

# NATIVE COMPANIONS: BLANDOWSKI, KREFFT AND THE ABORIGINES ON THE MURRAY RIVER EXPEDITION

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This paper explores relations between Blandowski, Krefft and the Aborigines during the 1856-57 Murray River expedition. As with many scientific enterprises in Australia, Aboriginal knowledge made a substantial contribution to the success of the expedition. While Blandowski generously acknowledged this, Krefft, who was responsible for the day to day running of the camp, maintained his distance from the Aborigines. The expedition context provides an insight into tensions between Blandowski and Krefft, and also into the complexities of the colonial project on the Murray River, which involved Aborigines, pastoralists, missionaries and scientists.

*Key words:* scientific expedition, colonial attitudes, missionaries, contact history.

WILLIAM BLANDOWSKI described the ‘Superstitions, Customs and Burials of the Aborigines’ in an address to the Melbourne Mechanics’ Institute in October 1856. In that lecture, Blandowski warned that ‘...the world was still without any distinct information as to the habits and manners of the inhabitants of a country equal in size nearly to the whole of Europe’ (*The Argus*, 25 October 1856). The opportunity to gain further information about the Aborigines came a month later, when Blandowski was appointed to lead an expedition to the Murray River to investigate its natural history and to collect specimens for the National Museum (Pescott 1954:10). Gerard Krefft was appointed artist for the expedition and became its de facto second-in-command. The expedition was in the field from December 1856 until the end of November 1857. This gave Blandowski and Krefft ample time to become familiar with the Aboriginal people who collected many of the expedition’s specimens. It also provided time for tensions to emerge between Krefft and Blandowski, tensions which remained hidden until after the expedition’s return to Melbourne, when Krefft was employed by Frederick McCoy to catalogue the faunal collections for the museum (Krefft n.d.a; Pescott 1954:15-18).

The Expedition journeyed to north western Victoria and south western New South Wales when pastoral activities had been consolidated and the Aborigines and whites had arrived at a one-sided accommodation following earlier periods of conflict (Broome 2005; Eyre 1845, Volume II:149; Powell 1969; Russell 2001:5). White colonial society, in the form of pastoral stations, a mission to the Aborigines at Yelta, and townships at Swan Hill and Echuca, was

at an early stage of development. It remained a world where Aboriginal communities continued to exist and, to a limited extent, could live according to their own standards (Littleton et al. 2003).

Using the records of the expedition and contemporary accounts, this study will focus on Blandowski’s and Krefft’s actions and attitudes towards the Aborigines and the Aboriginal responses to these. Blandowski and Krefft were fellow countrymen and relative newcomers to Australia. Despite these similarities, there was considerable tension in their relations with each other and with the Aborigines. Comparing their views, together with information from settlers and missionaries, provides an insight into both the running of a scientific expedition and the range of European attitudes concerning the Aborigines during the middle decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It also provides information concerning the manner in which Aboriginal people had reached an accommodation with the Whites. The information at hand, however, is incomplete (Allen 2006:24). To draw the expedition records and contemporary sources together, use will be made of ideas developed in recent Aboriginal historiography and Wylie’s concept of ‘interpretive tacking’, which allows for inferences to be drawn, based on plausibility and experience (Russell 2001; Wylie 2002:163-5).

Information concerning Blandowski and Krefft’s behaviour during the expedition is organised in the following manner. First, there will be a short discussion of Blandowski’s and Krefft’s viewpoints and how these differed. Secondly, a number of interactions which demonstrate differences between Blandowski’s and Krefft’s approaches to the Aborigines

will be examined. These include: the management of Aboriginal labour and the Aboriginal contribution to the expedition; the Aboriginal response to European economic domination; and, finally, the Aborigines as the subject of scientific inquiry. There will be a discussion of the relationships between the Aborigines and the members of the expedition at the end of this work.

*Blandowski and Krefft on common ground?*

In the Introduction to his monumental *History of Australian Exploration*, Favenc (1888) noted,

The charm of romance and adventure surrounding the discovery of hitherto unknown lands has from the earliest ages been the lure that has tempted men to prosecute voyages and travels of exploration. Whether under the pretext of science, religion, or conquest, hardship and danger have alike been undergone with fortitude and cheerfulness, in the hope of being the first to find things strange and new, and return to civilised communities with the tidings.

The journeys of Mitchell, Sturt, Eyre and Leichardt held the Australian public's attention during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Exploration was in the air and both officials and the public continued to be intrigued by the disappearance of Ludwig Leichardt, on an expedition to cross the continent in 1848. The British Government and New South Wales financed A.C. Gregory's expedition to further the exploration of northern Australia with the Victorian botanist, Ferdinand Mueller, as a member of the party (Favenc 1888:184). Having recently achieved statehood, there was a feeling that Victoria was missing out in the rush to fill the map of Australia. This issue was taken up by the Philosophical Institute of Victoria which established an Exploration Committee and advocated that a Victorian party should attempt to follow Leichardt's attempted crossing of the continent (Bonyhady 1991:12-13). A foundation member of the Institute, William Blandowski, curator of the [Melbourne] Museum of Natural History, had already conducted a number of scientific expeditions in southern and eastern Victoria and presented the results to the Institute (Blandowski 1855a,b, 1856a,b). Following the loss of the museum collections to Frederick McCoy and the University in 1856 (Wilkinson 1996), Blandowski proposed a further expedition along the Murray River to its mouth. When Government approval was received, however, Queensland

was listed as its ultimate destination (Darragh, this volume). It is clear that Blandowski saw the expedition, not as a limited scientific enterprise, but as one of the great journeys of Australian exploration, with himself as its central figure. To this end, the Expedition carried '...every book...on the Australian fauna... including all the exploring expeditions from Sturt to Leichardt' (Krefft n.d.b: December 1856).

Blandowski and Krefft believed that one of their tasks was to record Aboriginal life before it became extinct. This, and the fact that both thought that the Aborigines of the future would survive only in the settler's memory, reveals that they shared a romantic view of their role as observers and record keepers (Blandowski 1862 in Allen 2007c:11; Krefft 1866b:357). The title of Krefft's (1866b) published article, *On the Manners and Customs of the Aborigines of the Lower Murray and Darling* locates it within the genre of traveller's accounts (see Crick 1991).

At the beginning of his Mechanics' Institute lecture, Blandowski drew attention to a strange and unvarying law '...which causes the dark and savage races of mankind to dwindle and wither before the whiteman's civilisation' (*The Argus*, 25 October 1856). The idea that an unseen but relentless process was responsible for the demise of the Aborigines was a common view at the time (Broome 2005:98-103; Fox 1988:16; McGregor 1997:13-15). It was explained variously in terms of providence, a natural law or the inferiority of the Aborigines themselves. The theory appeared to find empirical evidence in the rapid loss of Aboriginal populations observed across the colony. Blandowski supported his case by pointing to the rarity of Aboriginal people in the vicinity of Melbourne in 1856 and contrasting this with the former situation, when 'crowds' of Aborigines lived near the city (*The Argus*, 25 October 1856).

