

Social Organisation of Some Australian Tribes

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In 1901 I contributed to this society an article containing certain rudimentary remarks on the social state of the Yungmunni and some tribes allied to them who occupy a large region of the plain separating the sources of the Roper and Daly rivers of the Northern Territory, the name given to the northern and central portions of South Australia.²

Since that time, I have been able to procure for myself some more complete details on the sociology of the native tribes in question which I consider my duty to communicate to the society.

More urgent matters have prevented me from going personally among these tribes, but I had the good fortune to make the acquaintance of owners and managers of many 'runs'³ of this part of Australia. I sent them very precise lists of all the subjects about which I wished to be informed, as well as giving them some indication of the manner in which to proceed with their investigations. The confidence with which my correspondents inspire me, and the personal knowledge I have on the subject, allow me to assert that the information contained in these pages can be safely accepted.

To clarify the subject, I remind the reader of Table 1 from my preceding paper, reproduced on page 415. The only difference between the present table and the preceding one is that the 'Wives' column is placed first and the 'Husband' one after it. This arrangement makes the cycle of the women stand out better.

The whole tribe is divided into eight sections, each one having a distinct name, which allows the members of each division to be easily recognised; the identification is, in addition, made easier by the masculine or feminine form of each of the eight names.

Table 1

Cycle	Wife	Husband	Son	Daughter
A.....	Inkagalla	Eemitch	Uwallaree	Imballaree
	Imballaree	Unmarra	Urwalla	Imbawalla
	Imbawalla	Uwannee	Uwungaree	Imbongaree
	Imbongaree	Tabachin	Yungalla	Inkagalla
B.....	Immadenna	Yungalla	Tabachin	Tabadenna
	Tabadenna	Uwungaree	Uwannee	Imbannee
	Imbannee	Urwalla	Unmarra	Inganmarra
	Inganmarra	Uwallaree	Eemitch	Immadenna

The above table shows the mother, father, son and daughter on the same line from left to right. Note that the eight sections of women are classed in two distinct series which have been called 'cycles',⁴ each cycle being composed of four specific categories of women, repeating itself continually as follows.

Let us examine the upper moiety of the table—the A Cycle. We will find that the women from the 'Wife' and 'Daughter' columns reproduce each other in a certain rotation. For example, Inkagalla is the mother of Imballaree and she has a daughter Imbawalla; Imbawalla, in turn, produces Imbongaree who becomes the mother of Inkagalla; now, Inkagalla is the name of the section with which we started. This series is continually repeated, no matter which name we commence with. Let us call this series of women 'Cycle A'.

If we take the women from the lower moiety of Table 1 (Cycle B), we find that Immadenna is the mother of Tabadenna; Tabadenna bears Imbannee and her daughter is Inganmarra; Inganmarra, in turn, produces Immadenna. This series, which we call 'Cycle B', repeats itself forever just as the first one does.

Let us come back to Table 1. Eemitch marries Inkagalla, Unmarra weds Imballaree and so on for all the others. Those are the normal and general alliances and can, as a result, be distinguished as 'tabular' marriages.⁵ But more detailed investigations into the marriage laws of this tribe have shown that a man from any section is qualified to marry within three other sections of women who have been added to, or rather replaced by, those mentioned above.

To draw out all the possible marriages between sections, we must establish another table which will show that the four sections of women within which a man—Eemitch, for example—can marry, might also be claimed by three other sections of men. For instance, Uwannee, Urwalla and Yungalla, as well as by that same Eemitch. The following table indicates a category of four sections of women from whom four categories of men are required to take their wives, in accordance with the rules which will be explained in detail in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 2

Cycle	Husbands	Wives	Offspring
A	Eemitch	Inkagalla	The children of each woman, taken individually, are the same as in Table 1, regardless of the name of her husband.
	Uwannee	Imbawalla	
	Urwalla	Imbannee	
	Yungalla	Immadenna	
B	Unmarra	Imballaree	
	Tabachin	Imbongaree	
	Uwungaree	Tabadenna	
	Uwallaree	Inganmarra	

In all cases, the name of the section to which her offspring will belong depends irrevocably on the mother. If Eemitch marries Inkagalla, his children are Uwallaree and Imballaree; if he weds an Imbannee, they will be Unmarra and Inganmarra; if he takes an Imbawalla, they will be Uwungaree and Imbongaree and if he is married to an Immadenna, they will be Tabachin and Tabadenna. See in Table 1, the name of each woman's children and of all the sections of women.

