

They will offer all friendship: The evidence for cohabitation between indigenous Australians and marooned Dutch mariners and VOC passengers.

Rupert Gerritsen

Many claims have been made that people from other lands, such as the Chinese, the Baijini, the French, the Portuguese and the Spanish may have come into contact with Australia and its indigenous population prior to the first documented instance by the *Duyfken* in 1606. There are no competing claims, however, that anyone other than Dutch mariners and their ships' passengers were the first Europeans or outsiders to find themselves actually living in Australia.¹ This is historical fact, although a fact that is often overlooked because many Australians are simply unaware of it, or chose to ignore it in favour of a national founding myth based on the exploits of Captain Cook and the arrival of the First Fleet. The circumstances in which these unfortunate Hollanders, and some from other nationalities, unwillingly commenced new lives in Australia are well documented, as well documented as most historical events from the period in question, the 17th and 18th centuries. What became of those folk, perhaps exceeding 200 in number, is not, however, documented in any way, nor is their ultimate fate known with any certainty. Nevertheless there is reason to believe some did survive and prosper. How do we know this? Because of their impacts upon the Aboriginal people and their traditional cultures in particular parts of the west coast of Australia. This chapter will document the events, as described in the original sources, which lead to the marooning of so many Dutch sailors, passengers and others, before presenting the principal evidence in support of the case that some of these people did indeed survive as permanent residents.

The events in question began on 16 November 1629, a typical spring day on the west coast of Western Australia. Around noon a Dutch ship, the *Sardam*, approached Broken Anchor Bay, a shallow inlet 450 kilometres north of present day Perth. The Captain, Fransisco Pelsaert, noted that this had been the same "small Inlet where on 8 June when in the boat searching for water, we thought to run in."² But so much had happened since that day five months earlier. They had not "run in" on 8 June, actually it was 9 June, because with a north westerly gale blowing, "the swell became so heavy and ran so high we could not readily keep off it."³ Instead they continued north in search of badly needed water for the survivors of his ship *Batavia*, wrecked on Morning Reef in the Wallabi Group of the Abrolhos Islands five days before.⁴ In the end Pelsaert and his crew continued on to Batavia [Djakarta] in Java in their open boat, suffering great thirst and hunger. Upon arriving there he had been given command of the *Sardam* to return and find the people he had left behind, perhaps 200 souls. Upon his return to the area he spent three weeks desperately trying to find the islands where the *Batavia* had gone down in the middle of the night on 4 June. Undoubtedly he hoped beyond hope that the poor wretches he had left behind would still be alive, waiting for him. But, upon finding them he was confronted by the

¹ Though it is likely some Melanesians from New Guinea and islands to the east did come to reside in Cape York as historical records indicate they were frequent visitors.

² Pelsaert 1963:237.

³ Pelsaert 1963:129.

⁴ The Abrolhos Islands are a chain of island groups situated 50-80 km from the Australian mainland between 400 and 500 km NNW of Perth.

unspeakable horrors that had taken place in his absence, 125 of the survivors had been murdered by a small band of cutthroats, mutineers. And now, the final act was being played out. Two of those scoundrels, the ones he hadn't hanged, were to be abandoned here at Broken Anchor Bay, the mouth of the Hutt River.⁵ Pelsaert noted in his journal, "At this good opportunity, I have ordered the two sentenced delinquents, to wit, Wouter Loos and Jan Pelgrom de By van Bemel, with a Champan provided with everything, to sail to this land."⁶

Pelsaert, even prepared a set of instructions for the recalcitrants:

"In order to ... put ashore ... to make themselves known to the folk of this land by tokens of friendship. Whereto are being given by the Commandeur some Nurembergen [wooden toys and trifles], as well as knives, Beads, bells and small mirrors, of which you shall give to the Blacks only a few until they have grown familiar with them.

Having become known to them, if they take you into their Villages to their chief men, have courage to go with them willingly. Man's luck is founding strange places; if God guards you, will not suffer any damage from them, but on the contrary, because they have never seen any white men, they will offer all friendship."⁷

Thus these two Dutch seafarers, one a cabin boy, the other a soldier, became the first documented outsiders destined to remain in Australia for the rest of their lives, 159 years before shiploads of hapless convicts, dragged unwillingly half way around the world, formed the colony of New South Wales. But this was a very different situation for Loos and de By. At that point in time only about half of the coastline of the continent was known, just in outline, a river or two had been explored, and there had been some brief contacts, often violent, with Aboriginal people in Cape York and Arnhem Land. Beyond that almost nothing was known of this land mass the Dutch called "Nova Hollandia", or "Terra Australis", its people or its character. So Pelsaert indeed took this "good opportunity" to enlighten Europeans, especially the Dutch, with an eye on what commercial advantage could be gained.

On the day he marooned the two mutineers, as they anchored in Broken Anchor Bay, Pelsaert observed smoke and sent a yawl "to get sure information about this place and the smokes" but "the Blacks kept themselves hidden"⁸ In actual fact Pelsaert was not just seeking contact with the local *Nhanda* people but was hoping he may relocate five sailors lost in a boat near the Abrolhos Islands around 13 October. They had set out to retrieve a barrel of vinegar from one of the islands, a southerly gale blew up, a common occurrence in these waters at that time of year, and they and their boat were not seen again.⁹ The loss of those five sailors and the marooning of the two

⁵ There has been an extended debate as to the actual locality the mutineers were marooned. Playford (1960:32; 1996:237-242), with support from Dash (2002:231,258-61), has argued for Wittecarra Gully, just south of the Murchison River. Drake-Brockman (1963:295-300) challenged this view from a very early stage, proposing Hutt River as the landing site. I (Gerritsen 1994a:271-287) and others (Dixon 1972:715; McDonald 1993; Gerritsen, Slee and Cramer 2003) have also argued for the Hutt River site.

⁶ Pelsaert 1963:237.

⁷ "Instructions for Wouter Loos and Jan Pelgrom de By van Bemel, 16 November 1629" in Pelsaert 1963:230.