The Murray River Expedition first met up with Aborigines at Spring Plains, where Krefft noted, '...There were a few natives of the Goulbourn tribe encamped on the creek a miserable looking remnant, starved and diseased, living examples of the White man's curse' (Krefft n.d.b: Sunday, 21 December 1856).

Writing ten years after the return of the expedition (1866b:357), Krefft observed that many of the natives on the Murray, '...then in the prime of life', had since disappeared. Krefft pointed to colonisation as the reason that the Aboriginal population had declined, noting that the Aborigines, being tied to the land, could not retreat before the Europeans. Instead, they,

... took to rum and tobacco, sacrificed their wives and daughters to the white man (if a free offer may be termed a sacrifice), and at last, almost ceased to increase in numbers as women became either barren or produced a weak half-caste offspring... (Krefft 1866b:358).<sup>1</sup>

Following the return from the Murray, Blandowski (1857:137) also took a pessimistic view, '...I have but to make the most deplorable statements concerning our natives. Extermination proceeds so quickly that the regions of the Lower Murray are already depopulated.' Five years later, he explained the disappearance of the Aborigines from their hunting grounds in more radical terms,

...vanquished, begging like gypsies, sinking into lethargy and apathy, they will survive by the mercy of those who murdered their parents, siblings, children and tribal members (Blandowski [1862] in Allen 2007c:11).

Published in German, this statement suggests a continuance of the revolutionary ideals of his youth, though by 1862, Blandowski had little reason to soften his views of the Victorian colonists (Darragh, this volume). Blandowski was critical of the British colonial project and of the settler's treatment of the Aborigines, views which were held by other Germans in Victoria, including the Moravians from the failed Lake Boga mission (Jensz 2006:224; Kenny 2003:108).

Blandowski and Krefft had German romantic and scientific traditions in common. However, as far as the expedition was concerned, the working out of these ideas took very different forms. Blandowski worked on a broad canvas and considered the expedition a potential field of achievement and renown. He left Krefft to deal with the mundane details of camp life and scientific collecting, tasks to which Krefft was well suited to, but, as it emerges, was also highly resentful of.

#### MANAGING THE ABORIGINES

Given that the expedition was collecting plant and animal species for which there were few records and even fewer preserved specimens, it was inevitable that Aboriginal knowledge would form a part of the expedition's findings. Both Krefft and Blandowski made use of this knowledge, to secure and name specimens, and, in many cases, to obtain knowledge of a species' habits and ecology (Allen 2001; Blandowski 1857:131-4; Krefft n.d.b, 1866a,b).

In his published report, Blandowski acknowledged the contribution of the Nyeri Nyeri, and other Aboriginal assistants, commenting that, while Krefft and Manson had been responsible for the *mechanical* part of preservation, the specimens themselves were,

...obtained by the assistance of the aborigines, to whom I am indebted for all the information and discoveries I have made... (Blandowski 1857:127).

Krefft also acknowledged that the Aborigines were 'very useful'. However, he was never entirely comfortable with this. At Gardiner's outstation, he complained that he had to number, catalogue and preserve '... every thing the lubras brought in'. Krefft described an Emu, brought in by Billy Booby and Sergeant, as being, '...all in a mess with blood and dirt' (Krefft n.d.b: Mt. Hope, January 1857). At the beginning of the expedition, he was very critical of Blandowski's employment of the Aborigines, noting that they,

... showed a great deal of activity during the first few days and brought in more wallabys (Bridle Nail Tailed kangaroos *Onychogalea fraenata*) than Batchelor could skin in a week, so Mr Bl. soon set the natives to work to skin the wallabys which they did in a most dirty manner as heaps of skins quite useless for anything will prove to the visitor of the Melbourne Museum. In a very liberal manner our Commander paid about 1 shilling for each skin, a most exorbitant price when we had to find the natives powder and shot, of which only 3 or 4 charges were expended on wallabys and the rest was used for knocking down a few brace of Black Duck (Krefft n.d.b: Gunbower, 28 December 1856).

While Blandowski, as leader, rode on a horse and stayed at head-stations, Krefft, as well as being artist, cataloguer and note-taker, had to act as cook, bullock driver, messenger, and collector of forage and firewood. Krefft complained that Blandowski's attitudes towards the Aborigines made his lot more difficult. He regarded the Aborigines as essential only in so far as Blandowski was unwilling, or unable, to retain competent European workers.

... If our party had consisted of the full complement of 4 men allowed by the Government we might have done entirely without the natives at this place, for as long as necessity compelled us to stay there they never brought us in anything what was of particular interest or new to us. But of course it alters the question if two men are com-

pelled to do everything. Batchelor was occupied the whole day in skinning and making skeletons or trying to put the skins into shape again which the natives had spoiled and my own duties were of a kind so utterly at variance with each other that I am afraid to reckon them up here (Krefft n.d.b: Gunbower, January 1857).

At the expedition's end, Krefft remained less than generous to both Blandowski and to the Aborigines, noting that he [Krefft] had succeeded in procuring almost every species known to exist [near the Murray River], '...With the aid of Messrs. Williams [of GolGol Station] and the natives...' (Krefft 1866a:6).

Similarly, Blandowski diminished Krefft's role, claimed the discoveries for himself, and, while he acknowledged the Aboriginal contribution, simultaneously located them as his friends and as paid servants,

...Of the quadrupeds I have found 26 different species, of which... five are entirely new to me... Most of these quadrupeds I have collected in large numbers, and they are entirely the results of the exertions of my friends the Yarree Yarree [Nyeri Nyeri] aborigines for which I have given them flour, sugar, tea, blankets, clothing and other small presents, amounting in all to about £200 in value (Blandowski 1857:136).<sup>2</sup>

Blandowski spent less time in direct contact with the Aborigines, often being away on trips to the central Darling, to Moorundie, at settler's houses or inns (Krefft n.d.b). Furthermore, in August, he left the expedition early and took a steamer back to Melbourne (Blandowski 1857:126). By contrast, Krefft was in daily contact with the Aborigines managing the camp, directing their efforts and recording and preserving the specimens they brought in (Krefft n.d.b, 1866b).

The tensions between Krefft and Blandowski which emerged during and after the expedition are demonstrated in their differing assessments of the Aboriginal contribution (Allen 2006; Krefft n.d.b). Blandowski's romantic assessment can be contrasted with Krefft's more hard-nosed one. Blandowski stressed his own generosity to the Aborigines. In presenting the results of the expedition, Blandowski blamed his men rather than himself, noting that he had made a bad selection,

...I was soon deserted and left to myself, being, in consequence of this, exposed to innumerable delays and inconveniences, so that I had very great difficulty in fulfilling the duties which were expected of me (Blandowski 1857:125).

