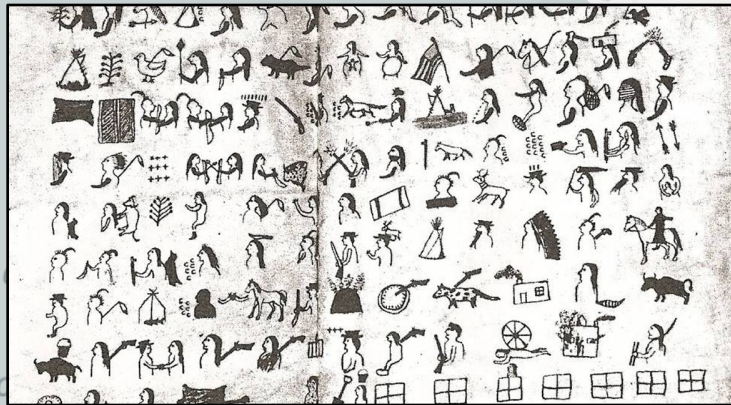




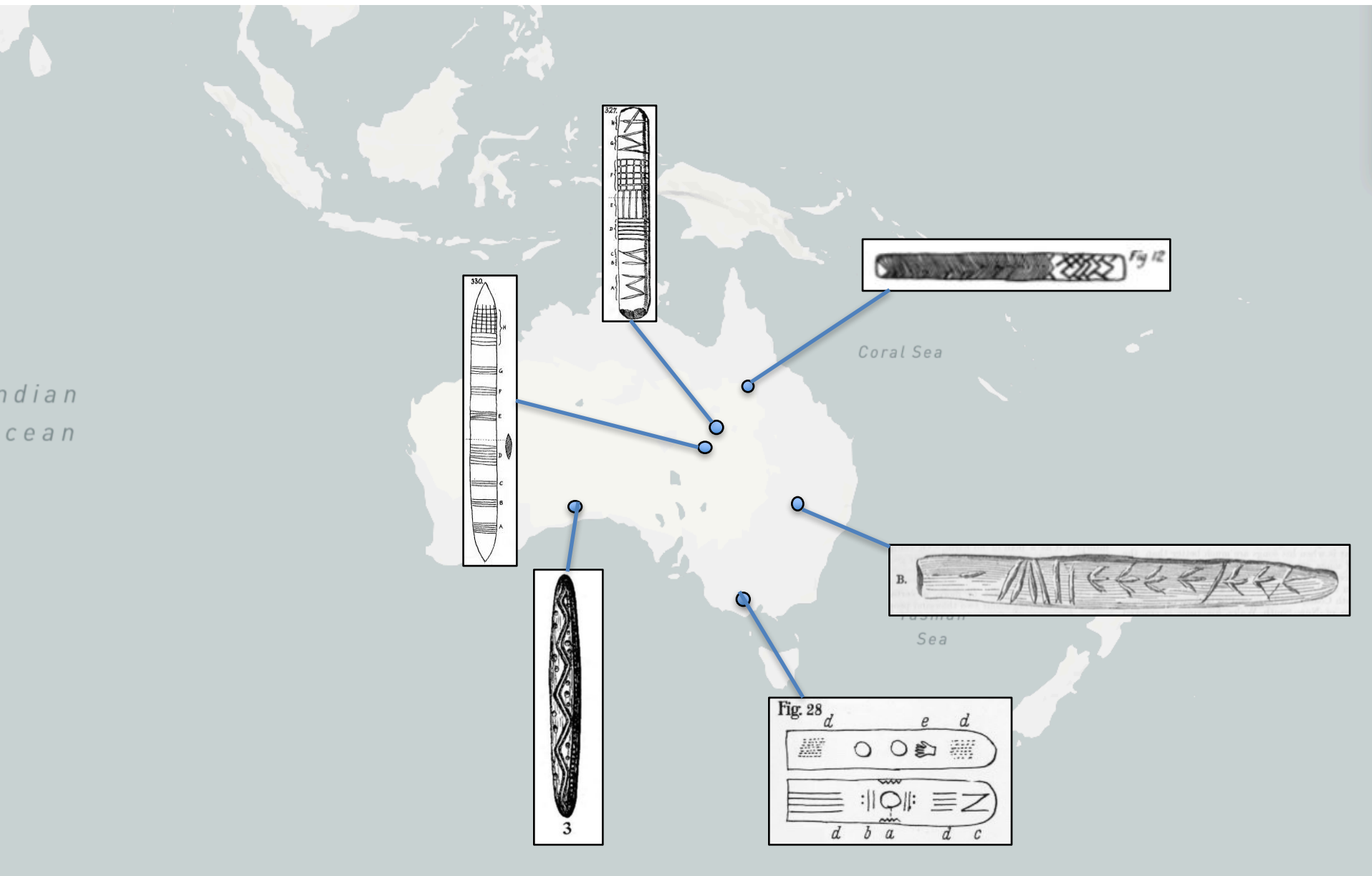
Vinča symbols, central Europe, 6th to 5th millennia BCE



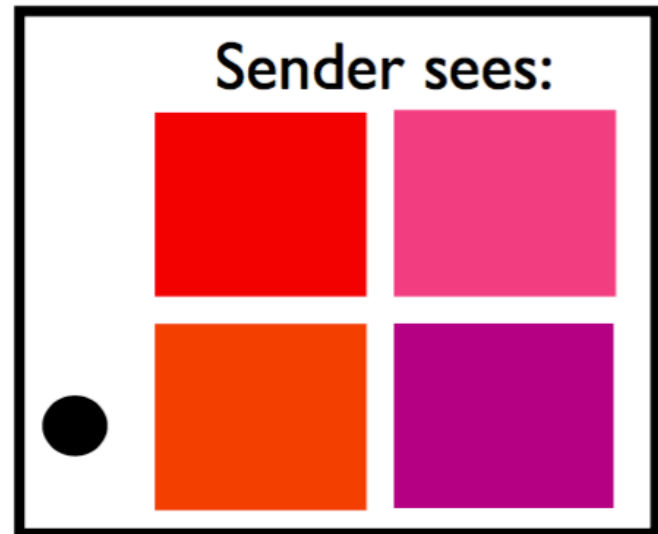
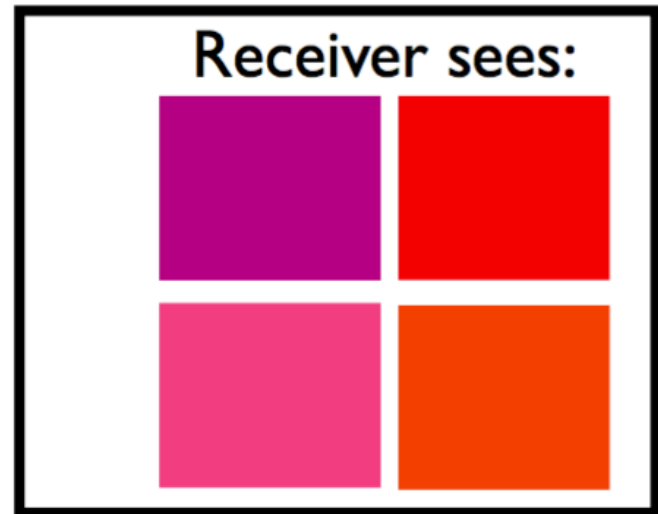
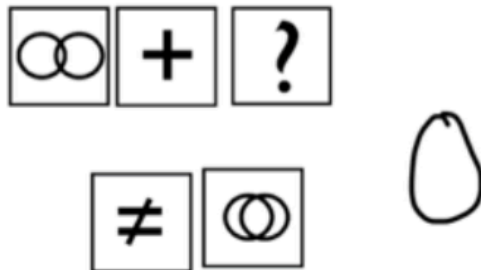
Nsibidi, southeast Nigeria



