THE ABORIGINAL COSMIC LANDSCAPE OF SOUTHERN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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This paper provides an overview of recorded accounts of Aboriginal beliefs from southern South Australia concerning the cosmos. This study is restricted to discussing a pre-European system of beliefs. It further develops concepts about Aboriginal relationships to space as discussed by Clarke (1991a). Star maps are provided for the Adelaide and Lower Murray areas.

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INTRODUCTION

In the mythologies recorded by the ethnographic sources for southern South Australia, there is frequent mention of Aboriginal beliefs concerning the origin of various cosmic bodies and their relationships to ancestral beings, both in the heavens and on earth. Many of the ancestral spirits that were considered to have been involved in the creation of the world, ended up in the sky. The present paper assembles information on the heavens and discusses how it was organised in the pre-European systems of belief. Although atmospheric properties, such as clouds, wind, rain, etc., are also clearly related to Aboriginal beliefs about the regions above them, this paper focuses chiefly on astronomical traditions.

The data presented in this paper is historical, recorded from Aboriginal people who had lived in the southern districts prior to and during the early phases of European colonisation in South Australia. The sources provide a fragmentary record from observers who were generally not privy to insider views of the indigenous cultures. Much of the material available consists of the observations from Europeans chiefly concerned with the setting up of colonial social structures, such as the legal system and Aboriginal welfare. Teichelmann, Schurmann, and Meyer were German missionaries who actively recorded the culture of their intended Aboriginal converts. Their reliability as sources comes through personal knowledge of the languages involved. Nevertheless, some caution is necessary because the missionaries were looking for religious ideas to assist in translating Christian terms. Their publications, which were published between 1840 and 1846, were essentially studies of Aboriginal language and religion (Teichelmann & Schurmann 1840; Teichelmann 1841; Meyer 1843; 1846; Schurmann 1844; 1846). The ethnographic dominance of these recorders was such that other sources for southern South Australia, such as Gell (1842), Wilhelmi (1860), and Taplin (Journals; 1874; 1879) acknowledged them as major sources of primary data. The main account provided by Wyatt (1879) stemmed in part from material he gathered while preparing a report in 1838 concerning whether Aboriginal religion provided for beliefs in 'God' and an afterlife, upon which an oath in a court of law could be based. The ethnography of Moorhouse (1843; 1846) was compiled by him in his official capacity of Aboriginal Protector. Although all ethnographic accounts were written by men, in the case of the missionary, Taplin, there is evidence showing that he incorporated the observations and views of his wife. These observers had a practical interest in Aboriginal religion and traditions, in spite of the fact that their records were compiled before the development of anthropological theory.

During the twentieth century, much ethnographic data from southern South Australia was collected and published by Tindale (1935; 1936; 1937; 1938; 1939; 1940; 1941; 1974; 1987; Tindale & Mountford 1936; Tindale & Pretty 1980), the Curator of Anthropology at the South Australian Museum. His data chiefly came from elderly Aboriginal informants he interviewed from the late 1920s onwards. His Aboriginal sources included John Wilson ('Sustie'), Reuben Walker, Amelia Savage ('Ivaritji'), Henry Mason
('Mengoan'), Robert ('Joe') Mason, Mary ('Grannie') Unaipon ('Ngunaiponi'), and Clarence ('Clarrie') Long ('Milerum'). The Aboriginal people who worked with the social anthropologists, Ronald and Catherine Berndt (Berndt 1940; Berndt & Berndt 1993), included Barney Warrior ('Waria'), Albert Karloan ('Karlonie'), Mark Wilson ('Thralrum'), and Margaret ('Pinkie') Mack. The mythology upon which the folklorist, Smith (1930), based his Aboriginal stories was primarily gathered by his Ngarrindjeri informant, David Unaipon. As a body of literature these twentieth century ethnographic sources are essentially attempts to record a pre-European culture as it would have been experienced to the generations preceding that of their informants. In contrast to studies that described a living situation, these are studies of 'memory culture' (Berndt 1974: 22, 25; Tonkinson in Berndt & Berndt 1993: xix). A more

FIGURE 1. Aboriginal cultural blocs in southern South Australia.
detailed analysis of the chief historical sources used in this paper is given elsewhere (Clarke 1994: 63–81, 417–425; Clarke 1995: 145, 146). The present article is part of a larger study of Aboriginal relationships with the landscape of southern South Australia (Clarke 1990; 1991a; 1991b; 1994; 1995), which combine historical and ethnographic sources with data gathered from contemporary fieldwork. The language and cultural groups identified in the literature are mapped by Schmidt (1919) and Tindale (1940; 1974). The geographical and broad cultural regions used in this paper are identified in Figure 1.

European accounts of Aboriginal relationships to space have tended to describe territoriality over two-dimensional space, rendered as ‘tribes’ on maps (for example Tindale 1940, 1974). Nevertheless, from ethnographies across Australia, it is clear that Aboriginal people considered that there were other realms within the perceived cultural landscape in addition to their own terrestrial regions, to which they could travel in spirit form. Such regions are the Skyworld and the Underworld. The latter is also sometimes recorded as the ‘Land to the West’. It appears that with the fragmentation of the spirit after death, both regions could be the abode of the spirit to the same Aboriginal group. These landscape perceptions are also common concepts throughout the Oceanic region (Luquet 1968: 451, 452). Such places are defined as psychic landscapes in this paper because they are not tangible according to a contemporary Western definition of landscape, which is concerned with topographical features. They are nevertheless important inclusions to the mapping of the total cultural landscape of the Aboriginal people.

The perceived existence of the Heavens as an analogue of the terrestrial landscape is common across Australia. This Skyworld was considered to be a region which, to some extent, obeyed the same laws as those of terrestrial regions. Teichelmann stated that the Adelaide Aboriginal people:

> consider the firmament [Heavens] with its bodies as a land similar to what they are living upon... It is their opinion that all the celestial bodies were formerly living upon earth, partly as animals, partly as men, and that they left this lower region to exchange for the higher one. Therefore all the names which apply to the beings on earth they apply to the celestial bodies, and believe themselves to be obnoxious to their influence, and ascribe to them mal-formation of the body, and other accidents (Teichelmann 1841: 8).

In the Adelaide area, the ‘sky’ was recorded as ‘Ngaiera’ (Teichelmann & Schurmann 1840, pt 2: 29). In the Parnkalla language of eastern Eyre Peninsula, it was similarly termed ‘Naieri’ (Schurmann 1844, vol.2: 37).

Accounts that illustrate the connectedness between the Skyworld and the terrestrial landscape exist for other parts of southern South Australia. In the Mid Murray area, Eyre noted:

> One old native informed me, that all blacks, when dead, go up to the clouds, where they have plenty to eat and drink; fish, birds, and game of all kinds, with weapons and implements to take them. He then told me, that occasionally individuals had been up to the clouds, and had come back, but that such instances were very rare; his own mother, he said, had been one of the favoured few. Some one from above had let down a rope, and hauled her up by it; she remained one night, and on her return, gave a description of what she had seen in a chant, or song, which she sung for me, but of the meaning of which I could make out nothing (Eyre 1845, vol.2: 367).

It is possible that beliefs such as these reflect some influence from Christianity, perhaps gained from missionaries whom Murray River people met when receiving rations at the Native Location in Adelaide or through the education of their children at the Native School. In the Lower Murray area, Taplin recorded ‘Talkothere says that a little while ago he dreamed that he was sick and a line came down from heaven and fastened on his foot to pull him up there and he took out his knife and cut it and so escaped (Journals 22 April 1863)’. The connection between the spirit and the Skyworld is broad, involving both ends of an individual’s life cycle. For instance, Pinkie Mack, a Yaraldi woman of the Lower Murray, claimed that before birth ‘children are said to be little, flying about in the air, dropped out of a bag and they could be caught’ (Harvey 1939). Presumably, the sky was perceived as being spatially very close to people living in the terrestrial region. The body of knowledge about the cosmos was not divorced from everyday living.

The Skyworld was perceived as a place where greater knowledge could be attained (Elkin 1977: 55, 75, 76, 81, 87, 90). For example, in the Adelaide area, initiates were ritually taken to the celestial region in order to gain sacred knowledge (Teichelmann & Schurmann 1840, vol.2: 13, 22).

In the above quotation from Eyre, an Aboriginal woman reportedly learned a new song during a visit to the Skyworld. Similarly, in the Lower South East of South Australia, a healer reportedly gained knowledge through crossing into the
Heavens by climbing a tree (Smith 1880: 30). In south-western Victoria, Aboriginal ‘doctors’ and ‘sorcerers’ frequently claimed to have visited the Skyworld (Dawson 1881: 57,58). The perceived existence of this psychic landscape therefore had a significant role in the cultural organisation of people and space.