Krefft, in lessening the Aboriginal contribution, maintained his case that Blandowski was unnecessarily extravagant. He blamed Blandowski for the expedition's failings. His unpublished account (Krefft n.d.b), rewritten in London, after he and Blandowski had formally fallen out, catalogues Blandowski's deficiencies as a leader and a scientist, though this account is recognized as a biased source of information (Allen 2006:26; Pescott 1954:16-18; Paszkowski 1967:154-5; but see also Howitt, quoted in Darragh, this volume, for a similar assessment of Blandowski).

While the scientists and missionaries were critical of the settler's treatment of the Aborigines, they were also complicit in the act of colonisation (Jensz 2006:224). Both were involved in managing the Aborigines, and this management formed only a subset of general frontier labour relations, whether it was directed towards either a sacred or a scientific end. Once pastoralists had secured Aboriginal lands, the next task was to make them sufficiently productive to allow a permanent European presence. Godwin (2001) notes that pastoralists could either exclude the Aborigines entirely from their lands or they could allow some form of accommodation. As a result of the discovery of gold in the 1850's, European labour was difficult to find on the Murray River. Furthermore, stock management was through the system of shepherds which required a large work force (Littleton et al. 2003; Powell 1969). Hence, exclusion was not an option and, as Aboriginal labour was both available and cheap, many stations had Aborigines as permanent or occasional residents (see Foster 2000:2). Krefft records their presence, in groups ranging from seven to forty-five individuals, at fourteen pastoral properties between Echuca and Mildura. In addition, he notes that native police were stationed at Euston (1866b:358-9).

Bringing Aborigines into the European economy, however, was a two-way process involving complex cross-cultural negotiations (Thorpe discussed in Foster 2000:4). From a European point-of-view, the task was to make use of Aboriginal labour without being drawn into a web of mutual obligations. One way of achieving this was to maintain a level of social or spatial distance between the two peoples.

Blandowski seems to have been oblivious of these cross-currents. Krefft showed his irritation with Blandowski's relationships with the Aborigines, noting that Blandowski paid the Aborigines too liberally, that he failed to keep them at a sufficient distance and that he favored Aboriginal companions

over his white colleagues (Krefft, n.d.b: Gunbower – January 1856). There is some truth in Krefft's accusations. On one occasion, Blandowski (1857:127) described Krefft and Manson as his 'white labourers' placing them on an equal footing with his black ones. This would not have been a popular opinion.

A case in point is Buckley, whom Krefft describes as a repulsive looking half-caste with a squint eye. According to Krefft, Blandowski was on somewhat intimate terms with Buckley, lending him a part of his bedding and his best horse and spurs, the latter being denied to Krefft, who had to walk beside the bullock wagon. While Blandowski laughed at Krefft's warnings, Krefft felt vindicated when Buckley stole two guineas, got drunk, lost the letters he was entrusted with, and, finally, abandoned Blandowski's horse, lame and galled, at a public house (Krefft n.d.b: Campaspe Plains, 25-27 December 1856).

When the party made camp at Gunbower, Krefft initially hailed the Aborigines as 'fine, stalwart fellows', but altered his opinion when a group of Aboriginal men, women and children camped in close proximity to their tents,

... I remonstrated with Mr Bl. and wanted him to order the blackfellows further off. The consequence was that the first dry sticks which were lying about were soon burnt up and ... Batchelor and myself were obliged to run through the paddock for an hour every day to collect a sufficient quantity of dry wood to boil our tea kettle (Krefft n.d.b: 29 December 1856).

There are other examples where Krefft attempted to maintain his distance from the Aborigines. When travelling to Mount Hope to hunt for specimens and food, Krefft relates that he bundled the whole tribe off the dray as soon as they were on the road, an action the Aborigines did not like very much, '...so that a great deal of, Greek to me, was talked by them during our journey, very likely censoring my rude behaviour...' (n.d.b: Mount Hope).

At Mondellimin, Krefft (n.d.a) describes 'rambles' in the bush with the Aborigines, sometimes as far as 20 miles from the Murray. Even on these collecting trips, he refused to fit in with Aboriginal wishes. He relates an Aboriginal 'superstition' that requires hunters to fast when tracking a kangaroo, irrespective of the length of the hunt,

... They would always blame me for it if they lost a kangaroo, as I would refresh my self with a creeping plant very plentiful on the salt bush plains, in spite of their remonstrances... (Krefft n.d.a: entry for great red kangaroo).

On another occasion, Krefft was asked to release a small bat as it was a '... brother belonging to Blackfellow'. Krefft notes that the boy begged very hard for the animal, informing Krefft that if he killed it, one of the bat's relatives would kill a 'lubra'. While he promised to let it go, Krefft states that he did not kill it in front of the boy, recording that the Expedition was only able to obtain a single specimen of this species (the lesser long-eared bat, *Nyctophilus geoffroyi*, Krefft n.d.b: February, 1857, 1866a:1-2, b:359-60).

Krefft occasionally names individual Aborigines.<sup>3</sup> He does this at Mount Hope in the case of Billy Booby and Sergeant, whom he sketched (Krefft n.d.b: February, 1857; Fig. 1). Similarly, 'Old Jacob', a chief from the Darling River is mentioned a couple of times (Kean, this volume). However, he does not name the two Aborigines who accompanied the Expedition from Gunbower to Mondellimin, a distance of more than 300 km and five weeks duration, though he does observe that they kept white feathers in their hair to signal their status as visitors throughout the journey (Krefft 1866b:364).

Rowse (1998) discusses rationing as a colonial technique that created possibilities for both coercion and observation. He notes that Europeans, early on in the process of colonisation, discovered that they could use rations to draw the Aborigines into their

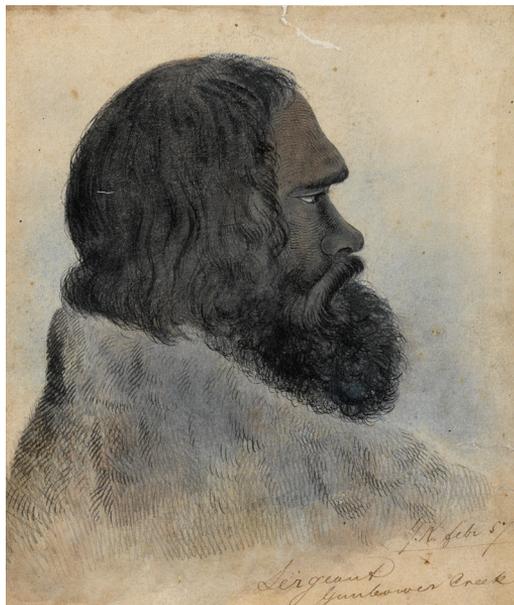


Fig. 1. Gerard Krefft: *Sergeant, Gunbower Creek, G.K. Feb 185. [7]*. Watercolour on paper, 1857. Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales Collection.

sphere (see also Foster 2000). However, they worried about the potential that 'hand-outs' might turn the Aborigines into paupers and they attempted to secure a full return for any rations issued (Foster 2000:12-13; Rowse 1998:25-8). At Yelta mission, daily rations were provided but work was required in return (Fifth Annual Report to the Church of England Mission, 1866, quoted in Massola 1970:29).