Winter count pictographs, Oglala Lakota



Australian message sticks



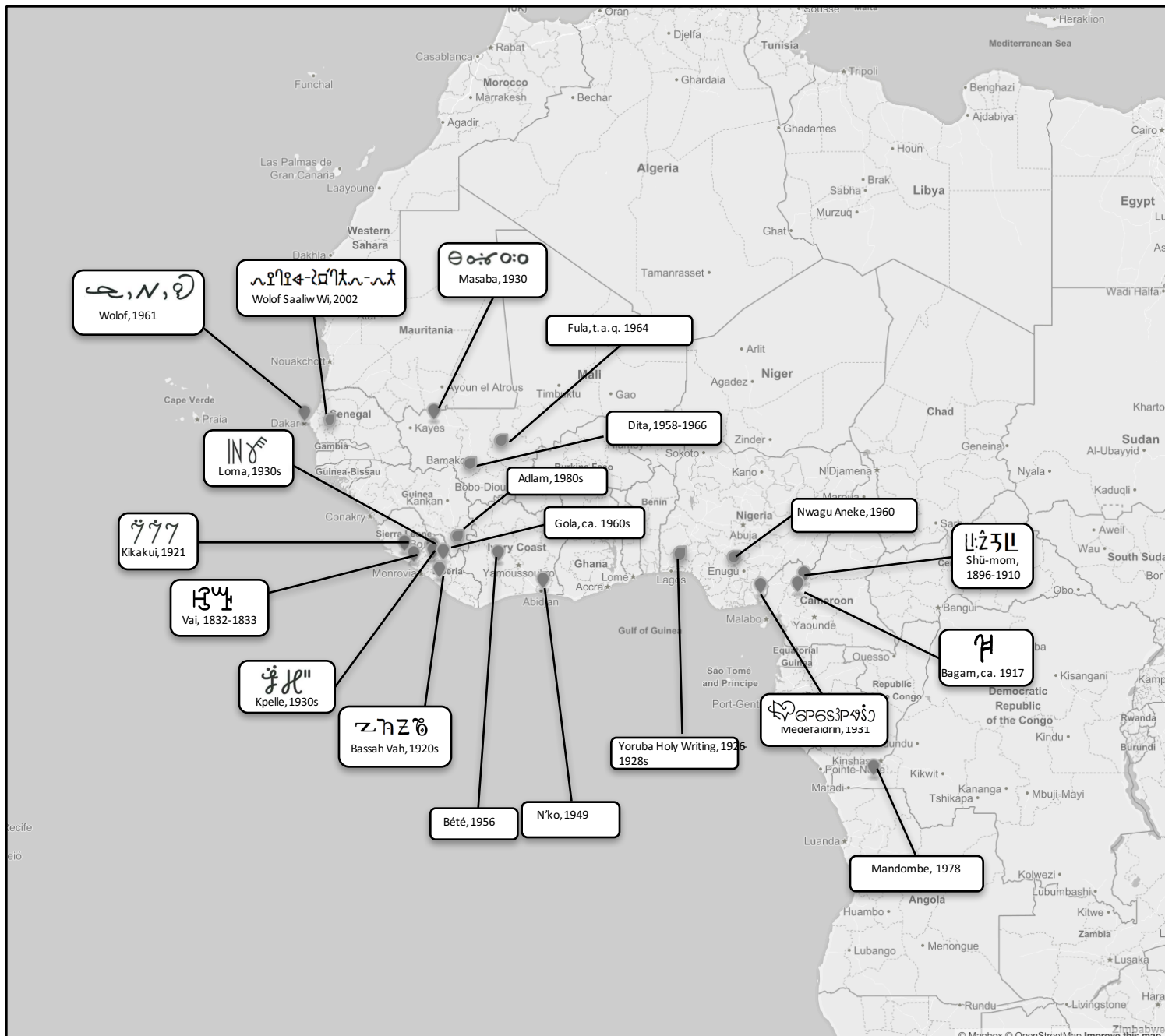
The Colour Game experiment



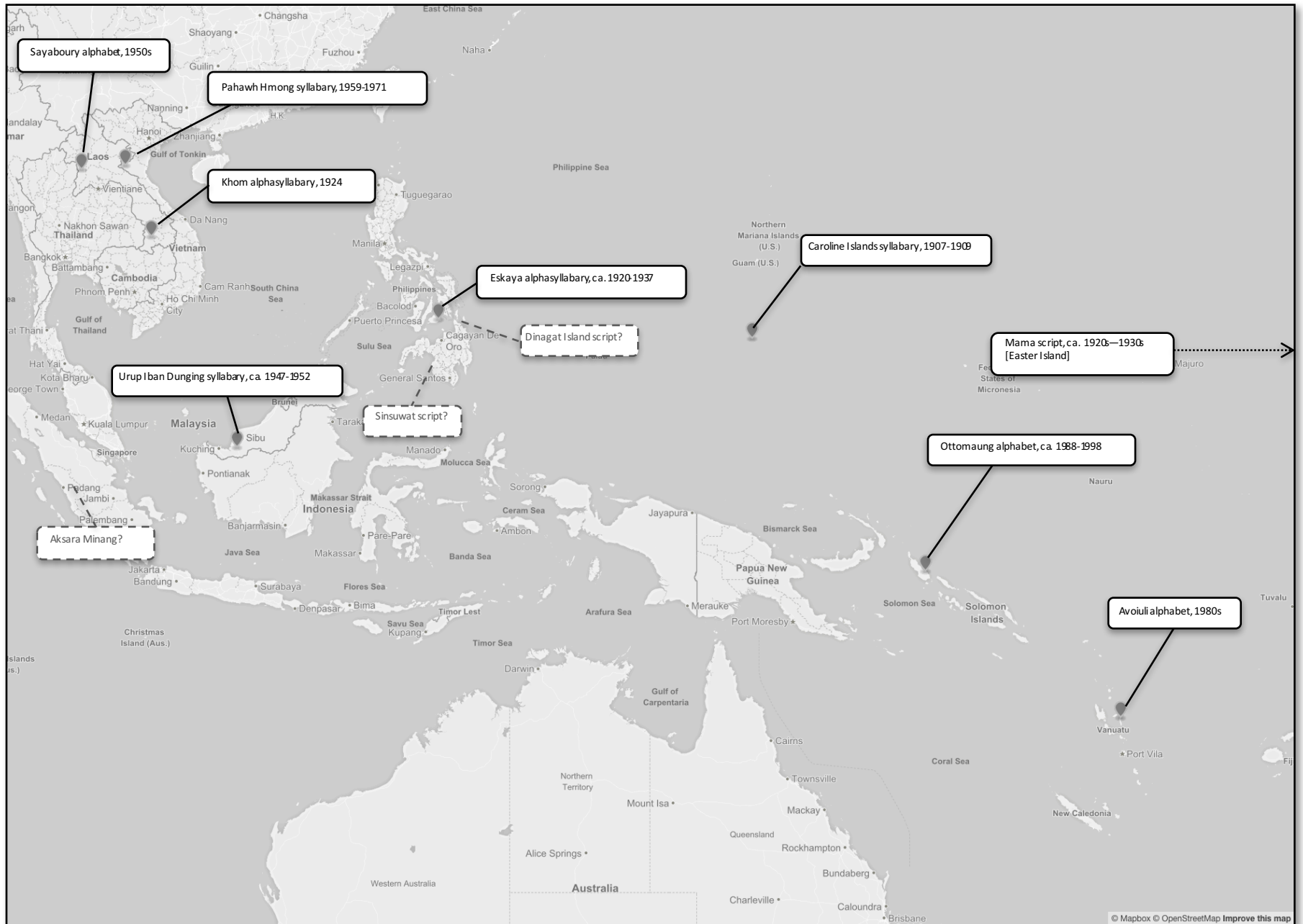
The Heraldry Project

	A	E	I	O	U	V
	D _a	R _e	T _i	Ꭰ _o	Ꭱ _u	i _v
G/K	Ꭶ _{ga} Ꭷ _{ka}	Ꭵ _{ge}	Ꭶ _{gi}	Ꭰ _{go}	Ꭱ _{gu}	Ꭶ _{gv}
H	Ꭶ _{ha}	Ꭶ _{he}	Ꭶ _{hi}	Ꭶ _{ho}	Ꭶ _{hu}	Ꭶ _{hv}
L	Ꭶ _{la}	Ꭶ _{le}	Ꭶ _{li}	Ꭶ _{lo}	Ꭶ _{lu}	Ꭶ _{lv}
M	Ꭶ _{ma}	Ꭶ _{me}	Ꭶ _{mi}	Ꭶ _{mo}	Ꭶ _{mu}	
N	Ꭶ _{na} Ꭶ _{hna} Ꭶ _{nah}	Ꭶ _{ne}	Ꭶ _{ni}	Ꭶ _{no}	Ꭶ _{nu}	Ꭶ _{nv}
QU/KW	Ꭶ _{qua}	Ꭶ _{que}	Ꭶ _{qui}	Ꭶ _{quo}	Ꭶ _{quu}	Ꭶ _{quv}
S	Ꭶ _{sa} Ꭶ _s	Ꭶ _{se}	Ꭶ _{si}	Ꭶ _{so}	Ꭶ _{su}	Ꭶ _{sv}
D/T	Ꭶ _{da} Ꭶ _{ta}	Ꭶ _{de} Ꭶ _{te}	Ꭶ _{di} Ꭶ _{ti}	Ꭶ _{do}	Ꭶ _{du}	Ꭶ _{dv}
DL/TL	Ꭶ _{dla} Ꭶ _{tla}	Ꭶ _{tle}	Ꭶ _{tli}	Ꭶ _{tlo}	Ꭶ _{tlu}	Ꭶ _{tlv}
TS/J	Ꭶ _{tsa}	Ꭶ _{tse}	Ꭶ _{tsi}	Ꭶ _{tso}	Ꭶ _{tsu}	Ꭶ _{tsv}
W	Ꭶ _{wa}	Ꭶ _{we}	Ꭶ _{wi}	Ꭶ _{wo}	Ꭶ _{wu}	Ꭶ _{wv}
Y	Ꭶ _{ya}	Ꭶ _{ye}	Ꭶ _{yi}	Ꭶ _{yo}	Ꭶ _{yu}	Ꭶ _{yv}

Cherokee syllabary, 1821.



West African script invention



Asia-Pacific script invention in the 20th century



Botenstäbe in Australien.

Von

Maria Frank.

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I. Einleitung.

Wir Europäer können heutzutage das Leben ohne schriftliche Mitteilungen nicht meistern. Die Schrift stellt in unserer gesamten Kultur einen integrierenden Bestandteil dar. Gerade das Vorkommen derselben gilt als eines der Unterscheidungsmerkmale zwischen Natur- und Hochkulturvölkern. Den Primitiven fehlt die Schrift im eigentlichen Sinne des Wortes.

In meiner Arbeit will ich nun versuchen darzustellen, wie ein solches Naturvolk, nämlich die Eingeborenen von Australien, sich untereinander

Frank, Maria. 1940. "Botenstäbe in Australien."

Zeitschrift für Ethnologie 72 (4/6):328-352.



Functions of message sticks

- to grant authority to the messenger (passport)
- to grant authority to the message (seal)
- to reinforce memory (mnemonic)

Note: The graphic message is not a transcription of the verbal message.

Unanswered questions

- *History*: What is their origin and diffusion?
- *Ethnography*: How were/are they used in practice?
- *Communication*: What are their principles of composition and interpretation?