⁸ Pelsaert 1963:237.

⁹ Pelsaert 1963:215-6.

They were last seen on 13 October about 9 kilometres NNE of the Wallabi Group.

“delinquents” marked the beginning of a series of mishaps over the next 100 years almost, in which many officers, sailors, soldiers, Dutch East India Company (VOC) officials and perhaps their wives and children found themselves unwilling residents of Australia. While most were Dutch, not all were, some were German, French, English, Spanish, Portuguese, other Europeans, even Africans. Nevertheless, they all found themselves in the same predicament.

In the early hours of 28 April 1656, the *Vergulde Draeck*, with 193 people on board, struck a reef five kilometres off the West Australian coast, south of a place now known as Ledge Point, 100 km north of Perth. Little is known of what actually happened, though it appears only 75 souls made it to shore. Whether they were just the sailors or included wives and children (there were a number of women on board) is uncertain. It is known, however, that they were experiencing considerable difficulties, “nothing was saved” from the wreck, and they were subsisting on the “very few provisions thrown by the waves on the beach”. A boat with 7 sailors had been sent to sail back to Batavia for help, miraculously reaching this destination, a distance in excess of 2,500 kilometres, “after one month wandering around”, on 7 June.¹⁰ These sailors reported the tragic event to the VOC’s Governor-General of the Indies in Batavia, informing him that the 68 people who had remained were “about to go inland ... where we very much hope they will have found provisions and drinking water”¹¹

Two ships, the *Witte Valk* and the *Goede Hoop* were immediately despatched to rescue the stranded survivors. The *Witte Valk* returned without having even landed a shore party because of the wild winter weather.¹² The *Goede Hoop* did, however, managed a landing and the shore party proceeded inland, only to lose three sailors in the bush. When they sent a boat to look for the lost sailors it overturned close to the shore. Without another boat, and in worsening weather, the *Goede Hoop* sailed away without being able to ascertain the fate of the 11 missing sailors, whom they simply presumed to be dead.¹³ Now there were 79 officers, crew and passengers unaccounted for in this area.

While Dutch and English ships were relatively frequent visitors to the coasts of Western Australia in the years that followed, as far as is known for certain no other ship foundered on these coasts again until 1712. This was the *Zuytdorp* which had departed the Cape of Good Hope on 22 April 1712 with at least 200 people on board.¹⁴ Although the exact composition of the complement is not known it is likely there was a mixture of nationalities, with Dutch making up only perhaps 60% of the total. There were also a small number of passengers and these may have included women and children.¹⁵

¹⁰ Resolution of the Council for the Indies, 7 June 1656. Algemeen Rijksarchief, Kolonial Archief VOC (ARKA-VOC) 577 in Green 1977:1:48.

¹¹ Letter from Governor-General and Council to the Council (Chamber of Amsterdam) of the VOC, 4 December 1656. ARKA-VOC 1214 fol. 84r in Henderson 1985:54.

¹² Letter 4 December 1656, in Henderson 1985:54.

¹³ Report from Governor-General to Council of the VOC, 28 November 1656. ARKA-VOC 1104 fol. 3-4 in Green 1977:1:50. Sailing Orders for ‘Emeloordt’ and ‘Waeckende Boey’ 31 December 1657 in Henderson 1985:62.

¹⁴ Playford 1960:31; 1996:61,200.

¹⁵ Playford 1996:41-43. Other nationalities may have included Germans, Norwegians, Swiss, Latvians, Swedes, Indians and Belgians

The *Zuytdorp* simply “disappeared” after leaving the Cape and it was not until about 1927 that it whereabouts began to be unveiled.¹⁶ It appears the *Zuytdorp* had struck the rocky platform at the base of the Zuytdorp Cliffs (580 km north of Perth), swung side-on and came to rest against the rocky platform, eventually breaking up into three sections.¹⁷ The discovery of a considerable amount of material from the wreck on the scree slope and top of the cliffs established that a proportion of the ship’s complement managed to get off the stricken vessel and on to shore. This material included coins, cannon breech-blocks, lead sheeting, large bottles, navigational instruments, the remains of chests and barrels, a brass dish, clay pipes, callipers, pins, writing slates, a pistol and musket balls.¹⁸ Two, possibly three, campsites appear to have been established at the time in close proximity to the wreck site, indicating, along with the ashes of a large fire beacon, that the survivors were present in the area for some time after their unfortunate accident.¹⁹ Exactly how many survived this particular episode is uncertain, however. Estimates, no more than educated guesses really, vary from 30 up to 180.²⁰

Included in the list of mariners and passengers who “disappeared” in the vicinity of the west coast of Western Australia during the 17th and 18th centuries are another 12 sailors from the *Zeewijk*. The *Zeewijk* foundered on Half-Moon Reef in the Southern or Pelsaert Group of the Abrolhos Islands on 9 June 1727. Over half the ship’s complement perished before they found refuge on nearby Gun Island. After regrouping, they sent their longboat off on 10 July, with the 12 sailors under the command of upper-steersman Pieter Langeweg, headed for Batavia to effect a rescue. Nothing further was ever heard of those sailors and their vessel which may have come to grief further north on other islands or on the mainland coast. After waiting months for their salvation the 88 remaining behind, realising there must have been some mishap, built a new vessel called *Sloepie*²¹ from the remnants of the *Zeewijk* and successfully sailed back to Batavia in Java.²²

There remains the possibility that other seafaring folk of whom we have no certain knowledge also became stranded on the coast of Western Australia during this period. Three Dutch ships, the *Ridderschap van Holland* (1694), the *Fortuyn* (1724) and the *Aagtekerke* (1726) are known to have vanished without trace following their departure from the Cape of Good Hope.²³ Where they went and what became of them and the people on board is a complete mystery. However, there does appear to be an as yet unidentified Dutch shipwreck, the remains of which are yet to be specifically located, situated just north of Busselton in the south west of Western Australia. Here, in 1846 Frank Gregory, a surveyor, and ultimately explorer of some note, reported in 1861 that he had come across:

¹⁶ There has been considerable debate about who first found the wreck in modern times. See Playford 1996:82-100.