Seen from an Aboriginal point of view, the provision of food might be considered a gift which created ongoing rights and obligations within a moral economy (Sansom 1988; Wolski 2001:227). Krefft identifies services provided by the Aborigines which appear to have an element of 'looking after'. On one occasion, he observed an Aboriginal group returning stray sheep to Mount Hope Station (Krefft n.d.b). Krefft (1866b:360) argues that the settlers were 'kindly' and, in return, the Aborigines would keep an eye on the owner's property. He relates that McDonald, a squatter at Mount Hope, gave gifts of flour and presented 'Billy' with a pair of moleskin trousers and a shirt. Such gifts could be seen by the Aborigines as creating a set of mutual obligations (Wolski 2001:227).

In discussing the enlightened humanitarianism of Edward John Eyre, Evans (2001:166-9) argues that Eyre's distribution of food and blankets at Moorundie involved a coercive intent, using food and blankets to encourage the Aborigines to restrain their wandering habits and to locate permanently near the settlement. Evans sees this as a strategy to control Aboriginal people in order to assert British authority. In a similar fashion, Krefft was able to harness Aboriginal labour to the expedition's ends through controlling the distribution of food. However, Krefft also wished to avoid relations of reciprocity with the Aborigines. He worked to ensure that the rewards for labour went to the individuals who had done the work, even if this meant going against the norms of Aboriginal sharing.

Like all the other tribes they share their food with each other, and if out hunting, and having too many followers for the few pounds of flour and tea with which we started, it was frequently found necessary to starve part of the garrison, by making the natives who accompanied us, eat their rations before our eyes, so that the idle camp followers were compelled to look after opossums, and leave us alone (Krefft 1866b:360, see also, n.d.b: Mt Hope, December 1856).

Elsewhere, (Krefft n.d.b: Gunbower, February 1857), Krefft describes the sharing of food as a good

characteristic, noting with approval that whenever he gave a young man some beef or damper, even if he was hungry, '...he would not taste a morsel of it, but would divide it among his relations and if there was sufficient, he would hand over something to each member of the tribe.'

The Expedition established a permanent camp at Mondellimin, on Mildura Station, and stayed there for eight months. Krefft (1866b:364-5) documents the Aboriginal reaction to their arrival,

...in a few days some twenty of them, including men, women and children, were assembled near our huts; they could not at first understand what brought us there, but when we purchased some of the native animals captured by them, they ever after brought in a good supply and became our permanent huntsmen. The boys would go out to collect insects, the women to look for small mammals, and the men looking for larger game; they would try their best to please, and obtain the reward offered for the more rare creatures, but not succeeding, they would as quickly try to pass off some common animal as the one which we were in want of....

While Krefft paid the Aborigines to hunt and gather, he records a calculative tone in their attitude, ...they became...very much attached to us (as long as our flour bags lasted, at least); but whenever the stock of flour diminished, they would break up their camps, and pay visits to the neighbouring stations; returning as quick as possible when they heard that a steamer had arrived with fresh supplies (1866b:365).

Towards the end of the time at Mondellimin, Krefft found it necessary to use trickery to keep the Aborigines hunting.<sup>4</sup> That this was a system of coercion was not lost on the Aborigines, who used a marked stick to keep a running tally of the bags of flour. Krefft continues,

...they made a notch for every bag, keeping henceforth as good an account as the storeman. Nothing could keep them near the camp, or induce them to exert themselves in hunting, except seeing a good supply of flour on hand; and when some two months before our return to Melbourne, the stock became very low, and I feared to lose the natives, they were completely out-manoeuvred; as I filled the empty bags with sand during the night, and piled them up with the rest. Never did I behold such astonished faces as the natives showed on the next morning; they examined the ground for miles,

looking for dray tracks, and as no steamer had passed, could not account for the flour thus arrived, and as usual, put it down to the agency of "Devil-Devil" (Krefft 1866b:365).

*The Aboriginal response to European economic domination*

Wolski (2001:232-3) argues that the frontier continued wherever there remained contestation between Aborigines and the whites, where possibilities remained for a degree of independent action on the part of the Aborigines. Once violence was suppressed, Aboriginal resistance might take other forms. In such situations, Europeans might be vulnerable to attacks on stock, or the withdrawal of Aboriginal labour, while the Aborigines might retain confidence in their way of doing things, notwithstanding violent clashes and the loss of lands and population (Evans 2001:152; Littleton et al. 2003:95-6). Continuity in rituals, the preservation of food ways, the maintenance of traditional social relations, and even mimicking the Europeans, might be ways in which the Aborigines could resist total cooption into a European scheme of things (Wolski 2001:221, 228-9).

A letter from Hugh Jamieson, one of the owners of Mildura (formerly Yerre Yerre) Station, explains that Aboriginal labour was used for shepherding, sheep-washing and shearing,

...Their services have, during the recent scarcity of labour consequent upon the gold discoveries...been to us and other settlers on the Murray and Darling of great value. The proper principle of managing them is founded on consistency, kindness, firmness, and decision. Following out this plan, we continue to secure their services for shepherding and some other descriptions of work... (Jamieson [1853] in Bride 1983:379).

Jamieson, however, expressed his frustration with the fact that during the summer months, the Aborigines abandoned their employment and indulged '...in the roving life of naked savages'. He continues,

...they do not infrequently during their annual migrations travel over 200 or 300 miles of country, increasing in numbers as they proceed, alternately hunting, fishing, and levying contributions on both sheep and cattle, as they slowly and indolently saunter along the banks of the Murray and Darling. Such is the limited degree of civilization, which even the best of our blacks have

reached, that during these migrations we always experience considerable difficulties in retaining out of the whole tribe the necessary numbers for shepherding alone. All the present and future advantages offered [to them] fail to compensate for the disappointment of not being able to join these wild and roving excursions (Jamieson [1853] in Bride 1983:379-80).