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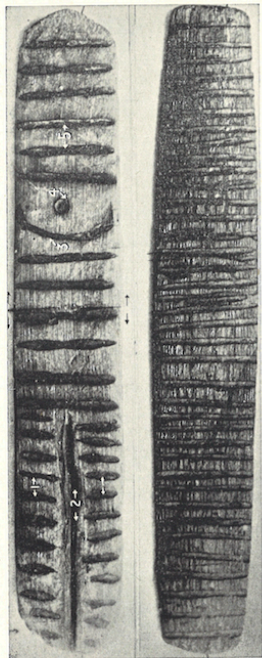
Trove



HATHI
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A MESSAGE-STICK GIVING DETAILED INSTRUCTIONS TO MEET FOR ANNUAL INITIATION RITES

Above: 1. These Mount Hart tribesmen must come down to 2. The Crocodile Hole at the time of the New Moon to 4. Fairfield Station where 5. These Fairfield blacks will meet them for the Big Initiation in the making of young men.

Below (Reverse side): The markings on this reverse side of stick represent individual Fitzroy River tribesmen who will meet the Mount Hart and Fairfield blacks.

Letter to Mr. Howitt
April 15, 1880

I will answer all your letters as Blackfellas shortly, for some time past. I have not had many here. They have been away picking and after the rains were done with the work. Having they are all leaving to draw up to the station. I will get the information you require and forward it.

I think I can answer your last note at once. I have asked the Blacks and they give the same answer as before. The did. If your Bolly was going to challenge the Bond Bond men to fight he would carry his spear & throw it. A spear, or a shield sent to a tribe was an act of defiance and

Idriess, Ion L. 1937 [1948]. *Over the range: Sunshine and shadow in the Kimberleys*. Sydney and London: Angus & Robertson.

Bulmer, John. 1880. [Letter to A.W. Howitt], Apr. 15, 1880. AIATSIS.

tained that the information was correct to the hour."

HOW IS IT DONE?

I asked Dr. Basedow to explain this phenomenon, and he replied that it was not quite so easy as one might imagine. The local European settlers generally describe these mysterious messages as "mulga wires," but that, of course, conveys nothing to the enquirer. The aborigines certainly have a very intricate system of gesture language and signalling (said Dr. Basedow). When the message is to be sent to a person, or camp, located within the range of human eyesight, a conventional code of gestures by means of arms, head, legs, and certain inanimate objects carried in the hands, is employed.

WHERE THE PUBLIC MAY SEE IT.

The position selected for hanging the portrait of Mr. Peake (from the brush of Mr. G. A. J. Webb) is at the extreme southern end of the western wall. It will take the place of the large picture of Governor Gawler, so that the public may have an opportunity of seeing the fine life-like canvas from the galleries.

It is a three-quarter length portrait, and will take an honoured place in the historic Assembly gallery, preserving, in a long and notable line, the memory of a distinguished and esteemed personality—a Premier three times, and a member for 23 years. This will be the enshrining of a great example. Mrs. Peake and her daughters and relatives will be present, and no



AN ABORIGINAL MESSAGE STICK OF THE ALURIDJA TRIBE, CENTRAL AUSTRALIA.

The message interpreted reads as follows:—"A number of men are asked to come to us when the moon's face is round; goannas are fat and plentiful; and the gumtrees are teeming with grubs; bring spears."

Take a very simple case. It is desired to announce the coming of a party of horsemen. The signaller moves his arms, and bends in the elbows, in much the same way as many do when riding a trotting horse. Then he sweeps his arms fully extended in the direction the horses are travelling. When the death of a person is to be announced, the arms are kept rigidly extended, and the head is thrown backwards. When the sex of a person, or animal, is to be indicated, an action exaggeratedly imitating the stroking of a long beard designates the male, while a semicircular swing of a hand towards the breast stands for a woman.

fewer than 500 invitations to attend the unveiling have been issued.

The speakers will be the Premier, the Chief Secretary (Sir John Bice), the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Gunn), the Speaker (Sir Richard Butler), the Leader of the Country Party (Mr. McIntosh), and Mr. Reidy.

THE EMPIRE EXHIBITION.

Passages have been booked for the Chief Secretary (Sir John Bice) and "secretary" and Miss Bice in connection with South Australia's representation at the Empire Exhibition next year. The trip will extend to the Continent, and available to America. The name of Mr.

1923 'Round the city', *Saturday Journal* (Adelaide, SA: 1923 - 1929), 29 September, p. 17. , viewed 16 Aug 2016, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article199233785>

The British
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national
museum
australia



South
Australian
Museum



QUEENSLAND
MUSEUM



MUSEUM VICTORIA

MUSEUM
VOLKENKUNDE
LEIDEN



★ musée du quai Branly

LA OÙ DIALOGUENT LES CULTURES



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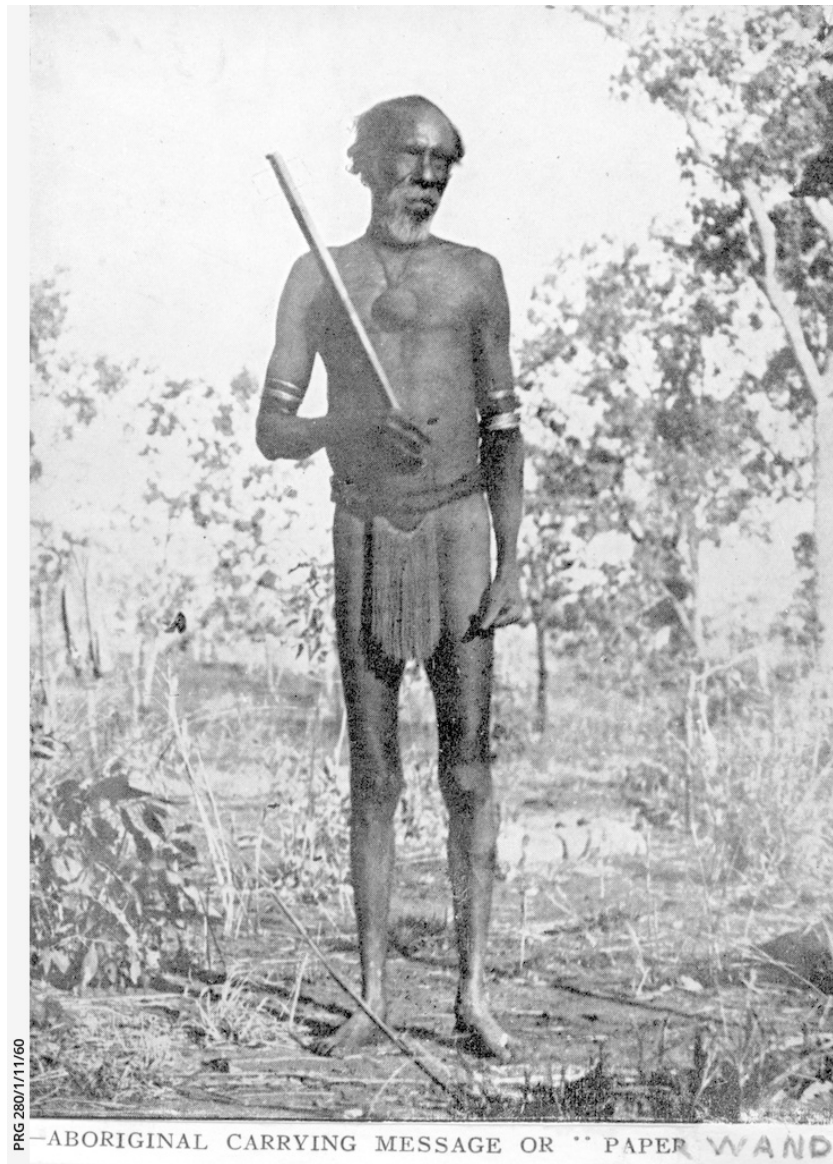


