



# Kimberley Society

## Book Note

***The Papal Line of Demarcation and its Impact in the Eastern Hemisphere on the Political Division of Australia 1479 - 1829* by Leslie R Marchant. Woodside Valley Foundation, Greenwood (WA), 2008, soft cover, 234 pages, illustrated, maps, ISBN 1-74126-423-5, retail price \$25.**

This wide-ranging book, with its link to the Western Australian border, and thus to the eastern boundary of the Kimberley, offers lots of information and speculation about events that preceded Britain's colonisation of Western Australia. The border is a repositioned remnant of a line of demarcation, and the book sets down the author's lightly referenced conclusions about events associated with the creation of such lines and the growth of French, Dutch and English knowledge of the Australian coast. Readers familiar with his earlier work will find echoes of the extensive historical and literary context he provided for voyages discussed in *France Australe* and *An Island Unto Itself : William Dampier and New Holland*. In this latest and final work, there is also acceptance that Dutch seafarers may not have been the first to chart parts of Australia's coast. The Portuguese are seen as contenders but not as the only ones.

Marchant gives a good account of Portugal pushing eastward into the Indian Ocean and South East Asian waters in the early 16th century. He tells of treaties being made to trade, and Papal sanctions being obtained to establish Christian missions. Importantly, he ties this expansion to what he calls a 'race to fill the Ptolemaic Gap'. Page 96 shows the "Ptolemaic Gap" projected onto a modern map, with the western edge of the "gap" at 120°E longitude (passing through the Kimberley) and the eastern edge at 150°W (passing through Alaska). Instead of simply stating that the large western portion of Australia was in the Portuguese rather than the Spanish zone, he explains that situation in terms of revised cartography and adjusted lines of demarcation. He also argues that the positions of the lines 'show where Portuguese ships could be expected to sail in Australian waters, and where Portuguese wrecks and relics could be found'.

The book notes that the Portuguese, by favouring treaties over conquest, contributed to the emergence of 'the very laws of the sea and the seabed which now prevail in the seas north of Australia'. It also shows how the French and the Dutch became active in the East Indies and later undertook maritime exploration on parts of the Australian coast that had been in the Portuguese zone. Such things have been documented elsewhere in much greater detail but here they bring into sharp focus the unfolding of maritime exploration of the Kimberley coast. Also mentioned is the author's belief, previously recorded in newspaper articles, that the Heinrich Bünting woodcut of 1581 may actually show the Western Australian coast.

Marchant remarks that France's early 19th century expansion could have seen the west side of Australia become a convict colony or an African slave colony. One is left wondering if the plantation aspect of the slave colonies and proximity to South East Asia would have put the Kimberley region on any list of feasible sites but the book explains why neither French nor Dutch colonisation occurred. Its analysis of the evolving international relations of that period is, like the rest of the work, clear enough to provide good insight into why Australia's colonisation began as it did.

It is disappointing that so detailed a book has no index but that is offset by the numerous sub-headings in the table of contents. Also relevant is that the book, compiled when the author's health was in decline, was completed and published posthumously – a great achievement by a dedicated team of people.

*Cathie Clement*