Jamieson thought that the Aborigines were doomed before the progress of civilization. His reasoning for this was their obstinate attachment to '... all the superstitious prejudices, passions, customs, and habits of their forefathers', particularly their refusal to abandon the wandering life. He advocated 'concentration' as a possible cure, a policy which the Victorian Government introduced in 1860 (Broome 2005:120-132; Jamieson [1853] in Bride 1983:380, 83, 85).<sup>5</sup> Jamieson's attitude towards the Aborigines was utilitarian, he intended to replace his Aboriginal shepherds with Europeans as soon as circumstances allowed.

Krefft documents many of the changes in Aboriginal life that had occurred along the Murray River. The Aborigines use '... some very queer looking fowling pieces', iron spears, fishhooks; they work on pastoral stations, feast off beasts shot by the settlers and perform attenuated ceremonies (Krefft 1866b:359, 364, n.d.b: March 1857). At the same time, he notes the continuance of many aspects of traditional life; the marriage of young girls, male initiations, sister exchanges, the observance of naming, food and hunting taboos, wife lending, fights over broken marriage contracts, and the freedom to camp on river and lake frontages (Krefft 1866b:364, 372, n.d.b: February 1857). The missionaries at Yelta, Thomas Goodwin and John Bulmer also document a degree of Aboriginal independence noting the existence of moieties, marriage restrictions and severe fights over tribal matters (Massola 1970; Bulmer in Vanderwal 1999). From an Aboriginal point of view, the maintenance of traditional social forms within an economy that included station work, trading and hunting and gathering, approaches what Altman (2001:v) has described as a 'hybrid' economy, an active adaptation to the prevailing circumstances.

While Jamieson, and many other Victorians, thought that Aboriginal degradation came from their continued adherence to Aboriginal customs (Buchan 2005), Krefft, believed that Aboriginal freedom was limited by their dependence on European commodities.

...he came to terms, bartered his opossum rug for blankets; his game for flour, beef or mutton;

his services as a shepherd or stock-rider for other luxuries of civilised life; and at last he became dependent for almost everything upon the occupant of his own domain. The consequence of this is obvious. A native once used to flour, tea, sugar and tobacco can hardly exist without them; hence very few independent tribes remain within the settled districts, and the younger members of them have almost forgotten the vegetables or the game upon which their fathers once feasted... (Krefft 1866b:357-8).

Krefft may have intended to limit these comments to areas closer to Melbourne where he describes the Aboriginal population as degraded (Krefft 1866b:359). On the other hand, he may have been making a prediction about what the future held for Murray River Aborigines whose robust health he documented. While based on observation, these statements carry an ideological load. He sees the reason for the Aboriginal demise in terms of a loss of Aboriginality, occasioned by the desire for flour, tobacco and alcohol, a desire the Whites interpreted as a moral failing on the part of the Aborigines (Rowse 1998:32-33).

Krefft directs attention to the question of alcohol when he is accompanied by four 'blackfellows' on his way to Echuca. He suspects that they are going to spend the shillings Blandowski paid them getting drunk 'like whitefellows'. Beginning with a complaint about misguided people who pay the Aborigines in cash (i.e., Blandowski), he launches into a set-piece about those who supply the '...cursed drink' to the Aborigines.

...There is a law not to supply an Aborigine with ardent spirits but as there are always a lot of low wretches about a public house (who rank far below a blackfellow) who are willing for the sake of a dram to supply the poor native with what is out of his power to procure (Krefft n.d.b: February 1857).

On another occasion, Krefft (1866b:366) portrays Yelta, a Church of England Mission station, in positive terms. The Aborigines lived in comfortable huts and received payment for any work they did. However, he also observed that the work of the missionaries was being undone by drinkers at the public house across the river.<sup>6</sup> This is interesting as a letter from Marian Bulmer, written from Yelta a year later, notes that the Aborigines had only just acquired a taste for 'grog' ([1858] in Massola 1970:17), though by 1866, Goodwin noted that the desire for alcohol had increased greatly for men and women alike, '...

nearly all their earnings are spent in drink, which is taken to the camp, and frequent quarrels and fights are the result' (Goodwin in Massola 1970:29). Krefft may have projected his knowledge of a later period back to 1857, a support for Langton's (1993) argument that views of the Aborigines as indigent drunks predated their ready access to alcohol.

On the other hand, Krefft was tolerant of sexual relationships between the Aborigines and the Europeans arguing that the 'immorality' of the situation could be explained in terms of the scarcity of European women and the humanness of the stock-keepers, shepherds, hut-keepers, bullock-drivers and shearers who might be at an outstation for months on end.

...Now what can be expected under these circumstances from the recluse who hardly sees his fellow mans face all the year round. Is it to be wondered at, that he is glad to meet a tribe of natives now and then, who supply him with a change of diet in the shape of fish, crawfish and wild ducks or eggs for his daily ration of salt beef. Is it astonishing that this man should take unto himself a young native woman if he is able to satisfy her relatives with tobacco, flour, tea or sugar? I should say it is natural, and whatsoever may be said or written against the immorality of the subject it will never alter the opinion or the habits of the men so situated (Krefft n.d.b: February 1857).

While he does not go so far as to see an element of 'sociality' in Aboriginal sexual relationships, he takes time to consider Aboriginal motivations and observes that the exchange of wives between visiting tribesmen was a common practice (Krefft n.d.b: February 1857, 1866b:372), but adds, '...they freely offer both their wives and daughters to any European who may have a piece of damper, a fish-hook, or any other present to bestow.' Similarly, Marian Bulmer at Yelta relates that they could not keep the girls at the Mission because '...they find it profitable to be about the resorts of idle shepherds...' ([1858] quoted in Massola 1970:17).

Apart from general observations, Krefft makes only one direct reference to sexual interactions involving the expedition. At Reedy Lake, a group of young women came to barter crayfish for flour and tobacco. Krefft noted that the Europeans blushed at their nakedness and he wondered how the men at the stations got on in such circumstances.

...Three or four of the younger girls were good looking making allowance for their colour, and their forms unexceptionable, but the older ones

looked perfect frights. As Punch has it, one old hag asked if we wanted any lubras and was quite astonished when we declined the offer, she thought perhaps we did not understand her and in the evening she reappeared with 3 of her charges, so I gave her a piece of bread and told her to be off (Krefft n.d.b: Reedy Lake, March 1857).

Here, Krefft raises the possibility of desire on the part of himself and the others (see Kean, this volume, for a further discussion of Krefft's watercolour entitled 'Three Aboriginal Girls'). While Krefft sketches these girls in a charmingly innocent pose, he follows this in his narrative with a passage that stresses the lack of cleanliness of the Aborigines '...A peculiar odour hovers about a native during this season of dirt and filth', thus reassuring readers that the Expedition maintained the discipline required by their scientific enterprise.