A woman taken from the 'Wife' column of Table 2 can be married by any member of one of the four sections of men in the 'Husbands' column. Therefore it is obvious that the name of her child's father will not matter, because it will depend on which of the four sections she has taken him from.

For example, let us take Uwallaree, the first of the names in the 'Sons' column of Table 1. If his mother, Inkagalla, had married Eemitch, he would be the direct father or 'First Father' of Uwallaree (see Tables 3 and 4). If, on the contrary, Inkagalla married Uwannee, he would become the alternate father or 'Second Father' of Uwallaree. If she married with Urwalla, he would be the 'Third Father' and finally, if with Yungalla, this last one would be the 'Fourth Father' of Uwallaree. All of which goes to show that it matters little which of these four husbands Inkagalla will have chosen—her son will still be Uwallaree.

Let us temporarily admit the term 'phratry' to refer to each of the categories or groupings of women appearing in the 'Wives' column of Table 2. We notice that the men in the 'Husbands' column of Phratry A produce the men in the 'Husbands' column of Phratry B, notwithstanding the fact that this filiation is limited by that which we have described as 'First Fathers' which we find on the same line from left to right. The 'Wives' of one of the phratry columns equally produce the 'Wives' of the other without limits, the descent in each section being ruled by the mothers. It is therefore obvious that just by alternating itself, one phratry stays related to the other.

I have shown on a preceding page that although a man can only have one real father, the name of this father's section would depend on the man whom his mother had married. It follows that a man from any section can have a

different paternal grandfather. But in retracing the filiation of many families, thanks to the help of trustworthy correspondents who have resided in the district for years, I find that there are, so to speak, four sorts of men in each section; for example, there are four Eemitchs of different descents which we will distinguish with the Numbers 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Let us look at Table 3. We find, on the left, that the father of Eemitch No. 1 is Uwallaree and that the 'First Father' of Uwallaree is Eemitch. Eemitch No. 1 marries as his 'First Wife' Inkagalla, daughter of Tabachin, who is the son of his 'First Father's' sister; or he marries as his 'Second Wife' Imbannee, daughter of Tabadenna, daughter of his 'First Father's' sister.

Moving on in Table 3, let us take Eemitch No. 2 with a different descent; he marries as his 'First Wife' Imbawalla, daughter of the son of Imbannee, who is sister of Uwannee his 'Second Father' or alternate father; or, he marries as his 'Second Wife' Immadenna, daughter of Imbannee, who is sister of Uwannee, his 'Second Father'.

Now, let us take Table 4. Eemitch No 3, son of Uwallaree who, in turn, has Urwalla as 'Third Father', or let us also take Eemitch No 4, son of Uwallaree whose 'Fourth Father' is Yungalla. The other details are the same as those given in our explanation of Table 3.

Table 3

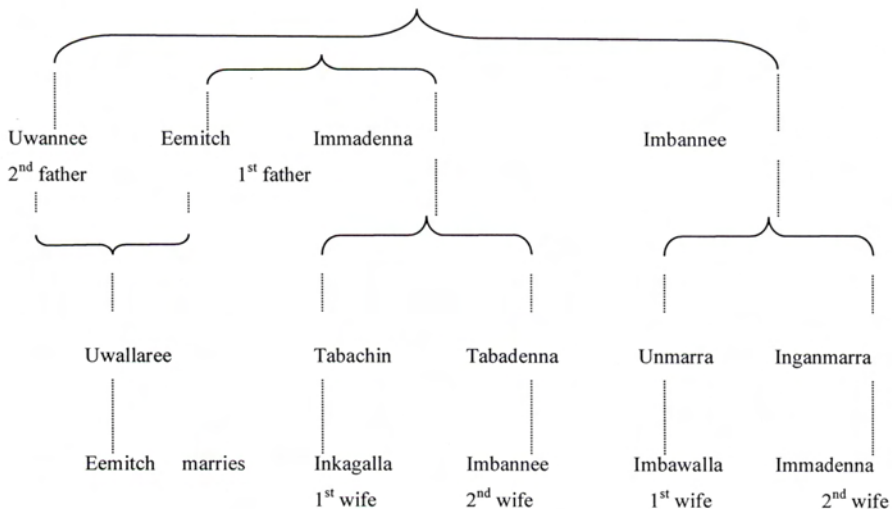
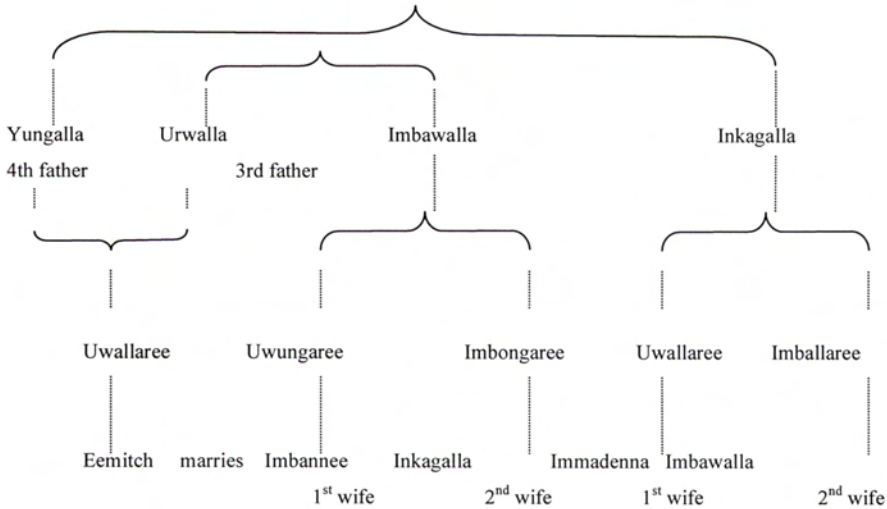


