Boomerangs Shape Stone Tools in Ancient Queensland: Experimental Archaeology and Traditional Knowledge Reveal a New Function of the Most Iconic Indigenous Tool

Eva F. Martellotta$^1$ and Paul Craft$^{2,3}$

ABSTRACT

Without a doubt, boomerangs are one of the Sunshine State’s symbols. But forget everything you know about their ‘returning effect’. Whereas returning boomerangs were only used for games and learning purposes, non-returning boomerangs were complex, multifunctional tools. They played a crucial role in Aboriginal communities’ daily lives in Queensland and other parts of Australia. In our work, we put together Traditional knowledge and experimental archaeology to investigate a forgotten use of boomerangs: modifying the edges of stone tools. This activity is fundamental to producing a variety of stone implements, each of them with a specific function. In our study, experimental replicas of boomerangs proved very functional to shape stone tools. Our results are the first scientific proof of the multipurpose nature of these iconic objects.

Keywords: Australian archaeology, wooden tools, hardwood boomerangs, multipurpose

$^1$ Australian Research Centre for Human Evolution, School of Environment and Science, Griffith University, Nathan, QLD 4111, Australia (eva.martellotta@griffithuni.edu.au)

$^2$ Birrunburra/Bundjalung/Yugambeh/Yuggera & Turrbal Aboriginal Nations, Australia

$^3$ Burragun Aboriginal Cultural Services, Burleigh Heads, QLD 4220, Australia (paulcrafty@hotmail.com)