At various times, both Krefft and Blandowski comment on Aboriginal personal traits. Blandowski ([1862] in Allen 2007c:11) stressed their humanity,

The Australians are courageous and brave, natural in their ways, and possess the cunning and ingenuity to hunt for food without powder and lead. They have combined times of leisure and the requirements of survival into a stimulating and meaningful way of life. They recognize when to respect keeping a natural distance and are warm and faithful friends. Their grief for the dead is more deeply felt than we like to believe....After making such observations and knowing their good heads and hearts one has to reject categorically the assumptions that they should be relegated to the level of animals <sup>7</sup>

Krefft (1866b) noted their agility, ingenuity in obtaining food, generosity; their kindness to children, the aged and handicapped; sociability; and the genuineness of their mourning. His artistic appreciation comes out in his description of the lower Murray Aborigines as being '...well made with highly intelligent countenances' (Krefft 1866b:364). He is also critical of the Aborigines, noting that they were cunning, superstitious, gullible and lazy,

...Their social position is naturally a very low one; they do not appear to have any idea of a Supreme Being, they possess no religious rites, and every man who is strong and cunning enough to enforce his authority and to subject the weak, will always be a chief among them.

Marriage ceremonies they have none, and when a native takes a lubra to himself for good, it is pretty certain that, however young she may be,

she has had connection with most of the men of the tribe. The women are often obtained by stealing them from another tribe, in which case the unhappy creature is generally beaten into a state of insensibility (Krefft 1866b:372)

Despite the tone of these comments, it is clear that, for the most part, Krefft did not approach these questions from a moral viewpoint but makes the argument that their customs were those appropriate to their manner of life.

...on consideration, it appeared to me that their philosophy was quite correct; why should they exert themselves? They did not lay in stores, and many of their viands being of a perishable nature, and to be had almost every day, there was no reason why they should work like their civilised brethren (Krefft 1866b:359).

Rowse (1998:5) suggests that one aspect of a rationing relationship was that it brought the colonists into a close relationship with the Aborigines and generated a body of knowledge about the colonized. Exchanges involving sexual favours provided the Aborigines with information about the whites (Schaffer 2001:137). That this was a matter of concern is confirmed by Sturt ([1853] in Bride 1983:368), who thought that such 'intimacies' could reveal the weak state of the Europeans.

Beyond the exchanges involving labour and food, sex created intimate relations between the Aborigines and the Whites and brought the frontier to the centre line of whatever served as a shepherd's bed (Critchett quoted Wolski 2001:232). Much of the violence of the frontier is considered to be a consequence of the abuse of Aboriginal women (Schaffer 2001:135; Robertson [1853] in Bride 1983:164-5). Frontier sex between the Aborigines and the Whites was abhorrent to officials and missionaries, who interpreted the exchange of goods for sex as 'prostitution' (Reed 2004:96-97; Rowse 1998:30-31). It is probable that the shepherds also considered that payment discharged any obligation on their part. It is also true that some of the Aboriginal 'outrages' against shepherds were a result of Europeans attempting to rape or to avoid payment for services rendered (Broome 2005:71-2). Krefft's policy of avoiding entanglements may have been good sense in these circumstances.

Missionaries and officials, in England and in Australia, were worried by the violence between Blacks and Whites and the sorry state to which the Aborigines were reduced. A part of their justification for colonization was that the colonial project brought

the wilderness into productive use and the gifts of civilization and Christianity to the Aborigines (Select Committee [1837] quoted in Reynolds 1972). They saw Europeans who supplied alcohol to the Aborigines and took advantage of the frontier's sexual opportunities as calling into question the moral basis of colonial authority (Reed 2004:94; Rowse 1998:29; Schaffer 2001:147). The missionaries, and European society of the time, held a somewhat Manichean view of both colonial and Aboriginal society, seeing their own worthy efforts undermined by morally lax elements of colonial society. The Aborigines, already prone to unsettled habits seemed 'hostile to the lessons of morality' (Buchan 2005:47). Krefft's moral relativism was selective; he was forgiving of sexual relationships, but accepted the missionary's thesis concerning alcohol believing it to be a destructive addiction on the part of the Aborigines.

#### THE ABORIGINES AS A SUBJECT OF SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY

As discussed previously, both Blandowski and Krefft aimed to document an Aboriginal world which they assumed would disappear in the near future. Discussing the Aborigines as a subject of inquiry raises questions concerning the accuracy and authenticity of their findings. In particular, one might question the extent to which their information, both textual and graphic, was filtered and interpreted through their ideas concerning the Aborigines.

There are considerable differences in the style of documentation each produced. Blandowski's work was for a general, and probably European, audience. His proposed encyclopaedia and his later publications were comparative in nature (Blandowski 1861, 1862, n.d.). In the *Australien in 142 Photographischen Abbildungen* (1862), Blandowski attempted to create an illustrated account of Aboriginal life in Australia, with different sections dealing with the Aborigines physical appearance, economy, activities, and life crises; initiation, ceremonies, marriage, combat, sickness and death (Allen 2006). Where information was not available from his primary sources, Blandowski borrowed freely from others, often with little acknowledgement (Allen 2007a:26-31). He adopted this approach because he believed that,

...The Australians share the same physiognomy, rituals and weapons (these vary only in shape) across the whole continent, and we without doubt are dealing with a single isolated race which still

lives by its age old customs (Blandowski 1861 in Allen 2007b:9).

Blandowski also engaged the German graphic artist Gustav Mützel to rework Krefft's field sketches into montages illustrating different aspects of Aboriginal life (Allen 2006, 2007a:31-9). It was Blandowski's intention to document the Aboriginal world prior to European colonization and only six out of the 142 illustrations in the *Australien* deal with settlers, the expedition or relations between the Europeans and the Aborigines. Most of these portray Blandowski as an adventurous explorer (Illustrations 19 – 24 in Blandowski 1862; Allen 2007c, see Illustration 22 reproduced in Menkhorst, this volume).

As noted previously, Krefft spent more time in direct contact with the Aborigines. His published and unpublished accounts (Krefft n.d.b, 1866b) clearly note changes in Aboriginal life on the Murray River subsequent to European colonization and discuss interactions between the expedition and the Aborigines. His observations are often related to a place and time, and are sprinkled with first person statements, 'I have seen', 'I noticed', 'while I was with the Aborigines' and even the cautionary, 'I believe' or 'I was informed by the Aborigines'. In addition, he paid for, and accompanied, many of the hunting trips that the Aborigines undertook for the expedition (Krefft n.d.a, n.d.b, 1866b). As a result, it is possible to differentiate between the, often moral, points that Krefft was making and his direct and local observations of Aboriginal life.