¹⁷ Playford 1996:115, 201-3.

¹⁸ Playford 1960:24-29; Gerritsen 1994a:36-7; Playford 1996:82-4,120-27.

¹⁹ Playford 1996:120-24.

²⁰ Gerritsen 1994a:37-8 (40-180 survivors); Playford 1996:203 (30 survivors).

²¹ As far as is known the *Sloepie* was the first European vessel built in Australia.

²² Edwards 1971:86-168; Ingelman-Sundberg 1978:7-10; Gerritsen 1994a:38-9.

²³ Henderson 1980:33-4,37-45.

*“remains of a vessel of considerable tonnage ... in a shallow estuary near the Vasse Inlet ... which, from its appearance I should judged to have been wrecked two hundred years ago...”*²⁴

A number of observers reported this wreck, which has come to be known as the “Deadwater Wreck”, in the course of the 19th century including the Receiver of Wrecks, Worsley Clifton, in 1876. Clifton, who it seems had also seen the wreck in 1846,²⁵ stated that it was “covered with Water, Sand and Seaweed to the depth of about fourteen feet” that it was “evidently ancient” and “must have been a very large ship”. Clifton further noted that “two ancient coins” and “about 70 lbs [32 kg] of quicksilver [mercury]” had been found in the vicinity.²⁶

Unfortunately, in the course of the 19th and early 20th centuries, much material appears to have been pilfered from the wreck, and it was subsequently the subject of at least two salvage claims.²⁷ By 1910 there was no longer any sign of the wreck.²⁸ However the location of the wreck site has been narrowed down to an area 100 by 500 metres where it is thought what remains is buried under one to two metres of waterlogged sand.²⁹ While there was a body of hearsay evidence from the period indicating it was a Dutch wreck,³⁰ it is only recently that new evidence has come to light which provides strong, though not certain, corroboration. A. C. Gregory MLC, Surveyor-General of Queensland, renowned explorer and brother of Frank Gregory, claimed in 1902-3 that “Several articles were recovered from the wreck, and their patterns are similar to Dutch ships of that period [1690s].”³¹

By collating and consolidating all available information it has been concluded that the vessel in question had been quite large, possibly 30 metres or more long, of “considerable tonnage”, that it had been built in the period between 1650 and 1750 and was probably of Dutch origin.³² It could possibly have been one of the three ships unaccounted for.

In summary, it is established fact that 73 individuals from Dutch ships were last seen alive on the shores of the coast of Western Australia between 1629 and 1656. A further 25 individuals disappeared near the shore (boat crew from the *Goede Hoop*) or in proximity to the coast (boat crews from *Sardam* and *Zeewijk*) between 1629 and 1727. In addition at least 30, possibly as many as 180, are presumed to have survived the sinking of the *Zuytdorp*, with other potential survivors from wrecks, such as the Deadwater Wreck, contributing to these numbers.

²⁴ Gregory 1861:482.

²⁵ It seems Clifton, a teenager at the time, had accompanied Resident Magistrate of Bunbury, George Eliot, on an inspection of the wreck.

²⁶ W. Clifton to Colonial Secretary 25,29 April 1876 quoted in Gerritsen 1995:49.

Alfred Burt, surveyor, and later Registrar of Titles and Deeds, saw the wreck in 1876 as stated it had “a high stern built in an olden style” (D.C. Cowan 1929).

²⁷ Gerritsen 1995:2-3,33-41,74-81.

²⁸ Gerritsen 1995:38-9.

²⁹ The saline content of the waterlogged sand and the presence of ilmenite in this area severely hampers current remote sensing technologies.

³⁰ Gerritsen 1995:31-2.

³¹ Gregory 1902-3:131.

Gregory (1886:24) had previously claimed the construction of the vessel “indicated a very early date in naval architecture”.

³² Gerritsen 1995:13-32.

While there is incontrovertible evidence of these events, such as the structures from Batavia Mutiny still remaining on West Wallabi and Beacon Islands (see below),



Figure 1: “The Fort” - West Wallabi Island
(Courtesy WA Maritime Museum)

and the land-based artefacts found at the Zuytdorp wreck site, no other archaeological or observational evidence has yet come to light capable of providing us with any certainty as to the ultimate fate of any these marooned seafarers. A range of objects and features have, however, turned up over time, providing tantalising clues in this regard. For example, an upright with planks around it was encountered by searchers near the *Vergulde Draeck* wreck site in 1658. Unexplained uprights and poles were chanced upon in the mid-19th century at three points along the coast, and a spectacular “incense urn”, was handed over to the New Norcia Mission in 1846 by some *Juat* people who had found it at a well about 20 kilometres south of where the *Vergulde Draeck* was wrecked. A single coin, probably deriving from the *Zuytdorp*, was given to a station owner at Shark Bay in 1869 by a man named War-du-marrah, who seems to have found it at Woomerangee Hill, 40 km north of the *Zuytdorp* wreck site. A curious “Circle of Stones” with one or two of radiating lines, first seen in 1875 in very inhospitable country 200 km north of the *Vergulde Draeck* site, is thought to possibly be associated with the survivors from that ship. Similarly, an extremely weathered skeleton and a clump of coins, found on the beach opposite the *Vergulde Draeck* wreck site in 1931, are presumed to have some relationship to the wreck or its

aftermath, as is another coin reputedly found on the banks of the Moore River 65 km east of there in 1957. Finally an inscribed brass tin, known as a “Leyden Tobacco Tin”, similar to those found at other wreck sites, discovered at Wale Well, 55 km north of the *Zuytdorp* wreck site in April 1990, is thought to possibly have come from a survivor of that wreck.³³

