KenyA

Introduction
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The Australian Archaeological Association and the Australian Association of Maritime Archaeology held a Joint Conference at the Maritime Museum in Fremantle between the 27th and 30th November, 2005 and for the first time in the history of either organization, included a session on Africa’s past (in keeping with the overall conference theme, titled Africa’s past: trade, exchange and other recent studies). That this was a first is not surprising because two decades ago Graham Connah was the only archaeologist based in Australia who was undertaking research in Africa (apart from a few Egyptologists), and a decade ago there were still only two (and as they were located in different parts of a large continent they did not actually meet each other until a mutual colleague took it upon himself to introduce them at a conference held, of course, in Africa). It is worth noting, however, the significant contributions to African archaeology that have been made by a number of Australian geologists and geochronologists (e.g. Ambrose et al. 2003; Grün and Beaumont 2001; Grün et al. 1996, 2003; McDermott et al. 1996; McDougall 1985; Talbot et al. 2000; Williams 2003; Williams et al. 2000, 2003).

In the past decade Australian researchers, like those from other parts of the world, have taken a much greater interest in the archaeology of the African continent. No longer is it simply the birthplace of the hominin lineage, or the continent on which the first million years of human history were written in uninspiring-looking patches of broken up animal bones and chipped stone tools. It is now widely acknowledged that Africa was the birthplace of our own species and as a result it has been catapulted to centre stage in ongoing debate about when and how the modern behavioural repertoire was established (Deacon 1989; Deacon and Wurz 2001; Klein 1989, 2001, McBrearty and Brooks 2000; Wadley 2001; Henshilwood and Marean 2003). But Africa also preserves a unique record of the transformations that have helped to shape the modern world and many of these present challenges to traditional accounts of the rise of metallurgy, food production and complex societies (Marshall and Hildebrand 2002; LaViolette and Fleisher 2005). So it is not surprising that researchers based in Australia have been inspired to pursue many of the different intellectual challenges presented by the archaeology of the African continent and to explore the import of some of the similarities and differences that characterise portions of the archaeological records found in each continent (Schrire 1980; Hiscock, 1996; Hiscock and O’Connor 2005; Smith 2005; Stern n. d.).

The fact that this conference was held on the eastern edge of the Indian Ocean provided the springboard needed to initiate an exchange of ideas between the scattered Africanist archaeologists based in Australia, and between researchers working in Africa and those working in Australia. Many more expressed an interest in participating in this session than were able to attend, which may auger well for future endeavors. The papers presented at this conference ranged across the Pleistocene record as well as including discussion of issues relating to pastoral adaptations and the impact of European trade on specific polities. Three of these papers are published here (Curnoe et al., Simons and Stern) and serve to illustrate the range of interests being pursued by Africanist archaeologists based in Australia.

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