It is clear that Krefft's original field sketches of Aboriginal life on the Murray River would prove to be an invaluable source of information concerning the Aborigines there in 1857. Unfortunately, Blandowski took the sketchbooks to Germany in 1859 (Allen 2006: 24-7). While the illustrations of fauna have survived in the collections of the Museum of Natural History (Humboldt University, Berlin, see Landsberg & Landsberg, this volume), the ethnographic sketches have been lost. However, Mützel used them as basis for the illustrations published by Blandowski in the *Australien* (1862; Allen 2006, 2007a,b,c). As a result, we can use Mützel's illustrations to get some idea of Krefft's originals. We are aided in this by the fact that in one case only a natural history sketch also shows an Aboriginal hunting scene. A detail from this sketch can be compared with Mützel's illustration of Aborigines hunting stick-nest rats which is clearly based on Krefft's original (Menkhorst, this volume, fig. 4 and Figs 2 & 3).

Other insights can be gained from Mützel's illustrations where Krefft's written accounts give addi-



Fig. 2. Detail from Gerard Krefft: *Hapalotis conditor*, *Building Hapalotis*, “Koehl” YY. (Bl.) (now *Leporillus conditor* (Sturt, 1848), greater stick-nest rat). Reproduced with permission of Museum für Naturkunde der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Historische Bild- u. Schriftgutsammlungen. Bestand: Zool. Mus. Signatur: B VIII/228. Blandowski Mammals.

tional details. Two examples will be discussed here. The first is Mützel’s illustration of the construction of a bark canoe,<sup>8</sup> for which Krefft (1866b:362-3) provides a very full description (Allen 2006:35). Comparing Krefft’s written account (1866b:362-3) with the one Blandowski provided to accompany illustration 34 (Blandowski 1862 in Allen 2007c; Kean, this volume) indicates that Krefft was recording an event he witnessed while Blandowski had little information beyond the sketch itself (Allen 2006:26).

The second example is a detail taken from one of Mützel’s life tableaux, where a number of individual sketches have been joined to create an illustration of an Aboriginal camp scene (Illustration 41 in Blandowski 1862; Fig. 4). In the centre of this illustration is a detail of Aboriginal boys playing a version of ‘hacky sack’ or circle kicking. Blandowski’s (1862) note accompanying Illustration 41 describes,

‘...A group of children is playing with a ball; the ball is made out of Typha roots; it is not thrown or hit with a bat but it is kicked up in the air with the foot. Aim of the game: never let the ball touch the ground...’ (Blandowski 1862 in Allen 2007c:17-18).<sup>9</sup>

Krefft (1866b:373) provides an additional note which might be associated with this scene.

Cases of insanity are, I believe, of very rare occurrence; though I remember a single instance, - a boy about 14 years of age was pointed out to me as a “silly boy;” but I had not sufficient time observe him, he played football with the other boys of the tribe and appeared to be the most expert of them.

The artists and printmakers Blandowski employed, Redaway, Mützel and Krefft used artistic conventions to enhance their works. In the case of the sketches he made on the Murray River, Krefft worked these up into more formal pieces and it is

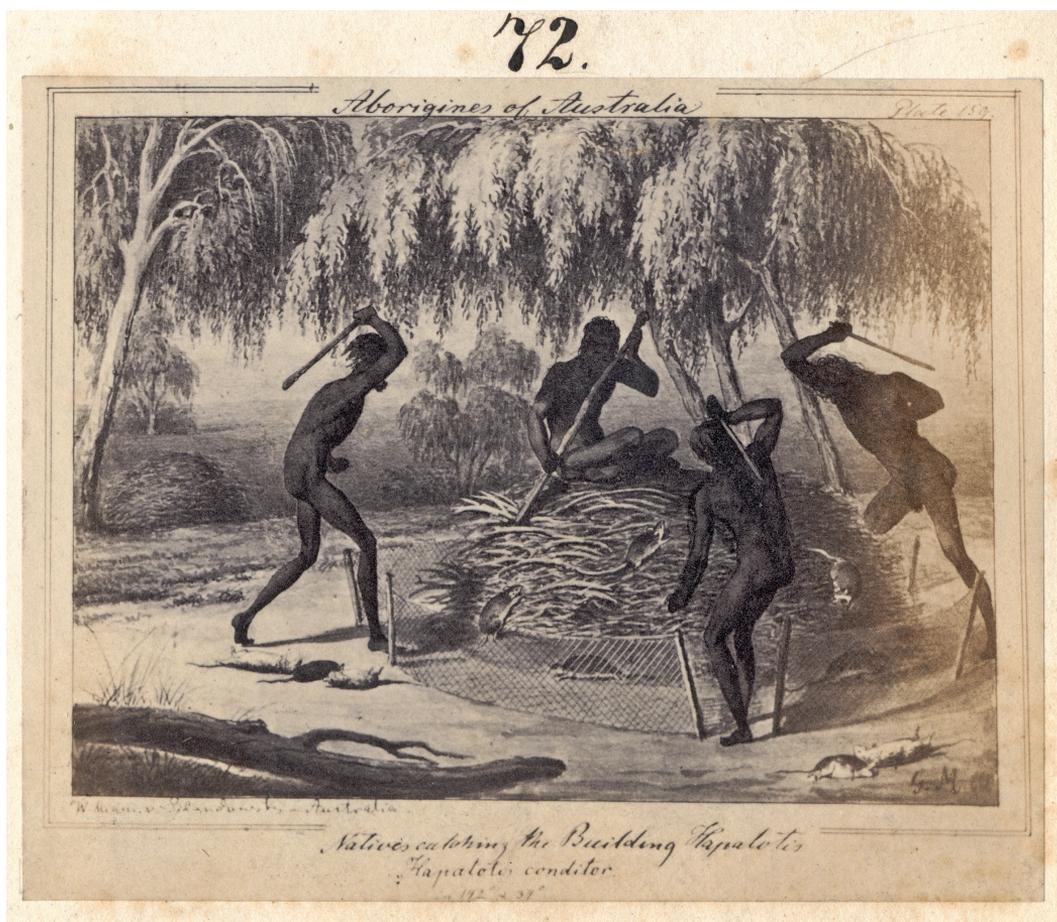


Fig. 3. Gustav Mützel: *Natives catching the Building Hapalotis*. Plate 72 from Blandowski's *'Australien in 142 Photographischen Abbildungen'* (1862). Reproduced with permission of the Haddon Library, Faculty of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge.

these water colours which survive in the collections of the State Library of New South Wales. These watercolours are assessed by John Kean (this volume) as providing an intimate view of both the animals and the Aboriginal persons depicted. A fine example is Krefft's illustration of a woman using a shell scraper to clean a fish (Fig. 5). It must have been an everyday scene to those living on the river, but it remains the only illustration of this activity we have from anywhere in Australia.