The Heavens were known to Lower Murray people as Waiirri.13 The Lower Murray people believed that they would all go to Waiirri after death (Taplin 1874 [1879: 18,19]). The Ramindjeri people had a term, ‘Ngranggerakkuwull-urmi’, which reportedly meant the ‘arch of the heavens’ (Meyer 1843: 88). The Booandik people from the Lower South East possessed the phrase ‘kan-murn-a-moorn-o-noong’, which apparently translated as ‘up in the clouds’ (Smith 1880: 134). They also called the clouds, ‘moorn’, which was apparently the same term for skin (Smith 1880: 129). In Gundidjmara region of south-western Victoria, the ‘smaller stars’ together formed ‘star earth’ (Dawson 1881: 99). In Central Australia, ‘tribal’ or linguistic boundaries are reflected in the cosmic landscape (Maegraith 1932: 20,26). The Aboriginal ethnography of southern South Australia demonstrates the widespread perception that the sky was a landscape, similar to that of the terrestrial plane.

It appears that the sky was considered to begin at the height of a tree or at most a hill. One ethnographer claimed that the ‘Lower Murray tribe do not climb trees’.14 This may possibly have been through a general fear of entering the Skyworld. If so, then presumably this only applied to upper sections of the tree, as Aboriginal people in better wooded areas still climbed trees to catch possums, collect honey, and cut bark for canoes. In the Lower Murray region, particular large trees and big sand dunes that were considered to reach the clouds and which attracted lightning strikes, were regarded as malevolent (J. C. Harwood, cited Tindale 1930-52: 193,194).15 In the Waiyungari myth of the Lower Murray, the Skyworld was reached by the throw of a spear (Tindale 1935). In the Adelaide area, a Monana spirit used a similar method to attain access to the Skyworld.

[He] was one day throwing large spears in various directions, east, west, north, south; when, having thrown one upwards, it did not return to earth. He threw another, and another, and so continued throwing; each spear sticking fast to the former one until they reached the ground, and he climbed up by them to the sky, where he has ever since remained (Wyatt 1879: 166).16

Monana was considered to be a mortal who had accomplished immortality. In the southern Eyre Peninsula district, Aboriginal people believed that thunder was caused by the spirit creator, Pulyallana, having fits of rage and storming about the clouds (Schurmann 1846 [1987: 243]; Wilhelmi 1860).17 Lightning was reportedly produced when he jerked open his legs. The Skyworld was perceived by Aboriginal people of southern South Australia as a part of the landscape that was not beyond their physical reach.

The amount of cosmological knowledge possessed by the Aboriginal people of southern South Australia must have been considerable. Teichelmann recorded that with ‘the exaltation of almost every constellation they give the history of the attending circumstances, which the reasons of their present movements explain’ (Teichelmann 1841: 9). The cosmos is important in the mythology associated with the ancestral creative period, called in Aboriginal English the ‘Dreamtime’.18 However, there appears to have been many layers to this body of knowledge. Teichelmann wrote:

The opinions which the Aborigines of South Australia entertain about the visible world are limedly known, as they carefully conceal them from Europeans, and even their own males are only at a certain age initiated into the knowledge of them (Teichelmann 1841: 8).

Indeed, the informants of Schurmann guarded their secrets so much that he was only told about the cosmology under the condition that he would not tell another Aboriginal person.19 The cosmic bodies were rich with meaning. This is illustrated in an account by Giles, recorded from an Aboriginal man named Billy Poole from the Lake Albert area of the Lower Murray.

When around the camp fire at night he [Billy Poole] told me the names of stars, and, moreover, of constellations. He pointed out one group as an old man kangaroo with his arm broken; another group was a turkey sitting on her eggs, the eggs being our constellation Pleiades, another a Toolicher, a small and very prettily marked kangaroo peculiar to the district; another an emu and so on.20

Another record for the Lower Murray lists celestial bodies such as Nunganari (stingray), Pindjali (emu), and Prolggi (brolga) (Berndt & Berndt 1993: 164, Fig.25).21 The cosmic landscape was therefore, to these Aboriginal people, populated with animal species that also occurred in their terrestrial landscape of the Murray River.
Aboriginal kinship patterns were also reflected in the sky (Fig. 2, 3). For instance, Lower Murray people formerly believed that some of the stars were deceased ancestors, such as Ngurunderi, Waiyungari, Nepeli, Manchingga, and their families, who were now living in Wairiri. This is consistent with the relatively short lineages recalled by them, with their totemic ancestors ending up as stars. Meyer (1846 [1879: 201]) recorded the Ramindjeri belief that ‘The stars were formerly men, and leave their huts in the evening, to go through the same employments which they did while on earth’. In the Adelaide region, Monaincherloo (= Munaintyerlo or Monaincherloo) was described as the ‘highest creature’. He created all things in the visible world. No one made or created him. According to one account he had always been in the Heavens above, although others state that he did live on the lower landscape once. Another ancestral being significant to Adelaide people was Teendo Yerle, literally ‘Sun-father’ (= Tindoyerli & Tindojerlimajo [lit. ‘Sun-father man’]). The name of Teendo Yerle suggests a father relationship with the Sun. Teendo Yerle had several wives, probably planets, who were perceived as very good. However, he also had a pair of sisters who were said to be ‘long’, probably comets, and evil. He had power over life and death. The Skyworld landscape was therefore humanised, to a similar extent to the lower landscape.

The influence of the stars was not always considered benign. For example, Eyre (1845, vol.2: 361) stated that Aboriginal people in the Mid Murray area considered ‘Malformations of the body are attributed to the influence of the stars ... in consequence of forbidden food being eaten.’ Teichelmann (1841: 9) recorded a similar belief from the Adelaide people. Similarly, the Lower Murray people believed that a being named Karungpe, who lived in Wairiri, would come down to the campfires at night, scattering the embers and causing death (Taplin Journals 27 June 1861). Southern Aboriginal people generally considered that the beings who had become stars still had some influence over earthly events.

Knowledge of the cosmos appears to have existed in the same varied manner of other bodies of mythological-based beliefs (see Clarke 1991a; Clarke 1995). In south-western Victoria, Dawson (1881: 98,99) stated:

Although the knowledge of the heavenly bodies possessed by the natives may not entitle it to be dignified by the name of astronomical science, it greatly exceeds that of most white people. Of such importance is a knowledge of the stars to the aborigines in their night journeys, and of their positions denoting the particular seasons of the year, that astronomy is considered one of their principal branches of education. Among the tribes between the rivers Leigh and Glenelg, it is taught by men selected for their intelligence and information.

With the identification of ‘Dreaming’ ancestors in the Skyworld, it is clear that the cosmic bodies were referable as markers of ‘Dreamtime’ events in the same manner as terrestrial topographic features of the landscape. It follows that like the accounts of the ‘Dreaming’, we should expect the associated mythology to vary in detail even within a cultural area, although the basic structure remained the same.

Across Australia, many Aboriginal groups considered the Heavens or Skyworld to be where their spirit, or a part of it, travelled to after death (Elkin 1977; Berndt & Berndt 1993 [1981]). The accounts from the Lower Murray of the Sun and the Moon, mention that after setting they passed through the ‘dwellings-places of the dead’. Taplin (Journals 12 April 1862) records that Aboriginal people in the Lower Murray had a belief that the spirits of the dead descended into the ocean at a place beyond Kangaroo Island. Nevertheless, the Skyworld was also a destination for the souls of dead people. It is therefore likely that the early Lower Murray people believed in the fragmentation of the soul in the afterlife, which conforms to the beliefs of other southern Aboriginal groups. The movements of the Dreaming ancestors in the Lower Murray also shows this division. For instance, Ngurunderi was perceived as going to live in the west after creating the Lower Murray (Clarke 1995). The west here was equated with the Underworld, where the Sun passed through after setting in the western horizon. However, Ngurunderi was also thought to be present in the Skyworld. From here he directed the movement of souls, termed ‘pangari’ by Lower Murray people (Meyer 1843: 90; Taplin 1879: 138). Angas (1847: 97) records that ‘after death the spirit wanders in the dark for some time, until it finds a string when ... Oorundoo [Ngurunderi] pulls it up from the earth.’ It is possible that the introduction of Christianity influenced south-eastern Australian Aboriginal beliefs about spirit ancestors who went up into the Sky. Other Dreaming ancestors became divided in a different way. For instance, in the southern Fleurieu Peninsula area, the body of the Tjirbruki ancestral creator became a stone, and his spirit
FIGURE 2. The Aboriginal cosmic landscape of the Adelaide area.