Table 4



The examination of these two tables shows that, whichever one of the four wives a man of any given section is permitted to marry, this wife is always related to him, although the filiation is different.

If, in Table 3, I have brought together Eemitch and Uwannee as grandfathers, it is because, in referring to Table 1, we find that these men, while belonging to two sections, take their wives directly and normally from the same cycle of women. I have, for the same reasons, brought together Urwalla and Yungalla as grandfathers in Table 4.

In Table 3 we see Eemitch No. 1 marrying an Inkagalla or an Imbannee as first or second wife. Eemitch No. 2 will take, in the same way, an Imbawalla or an Immadenna. Eemitch No. 3 (Table 4) marries an Imbannee or an Inkagalla and Eemitch No. 4 becomes tied to an Immadenna or an Imbawalla. Careful examination of Tables 3 and 4 shows that each of these four Eemitchs in our example can marry his 'First Wife' from among those in Cycle A, Table 1, and his 'Second Wife' from Cycle B of that same table. There are, however, certain customary extensions or variations to this last paragraph. An Eemitch can, for example, marry, in certain cases, an Inkagalla as 'first' wife and an Imbawalla as 'second' wife; in this case, the two wives would be taken from the same cycle (Cycle A, Table 1).

Although each section is comprised of four categories of men—four Eemitchs for example—they reduce themselves, in fact, to two, and it follows that they marry women from Cycle A or they take them from Cycle B, which in reality reduces each section to two parties instead of four.

In all Australian tribes, the children call their father's brothers by the same name as their father. Thanks to this custom, the Eemitch of our examples could trace his filiation back through one of his father's brothers who would have a 'Father No 2' by modifying the details.

In Table 3, we have shown that Eemitch No 1 marries Inkagalla, that is to say that if Tabachin weds Imbongaree, as in Table 2, his daughter will be Inkagalla and could be considered his 'tabular' daughter. But, let us suppose that this same Tabachin marries one of the three other women in Phratry A, his daughter could be Imbawalla or Imbannee or Immadenna; this daughter would therefore be 'first wife' to Eemitch. The same variant would happen for the 'first wife' of Eemitch's Nos. 2, 3 or 4. Other variants could be cited, but the fundamental principle remains immutable for all of them.

However, although the phratries recur, they have this particular characteristic of not marrying between themselves. Let us take, for example, the 'Husbands' and the 'Wives' of Phratry A, Table 2. Their 'sons' and 'daughters' become the 'Husbands' and 'Wives' of Phratry B, but they intermarry exclusively among themselves. Their offspring become, in turn, the 'Husbands' and 'Wives' of Phratry A, and intermarry among themselves exactly as their parents did. There is therefore no possible outside marriage, either within the sections or the Phratries, if we accept Table 2.

Returning to Table 1, it is clear that Eemitch can marry Inkagalla or Imbawalla from Cycle A, or he can take Imbannee or Immadenna as his wife, these unions being ruled as explained in Tables 3 and 4. That is to say that Eemitch will look for his wife in one of the two cycles, a custom which absolutely excludes all exogamy or outside marriage.