#### DISCUSSION

As with all historical documents, the materials from the expedition can only be judged through an under-

standing of the circumstances, aims, and motivations behind their production. Placing the illustrations and individual accounts from the expedition, against parallel accounts from missionaries and pastoralists, and making use of contemporary understandings, has enabled us to add contextual detail to our understanding of the expedition and its record of Aboriginal life. To a limited extent, it has also allowed the Aborigines to emerge as individuals acting within the boundaries of a colonized landscape (see Macneil 2001).

In assessing images of Aborigines on postcards, Peterson (1985:165) makes use of Kolodny's (1978) division of photographic styles as either 'romantic', 'realist' or 'documentary'. Blandowski's writings and illustrations cross the divide between the romantic and



Fig. 4. Gustav Mützel: *Domestic occupations in the summer season on the Lower Murray River*. Plate 41 from Blandowski's *Australien in 142 Photographischen Abbildungen* (1862). Reproduced with permission of the Haddon Library, Faculty of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge.

the documentary. While he wished to create an encyclopaedia of Australian natural history and Aboriginal life, behind this aim lay the ambition to make his name as an explorer and naturalist. He answered critics who claimed that he wished to preserve Aboriginal culture '...at the expense of stopping the advances of Caucasian civilization', stating,

Should we not collect and carefully preserve these important documents and observations in order to keep these things from being forgotten (Blandowski [1862] in Allen 2007c:12).

Achievement of these aims, however, required the management of a scientific enterprise and the maintenance of professional relationships, areas which tested Blandowski considerably. His failings were to cost him his position in Australia, and, with

the removal of expedition materials to Germany, to rob the expedition of much of the scientific credit due to it (Allen 2001, 2006; Humphries 2003). While superficially, Blandowski appears to have been more at home with the Aborigines than with his European workers,<sup>10</sup> his attitude towards both remained utilitarian. He appears to have been unaware of his failings as a leader and considered that he had been let down by his men (Blandowski 1857:125), or else by personal enmities (see Krefft letter to McCoy, 1859, Museum Victoria; Allen 2006:27).

While there are painterly elements in Krefft's more formal watercolours, his writings, both published and unpublished, and his lost sketches, which can be glimpsed through Mützel's reworking of them, represent a considerable record of Aboriginal life as



Fig. 5. Gerard Krefft: *Aboriginal woman cleaning a fish*. Watercolour on paper, 1857. Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales Collection.

it existed in 1857. Both his style and intent was documentary, though it is clear that the recording of Aboriginal activities was secondary to the collection of information about the fauna of the area. Managing a scientific enterprise forced Krefft to direct Aboriginal labour to secure the required specimens. This placed him in close contact with the Aborigines, enabled him to gather Aboriginal knowledge about these species, and to participate in hunting, cooking and eating the animals. His record is unusual and probably closer to ethnographic recording techniques than are the majority of accounts that we have from this period (c.f., Rowse 1998:13-24 for a discussion of the Horn Scientific Expedition). In keeping the Aborigines at a distance, he retained the ability to direct them without being subject to claims of friendship. To this extent, he maintained the moral authority of the colonial project (Rowse 1998: 26-29). On the other hand, the Aborigines were not mere ciphers and they in return took a utilitarian attitude towards the expedition, returning Krefft's lack of ease in his dealings with them with comparable aplomb. Paradoxically, it is Krefft who appears to have gained an understanding of the Aboriginal position and to see

them as people rather than solely as objects of romantic vision or of scientific observation.

The concept of intersubjective understanding (derived from Husserl, see Beyer 2007) allows us to consider how individuals, whose experiences and interpretations of the world might be very different, understand and relate to each other. While it might be expected that Krefft and Blandowski would share many experiences and understandings, this in fact was not the case. The differences between Blandowski and Krefft go beyond those of personality and demonstrate mutual misunderstandings which proved costly to both of them.

The picture of Aboriginal life which emerges from these multiple sources, however, is not one of Aborigines captured within historical documents so much as an outline of complex relationships and motivations on the part of the individuals making up the expedition and on the part of the Aborigines as well. Future uses of the illustrations and written descriptions will have to take these relationships and motivations into account.

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## NOTES

1. Krefft mentions sexual relations between Aborigines and Europeans a number of times and his comments regarding half-castes are generally negative. He may have been anticipating the late 19<sup>th</sup> century debate concerning race and miscegenation (see McGregor 1997:81-2).
2. Using the changes in the UK retail price index as a guide, £200 in 1856 would be worth £12,440 today, so Blandowski would appear to have been very generous. In any case, the £200 he claimed here represented 10% of the expedition's budget (Pescott 1954:11; see also <http://measuringworth.com/calculators/ukcompare/>)
3. In the report on his excursion to central Victoria, Blandowski (1855a:68) notes the presence of Sandy and Mackenzie, Aborigines from Seymour and a third unnamed Aboriginal person. He describes their unsuccessful attempt to dig out a wombat. He does not, however, name any Aboriginal persons in his publications from the Murray expedition.
4. The Aborigines were also feeding the Expedition. Krefft notes the eating quality of many of the species collected (1866a).
5. To be fair to Jamieson, the term 'concentration' did not then involve the same connotations as it does today, though the Victorian reserve system subsequently created conditions that were disastrous for the Aboriginal population (Broome 2005:143).
6. NSW *Butts and certificates of Publicans' Licenses* April 1853 – May 1854 notes No 35 Publican's License issued...to James McLeod for the Darling Inn at the confluence of the Darling and Murray Rivers. Sureties each giving £50 –Henry Williams of Gol Gol Creek; Albion Gibbs of Euston. There is evidence that workers from Mildura station visited this hotel but not that either Blandowski or Krefft visited the hotel (<http://homepages.rootsweb.com./NSW/Hotels>).
7. Mulvaney (1958:141-2) provides examples of Europeans, including missionaries, who questioned the human status of the Aborigines.
8. Thomas reproduced Blandowski's illustration of the construction of a bark canoe from the *Australien* (No

34) in his (1906a) article. He used other Blandowski illustrations in his book (1906b).

9. This illustration has been used recently (*The Age*, 21 September 2007) to argue that the Aboriginal game of Marn Gook was the basis for Australian Rules Football.
10. Blandowski's judgment as regards companions and horses appears to have often been faulty. Examples of both can be found in Howitt's account of the expedition to Western Port (Blandowski 1856a, see Darragh, this volume), where Blandowski was let down by a gypsy horse thief. On the other hand, his judgment of artistic abilities, as in the case of James Redaway and Sons, Frederick Grosse, Gerard Krefft and Gustav Mützel, appears to have been very good (see Allen 2006:26-7). Furthermore, the work of Batchelor, Krefft and Manson for the expedition cannot be faulted.

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