- KUMOMARI
- MONANA
- NJENGARI
- SISTERS (COMETS)
- TINDOYERLI
- KAKIRRA (MOON)
- DOGS OF THE MOON
- MADLETALTARNI (BETELGEUSE?)
- TINDO (SUN)
- WIVES (PLANETS)
- PARNAKKOYERLI (AUTUMN STAR?)
- TINNYARRA (ORION - YOUNG MEN)
- YURAKAUWE (POND - HOME OF YURA & PAITYA)
- WOLDLIPARRI (MILKY WAY - RIVER WITH REEDS)
- MATTNYI
- WOLTA (WILD TURKEY)
- WILTO (EAGLEHAWK)
- NGAKALLAMURRO (MAGELLANIC CLOUDS - ASHES OF LORIKEETS)
- MANKAMANKARANA (PLEIADES - YOUNG WOMEN)
- ORPHANS (METEORS)
- ISLANDS
- SEA
- ADELAIDE PLAINS
- MOUNT LOFTY RANGES
- WEST
- EAST
- TINDO (SUN)
- KAKIRRA (MOON)
was transformed into a blue crane (Smith 1930: 340,341). With Aboriginal beliefs in the spirit, it is clear that the total landscape defined both the living and the dead.

Although the original traditions were rich, the cultural information garnered from the historical literature is fragmentary and sometimes contradictory. At least some of the variations in beliefs about the cosmos may have resulted from the differences between insider and outsider knowledge. In other cases, the differences may reflect regional and socio-political influences. A few of the records also indicate an error by the recorder. In some cases, the combinations of stars which form a constellation for Europeans, differ from those that other cultural groups have chosen. Therefore, the translator may not be accurately recording the identity of some of the constellations as perceived by Aboriginal people. Elsewhere in Aboriginal Australia, colour was important in determining the identity of various celestial bodies (Maegraith 1932: 25). With these restraints in mind, an outline will now be provided of the Aboriginal cosmology of southern South Australia.

**STARS (GENERALLY)**

In the Adelaide area, stars as a class were called ‘purli’. Similar terms for other areas include ‘purdli’ or ‘purli’ in the Pamkalla language of eastern Eyre Peninsula (Schurmann 1844, vol.2: 61), ‘buli’ in Narangga from Yorke Peninsula (Black 1920: 86), ‘purtli’ or ‘purli’ in Nukunu of the southern Flinders Ranges (Hercus 1992: 27), ‘budli’ in Ngadjuri of the Mid North of South Australia, ‘buudli’ in Wailpi of the central Flinders Ranges (Berndt & Vogelsang 1941: 9), and ‘pedli’ in the Ngaiawang language of the Mid Murray area (Moorhouse 1843 [1935: 34]). In the Lower Murray area, stars were collectively called ‘tulde’ by Ramindjeri people at Encounter Bay (Meyer 1843: 101), ‘tuldar’ in the Ngarrindjeri language of the Lower Lakes area (Taplin 1879: 138), and ‘thildi’ in the southern Coorong district (Wells 1852-1855: 112). In the South East, the star terms are ‘troot’ in the Tatiara language (Haynes & Curr, in Curr 1886, vol.3: 457,459), and ‘boongil’ in Booandik from Mount Gambier (Stewart, in Curr 1886, vol.3: 465).

**MOON**

In Adelaide mythology, the first celestial body to leave the lower landscape was the Moon. Here, the Moon, known as Kakirra, was considered to be male. He persuaded all the rest to follow so that he might have companions. The Moon kept a great number of dogs for hunting, who were seen as stars. They had two heads but no tail. He was generally benevolent and had no particular influence on human life. Here, the Moon was called Kakirramuntoo when in full phase. In Nukunu mythology from the southern Flinders Ranges, there was a related account of how the Moon entered the Skyworld:

The Moon [Pira] was greedy with meat and would not share it with others, crowd decided to get rid of him, coaxed him to climb a tree and get grubs, coaxed him up higher and higher until they could hardly see him. They cut the tree down, and the Moon hung up in the sky. Moon said ‘I’ll give the light for people who walk at night. I’ll die then come to life again’ (Mountford, cited Hercus 1992: 16,17).

In the Mid Murray region, Aboriginal people used the term, ‘Kakere’, or variations of it for the Moon. One group of people was known to Murray River as the ‘Moon men’ (Tindale 1953: 17,31,32). Their territory, north of Morgan, was the ‘country of the Moon’. A ‘tribe’ to the east of the Adelaide region apparently called the Moon, Piki, although this term also appeared in an example of a sentence spoken by an Adelaide person (Teichelmann & Schurmann 1840, vol.2: 38; Teichelmann, 1857). Near the confluence of the Darling and Murray Rivers, the Maraura called the Moon, ‘Patjira’ (Tindale 1930–52: 251). In the Eyre Peninsula and West Coast districts the Moon was considered to be the spirit being, Piira, who was once a man who chased the Seven Sisters (Pleiades) across the landscape (Tindale 1928: 21).

To the Lower Murray people, the Moon was called Markeri, or variations of it. In contrast to the Adelaide area, here the Moon was female. Meyer stated that the Ramindjeri people believed that, like the Sun, the Moon spends its time away from the sight of the terrestrial landscape with men of the ‘dwelling-places of the dead’ (= Underworld). He recorded:

The Moon is ... a woman, and not particularly chaste. She stays a long time with the men, and from the effects of her intercourse with them, she becomes very thin, and wastes away to a mere skeleton. When in this state, Nurrunduri [Ngurunderi] orders her to be driven away. She flies, and is secreted for sometime, but is employed all the time in seeking roots which are so nourishing that in a short time she appears again, and fills out and becomes fat rapidly (Meyer 1846 [1879: 200,201]).
This belief explains how the Moon’s appearance is not timed to the Sun, and also accounts for the phases of the lunar month. The Yaraldi people of Lake Alexandrina had similar traditions to the Ramindjeri concerning the Moon (Berndt & Berndt 1993: 131, 232, 233, 445). They also believed that the lunar cycle had an effect upon female menstruation (Berndt & Berndt 1993: 156). Further up the Murray River, into northern Victoria, the Moon was considered to be female, as it was in the Lower Murray (Smyth 1878, vol. 1: 431).

The Potaruwutj people of Keilira in the South East called the Moon, Mitjan, and considered it to be a male of the native cat (Dasyurus) totem. It was believed that he attempted to steal the wife of another being before being driven away. He wandered about, sometimes well fed, at other times starving. This observation explains the phases of the Moon. According to Tindale, the name, Mitjan, or a variation of it, was used by groups ranging to the east of the Potaruwutj. Similarly, Tungum was used in the Lower South East of South Australia and in the adjacent parts of Victoria. Here, the Moon was also considered to be masculine (Dawson 1881: 99).

In southern South Australia, the appearance of the Moon was used as a measure of time. In the southern Coorong district, the number of full Moons was sometimes used to record the age of children, if less than a year old (Wells 1852–1855: 102). Similarly, in the Hahndorf area of the Adelaide Hills, the local Aboriginal people were observed making notches in their digging-sticks upon the appearance of each new Moon to mark their own age (Hahn 1838–1839 [1964: 130, 131]). However, it is doubtful that this served as a long term counting device. Some activities were governed by the phases of the Moon. For instance, a colonist noted that ‘at every new Moon they [Aboriginal people] also light fires in the hills. From this fact, people conclude that they adore and worship the Moon’ (Hahn 1838–1839 [1964: 133]). Moonlight was regarded as a deterrent for harmful spirits, who were chiefly active during the darkness of night. The Ramindjeri called a half Moon, ‘Marger-ald-narte’, meaning ‘Moon of piece’, whereas a full Moon was ‘Marger-ald rakkuni’, that is ‘Moon of round’ (Meyer 1843: 78). In the southern Coorong area, ‘Mercuri’ (= Markeri) reportedly meant both the Moon and the night (Wells 1852–1855: 112).

In the Lower South East, the Booandik term for the Moon, Toongoom, was reportedly also used to indicate a period of a month (Smith 1880: 131).