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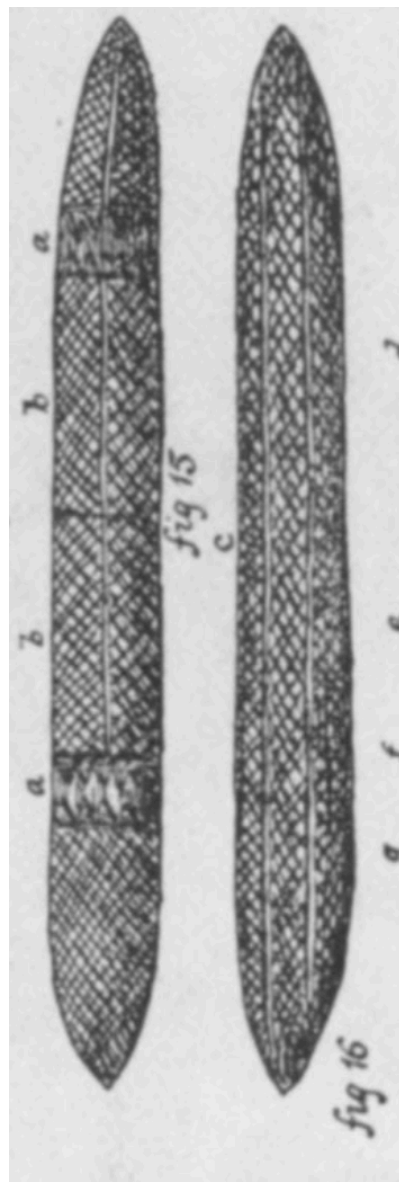


THE UNIVERSITY
OF QUEENSLAND
AUSTRALIA

School of Social Science
UQ Anthropology Museum



1914. *Aboriginal man carrying a message stick.* Searcy Collection, State Library of New South Wales.



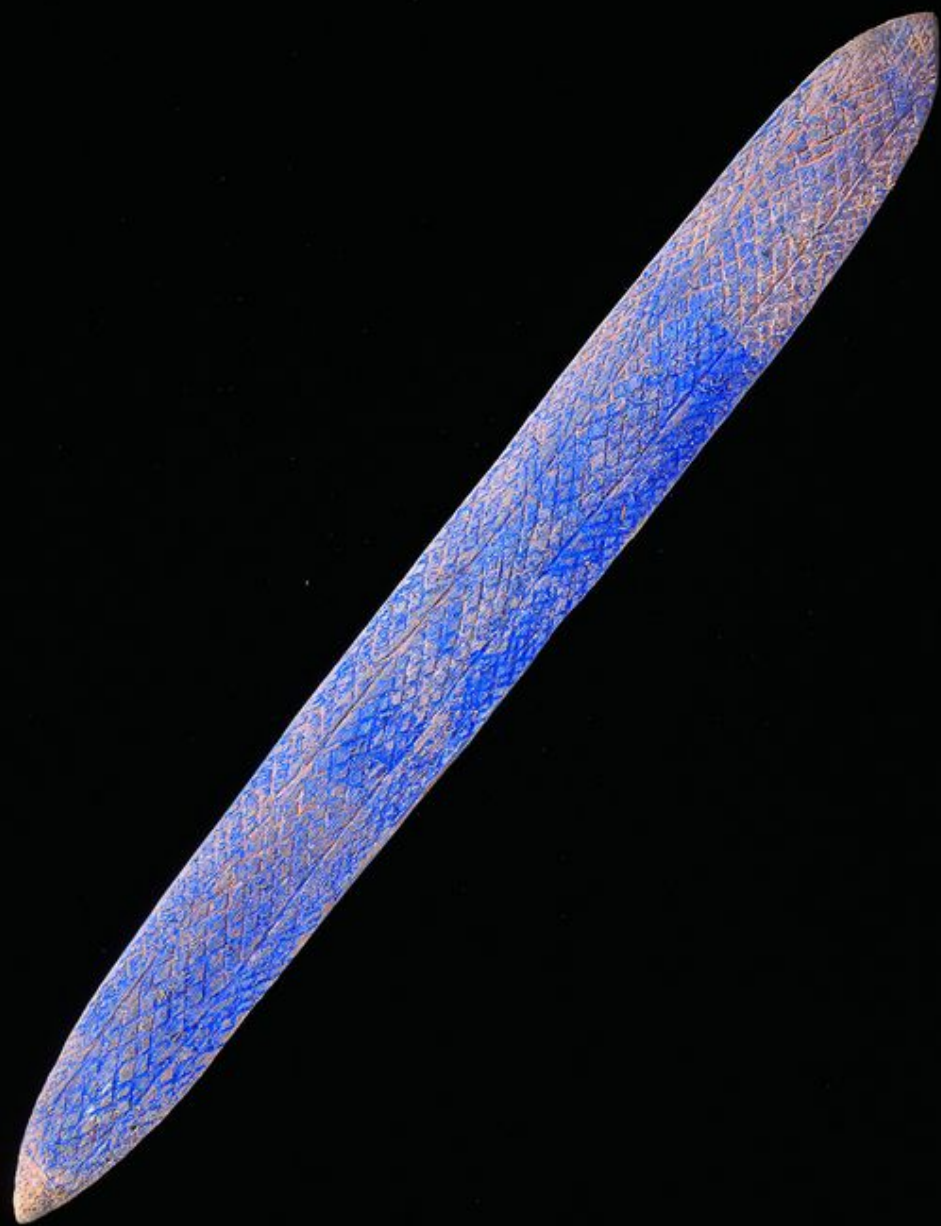
The following instance will show how message sticks are used in this tribe, figs. 15 and 16, Plate XIV, represent one which was sent by one of the Wakelbura, to a member of the Yangebura tribe at Blackall. The stick being sent by an Obū is Gidyea,¹ timber being *Wūtherū*. The message refers to game, (a) being for Emu, (b) for Wallaby, to be found near a certain wire netting fence, (c) on a station near Clermont. The marks on the stick do not convey their meaning without a verbal message. The man who takes the stick explains their meaning. If the stick were sent by a Mallera, everything marked on the stick would be Mallera, and it would be delivered to a Mallera. But the above described and figured stick was sent by Obū to Obū. The sticks are always painted, this one was coloured blue.