Given the fragmentary nature of this type of evidence, is there any basis for believing the people stranded in western Australia in the 17th and 18th centuries survived beyond the brief period in which what food and water they had held out? And if they did where did they go and what happened to them? Artefacts such as coins, tobacco tins and incense urns offer no proof and little guidance, simply because they could either have been given in trade or as presents to individual Aboriginal people by the marooned people they came into contact with, or because the items may have been picked up from departed or deceased maroonees camp sites. In either case these objects could then have been carried or traded to more distant locations. An alternative approach turns upon consideration of the Aboriginal people and their cultures in the regions where these “accidental tourists” were last known to be, and identification of any unusual features in those cultures that could reasonably be ascribed to exogenous influences. This necessitates hypotheses being formulated as to what those influences could possibly have been. If such influences can be identified then a strong case can be made that some of the castaways survived long enough to interact, intermingle and integrate with local Aboriginal populations. In embracing this approach a number of lines of evidence have emerged which appear to provide some validity for the view that some form of “cohabitation” or accommodation did develop. These lines of evidence encompass genetics, biogeography, linguistics, technology, mythology, social organisation and social customs.

When the matter of genetics is examined a number of different facets have emerged as possible evidence. Genetic diseases are one of these, as are factors affecting physical appearance and characteristics. The genetic diseases in question are porphyria variegata and Ellis-van Creveld syndrome. Porphyria variegata, which has a high prevalence among Dutch descended Afrikaners in South Africa, also appears in Aboriginal populations along the west coast of Western Australia. The argument is that a crew member or passenger picked up at the Cape Colony may have had that disease, survived a shipwreck and introduced it into the local Aboriginal populations.³⁴ A similar argument has been put forward in regard to Ellis-van Creveld syndrome. This disorder, characterised by polydactylism, has its highest incidence globally in the Mennonite sect of the Amish community. The Amish moved from the Netherlands to the USA in the late 17th century. The second highest incidence of Ellis-Van Creveld is amongst the Aboriginal population in the south west of Western Australia, the implication being that the defect was introduced by Dutch seafarers.³⁵

A considerable body of observational evidence also exists, based on reports by explorers and others from the early colonial period, regarding the physical appearance of Aboriginal groups along, and inland from, the West Australian coast. Most of this

³³ Gerritsen 1994a:42-348-57, 236-43; Playford 1996:214-6; Flowers 2001.

³⁴ Nicholson 1990:6, Gerritsen 1994a:200-1; Playford 1996:227-31.

Rossi et al. (2002) have recently argued that this disease is an endemic arising from a natural mutation rather than being introduced

³⁵ Goldblatt et al. 1992; Gerritsen 1994a:201; Playford 1996:231.

evidence relates to encounters with Aboriginal people who appeared to have atypically fairer skin, lighter coloured hair and eyes. A. C. Gregory, for example, reported that when exploring in the Hutt River region in 1848 he came across a tribe whose “colour was neither black nor copper, but that peculiar colour that prevails with a mixture of European blood.”³⁶ These people Gregory wrote elsewhere had “light flaxen hair, the eyes approaching the colour of the same.”³⁷ Founder of the New Norcia Mission, Bishop Salvado in the 1840s, noted that some local Aboriginal people had hair “often fair enough to make a European envious.”³⁸ Pastoralist Augustus Oldfield claimed in 1865 that he was “very much surprised to find in some of the old natives [in the Geraldton area³⁹] features nearly approaching the European type, although these parts have been settled but a few years.”⁴⁰ Similarly he had “also observed [this] among the natives about Geographe Bay [Busselton area].”⁴¹

Other genetic indicators embrace factors such as tallness and baldness as signs influence of Europeans prior to colonisation of Western Australia. This is firstly based on the observation that northern Europeans are relatively tall and the impression,⁴² drawing on very limited evidence, that the Aboriginal people from the upper Murchison and Gascoyne Rivers, and from Shark Bay to the north west coast, were also relatively tall, the latter populations particularly.⁴³ Baldness appears to have been uncommon in all Aboriginal populations except along the Murray River in south eastern Australia.⁴⁴ However, anecdotal evidence indicates it was a feature in the central west of Western Australia, from the coast to the western edge of the Western Desert.⁴⁵ Surveyor Phillip Chauncy commented that in the 1840s and 1850s the “only bald natives I ever saw are the warran [yam] diggers [of the central west coast region].”⁴⁶ Perhaps the most dramatic, albeit unverified, claim of unusual physical attributes of Aboriginal populations from the central west of Western Australia arose in 1861 when the *Perth Gazette* reported:

*“From Champion Bay [Geraldton] we hear that a tribe of natives have made their appearance at the eastern most sheep stations upon the north branch of the Upper Irwin [River⁴⁷], who differ essentially from the aborigines previously known, in being fair complexioned with long light coloured hair flowing down to their shoulders, fine robust figures and handsome features: their arms are spears ... which they throw underhanded.”*⁴⁸

If the unfortunates from wrecks and the other calamities did survive one might expect, given that the people of this region had never seen or met Europeans previously, they

³⁶ Gregory 1886:23.

³⁷ Gregory quoted in Bates n.d.a:31.

³⁸ Salvado 1978:112.

³⁹ Geraldton (known originally as Champion Bay) lies 450 km north of Perth.

⁴⁰ Oldfield 1865:218.

⁴¹ Oldfield 1865:219.

⁴² No specific study was done of height in traditional Aboriginal societies in Western Australia so this argument relies upon fragmentary records and observations.

⁴³ Gerritsen 1994a:76-7.

⁴⁴ Birdsell 1972:506.

⁴⁵ Gerritsen 1994a:75-6.

⁴⁶ Chauncy 1878:2:246.

⁴⁷ Approximately 100 km east of Geraldton.