**SUN**

In the Adelaide area, the Sun, known as Tindu, was said to be female and, with her several sisters, had a negative influence over humans. One of the afflictions perceived as caused by the Sun was a very painful and often fatal cough. The Moon taught the Adelaide people that should a very ill person offer a hand of coughed up phlegm to the Sun as a form of appeasement, that person might recover (Wyatt 1879: 166, 167). However, if not properly appeased, the Sun said ‘Noornte oornte, wirrilla pallone ningko’ which means ‘Go away, quickly dead you’. The Sun also had a negative effect on the Moon who was old and suffered from a strong cough. She was able to easily beat him every month so that he died. But in dying he revived again. Of the Sun and the Moon it was said ‘Tikkkan teendo, wandeel olte, karkara tatteen, boora pallon’. This reportedly meant that the Sun rested or slept at night while the Moon climbed and eventually died. By another account the Sun sat in her house at night and ate fish. It is likely that the observable difference in the relative strength of illumination between the Sun and the Moon is a factor in this perceived Aboriginal dichotomy of strength versus weakness. The term, ‘Tindu’, or variations of it, appears in several languages to the north and west of the Adelaide area. In Ngadjuri mythology of the Mid North of South Australia, the Sun went to the Underworld (= Land of the West) for the first time as the result of the killing of an old woman and her two dogs (Tindale 1937). Tindale’s explanation for this myth is that it is an Aboriginal record of a complete lunar eclipse that occurred in 1793.

The Ramindjeri people of Encounter Bay believed that the Sun was female. Meyer recorded:

> The Sun they consider to be female, who, when she sets, passes the dwelling-places of the dead. As she approaches, the men assemble, and divide into two bodies, leaving a road for her to pass between them; they invite her to stay with them, which she can only do for a short time, as she must be ready for her journey for the next day. For favours granted to some one among them she receives a present of a red kangaroo skin; and, therefore, in the morning, when she rises, appears in a red dress (Meyer 1846 [1879: 200]).
Their name for Sun was ‘Thulderni’.44 For the Yaraldi of the Lower Lakes, there was a similar tradition recorded (Berndt & Berndt 1993: 232,233,444). The Sun’s heat, ‘watalti’, was the ng&tji (spirit familiar) of the Wutaltinyeri descent group north of Meningie on the shore of Lake Albert in the Lower Murray, whereas the Sun’s disc, ‘nangge’, was that of another unnamed group (Berndt & Berndt 1993: 215). In the Lower Murray area, Aboriginal people generally called the Sun, ‘Nangge’ (Meyer 1843: 84; Taplin 1874 [1879: 131]; Taplin 1879: 139,142).45 In the Mid Murray area, the term for sun was ‘Nanka’, or variations of it.46 Here, a local landowning group was known as the ‘Sun people’ (Tindale 1953: 7).41

There was a belief amongst the Tangani of the Coorong that the Sun was in earlier times much brighter. Tindale records:

Wange [sic.? = Nangge?] was a Sun woman, a being who, in ancient times, climbed into the heavens where she carried firesticks; but these firesticks did little for people on earth in keeping them from being cold. The light from her firesticks was too bright. Another being still on earth, named Nure:le, magically forced her to be less vigorous in waving her firesticks, instead of affording much bright light there was a greater amount of red glow. Thus people could remain warm (Tindale 1983: 7).

This belief relates to the observation by Aboriginal people that for maximum heat their own campfires needed more red coals, and less bright flame. In their society it was the older women who had responsibility for maintaining the fires. During the initiations in the South East of South Australia, the female gender of the Sun Being was reportedly an embarrassment to the Aboriginal people (Tindale 1983: 9). Her role in the ceremony was represented temporarily by ‘her brother’, who carried paired firesticks which were symbolic of those that lit up the earth from above. However, it is unclear whether this was a pre-European practice, or one resulting from more contact between Aboriginal groups after European colonisation.

The Tangani people of the Coorong called the day, ‘nangi’, and the Sun itself was ‘Tulduruwi’ or ‘Taldarawei’.48 In the southern Coorong region, the recorded name for Sun was ‘Thildiroor’, with a related term, ‘thildirooi’, which was said to mean a ‘day’ (Wells 1852-1855: 112). A nearby inland group, the Potaruwutj people, apparently called a day, ‘kado’, and the Sun, ‘Kardu’, and Sunrise, ‘Tarkinj’.49 In the Lower South East, the Booandik term for both the Sun and a day was reportedly ‘Karo’, the rising Sun, ‘Yoong-in-karo’, and the Sun having set was ‘Kap-an-a-karo’ (Smith 1880: 129,132,134).50 In the South East of South Australia, and the adjacent area of south-western Victoria, the Sun appears generally to have been considered a female entity (Dawson 1881: 99).

**Milky Way**

The Aboriginal cosmic landscape was dominated by the Milky Way. It was considered by the Adelaide people to be a large river, along the banks of which reeds were growing (Teichelmann & Schurmann 1840, vol.2: 11,35,38,57,62; Teichelmann 1841: 8). The Milky Way was given the name ‘Wodliparri’, which literally means ‘hut-river’. The Ngadjuri people of the Mid North of South Australia had a similar term for the Milky Way, ‘Walibari’ (Berndt & Vogelsang 1941: 7), as did the Nukunu people in the southern Flinders Ranges, who called it ‘Waarli Pari’ (Hercus 1992: 29). Similarly, the Gundidjmara in south-western Victoria reportedly considered this large cosmic feature to be a ‘big river’ (Dawson 1881: 99). The habitations of the deceased as a group were an important element of the Milky Way. A nineteenth century observer claimed that:

In parts of Queensland and South Australia the natives believed the “Milky Way” to be a sort of celestial place for disembodied spirits. They said it was the smoke proceeding from celestial grass which had been set on fire by their departed women, the signal being intended to guide the ghosts of the deceased to the eternal camp fires of the tribe.51

Similarly, to the Ngaiawang of the Mid Murray, the Milky Way was symbolic of the Murray River, with the stars being men hunting game in the mallee on either side.52 For the Nukunu, another important association with the Milky Way was that it represented a huge tree, like a ceremonial pole (Hercus 1992: 13–16). In this context, it was part of the Urumbula song-line which runs from the vicinity of Port Augusta all the way to the Gulf of Carpentaria.53 The Milky Way was therefore widely considered an important topographical feature of the cosmic landscape.

The Adelaide people considered that the dark spots in the Milky Way were water lagoons in which a ‘magnificent animal’ or ‘monster’ called Yura lived. One record actually describes Yura as...
a group of monsters, although other accounts mention Yura as a single being (Schurmann Diaries 5 June 1839; Teichelmann 1841: 8). These dark spots were known as Yurakauwe, which translates as ‘monster-water’. Adelaide people claimed that the monster Yura was vicious and would swallow people who did not hide from him. When he appeared, an abundance of water was created. Yura was the ‘author’ of circumcision and first taught the practice to the ancestors of the Adelaide people. He punished those who neglected it. Yura lived in the sky with Paitya, another dangerous monster. Schurmann recorded that women and children were not allowed to know of these things.

Yura is analogous to the Akurra, the huge mythical water snake of the Flinders Ranges (Tunbridge 1988: 5–11), and to Akaru, the Ngadjuri equivalent (Berndt & Vogelsang 1941: 9). The Akurra was sometimes considered to be a single being, although able to be in many places at once. This characteristic may help to explain how in the Adelaide area beings like the Yura and the Monana can be conceived as existing both in the singular and plural forms. Similarities of Yura with the Australian-wide Rainbow Serpent mythology are also significant (see Radcliffe Brown 1930).

According to Meyer (1846 [1879: 202]), the Milky Way was considered by the Ramindjeri people of the extended Lower Murray area to be a row of huts, among which were heaps of ashes and ascending smoke. Another account of the Milky Way, given by George Taplin, concerns the Ngarunderi myth (1874 [1879: 57]). Taplin related that when Ngarunderi caused the drowning of his fleeing wives, a flood occurred at Point McLeay (Rauwoke). Nepeli, who was living there, was forced to pull up his canoe to the top of the cliff (now called ‘Big Hill’). From here, the canoe was transported to Wairiri, and thereafter the dense part of the Milky Way was said to be the canoe of Nepeli floating in the Heavens.

