

INTRODUCTION

This preliminary register of Australian tribes and hordes is intended to provide a convenient classification and summary of our present knowledge of the ethnic groupings of the aborigines, as indicated by the sources available to the author up to 1938, and to call attention to the many gaps, inaccuracies, ambiguities and contradictions in the information with the hope that supplementary and corrective data will be furnished by those who may now possess them or who may subsequently be in a position to seek them. An ethnic map of the continent, derived from the evidence herein, and a brief general discussion of the political organization of the Australians have been published elsewhere (1) and should be used in conjunction with the register.

Although the list of tribes and hordes given in this register is as complete as the evidence permits it is far from satisfactory. Collected over the course of more than a century by many persons, most of whom either lacked proper training for such inquiries or were only casually interested in the records made, the information varies considerably in importance and reliability. The difficulties met in arranging such a heterogeneous mass of material into some semblance of a unified whole are numerous and readily understandable. The more important causes of confusion include 1. the great variation in the spelling of aboriginal names, 2. the lack of information on the meaning of these names, 3. the ambiguous descriptions of geographical locations, and 4. the lack of a unified terminology for the classification of types of ethnic groups.

In respect to spelling it often is difficult to ascertain whether two or more similar names are cognates or apply to different peoples, or whether the differences are actual and dialectic or fortuitous as the result of the difficulties of the observers in recording properly aboriginal words. In some instances the geographical locations assigned the names help in reaching a decision.

Another difficult problem is that of equating different names applied to the same tribe or horde. Except in the very few instances in which such equivalents are reported specifically we have only the locations to guide us.

The greatest difficulty is found in the lack of a consistent terminology. Such terms as horde (or local group), tribe, sub-tribe, nation, language and dialect have been used variously and in some cases interchangeably. Often it is a relatively easy matter to determine what a writer may have in mind by the facts presented or by their context, regardless of the terms he employs. In other instances it has been necessary for the author to come to some conclusion on the basis of carefully chosen criteria.

Other factors being equal a reported group has been assigned the status of a horde if it is described as characterized by one or more of the following:

1. A population of a less than fifty individuals.
2. Political independence under leadership of a headman.
3. Possession of a definite territory with trespass regulation against members of similar groups (excluding family hunting territories).
4. Membership in a tribe.
5. When only extent of territory is given, a group which on the basis of estimated density of population in that region would number less than fifty individuals.

(1) Davidson, D. S., An Ethnic Map of Australia. See Bibliography.

Assigned to the status of a tribe are those groups characterized by:

1. A population equivalent to that of several hordes.
2. Sub-divisions with political autonomy.
3. A large territory which, on the basis of estimated density of population of the region, would include the confines of several hordes or a population equivalent to that of several hordes.
4. Occasionally, in conjunction with other criteria, a group said to speak a distinctive dialect.

The status of an aggregation is accorded any group said to consist of units which qualify as tribes, as above.

In all instances in which reconciliations of evidence have been necessary the effort has been made to give more weight to the statements of persons known to have visited a region in question than to reports based on hearsay or correspondence with distant acquaintances. Thus the reports of professional field-workers have been considered as more accurate when in conflict with information supplied by others. Undoubtedly there have been many injustices to the latter, for lay observers in many instances have had better opportunities to secure accurate information than trained ethnologists who may not have visited all the tribes they list in their records or place on their maps. An attempt also has been made in a few cases to retain those names which have become more or less established in the literature in spite of the fact that phonetically they may be at variance with more accurate recordings. In those instances in which there have been no good reasons for preferring one spelling to another the more simple or the more suitable to English pronunciation has been favored.

In the register, itself, the ethnic terms are arranged alphabetically by states. The first column contains the key to the location of tribes on the ethnic map to which reference has been made. The location of the individual hordes is not shown on this map but two typical distributions are given on smaller maps in the text of the paper accompanying the map.

The second column contains all the ethnic names, the character of which is shown in column three as Horde (H), Tribe (T), Aggregate (A), or occasionally Linguistic (L). In respect to linguistic terms information is seldom sufficiently detailed to indicate any specific criteria for distinguishing dialect from language.

Column four contains the cross-references, cognates, equivalent terms, descriptions of location, and other pertinent information.

Reference to authorities are found in column five under abbreviations listed in the bibliography. In respect to any book with an index, to short articles in which the information is readily available, or to papers containing maps, page references usually are omitted.