

Abstract

From at least the 20th century, there has been a steadily growing emphasis from archaeologists and anthropologists alike to find suitable criteria to identify regional groupings of people. This thesis looks at a suggestion by Nicolas Peterson that drainage basins played a significant role in defining regional groupings of Australian Aboriginals or 'culture-areas', which he defines as "regional clusterings of bands such that interaction among the clusters is greater than beyond" (Peterson 1976:60).

The overall aim of this thesis is to test the validity of Peterson's suggestion using the archaeological record. This was achieved by comparing the differences in body scarification between adjacent major drainage basins. These included the Eyre and Gulf and Northeast and Rainforest major drainage basins. The data set consisted of 287 photos of scarred Australian Aboriginals.

Variables of body scarification were identified and the data for these variables was collected from these photos. These results were reported and used to identify differences in body scarification between the Eyre and Gulf and Northeast and Rainforest major drainage basins. These differences were tested for statistical significance using 2 x 2 chi square tests of independence, and the extent of the total number of statistically significant differences was analysed in order to test the validity of Peterson's suggestion.

This thesis supports Peterson's suggestion that the major drainage basins played a significant role in defining regional groupings of Australian Aboriginals or 'culture-areas', i.e., regional clusterings of bands such that interaction among the clusters is greater than beyond" (Peterson 1976:60).