To the Lower Murray people then, the brolgas in the Skyworld exerted a benign influence. A similar account was provided to Tindale (1934–37: 60) from a Meintangk informant who claimed that the emu concerned was to be seen in the sky just under the Southern Cross. The fight in the myth was apparently due to the jealousy of the emu over the brolga’s children. This mythology appears to be related to Gundidjmara beliefs, which held that the larger cloud was the ‘male native companion’ or ‘gigantic crane’, the smaller cloud being the female equivalent (Dawson 1881: 99). A similar version has also been recorded in the Kamilaroi language of northern central New South Wales (Austin & Tindale 1985). As with their terrestrial counterparts, these celestial spirit beings migrated according to the season. In the winter sky, the brolgas are seen lying to the southeast and then south of the Milky Way (Tindale 1938–56: 57). In summer they shift towards the western side.
PLEIADES

The Adelaide people considered the higher landscape to be similarly organised to the lower, to the extent that the celestial bodies were believed to obey the same laws as men and animals upon earth. For example, the Pleiades, which were called ‘Mankamankarranna’ (also Mankankarrana and Mangkamangkarranna), were considered to be girls who gathered roots and other vegetables around them in the sky. In the Narangga people of Yorke Peninsula had a similar mythology. They called the Pleiades the ‘Mangga Manggaridi’, who were said to be ‘maids’ (Black 1920: 87). Similarly, in Nukunu mythology, the seven sisters or ‘Purlara’, were reportedly chased into the sky by three brothers (Hercus 1992: 7,16,27). One sister became sick and stayed on the terrestrial landscape. These are clearly related accounts to the Seven Sisters Dreaming of the Western Desert, where the young women, called Kungkarungkara, are chased by Orion (Tindale 1959). Here they appear in the dawn sky during April/May, being the start of a ceremonial cycle. The southern myths also bear resemblance to the Mankarawora (Pleiades) of the Diyari in the north-east of South Australia (Berndt & Vogelsang 1941: 8). In the cosmology of the Adnyamathanha people of the Flinders Ranges, the Pleiades were known as the Makara or Artunyi, meaning a group of women (Mountford 1939: 103,104; 1976: 33–35; Mountford & Roberts 1970: 56; Tunbridge 1988: 16). They believed that the Akurra serpent ancestor ate the Artunyi women at Yandara in New South Wales, and that these women were later released into the sky when he drowned. Most beliefs concerning the Pleiades simply record a number of sisters, because Aboriginal counting systems before European contact had little use for figures greater than three.

In the account of cosmology recorded from Billy Poole of the Lake Albert area, the Pleiades represented the eggs that another constellation, a Turkey, was sitting upon. For the southern Coorong district, ‘the Seven Stars are black men sitting round a fire, of course they are smoking (Wells 1852–1855: 99)’. In south-western Victoria there are various accounts of the Pleiades, representing a flock of female cockatoos, or six women whose ‘Queen’ had been taken by the crow, signified by Canopus (Dawson 1881: 100). The Pleiades are probably the Yatuka constellation that Yaraldi people believed comprised six girls and one boy (Berndt & Berndt 1993: 163,164). This may relate to the Tangani belief that the Pleiades, called by them Mantjingga, were seven or eight girls and a single boy. He went with them because his fire had gone out. Munaijeri was one of the Mantjingga who went away (Tindale 1930–52: 290). The Pleiades are known in many cultures of the world as the Seven Sisters.

ORION

In the Adelaide region, the stars of the Orion constellation were called Tinniinyarra (also Tinniinyaranna and Kurkukkurika). They were considered to be youths who hunted kangaroos, emus and other game on the great celestial plain, called the Womma. The mother of the Tinniinyarra was a red star called Madletaltarni (Teichelmann & Schurmann 1840, vol.2: 17,37,42). This is probably the star astronomers call Betelguese. The father of the Tinniinyarra was a star called Parnakkoyerli. To the Parnkalla people of eastern Eyre Peninsula, the Orion constellation could be termed either Minye or Mirrarri, considered to be men or boys (Schurmann 1884, vol.2: 33). In the Western Desert mythology, Orion, called Njiru, chased the Pleiades across the terrestrial landscape, as he still does in the Skyworld (Tindale 1959).

A version of the Waiyungari story recorded in the Lower Murray region from an early Narrung resident has Waiyungari and the two escaping wives of Nepeli, who are sisters, becoming the three great stars of Orion’s belt. As reported below, Tindale’s version has Waiyungari becoming the planet Mars. In relation to Orion’s belt, there is a close parallel in the beliefs of the Gundidjmara people of south-western Victoria where three stars were the sisters of Sirius who always followed him (Dawson 1881: 100). There also, a red star in the constellation of Orion was called ‘fire’, and was masculine. The Ngalwara constellation recorded in Yaraldi cosmology, which was perceived as six young men (Berndt & Berndt 1993: 164), is possibly Orion. The Tangani called the seven boys the Ngawiri.

THE SOUTHERN CROSS AND THE COAL SACK

In the Ngadjuri language of the Mid North of South Australia, the Southern Cross was called
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‘Wildu’, the eagle (Berndt & Vogelsang 1941: 9). To the Parnkalla people of eastern Eyre Peninsula, the Southern Cross and adjacent stars were termed ‘Kadnakadna purdi’ (Schurmann 1844, vol.2: 9). The Tangani people of the Coorong had a death fear song concerning the arrival of a smallpox epidemic (Tindale 1937: 111,112; Tindale 1941: 233,234). As part of the story of this song, a ‘dream man’, Kulda, came down to the lower landscape from the Southern Cross, called Yuuki. He foretold the coming of death, with his ‘pointing bone’ taking the spirits of the dead with him to Kangaroo Island. Tindale recorded that:

The natives saw a man (meteor) come out of Yuuki, the Southern Cross; they heard a noise and looked up (meinyanganampi). They saw him move his hands and said ‘Ha! peika bakki’ (‘Ah! death coming’; ‘peik’ = ‘die’). The natives could not stand the murki [smallpox] and a great many died. The meteor was a madavuluni man whose name was Kuldalai, he travelled westward through the sky and beckoned to indicate that all the people should follow him. Then the smallpox came and many people followed him (literally went west) across to Kangaroo Island and beyond (Tindale 1931-34: 232).

Furthermore, Tindale (1931-34: 251,252) recorded that Kulda appeared ‘like a bright flash, too bright to look.’ The method he used to attract people was first by smoke signals, then by waving hands. Tindale’s Aboriginal informants believed that many of the bones in the sandhills of the Lower Murray belonged to people whom Kulda had beckoned to follow him. This account is further illustration of the perceived connections between the Skyworld, Land to the West, and the terrestrial landscape.

A Meintangk informant told Tindale (1934-37: 60) that ‘The black patch (Coal Sack) in the Southern Cross is the emu ... The Southern Cross stars are men.’ The emu in this instance was probably the spirit who fought with the brolgas, as already noted above. According to the Europeanised mythology of Smith, the ‘Grandmother Spirit’, known as Puckowe, was considered by Lower Murray people to inhabit the dark spot in the Milky Way, known as the Coal Sack (Smith 1930: 184,185,199). Aboriginal healers in the Lower Murray could reportedly appeal to her for help. The Gundidjmara people in south-western Victoria apparently believed that a ‘bunyip’, a mythical water spirit, lived simultaneously both in the Coal Sack and in parts of the terrestrial landscape (Dawson 1881: 99).

LYRA

The ‘doctor men’ of the Tangani interpreted the appearance of Vega, called by them Lawarikark, in the constellation of Lyra as indicating the nesting time of mallee fowls (Tindale 1983: 26). These birds, called lawari or lowan, make a harsh scolding noise when racking the leaves for their nests. For this reason, Aboriginal people considered this constellation to have quarrelsome properties.

SEASONAL BODIES

To the Adelaide people, the arrival of Parna in early autumn indicated the change of season and was a sign that large and waterproof huts needed to be built in the Adelaide foothills (Gell 1842 [reprint 1988: 7,9]). The Aboriginal place name for a hilltop campsite at Morphett Vale, south of Adelaide, was Parnangga. This reportedly meant ‘autumn rains’, and referred to the appearance of Parna. Similarly the Ngarrindjeri called autumn, Marangani, which is a time when stars of this name appear (Taplin 1879: 126). The Yaraldi term recorded for autumn, Marangalkadi, was said to mean ‘pertaining to the crow’ (Berndt & Berndt 1993: 21,76,240). Marangani was a crow (more properly called a raven) in the creative period of the Yaraldi ‘Dreamtime’ (Meyer 1843: 78; Berndt & Berndt 1993: 163,240-242). According to Yaraldi tradition, the autumn stars are low in the south-eastern sky because it was to the south-east of the Lower Murray that the crow spirit entered the Skyworld. When Marangani was at its zenith, both animals and humans were thought to enter the ‘rutting season’ (Tindale 1930-52: 266). Women in particular were considered to be easily affected by Marangani, making some individuals promiscuous.