Here we have again a case analogous to the Wirajuri practice, the message goes through the same totem. But the principle involved is here much more comprehensive. The stick itself is of wood which is of the same totem as is also the game noted on it. In this tribe the two primary, and the four sub-classes divide, I may say, the whole universe into groups. The two primary classes are Mallera and Wutheru, therefore all objects are either one or the other. The practice is carried to such an extent that for instance a wizard who is Mallera can only use objects for his magical practices which are also of the same class as himself. Moreover when he dies the staging upon which his body is laid out must be made of the wood of some tree belonging to the Mallera class. Hence it is necessary as in the case just given, that when a man of the Obū sub-class sends a message stick it must be made of some wood which is also Obū.

¹ *Acacia homalophylla*.

Howitt, A. W. 1889. "Notes on Australian message sticks and messengers."

The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland 18:314-332.



Sender Messenger Recipient



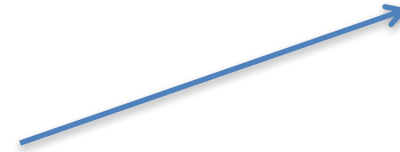
verbal message



message stick



[other communicative props]



MESSAGE STICKS AND THEIR MEANINGS BY MR. BUCKNELL.

TO F. N. Bucknell, Esq., of Burrendoon Station, near Moree, one of the oldest and most respected pioneer pastoralists of that District who knew the Camelaroy Tribe when it numbered several thousands strong, and was in its pristine glory, and had not learned the vices of the white people, is the Society indebted for the following information regarding the Message Stick, called by that tribe "Dooloo." In his letter he says "I got the enclosed Message Stick from a very old blackfellow, and he told me

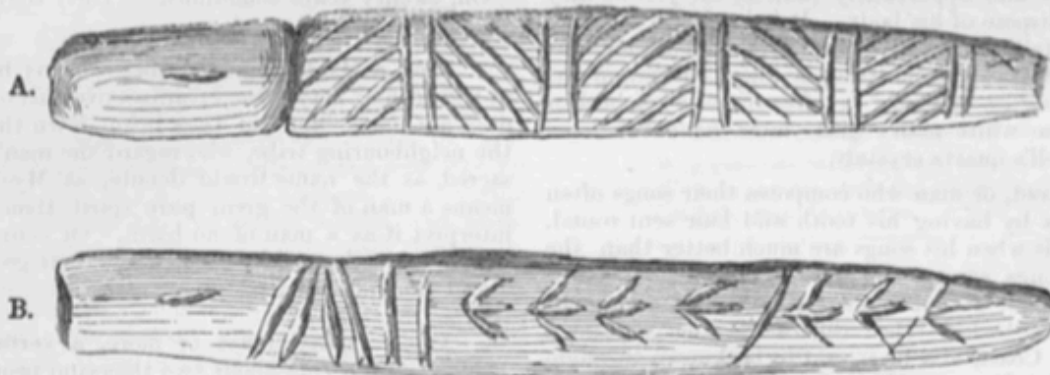
different marks as given by the Aboriginal, and translated into English from the Camelaroy by the writer.

(1.) Yel (?) To the chief of the camp.

(2.) Nummer niah Dooloo ivunder yan amberltei. I send this Dooloo to you.

(3.) Mate mece Dooloo dooneyivunder tie inder yanar-ba yel lodoo boolloona murray grove. I marked this Dooloo and send it to you. Come here at once the murrays (men) are nearly all dead.

(4.) Boolar marl murray gundabar yarrowakie, cuningo booloonay tie ganawa. Three black men left. All the others are dead. Come at once and see.



the meaning of each sentence in Camelaroy to English, and I think it is fairly correct."

The Message Stick is about seven inches long, and about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch wide at the bottom, tapering up to about $\frac{1}{4}$ an inch at the top, it is flat, with the sides slightly rounded off, being about $\frac{1}{2}$ of an inch thick down the centre, and has markings on both sides of it, the front being marked as shown in figure "A," and the back as shown in figure "B." The following is the meaning of the

(5.) Nia inunder Dooloo to yanawa nialeet nooloo-moot, indi mulbay emily. I send this Dooloo to you Come at once. Make no delay, that you may see the last of us here.

(6.) Yarrowaker indi malrey anney pianbar Yarrowa tie murrie butty inder omely maany. Come to Yarrowa to meet us. Come soon that you may meet us alive (?) Ix Barnarbar sends this Dooloo. This Dooloo is sent from where the Ibis lives and breeds.

Bucknell, F. N. 1897. "Message sticks and their meanings by Mr. Bucknell."
The Australasian Anthropological Journal 1 (3):10-11.