⁴⁸ *Perth Gazette* 9 August 1861, p.2.

might have accorded some place in local traditions, beliefs and mythology. Indeed, in 1834 a report reached the Swan River colonists [Perth], via local *Wadjuk* men Tanguin, Weenat and Moiley, of a wrecked ship “30 days walk” to the north. All crew had reportedly died though British coinage had turned up around this time in the possession of some of the *Wadjuk*.⁴⁹ It was realised eventually that this may have come from the *Mercury*, overdue on a trip from Calcutta.⁵⁰ A *Wadjuk* man, Weeip, was asked to go north to investigate. He was not successful in locating the wreck or survivors but reported “money, plenty” was reputedly to be found on the beach.⁵¹ Meanwhile, Moiley claimed that there were people alive, they had been living in “houses made of canvas and wood”, that there was heavy surf where the money was, and that it was 10 days horse ride from Swan River. It is now thought the *Mercury* was wrecked just south of Geraldton, near the mouth of the Greenough River, 350 kilometres north of Perth. But the distances involved, 30 days walk or 10 days on horseback imply a wreck in the vicinity of where the *Zuytdorp* lies. The contradictory accounts suggest that two wrecks were being reported, the *Mercury* and perhaps the *Zuytdorp*. Interestingly the report deriving from Moiley talks of “several white men” but also of “ladies and ‘plenty piccaninni’ [children].”

If sailors and their kindred had been present for an extended period on the coast of Western Australia and had had interaction with Aboriginal groups one might expect this to not only enter oral traditions but become the stuff of legends and mythology. A possible example, not the only one, of this was a legend, apparently “current among all the Aboriginal tribes from the Moore River [80 km north of Perth] to Shark’s Bay” at the time of the British colonisation, which referred to:

*“two tribes living on the banks of a large river, one (black) and the other (whites) residing on the opposite shores. For many years the two tribes were on amicable terms until a change in the sentiments of the northmen [whites] took place. ... [and] these northmen refused to hold any intercourse with their southern [black] neighboursone day it began to rain, and poured incessantly for many months, and the river overflowing its banks the blacks were forced to retire ... The flood was long in ebbing ... and thus it was long before they regained their old hunting grounds[but] to their astonishment ...in place of a fordable river they had left ...the impassable sea rolled to the north of them, and their late haughty neighbours had entirely disappeared.”*⁵²

Another set of myths, known as the Kooranup and Moondung Myths, may also have been influenced by the presence of the Europeans in the west coastal region of Western Australia. The Kooranup Myth, prevalent on the lower west coast and coastal areas of the south west of the state, was based on the belief that the spirits of deceased people passed “immediately after death, through the bosom of the sea to some unknown distant land ... their eternal residence”.⁵³ Allied to this was the Djanga Myth, the belief that the Europeans were the *djanga*, the dead, or the spirits of the

⁴⁹ *Perth Gazette* 12 July 1834, p318; 19 July 1834., p322.

⁵⁰ *Perth Gazette* 20 September 1834, p.359; 1 October 1834, p.382.

⁵¹ *Perth Gazette* 9 August 1834, p.334.

⁵² Oldfield 1865:234-5.

See Gerritsen 1994a:159-60 for other examples.

⁵³ Armstrong 1836:789 See Gerritsen (1994a:162-172, 261) for other examples and discussion of some of the complexities around this form of evidence.

departed returning from over the sea and “restored to the land of their nativity”.⁵⁴ This myth was also prevalent in the areas where the Kooranup Myths were to be found.⁵⁵ It was, according to E. R. Parker:

*“an idea prevalent amongst the sea-coast tribes [of the west coast] that their ancestors originally came from the west, and that their dead return thither, and that when the first Whites came in their ships they believed them to be ancestors risen from the dead.”*⁵⁶

With some evidence pointing to this being a pre-existing belief at the time of British colonisation,⁵⁷ it raises the possibility that these coastal Aboriginal communities knew there were “distant” lands to the west, through the contact they had had with errant seafarers, and incorporated that into their mythology.

The Moondung Myth, only found in the northern Gascoyne region on the upper west coast and around Geraldton, is an intriguing variant to the Kooranup Myth. In this the moon was the home of spirit beings, that one of these beings was a young man sent by his father to save them, and that these Moondung were “like white people”.⁵⁸ An associated ceremony seems to have been like a crucifixion.⁵⁹ What makes the Moondung Myth resonate with the notion that Dutch seafarers may have been instrumental in its formation, or adaption from earlier myth of this nature, is the similarity of the Dutch word for moon, *maan*, and the root term in Moondung, *moon*. Reinforcing that and the physical indications of a foreign influence is a report coming from Edward Cornally, one of Daisy Bates’ informants. Cornally grew up at Hutt River and reputedly informed her:

*“The first half caste child Cornally remembers seeing in Champion Bay was also stated by the mother ... to come from the moon and when asked why the child was a different colour they stated that this was common amongst them.”*⁶⁰

Various apparently anomalous features in the Aboriginal cultures in the west coast regions relating to social organisation and customs can also be adduced as evidence of survival by sailors and their kin. The traditional social organisation in the Geraldton area, bulging out to the upper Greenough River, the lower and middle Murchison and lower Sandford Rivers, and north to Shark Bay, was highly unusual in indigenous Australian terms. Instead of being based on marriage rules predicated on named sections or moieties, as used to be the case over most of the continent, reciprocal localities with unions being determined by the closeness of blood relationships, consanguinity, predominated. With consanguinity being the norm in European

⁵⁴ Moore 1842:28; 1884:20.

⁵⁵ The notion that Europeans, or any people from overseas for that matter, were deceased spirits was relatively common in traditional Aboriginal societies in Australia (Gerritsen 1994a:165) but Kooranup type myths very uncommon (Gerritsen 1994a:166).

⁵⁶ Parker 1886:339.

See also Moore 1884:60 (Netingar).

⁵⁷ See Armstrong 1836:789; Gerritsen 1994a:169.

⁵⁸ Bates n.d.b:87. See also Bates n.d.c:66.

⁵⁹ Bates n.d.d:269.

⁶⁰ Bates n.d.e:65.

cultures,⁶¹ it is possible this facet of social organisation arose from interactions with stranded Europeans.