In the Adelaide area, spring was termed Willutti or Wiltutti (Teichelmann & Schurmann 1840, vol.2: 55; Teichelmann 1857). It was under the influence of the constellation of the eagle, Wilto. It is likely that Wilto was the Southern Cross, through the apparent relationship between Wiltu in the Adelaide language and Wildu of the Ngadjuri mentioned above. Similarly, in the Adelaide area summer was governed by the wild turkey constellation, Wolta (Teichelmann & Schurmann 1840, vol.2: 57,58; Teichelmann 1857). Summer was therefore called Woltatti. The linking of seasons with the movements of celestial bodies is common across Australia (Clarke 1990: 6; Clarke 1991a: 59).
UNIDENTIFIED STARS

In the ethnographies of southern South Australia, there are several names for stars where identification is difficult due to lack of description. One example is Njengari, who reportedly was once a mortal on earth (Tindale 1941: 235; Tindale 1987: 12). He had a happy nature and was often observed dancing. He created a smooth dancing spot along the coast at a place called Watbardok in the Normanville area south of Adelaide. This later became an excellent fishing spot as nets could be drawn here without snagging. Njengari was a clansman of Tjirbruki, who was also a landscape-creating ancestor. Njengari was eventually transformed into a star. There are also recorded names from the Adelaide language for constellations such as ‘Mattinyi’ and ‘Kumomari’, for which there is no European equivalent given (Teichelmann & Schurmann 1840, vol.2: 13,22). Similarly, ‘Yurdakka’ was said to be ‘a star or constellation’ in the Pamkalla language (Schurmann 1844, vol.2: 87). The identity of these was not known to the recorder. In the Gundidjmara region of south-western Victoria, larger stars (and probably planets) were feminine and considered to be ‘sisters of the Sun’ (Dawson 1881: 99).

In the Lower Murray region, there was a celestial body that appeared every few years as a good omen. Tindale reports:

Nalkari – a special star or planet which appears every four or five years. It causes the fish to die in thousands and to float along the river banks. The people are glad when they see Nalkari for it means that much food can be obtained (Tindale 1934-37: 147).

The identity of this cosmic body is unknown, although it seems unlikely to be a comet, as these were universally held in great fear.

PLANETS

In the Adelaide region, the Sun-father, Teendo Yerle, had several wives which Schurmann thought were probably planets.69 In contrast to the sisters of Teendo Yerle who were bad, the wives were considered to be very good. In the case of the Lower Murray traditions, a version of the Waiyungari myth provided a Yaraldi account of the origin of the planet Mars (Tindale 1935). Tindale had several Aboriginal sources who confirmed that Waiyungari became Mars after he and the two wives of Nepeli fled into the sky. The Ramindjeri people considered that Waiyungari became a ‘star’ (Meyer 1843: 105). Waiyungari was said to actually mean ‘he who returns to the stars’ (Smith 1930: 250). However, there is no ethnographic record of the celestial identity of the two women of who accompanied him. A past Government Astronomer, G. F. Dodwell, suggested that they might have been perceived as Jupiter and Venus, as both of these planets move over the Heavens, coming into conjunction with Mars (cited in Tindale 1931-34: 189; Tindale 1935: 270–274). However, another record of the Waiyungari myth stated that his home was in the Milky Way (Smith 1930: 183,251). According to this version, Aboriginal people pointed out three stars in the eastern sky which represented Waiyungari and his two wives. Other accounts of Mars, perhaps associated with the Waiyungari mythology, state that when the ‘red star’ is shining at its ‘hottest’ and ‘brightest’, it is blamed for increasing sexual desire (Berndt & Berndt 1951: 223; Berndt & Berndt 1993: 164). To the Gundidjmara people of south-western Victoria, Mars was a feminine entity (Dawson 1881: 99).

According to George Taplin (1879: 135,140), Venus was termed Warte by the Ngarrindjeri. This term has also been recorded to mean ‘firestick’ (Meyer 1843: 106). Presumably the relative strong brightness of Venus adds to its association with fire. The Gundidjmara apparently considered Venus to be the ‘mother of the sun’ (Dawson 1881: 99). This tradition is possibly linked to the notion that Venus sometimes accompanied the Sun across the Skyworld, as it is visible during the day. In the recorded Pamkalla language of eastern Eyre Peninsula, the ‘evening star’ (Venus) was ‘Kabminye’ (Schurmann 1844, vol.2: 9). At the confluence of the Murray and Darling Rivers, the ‘evening star’ (Venus) was reportedly called ‘Pudi’ or ‘Pudali’ (Tindale 1930-52: 255), although this may have simply meant ‘a star’.

METEORS

Although many of the celestial bodies were linked to each other through kinship, in the Adelaide region meteoric lights (or shooting stars) were said to be ‘orphans’.70 Their ephemeral and unregulated nature may have contributed to this classification. Generally, meteors were considered to be bad omens, especially in times of great social disruption. The account of Kulda, perceived as a meteor who came out of the Southern Cross, is a good illustration of this. Furthermore, when a
falling star was seen, the Tangani people of the Coorong reportedly said 'peika bak:i', that is 'death coming'. Tindale (1938) linked the myth of Prupi, a cannibalistic woman living along the southern Coorong who was killed by fire, with a meteorite fall in the area. Furthermore, to the Gundidjmara people of south-western Victoria, a meteor represented 'deformity' (Dawson 1881: 101). In north-western Victoria, a meteor 'portends evil to those that have lost a front tooth, to avert which they stir the fire and cast about firebrands (Stanbridge 1857: 140)'.

Comets

The Adelaide people believed that Teendo Yerle or Sun-father, had a pair of evil sisters who were 'long' and probably comets. Aboriginal people here considered most of the unusual cosmic phenomenon they observed to be a 'sure harbinger of death [which filled] them with awe and terror' (Schurmann 1846 [1879: 242]). In March 1843, a comet visible to Aboriginal people from along the Murray River was taken as a: harbinger of all kinds of calamities, and more especially to the white people. It was considered that the comet would overthrow Adelaide, destroying all Europeans and their houses, and then to take a course up the Murray and past the Rufus River causing havoc in its path' (Eyre 1845, vol.2: 358,359).

It was believed to have been created by northern Aboriginal people who were powerful sorcerers. On this occasion, the Resident Magistrate at Moorunde, Eyre, was told by river Aboriginal people to go to Adelaide and procure the release of an Aboriginal man from the north gaoled for assaulting a shepherd. If this was done, he was told that disaster would be averted. The disquiet caused by unusual cosmic phenomena appears to have been widespread. In the Port Lincoln area, the 1843 comet caused Aboriginal people to hide in caves (Schurmann 1846 [1879: 242]). The Gundidjmara people of south-western Victoria considered a comet to be a great spirit (Dawson 1881: 101).

Other Celestial Events

There were also other celestial events that were perceived to be bad signs. In the Adelaide area, the Southern Lights foretold disease. Furthermore, an eclipse was considered to cause death and destruction. Aboriginal people at Point McLeay in the Lower Murray area were very fearful of the Aurora Australis and the eclipse of the Moon (Taplin Journals 4–7 June 1859, 2 September 1859). Both events were said to have been created by 'wild blackfellows', an early Aboriginal English term for 'uncivilised' groups living beyond the European colonial frontier. Such people were often feared as sorcerers. In the case of the Aurora Australis, it foretold the arrival of these dangerous human/spirit beings.

Discussion

This paper illustrates that the connections between Skyworld, terrestrial land and the Underworld were crucial parts of Aboriginal cosmology. Perceived events and influences from the cosmic landscape had a significant role in the ordering of human life. The observable seasonal changes in the cosmos, due to the movement of planets and constellations, mimicked the terrestrial movements of people and animals. These observances would have strengthened the perception that the cosmos was a landscape. These psychic regions were considered by Aboriginal people to be part of the land that they 'used'. With a social kinship system linking many of the celestial bodies, it can be seen that the cosmos and earthly landscapes were in at least one sense reflections of each other. The total cultural landscape was humanised by the people living within it.

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ENDNOTES

1 Quarterly Report (1 October to 31 December 1837) from Wyatt to the Colonial Secretary, dated 1 January 1838 (Colonial Secretary Reports, 1838/3 & 1838/69, Public Records Office, Adelaide).

2 Forevidence ofTaplin’s incorporation ofhis wife’s thoughts and observances see Taplin Journals, 12 September 1860.

3 Tindale’s journals, field notebooks, and the ‘Milerum’ manuscript are also important ethnographic sources. This material is housed in the Anthropology Archives, South Australian Museum.

4 Tindale records that Robert Mason remembered David Unaipon turning up at Swan Reach many years ago, offering 5 shillings for each Aboriginal story he was told (Tindale 1953: 39). Apparently, Ramsay Smith in turn paid him 10 shillings per story he collected. Unaipon collected mythology from Aboriginal contacts he had with communities across South Australia.