Descriptive adequacy

- The social category of sender and recipient
- The language and country of sender and recipient
- An accurate representation of the message stick (photo, sketch etc)
- Additional communicative props
- Direct speech transcription of verbal text with interlinear gloss
- Explanation of relationship between verbal text and graphic components
- Other relevant shared knowledge between sender and recipient

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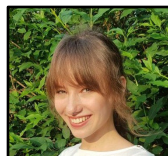

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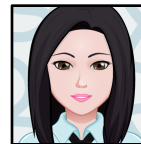

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Olena Tykhostup,
Friedrich Schiller
University, Jena



Junran Lei, The
Australian National
University, Canberra

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Australian Message Sticks

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Title 1918-Artefact_fig12-Hamlyn_Harris-On_messages_and_message_sti-p24

Keywords

Description Sketch of message stick on p. 24 of "On messages and "Message Sticks" employed among the Queensland Aborigines" by R. Hamlyn-Harris

Creator of Object

Date Created 1918
(YYYY-MM-DD,YYYY-MM-DDTHH:MM:SS)Notes on date created terminus ante quem
(YYYY-MM-DD,YYYY-MM-DDTHH:MM:SS)

Place Created Turn-off Lagoon, via Burketown, North Queensland

Object Type message stick

Language

Notes on language

Interpretation

Semantic domain

Dimensions

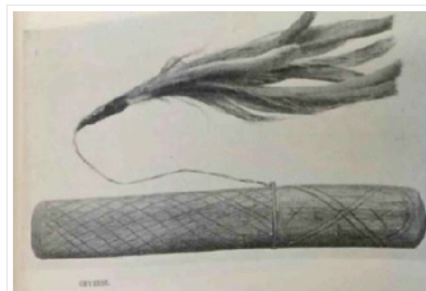
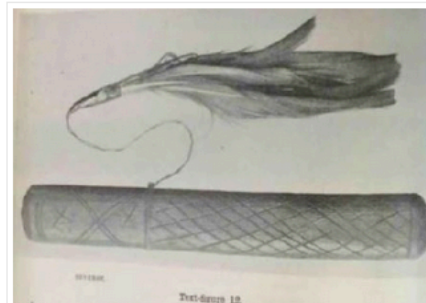
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Material

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Nouns

A: body parts and products
B: human classification
C: language, mythology, ceremony (and associated objects)
D: human artifacts (weapons, tools, clothing, etc.)
E: food, cooking and fire
F: water (fresh, salt, mud, current, etc.)
G: elements (weather, sky, topography, etc.)
H: mammals
I: reptiles (marine and land)
J: birds
K: marine life (except mammals and reptiles)
L: insects and spiders
M: plants

Adjectives

N: physical (bodily states, colours, dimensions, quantity)
O: non-physical (values, emotions, etc.)

Verbs

P: motion
Q: state
R: vocalising and thought
S: bodily function
T: impact and violence
U: holding and transfer

Miscellaneous

V: locationals, temporals, directionals
W: interrogatives
X: interjections
Y: particles
Z: pronouns

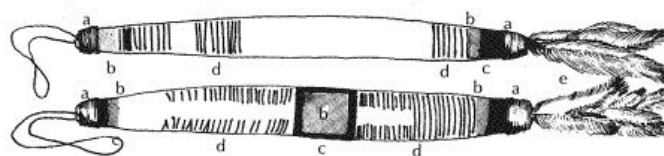
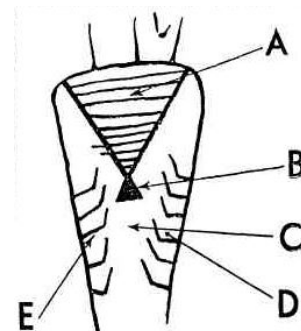
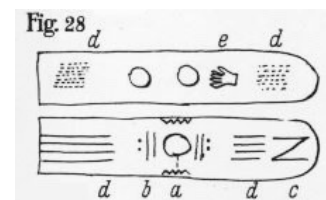
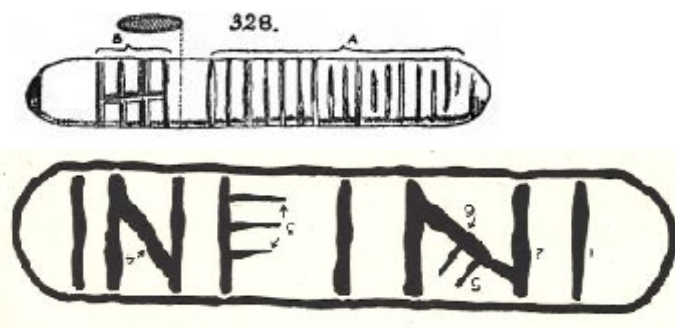
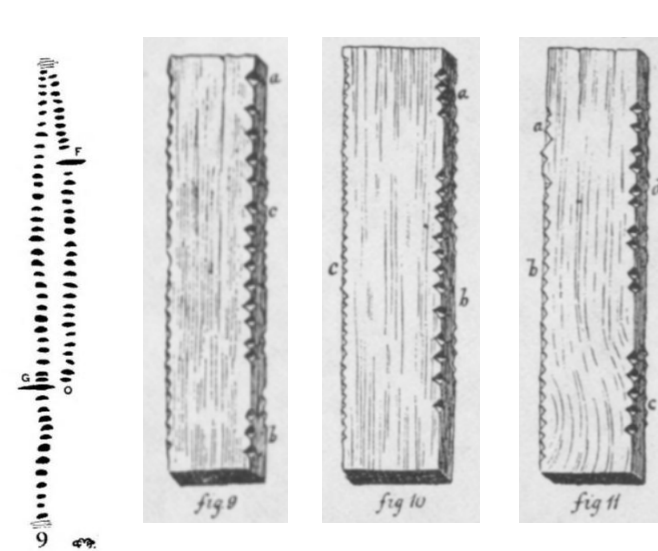




fig 13

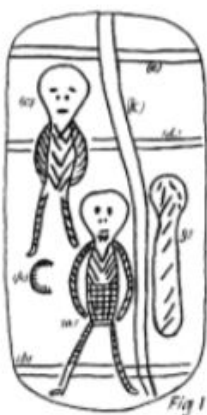


Fig 1



Fig 3



Fig 5



Fig 8



Fig 10



332.



1



6



8



fig 5



fig 6



3



fig 1

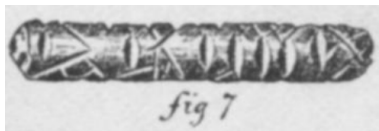


fig 7

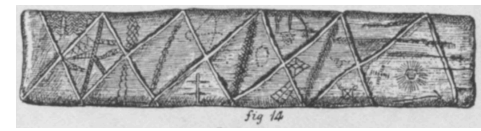
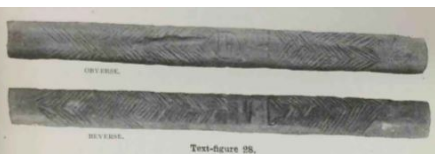


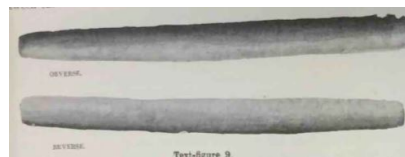
fig 14



Text-figure 28.