Comparative analysis of another aspect of traditional Aboriginal cultural practices, relating to circumcision, also points to an anomaly that is best explained by a foreign intrusion. Along the coastal strip circumcision was not practised by any Aboriginal groups. Further inland circumcision, and a more radical intervention known as sub-incision, were customary. Yet well into the area where circumcision and sub-incision prevailed, around the upper Greenough and lower Sanford Rivers, there was an outlier where non-circumcision was prevailed.⁶² Non-circumcision was of course the norm in European culture in the 17th century but the real significance of this observation lies in the fact that is the very area where the “fair complexioned” tribe had been seen in 1861.⁶³

Even at a more mundane level, traditional Aboriginal social customs in the regions where the maritime refugees were last seen point to the incorporation of exogenous influences. An example is “a curious custom” followed by the “*Watchandie*” [Watjandi] *Nhanda* clans of the lower Murchison River. Here Oldfield claimed in 1865 that:

*“Should a person drop a morsel of food, any other striding by immediately picks it up, and merely saying ‘Plokeman’ proceeds to eat it.”*⁶⁴

Although the *Watjandi* said “plokeman” meant “blood brother” it would also appear that “plokeman” can be interpreted as a Dutch term meaning “scrounger”, based on roots such as “pluk”, (gathering, picking), “plukken” (gather, cull, pick) and “man” (man), an intriguing co-incidence indeed.

The linguistic element in this instance highlights another line of evidence in the argument for the survival of the unfortunate castaways. On the assumption that it was likely these folk would have had an impact on indigenous languages, several linguistic investigations and analyses were undertaken. These relied almost exclusively on historical recordings of language material because of the decline, disappearance, profound disturbance and alteration traditional Aboriginal languages have suffered in southern Western Australia since the commencement of British occupation in 1829. One analysis in particular simply compared Dutch with historical transcriptions of *Nhanda*, the language spoken on the coast from Shark Bay to 60 kilometres south of Geraldton.⁶⁵ In this many terms were identified that seemed to indicate there were words in *Nhanda* of Dutch derivation, as can be seen in a selection of examples in the table below:

⁶¹ See Gerritsen 1994a:144-9.

⁶² Gerritsen 1994a:233-5.

⁶³ Corroboration of the “white tribe” story can be found in the writings of Bishop Salvado (1978:75), founder of the New Norcia Mission in the 1840s, who relayed reports from Aboriginal visitors to the Mission of “other white men” apparently in the same area identified in the “white tribe” report of 1861.

⁶⁴ Oldfield 1865:285.

⁶⁵ Gerritsen 1994a:123-131; 1994b.

Table 1: Comparison of Historical *Nhanda* with Dutch

Term	Nhanda	Dutch
Aged	Oop'baija	Oop bejaard
Bad	Gooraa'ee	Goor (nasty) Goorheid (nastiness)
Wooden Bowl (like a "coolamon")	Bat.tje	Badje (small bath) Batje (Middle Dutch)
Clod of earth	Turpa	Turfje (small mound) Turf (lump of peat)
Cold	Koon'dhetha	Koudachtig (Coldish) Koudete (Coldness)
Digging Stick (1-2 m long)	Wippa, Whippa	Wipje (small plank)
Exchange/Barter	Kooyeroo	Koopjeruillen
Hawk	Kir.ken.jo	Kiekendief (kite,hawk- like bird)
Jaw	Caar.do	Kaak
Many/Plenty	Bool.la	Boel (a lot)
Wind	Windhoo	Wind

The analysis also identified what appeared to be regular sound shifts which, when allowed for, revealed a range of other terms with an apparent connection to Dutch. Based on this it has been concluded that 16% of *Nhanda* would appear to have been derived from Dutch.⁶⁶ Furthermore, some of the unusual features of *Nhanda*, also found in some of the other languages along the west coast, such as "initial phoneme dropping", the appearance of word-initial consonant cluster "kn" and other anomalous phonemes have been ascribed to the impact of outsiders.⁶⁷

Anomalies such as this were manifest in different ways and in different places along the west coast of Australia. The presence of the yam plant *Dioscorea hastifolia* is another case in point. As can be seen from the figure below, the appearance of *D. hastifolia* on the west coast of Australia is highly unusual because it is so far removed from the contiguous distributions elsewhere.

⁶⁶ Gerritsen 1994b; 1994a:130.

⁶⁷ Gerritsen 1994a:110-133,211-18,323-4; 1997:11-12.

The methodologies and conclusions engendered in the linguistic analyses, particularly in relation to the Dutch influence in *Nhanda*, have become a highly contentious issue. See Anon. 1995, Gerritsen 1997; Blevins 1998; Gerritsen 2001a; Blevins 2001; Gerritsen forthcoming a.

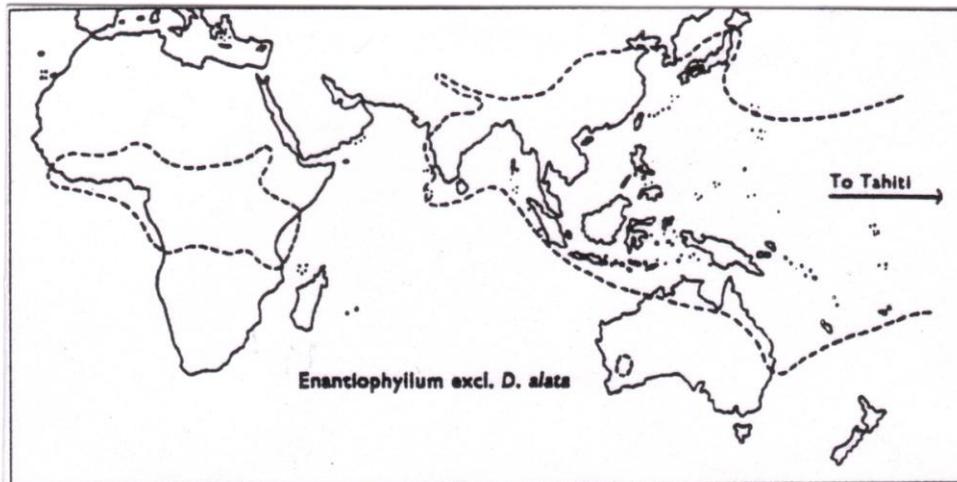


Figure 2: Global Distribution of *Enantiophyllum*
(Courtesy of the Linnean Society of London)