6 In the Adelaide region, the Underworld or Land to the West was known by variations of ‘Pindi’ (Clarke 1991a: 64,65). In the southern Flinders Ranges it was termed ‘Kintyura’ (Hercus 1992: 17,20,30). It is interesting to note that southern groups believed that the Sun entered the Underworld through diving into the sea, whereas groups near Lake Eyre in Central Australia believed that it disappeared into the ground at a place called ‘Dityi-minkka’, reportedly meaning ‘Hole of the Sun’ (Howitt 1904: 427,428).

7 This is consistent with the individual losing its corporeal identity after death, as noted for the Walbiri in Central Australia (Meggitt 1962: 317).

8 For instance, see the cosmologies described by Stanbridge (1857), Smyth (1878, vol. I: 430–434), & MacPherson (1882) for northern Victoria, Roth (1903: 7.8) for northern Queensland, Howitt (1904: 426–434) for south eastern Australia, & Maegraith (1932) for Central Australia.

9 This is quoted by Cawthorne (1844 [reprint 1926: 24,25]) without acknowledgment to Teichelmann.

10 Another word in the Adelaide language that referred to sky, heaven, & height is ‘karra’ (Teichelmann & Schurmann 1857), Smyth (1878, vol. I: 430–434), & MacPherson (1882) for northern Victoria, Roth (1903: 7.8) for northern Queensland, Howitt (1904: 426–434) for south eastern Australia, & Maegraith (1932) for Central Australia.

11 Other Parrkalla terms associated with the Skyworld include ‘Wangkurru kurtu’—‘heaven’; ‘Pandarri’—‘sky, heaven’; & ‘Walurr’—‘heaven’ (Schurmann 1844, vol. 2: 52,67,68). The ‘sky’ or ‘ether’ was ‘Ilkari’ (Schurmann 1884, vol. 2: 6).

12 Foster (1990) discusses the role of the Native Location & Native School.

13 Other variations include Waieruwar (= Wyirwarre), Wyirir (= Wayiyirri) & Wairait, depending on linguistic context, respectively meaning ‘Heaven’, ‘to Heaven’, ‘in Heaven’. These variations are illustrated by Taplin (1874 [1879).
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Schurmann’s account is similar to Wyatt’s but differs in that Monana represents a group of beings, not one individual spirit (Schurmann Diaries 5 June 1839; Wyatt 1879: 166, 181).

The ‘Dreamtime’ represents an Aboriginal English gloss of a range of meanings. The ‘Dreaming’ can loosely be defined as the whole body of mythology in Aboriginal Australia that provides some insight into significant cultural events.

Schurmann in a newspaper article titled ‘The Aborigines of South Australia’ in The South Australian Colonist, 10 March 1840.

1840, vol.2: 25). Also see L. Piesse in a newspaper article titled ‘The language of the natives of South Australia’ in The South Australian Colonist, 14 July 1840. A variation in the recording of ‘purli’ is ‘poulee’.

Other recorded variations in the Ngaiawang language are ‘piddi’ (Moorthis in 1843 [1935: 34]), & ‘pille’ (Tindale 1964: 7).

Schurmann Diaries (22 July 1839), Teichelmann & Schurmann (1840, vol.2: 7, 38, 46), Teichelmann (1841: 9), Wyatt (1879: 166, 167), & Stephens (1889: 500). Also see ‘The Transactions of the Statistical Society – Report on the Aborigines of South Australia’, The Southern Australian, 11 January 1842. Variations recorded for Kikima include Karkara & Cackara. Teichelmann (1857) also uses the term, Marrero. Tindale (1974: 48, 49) notes that in many parts of Australia, ‘Kakara’, as the word for Moon or Sun is also used to mean ‘the east’. He speculates that this relationship is based on the perception of the east being where these celestial bodies enter the sky.

The Erawirung people in the Mid Murray region used the term, ‘Kakere’, for the Moon (Tindale 1930–52: 251). In a cognatic language, Ngaiawang, the Moon was called ‘Kokara’ (Tindale 1964: 5), ‘Kakor’ or ‘Kagurre’ (Moorthis in 1843 [1935: 18]). Another word for Moon that Tindale (1953: 7) records for the Mid Murray region is ‘Kagura’. It was recorded in the Moorundie area as ‘Kokerer’ (Scott 1840–1907).

In the Whyalla area of Eyre Peninsula, Bira was perceived as an ‘old man from the moon’ who killed one of the seven sisters, while chasing the other ones across the landscape (Advertiser, 14 April 1990). Schurmann (1884: 3, 57) records the Moon in the Pamkulla language of eastern Eyre Peninsula as ‘Pira’. Similar terms recorded elsewhere in the Central Lakes cultural bloc, such as ‘Bira’ in the Narangga language of Yorke Peninsula (Black 1920: 86), ‘Pira’ in Nukunu of the southern Flinders Ranges (Hercus 1992: 2, 8, 27), ‘Bera’ in Ngadjuri of the Mid North of South Australia, ‘Vera’ in Wailpi of the Flinders Ranges, & ‘Pira’ in Dieri of the North East of South Australia (Berndt & Vogelsang 1941: 7).

To the Ramindjeri, ‘Markeri’ was also the name of a large shell which resembled a full Moon (Meyer 1843: 78). By another account, the Encounter Bay people called the Moon, ‘Mukkeri’. & pronounced it very much like the English rendering of ‘Mercury’ (Adelaide Observer, 10 May 1851). Taplin also listed the Moon as ‘Markeri’ in his Ngarrindjeri vocabularies (1874 [1879: 131]; 1879: 134, 142). The Tangane called the Moon, ‘Marakari’ (Tanganekald vocabulary cards, Tindale collection). In the southern Coorong district, Wells (1852–1855: 112) recorded the Moon as ‘Mercuri’.

A similar account exists in the mythology of northern Victoria, where the main male creative ancestor, Nooralla (= Nurell, Nurel), commands the Moon to die and the Sun to disappear (Smyth 1878: 431).

29 Teichelmann & Schurmann (1840, vol.2: 41). Also see L. Piesse in a newspaper article titled ‘The language of the natives of South Australia’ in The Southern Australian, 14 July 1840. A variation in the recording of ‘purli’ is ‘poulee’.

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The Erawirung people in the Mid Murray region used the term, ‘Kakere’, for the Moon (Tindale 1930–52: 251). In a cognatic language, Ngaiawang, the Moon was called ‘Kokara’ (Tindale 1964: 5), ‘Kakor’ or ‘Kagurre’ (Moorthis in 1843 [1935: 18]). Another word for Moon that Tindale (1953: 7) records for the Mid Murray region is ‘Kagura’. It was recorded in the Moorundie area as ‘Kokerer’ (Scott 1840–1907).

In the Whyalla area of Eyre Peninsula, Bira was perceived as an ‘old man from the moon’ who killed one of the seven sisters, while chasing the other ones across the landscape (Advertiser, 14 April 1990). Schurmann (1884: 3, 57) records the Moon in the Pamkulla language of eastern Eyre Peninsula as ‘Pira’. Similar terms recorded elsewhere in the Central Lakes cultural bloc, such as ‘Bira’ in the Narangga language of Yorke Peninsula (Black 1920: 86), ‘Pira’ in Nukunu of the southern Flinders Ranges (Hercus 1992: 2, 8, 27), ‘Bera’ in Ngadjuri of the Mid North of South Australia, ‘Vera’ in Wailpi of the Flinders Ranges, & ‘Pira’ in Dieri of the North East of South Australia (Berndt & Vogelsang 1941: 7).

To the Ramindjeri, ‘Markeri’ was also the name of a large shell which resembled a full Moon (Meyer 1843: 78). By another account, the Encounter Bay people called the Moon, ‘Mukkeri’. & pronounced it very much like the English rendering of ‘Mercury’ (Adelaide Observer, 10 May 1851). Taplin also listed the Moon as ‘Markeri’ in his Ngarrindjeri vocabularies (1874 [1879: 131]; 1879: 134, 142). The Tangane called the Moon, ‘Marakari’ (Tanganekald vocabulary cards, Tindale collection). In the southern Coorong district, Wells (1852–1855: 112) recorded the Moon as ‘Mercuri’.

A similar account exists in the mythology of northern Victoria, where the main male creative ancestor, Nooralla (= Nurell, Nurel), commands the Moon to die and the Sun to disappear (Smyth 1878: 431).