Text-figure 13.



Text-figure 9.



Text-figure 8.



335.



335.



335.



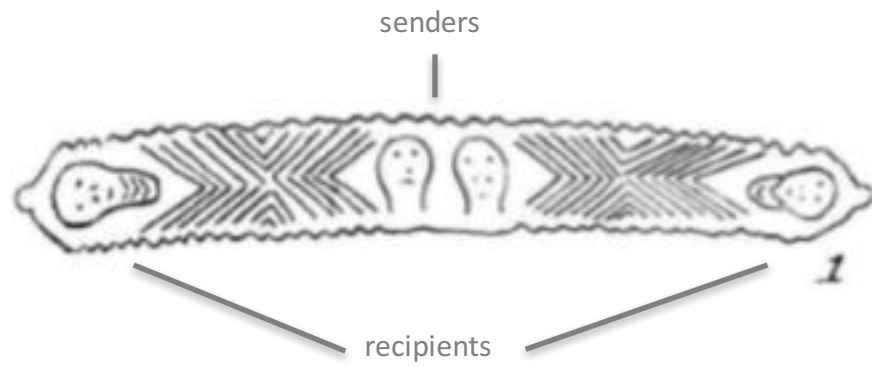
334.



- small sample size
- not yet coded for region
- selection bias
- elicitation errors



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People (general)

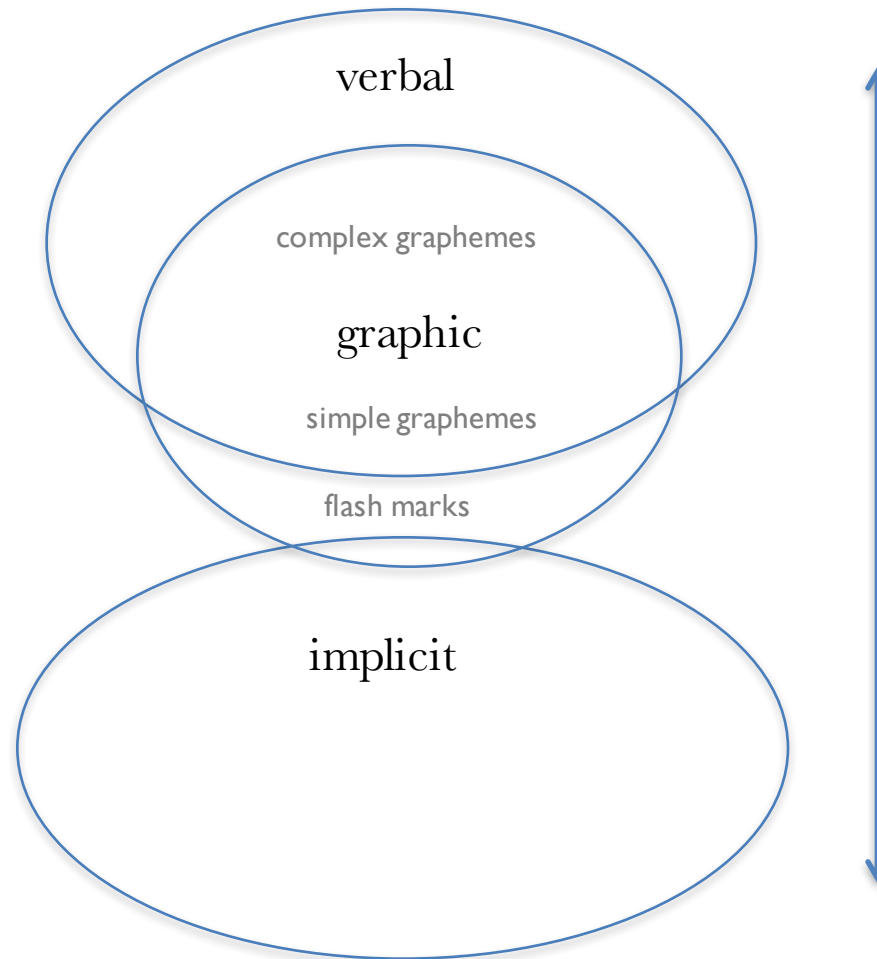
gloss	grapheme	languages
‘person’ (identified)	<notch>	 Danggali, Narangga, Wergaia, Woiwurrung,
‘sender’	<notch at edge>	 Danggali, Narangga, Wergaia, Woiwurrung
‘sender and sender’s companion(s)’	<two or more consecutive notches at edge>	 Wergaia, Woiwurrung
‘group’ (of one kind, eg, women, moiety)	<two or more consecutive notches>	 Danggali, Mandandanji, Narangga, Wergaia, Woiwurrung
‘second group’ (of contrasting kind)	<two or more consecutive notches on opposing edge or side>	 Mandandanji, Narangga, Wergaia, Woiwurrung
‘third, fourth group’ (of contrasting kind)	<two or more consecutive circles on flat surface>	 Mandandanji

Semantic information that is not represented on the message stick

Verbal message: woman, man, boy, singer, illness, social category, invitation, request

**Implicit knowledge:* name, social category, country, initiation status

tending to be more specific and lower frequency
(identified individuals, locations, etc)



tending to be less specific and higher frequency
(unidentified people, common activities etc)

Women and men

gloss	grapheme			languages
	description	image	iconicity	
‘male participant in ceremony’ (identified)	<outline of painted man>			Muruwari, Yuwaalaaray, Wiradjuri
‘female participant in ceremony’ (unidentified)	<concentric diamonds>		[vulva]	Kalkatungu, ‘Southern Queensland’
‘man’	<oblique intersecting lines>		[beard]	Kalkatungu
	<bearded head>			Muruwari

Semantic information that is not represented on the message stick

Verbal message: name

**Implicit knowledge:* name, skin/kin/clan/totem, country, initiation status

Places

gloss	grapheme	languages
‘place’ (any defined spot)	<short horizontal line>	
‘river’	<parallel lines>	
‘ceremonial ground’	<spoon shape enclosing oblique lines>	
‘waterhole’	<concentric circles>	

Semantic information that is not represented on the message stick

Verbal message: name of landscape feature, direction of travel

**Implicit knowledge:* country, border, proximity of other places