If we continue to scrutinise Table 1, it reveals to us the interesting fact that, taken as a whole, the four sections of the 'Husbands' column of Cycle A, are able to marry on average with all eight sections of women in the 'Wife' column. It is the same for an average of four men of Cycle B who can, in the same way, take a wife from all eight sections of the same table. The conclusion that can be drawn therefore, is that outside marriage does not exist in any of the tribes discussed in this article.

The preceding pages reveal the manner in which marriage is practised and perpetuated within the different sections. On this basis, unions between two given persons are ruled by a system of betrothal which takes place at the birth

of a child and, often enough, before the event. The choice of a wife or husband is fixed by the grandparents of the future spouses.

The genealogical graphics which follow give a summary which will allow the reader to follow my paper.

A brief summary of the succession of the 'totems' is not without interest. The traditions of these tribes are full of fabulous stories concerning the ancestors of each totem. While some of them resemble men and women of present days, others are fabulous beings created by the native legends. In far off times, as in our days, the ancestors of the totems formed families, or groups of families, each possessing their own hunting ground in a part of the tribe's territory. Born in a particular place, they occupied it by birth right. Some were referred to, for example, as swans, others as dogs, or kangaroos, or snakes, or crows and so on. The members of each of these family groups were divided up into the same eight sections which exist among them today.

Some of the traditional totems were invested with a greater authority than others, as is true of the head men of certain totemic groups today. Some of these fabulous territories were large, others small. As soon as death removed one of these legendary men, his spirit was supposed to establish itself in a well known place within his hunting ground, such as a rock, or a tree, or a hill, or a pond or even to disappear underground. He could also, by virtue of his supernatural power, leave some parts of his spirit, as a special gift to his lineage, in different places, such as places where he had camped or accomplished a brilliant feat, or celebrated some initiation ceremony and so on. The places consecrated by these events were scattered across different areas of the place where he lived.

All the members of his family naturally possessed the same rights over the same hunting grounds and, in turn, their spirits haunted certain places in the same way. After a number of generations, all the camps, all the ponds, all the large rocks, the springs, the hills, the noteworthy trees etc. of this territory were packed, saturated, so to speak, with spirits. Thus, there were bandicoots in certain places, snakes, porcupines etc. in others. Some of these animals, more numerous than others, left a large number of spirit offspring, while others less common had only a limited number of representatives. The exact location of each of these familiar sites is made known by oral tradition to all the living natives, who are sure to adorn the great feats of these ancestors with all the virtues that their imagination can invent.

Whether they take a human form or whether they are monsters, these creatures, fantastical or exaggerated by native inspiration, possess supernatural powers. Some made springs or streams flow, others raised up hills and rocks in certain historical places.

All the natives believe firmly in the reincarnation of their ancestors' ghosts, the first phalanx of the spirits, reappearing continually from one human to the other. These natives ignore the natural laws of procreation and are convinced that conception is absolutely independent of sexual consent. When a woman has felt, for the first time, movement within her, she remembers the place where the event took place and announces it to the people present. And so, the belief is, that it is the spirit or the soul of a late ancestor who, at that same moment, entered the body of the woman. This entrance could have taken place via one of the natural orifices or by some part of the skin.

When the child is born, it will be given the totemic name of the mystical ancestor attributed to this special place. If, for example, the foetus moved for the first time next to a remarkable rock, hill, pond or camp known for being haunted by the spirit of the galah, the child will belong to the galah totem, irrespective of the totem of its father or mother.

It is important to remember, as far as the succession of the totems is concerned, that in all our native tribes, the women are taken into the familial group or 'tribelet' of her husband and that she travels his country with him. If, for example, he is 'crow', he will spend a large part of his time, with his wife, in the places especially haunted by his ancestor. When his wife notices, for the first time, that she is pregnant, she will very probably find herself in a place consecrated to some crow of times gone by, because she lives in the country of the 'crow men'. In this case, the child will become a 'crow' like its father.

If, on the contrary, the foetus moves for the first time when she finds herself visiting her own people, that is to say in the district where she was born or where she grew up, it is very probable that the event will be related to one of her own ancestors. If it is 'porcupine' [echidna], the child will be 'porcupine' like its mother. If, at that critical moment, she found herself on a hunting ground haunted more particularly by the 'pigeon spirits', her child will become 'pigeon'. It could happen therefore that certain of her children have different totems; however, given that their parents will always live, by preference, in the 'crow' country as I have said, it is more than likely that the majority of the children will be 'crow'. It is thus by error that other investigators have been able to claim that the filiation of totems is made via the father.