Tindale, no date, loose sheet in ‘Milerum’, ‘Jobs needing further attention before typing.’ Anthropology Archives, South Australian Museum.
Tindale, no date, loose sheet in 'Milerum', 'Jobs needing further attention before typing.' Anthropology Archives, South Australian Museum.

Smith (1880: 131) lists the Moon as 'Toongoom'.

Quarterly Report (1 October to 31 December 1837) from Wyatt to the Colonial Secretary, dated 1 January 1838 (Colonial Secretary Reports, 1838/3, Public Records Office, Adelaide).

Schurmann Diaries (5 June & 22 July 1839), Wyatt (1879: 166), Stephens (1889: 501), Williams (1839 [1926: 59]).

Also see Schurmann in a newspaper article titled 'The Aborigines of South Australia.' in The South Australian Colonist, 10 March 1840. In the Adelaide area, variations in the recording of Tindu include Tecendo, Tindo, & Tindo.

Wyatt (1879: 166, 167). Also see letter by Wyatt dated 1 April 1838, from him to the Colonial Secretary, 69/1838. Public Records Office, Adelaide.

Schurmann Diaries, 5 June & 22 July 1839.

Similar names for the Sun existed across South Australia. It is 'Tjindu' in the Pitjandjara language of Central Australia (Goddard 1992: 151), & in the Wirangu language of the West Coast (Black 1917: 7; Tindale 1928: 21). It was recorded as 'Tjindo' in Kukatha from the West Coast (Black 1920: 91). In Wongaldia from Baroota in the southern Flinders Ranges it was recorded as 'Dindo' (Black 1917: 12). The Sun was 'Yurno' in the Parnkalla language of eastern Eyre Peninsula (Schurmann 1844, vol.2: 88), 'Thirntu' in Nukunu from the southern Flinders Ranges (Hercus 1992: 28), & 'Tindo' in Narangga of Yorke Peninsula (Black 1920: 89). Similarly, in a cognatic language, Ngadjuri, it was 'Jandu' or 'Djendu' (Berndt & Vogelsang 1941: 9).

In the Mid Murray area, the Erawirung people used a related term, 'Nanka', for the Sun (Tindale 1930--52: 251). Similarly, the Ngainawang people used 'Nunka' (Tindale 1930--52: 251). In the Earidge region, it was recorded as 'Tjindo' in Kukatha from the West Coast (Black 1920: 91). In Wongaldia from Baroota in the southern Flinders Ranges it was recorded as 'Dindo' (Black 1917: 12). The Sun was 'Yurno' in the Parnkalla language of eastern Eyre Peninsula (Schurmann 1844, vol.2: 88), 'Thirntu' in Nukunu from the southern Flinders Ranges (Hercus 1992: 28), & 'Tindo' in Narangga of Yorke Peninsula (Black 1920: 89). Similarly, in a cognatic language, Ngadjuri, it was 'Jandu' or 'Djendu' (Berndt & Vogelsang 1941: 9).

Adelaide Observer, 10 May 1851. However, 'thulderi' may be a version of the term, 'tulde', recorded by Meyer (1843: 101) to mean a star.

A variation in the recording of Nangge is 'Nungge'. At Currency Creek, an early colonist records that a local European woman, with the name 'Mrs Sunnan', was invariably called 'Mrs Nange' by the local Aboriginal people (Adelaide Observer, 10 May 1851).

In the Mid Murray area, the Erawirung people used a related term, 'Nanka', for the Sun (Tindale 1930--52: 251). Similarly, the Ngainawang people used 'Nunka' (Tindale 1930--52: 251). At Moorangie, it was recorded as 'Nanka' (Scott 1840--1907). Further north at the confluence of the Murray & Darling Rivers, the Maraura people called the Sun, 'Yukku', & dawn 'ngata yukui' (Tindale 1930--52: 251,253).

For the Mid Murray area, Eyre (1845, vol.2: 365) suggests that an Aboriginal practice of placing stones in trees was to measure time. However, the most likely explanation was that this was to indicate the proximity of water (J. Simpson, pers.com.).

Tanganekald vocabulary cards, Tindale collection, Anthropology Archives, South Australian Museum.

Potaruwutj vocabulary cards, Tindale collection, Anthropology Archives, South Australian Museum.

It is possible that 'kado', 'karoo' & 'kardu' are the same linguistic form.

Charles White in the Adelaide Observer, 14 January 1905.

Tindale, no date, 'Milerum', Stage A, #3. Anthropology Archives, South Australian Museum.

This trail may have been modified or extended as a result of the building of the Overland Telegraph Line (J. Simpson, pers.com.)

The term 'prolggi', appears to be related to the Australian English term, brolga. This is a borrowing by Europeans from the Kamilaroi language in eastern New South Wales, where it was 'burralga' (Dixon et al. 1992: 31, 87, 88, 218).

However, other Aboriginal languages from eastern Australia to the Lake Eyre region have similar terms for this bird. The Tanganke people of the Coorong called this bird 'porolgi' (Tanganekald vocabulary cards, Tindale collection). The 'native companion' is an early European term for the brolga.

By another account, the Granites near Kingston represented the emus of this myth (Tindale 1931: 34--192).

In the South East of South Australia, this myth was sometimes used to identify Aboriginal groups (Tindale letter to Dixon, 6 March 1976, correspondence files, Anthropology Archives, South Australian Museum). The coastal people called themselves Porolgi, while inland groups were Pindjali (= Peindjali).

Schurmann Diaries (12 July 1839), Teichelmann & Schurmann (1840: 19, 47), & Teichelmann (1841: 9). Also see 'The Transactions of the Statistical Society--Report on the Aborigines of South Australia', The Southern Australian, 11 January 1842.

Tindale, no date, loose sheet in 'Milerum', 'Jobs needing further attention before typing.' Anthropology Archives, South Australian Museum.

Adelaide Register, 5 October 1887.

Tindale, no date, 'Milerum', Stage A, #1. Anthropology Archives, South Australian Museum. This term may relate to the 'Manchinnga', the 'warrior who became a star' (Taplin 1874 [1879: 18]).

For generalised Australian accounts, see Smith (1930: 70,345--50), & Parker (1953: 105--109). Western Desert accounts are given by Robinson (1966: 91--93), & Isaacs (1980: 152,153). The 'Seven Sisters inma' is often performed by Western Desert women visiting capital cities for public ceremonies, such as those held at the Tandanya National Aboriginal Cultural Institute in Adelaide.


Tindale, no date, 'Milerum', Stage A, #1. Anthropology
Ngawiri appears to be related to ‘ngauwir’, meaning boy in the Ramindjeri dialect of Encounter Bay (Meyer 1843: 86).

Also see Tanganekald vocabulary cards, Tindale collection. As well as Tindale, no date, loose sheet in ‘Milerum’, ‘Jobs needing further attention before typing’. Anthropology Archives, South Australian Museum.

It is possible that there were several constellations termed Yuki by the Lower Murray people, as this term is applied to canoes (cf. Milky Way). In the Yaraldi dialect, the Southern Cross constellation was termed Tjirilengi (McDonald 1977).

Tindale, no date, loose sheet in ‘Milerum’, ‘Jobs needing further attention before typing’. Anthropology Archives, South Australian Museum. Stanbridge (1857) provides a similar myth concerning Lyra, which represents a lowan flying.

Tindale, Aboriginal Place Name File, Anthropology Archives, South Australian Museum.

Tindale, Aboriginal Place Name File, Anthropology Archives, South Australian Museum. A creek near Yankalilla in the southern Fleurieu Peninsula area is known as Paranananacooka. According to Tindale, this was a rendition of the Aboriginal forms, Paranankuka and Paranankuna. Its translation was said to refer to the excreta and urine of the Autumn Star, which explained why this creek becomes very brackish at the end of summer. However, given his word derivation, this appears to be unlikely on linguistic grounds (J. Simpson, pers.com.).

Schurmann Diaries (5 June 1839). Also see Schurmann in a newspaper article titled ‘The Aborigines of South Australia’ in The South Australian Colonist, 10 March 1840.


Tanganekald vocabulary cards, Tindale collection, Anthropology Archives, South Australian Museum.

Schurmann Diaries (5 June 1839). Also see Schurmann in a newspaper article titled ‘The Aborigines of South Australia’ in The South Australian Colonist, 10 March 1840.

The inclusion of the Rufus River in this explanation was possibly due to it being the site of a massacre of Aboriginal people by overlanders in 1842 (see Moorhouse correspondence to Colonial Secretary, reproduced by Taplin 1879: 115–123).

Schurmann (1844, vol.2: 79) suggested that in the Parnkalla language of eastern Eyre Peninsula the term for comet was ‘yandarri’.