It has been argued that the only feasible explanation for its presence in WA is the scenario that the *Sardam* had come from Indonesia with yams as victuals, a common practice at the time, that these formed part of the food supplied to the two mutineers Loos and de By, who were “provided with everything”, on the day of their marooning, and that they had then planted them.⁶⁸ This argument is supported by reports deriving from the earliest British explorers to visit the area. Grey in 1839 had come across yam fields square kilometres in extent, “as far as we could see” in the vicinity of Hutt River, as well as the other river valleys of the Geraldton region, while explorer and surveyor A. C. Gregory later reported that the *Nhanda* “never dug a yam without planting the crown in the same hole”.⁶⁹ What makes this all the more remarkable was the fact some of the *Nhanda* clan groups were living in permanent clay and turf cupola-shaped dwellings, each capable of housing at least 10 people, aggregated into permanent villages of up to 290 individuals, with the residents exhibiting a high degree of sedentism.⁷⁰ In effect an agricultural revolution was in progress by time the British invaded the area in the mid nineteenth century.⁷¹ It is difficult to account for all this unless the *Nhanda* did indeed “offer all friendship” to the two mutineers in 1629.

Many other anomalies and lines of evidence, from the occurrence of dugout canoes, net fishing and fish hooks in Shark Bay and the northern Gascoyne,⁷² to that curious arrangement known as the “Circle of Stones”,⁷³ can be interpreted as evidence that

⁶⁸ Gerritsen 1994a:92-102; 2001b:2-9; forthcoming b.

⁶⁹ Grey 1841:2:12; Gregory 1886:24. See also Gregory 1887:131.

⁷⁰ Gerritsen 1994a:88-92; 2002.

⁷¹ Gerritsen 1994a:82-92; 2001b:1-9; forthcoming b.

⁷² Gerritsen 1994a:174-181; 2001c:25.

⁷³ See Gerritsen 1994a:237-42.

A painting of a ship at a rock art gallery at Walga Rock on the upper Sandford River, 350 km ENE of Geraldton, has at times been promoted as evidence of the survival of people from the Dutch

passengers and crews of ships wrecked on the west coast of Western Australia in the 17th and 18th centuries did begin new lives in Australia. Paradoxically these individuals have belatedly given rise to a new chapter in Australian history, and the role of the Dutch in that history. But the case presented here, based on a relatively brief sketch of the evidence, merely represents a beginning in the writing of that chapter. Already debates have arisen regarding aspects of the evidence and arguments. These debates will of course continue, as will the quest to find further evidence, for some time to come before we will know with any degree of certainty what really happened. However, the fact remains we do know, without the slightest scintilla of doubt, they were here, and that some undoubtedly survived to live out their days in Nova Hollandia.

shipwrecks. A second painting of a ship has also been found about 200 km ESE of Geraldton (Cramer 1999:152-4). Such evidence is highly problematic and consequently of limited value. See Gerritsen (1994a:181-3), Playford (1996:221-4) and Cramer (1999:149-54) for discussion of this.

REFERENCES

- Anonymous 1995 Example of how not to use historical sources. In N. Thieberger (ed.) *Paper and Talk: A Manual for Reconstituting Materials in Australian Indigenous Languages from Historical Sources*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press.
- Armstrong, F. 1836 The manners and habits of the Aborigines of Western Australia from information collected by Mr F Armstrong, Interpreter 1836. In *Perth Gazette* 29 October 1836, pp 789-90; 5 November 1836, pp.793-4; 12 November 1836, pp.797.
- Bates, D. M. n.d.a Origin of the Australian Race. Section I. Papers of Daisy Bates 1900 – 1940 [manuscript]. National Library of Australia MS 365.
- Bates, D. M. n.d.b Religions, Superstitions. Section VI, Part 1. Papers of Daisy Bates 1900 – 1940 [manuscript]. National Library of Australia MS 365.
- Bates, D. M. n.d.c Gascoyne District – Ghosts. Section VI, Part 3a. Papers of Daisy Bates 1900 – 1940 [manuscript]. National Library of Australia MS 365.
- Bates, D. M. n.d.d Native Vocabulary Compiled From Vocabularies Drawn Up By L. A. Wells et al. Answer to Question 15 By R. J. Carlyon. Section XII, Part 2F,22. Papers of Daisy Bates 1900 – 1940 [manuscript]. National Library of Australia MS 365.
- Bates, D. M. n.d.e Native Beliefs: Cornally. Section VI, Part 3a. Papers of Daisy Bates 1900 – 1940 [manuscript]. National Library of Australia MS 365.
- Birdsell, J. B. 1972 *Human Evolution: An Introduction to the New Physical Anthropology*, Chicago: Rand McNally.
- Blevins, J. 1998 A Dutch Influence on Nhanda? Wanyjidaga innga! *Australian Aboriginal Studies: Journal of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies* 1998/I: 43-46.
- Blevins, J. 2001 A Dutch influence on Nhanda? Malya kanangga! *Australian Aboriginal Studies: Journal of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies* 2001/I: 74-75.
- Chauncy, P. 1878 Notes and anecdotes of the Aborigines of Australia. In R. B. Smyth (comp.) *The Aborigines of Victoria, Volume 2*, pp.221-284. 2 volumes, Melbourne: Government Printer.
- Cowan, D. C. 1929 Mystery ship of the south west. *Western Mail*, 19 December 1929, p.7.
- Cramer, M. 1999 *Treasures, Tragedies and Triumphs of the Batavia Coast: Max Cramer Memoirs*, Perth: Scott Four Colour Print.