Certain places, such as a rock, spring, tree etc, are supposed to be haunted by the spirits of animals of closely related species cohabiting together as they did when they were living. If a mother feels the first movement of her foetus in such a place, it would be impossible to decide which spirit had penetrated her body and it becomes very difficult for the elders of the tribe to determine the totem of the child.

The space in your journal being limited, I am obliged to bring to a close this interesting subject. Please recall that in preceding articles I have already proven

that 'exogamy' does not exist in Australian tribes. In dealing, in 1894, with the laws of marriage in the Kamilaroi tribe, I pointed out that although a Butha woman was the normal wife of a man from the Murri section, a Murri could also marry a Martha;⁶ which is to say, that a man from that section could take a wife from either phratry. In 1897, I again drew attention to a custom established in the Kamilaroi and Wirraidyuri tribes, allowing a man to marry in these two phratries.⁷ It is thus obvious that exogamy cannot exist among the Kamilaroi, Wirraidyuri, Ngeumba or other similar tribes in New South Wales.

In 1898, I described the sociology of the Dippil⁸ and other tribes occupying more than half of Queensland. In this article, I showed that a Barrang man married a woman from the same section. Since then, I have pursued my investigations throughout all of Queensland amongst the main tribes, and I have been able to assert authoritatively, in other papers, that exogamy did not exist there.

In 1904, I also made known a series of facts concerning the sociology of the native tribes of New South Wales and of Victoria, which refutes incontestably the existence of exogamy in these two states.⁹

If my preceding articles on this subject are put together side by side with this current paper, I can only draw one conclusion: that exogamy is absolutely impossible in the native tribes of the Northern Territory, New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and eastern Australia. Therefore the fact emerges that after all the investigations which I have pursued, there is no evidence of exogamy among the native tribes of the whole of Australia.¹⁰

My study of Australian sociology over many years has convinced me that neither sexual promiscuity, nor what has been called 'group marriage', have ever existed within the Australian tribes. I am equally sure that the divisions into cycles, phratries and sections were not instituted to prevent intermarriages, but that they were gradually developed under the influence of the environment.

Spencer and Gillen drew up, in their *Northern Tribes of Central Australia* (1904), tables of tribes whose sociology resembles that of the Yungmunni, who divide their tribe into eight sections. The tables published by these two authors are unable to give any idea of a practical arrangement of the sections in cycles, phratries or whatever we call them, and are nothing but a confused and ill-assorted mix. It is a mistake to assert, as they do, that the filiation of the sections operates via the men and they are completely mistaken in declaring that the community is divided into 'two exogamous groups'.

In his book *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia*, Mr A. W. Howitt proves that he does not understand anything about the elementary principles of Australian sociology when he claims that 'all the Australian tribes are divided into two moieties and it is forbidden for each of these moieties to marry in their

own group'. He is also completely mistaken in speaking of the 'division of the community into two exogamous moieties'.

ENDNOTES

¹ [Editor's note] An offprint of this article, containing pencilled corrections in Mathews' hand, is located at National Library of Australia MS 8006/8/307. These amendments have been incorporated in the text.

² RHM 1901, 'Organisation Sociale des Tribus Aborigènes de l'Australie', *Bulletins et Mémoires de la Société d'Anthropologie de Paris*, vol. 5, no. 4, pp. 415-19.

³ 'Run' is the term given to define an area of land used for the raising of all sorts of animals.

⁴ [Editor's note] Mathews usually referred to moieties as 'cycles' or 'phratries'. Both these terms are used in the article.

⁵ [Editor's note] Described as such because they conform to those laid out in the table.

⁶ RHM 1894-5, 'The Kamlaroi Class System of the Australian Aborigines', *Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia*, vol. 10, p. 24.

⁷ RHM 1897, 'The Totemic Divisions of the Australian Tribes', *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales*, vol. 31, pp. 156-76.

⁸ RHM 1898, 'Divisions of Queensland Aborigines', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 37, pp. 328-30, with a map of Queensland.

⁹ RHM 1905, *Ethnological Notes on the Native Tribes of New South Wales and Victoria*, F. W. White General Printer, Sydney, pp. 5-15 and 84-103. This is the book version of an article of the same title, first published in 1904.

¹⁰ [Editor's note] That Western Australia and South Australia go unmentioned suggests the translator erred in writing 'all of Australia'. Tasmania is generally ignored in Mathews' writings.