- Dash, M. 2002 *Batavia's Graveyard*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- Dixon, C. 1972 The first Australians. *History Today* 22(10):706-715.
- Drake-Brockman, H. 1963 *Voyage to Disaster*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson.
- Edwards, H. 1971 *The Wreck on the Half-Moon Reef*, London: Robert Hale and Co.
- Flowers, G. 2001 *Gilt Dragon Terrestrial Investigation Skeleton and Coin Sites April, 2001*, Maritime Archaeology Association of Western Australia.
- Gerritsen, R. 1994a *And Their Ghosts May Be Heard*, South Fremantle: Fremantle Art Centre Press.
- Gerritsen 1994b *And Their Ghosts May Be Heard – Appendix: The English – Nanda - Dutch Vocabulary*, South Fremantle: Fremantle Art Centre Press.
- Gerritsen, R. 1995 *An Historical Analysis of Wrecks in the Vicinity of the Deadwater, Wonnerup, Western Australia*, Fremantle: Western Australian Maritime Museum, Department of Maritime Archaeology. *Report No. 97*.
- Gerritsen, R. 1997 The note on page 146 of 'Paper and Talk': A Response. *Australian Aboriginal Studies: Journal of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies* 1997/II: 55-57.
- Gerritsen, R. 1998 *Early Records of the Wardandi Language*, Canberra: Intellectual Property Publications.
- Gerritsen, R. 2001a A Dutch influence on Nhanda?: A Reply to Blevins. *Australian Aboriginal Studies: Journal of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies* 2001/I: 69-73.
- Gerritsen, R. 2001b Factors influencing the development of indigenous Aboriginal agriculture in Australia. Paper presented to the International Conference on Cultural Encounters in the Indian-Pacific Region, 1200 -1800, Perth.
- Gerritsen, R. 2001c Aboriginal fish hooks in southern Australia: Evidence, arguments and implications. *Australian Archaeology* 52:18-28.
- Gerritsen, R. 2002 *Nhanda Villages of the Victoria District, Western Australia*, Canberra: Intellectual Property Publications.
- Gerritsen, R. (forthcoming a) Historical problems and methodological issues regarding Nhanda, an Aboriginal Language from Western Australia.
- Gerritsen, R. (forthcoming b) *Australia and the Origins of Agriculture*.
- Gerritsen, R., Slee, C. and Cramer, M. 2003 *The Batavia Legacy: The First Europeans to Live in Australia, Hutt River, 1629*, Geraldton: Batavia Coast Maritime Heritage Association.

- Goldblatt, J., Minutillo, C., Pemberton, P. J. and Hurst, J. 1992 Ellis-van Creveld syndrome in a Western Australian Aboriginal community. Postaxial polydactyly as a heterozygous manifestation. *Medical Journal of Australia* 157:271-272.
- Green, J. 1977 *The Loss of the Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie Jacht 'Vergulde Draeck', Western Australia 1656*, 2 volumes, Oxford: British Archaeological Reports. BAR Supplementary Series 36(i).
- Gregory, A. C. 1886 Inaugural address. *Proceedings of the Queensland Branch of the Geographical Society of Australasia* 1:18-25.
- Gregory, A. C. 1887 Memorandum on the Aborigines of Australia. In H. L. Roth 1887 On the Origin of Agriculture. *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 16:131-133.
- Gregory, A. C. 1902-03 Discovery and exploration of Australia. *Queensland Geographical Journal* 18:130-135.
- Gregory, F. T. 1861 On the geology of a part of Western Australia. *Quarterly Journal of the Geological Society of London* 17:475-483.
- Grey, G. 1841 *A Journal of Two Expeditions in North-West and Western Australia During the Years 1837 – 1839*, 2 volumes, London: T. and W. Boone.
- Henderson, G. 1980 *Unfinished Voyages: Western Australian Shipwrecks 1622 - 1850*, Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press.
- Henderson, J. 1985 *Marooned*, Perth: St George Books.
- Ingelman-Sundberg, C. 1978 *Relics from the Dutch East Indiaman "Zeewijk" Foundered in 1727*, Perth: Western Australian Museum. *Special Publication No. 10*.
- McDonald, G. 1993 *The Castaways: An Argument in Favour of Port Gregory as the Landing Site of the Two Batavia Mutineers*. Frematle.
- Moore, G. F. 1842 *A Descriptive Vocabulary of the Language in Common Use Amongst the Aborigines of Western Australia*, London: W. S. Orr and Co.
- Moore, G. F. 1884 Descriptive vocabulary in two parts. In *Diary of Tens Years Eventful Life of an Early Settler in Western Australia*, pp1-119. London: Walbrook.
- Nicholson, B. 1990 Dutch castaways our first settlers? *West Australian*, 8 September 1990, pp.6-7.
- Oldfield, A. 1865 On the Aborigines of Australia. *Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London* 3:215-298.

Parker, E. R. 1886 York District: Whadjook tribe. In E. M. Curr (comp.) *The Australian Race*, Volume 1, pp.336-341. Melbourne: Government Printer.

Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News, 9 August 1861, p.2.

Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal, 12 July 1834, p.318, 19 July 1834, p.322-3; 9 August 1834, p.334; 20 September 1834, p.359; 1 October 1834, p.382.

Pelsaert, F. 1629/1963 The Journals of Francisco Pelsaert. In H. Drake-Brockman (comp.) *Voyage to Disaster*, pp.105-254. Sydney: Angus and Robertson.

Playford, P. E. 1960 *The Wreck of the Zuytdorp On the Western Australian Coast in 1712*, Nedlands: Royal Western Australian Historical Society.

Playford, P. E. 1996 *Carpet of Silver: The Wreck of the Zuytdorp*, Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press.

Rossi, E., Chin, C. Y. B., Beilby, J. P., Waso, H. F. J. and Warnich, L. 2002 Variegated porphyria in Western Australian Aboriginal patients. *International Medicine Journal* 32:445-450.

Salvado, Dom R. 1978 *The Salvado Memoirs*, E. J. Stormon (ed. and trans.), Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press.