

# Remarks on the Natives of Australia

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## Introduction

In 1903 I published in this journal a short grammar and vocabulary of the Kumbainggeri language spoken on the northeast coast of New South Wales.<sup>1</sup> The following year I dealt with the elements of the grammar of the Tyeddyuwurru language,<sup>2</sup> in use in the central parts of Victoria, and described the important ceremony of initiation known as the Mũltyerra, which is practised by the Kurnũ tribe in New South Wales.<sup>3</sup>

In the present article I shall describe the social organisation of a number of tribes inhabiting both sides of the Darling River in New South Wales. Then follows information on the sociology of some tribes of Queensland. A study of these organisations will exhibit the utter fallacy of the belief in exogamy which has been so tenaciously adhered to by all Australian writers who belong to the old school.

I am the first and only author to report that there is no exogamy among any of the tribes whose sociology I have investigated, neither in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, the Northern Territory, nor in Western Australia. The range of my investigations comprises extensive regions in all the states mentioned, and I feel sure that the publication of my work will completely dispel all the antiquated notions of previous writers.

My article concludes with a brief description of the *Gurē*, or Aboriginal method of inflicting the death penalty as it was practised in certain parts of Victoria.

## Sociology of the Ngunnhalgu, Mailpurlgu and Maraura Tribes

Adjoining the Kurnũ<sup>4</sup> people on the southwest are the Ngunnhalgu, reaching down the Darling River from Winbar to a point a little way beyond Wilcannia. From that locality onward, down the Darling via Menindie to Cuthero, was the

habitat of the Mailpurlgu tribe. From Cuthero down the Darling river to its confluence with the Murray River at Wentworth, was the country of the Maraura tribe.

The social organisation of these three great tribes—Ngunnhalgu, Mailpurlgu and Maraura—may be briefly stated as follows. The community is segregated into two phratries, whose masculine appellations are Mukkungurra and Kilpungurra. The feminine of each of these names is formed by adding *ga* to the masculine. Arranged in tabular form, the rules of intermarriage of the phratries and the descent of the resulting offspring will be easily understood.

**Table 1**

| Phratry | Husband     | Wife          | Son         | Daughter      |
|---------|-------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|
| A       | Mukkungurra | Kilpungurraga | Kilpungurra | Kilpungurraga |
| B       | Kilpungurra | Mukkungurraga | Mukkungurra | Mukkungurraga |

In addition to the above divisions, every man, woman and child bears the name of some animal, plant or natural object, as his or her totem, which is in all cases inherited from the mother. If the mother is, for example, a magpie, the sons and daughters will be magpies also. All creation, animate and inanimate, is divided between Mukkungurra and Kilpungurra—the former possessing a certain aggregate of totems and the latter another. Members of both phratries and the various totems are scattered through all the local divisions of the tribe.

In addition to the partitions of the community into phratries and totemic groups, there is a further subdivision of the people into Muggulu and Ngipuru, meaning sluggish blood and active blood respectively, which may for convenience of reference be called ‘blood divisions’. These castes of ‘blood’ are not necessarily coincident with the other divisions. For example, a Muggulu man or woman may belong to either phratry, and the same can be said of a Ngipuru individual. Therefore the ‘blood’ castes are dispersed indiscriminately between the phratries.

There is still another repartition which can be designated ‘shade’ divisions, which are in reality an extension of the ‘blood’ castes, for the purpose of regulating where people rest under the shades of trees in the vicinity of water or elsewhere. For example, the people belonging to the Muggulu division sit down in the shadow thrown by the butt or lower partition of the tree, whilst the Ngipuru folk sit down to rest in the shade cast by the higher branches.

The castes of ‘blood’ and ‘shade’ must be considered in arranging the marriages. A man of the Muggulu blood and the butt shade marries a Ngipuru woman of the branch shade. And in regard to the offspring, a Muggulu mother produces Muggulu children, who take their mother’s butt ‘shade’. A Ngipuru woman produces Ngipuru children, belonging to the ‘shade’ of the branches.

Some further illustrations of the intermarriages will be interesting. A Mukkungurra usually espouses a Kilpungurraga as in the table, and in that case a man's son's child marries a sister's son's child. But if a Mukkungurra takes a Mukkungurraga as his conjugal mate, that represents the marriage of a man's son's child to a sister's daughter's child. According to this law it is evident that any given man can take his wife either from his own phratry, or from the opposite phratry. Hence it becomes quite clear that there is no exogamy among the tribes we are dealing with. We have seen that the phratry and the totem are in all cases perpetuated through the woman but this does not constitute exogamy, inasmuch as a man can marry into either phratry and consequently into either aggregate of totems.

Intermarriage of individuals of the same totem is forbidden. When a Mukkungurra marries a Kilpungurraga there is no risk of a clash of the totemic prohibitions. But if a Mukkungurra marries a Mukkungurraga it would be possible for the parties to belong to the same totem. In consequence of the 'blood divisions' already described, a Mukkungurraga of the proper lineage could not possibly be of the same 'blood division' as the man. This matter is illustrated more fully in my article on the sociology of the Wongaibon tribe.<sup>5</sup>

The subdivisions 'blood' and 'shade' had altogether escaped the notice of all writers on the sociology of the Australian Aborigines, and was reported for the very first time by me in 1904, as discovered by me among the Ngeumba and Kamilaroi tribes.<sup>6</sup> It has also fallen on me to be the first author to report the non-existence of exogamy among the Ngeumba, Kamilaroi, Wirraidyuri, Wailwan, Wongaibon and kindred tribes in New South Wales.

## **Sociology of some Queensland Tribes**

That portion of Cape York Peninsula extending from the Cape to about the fifteenth parallel of south latitude, in the state of Queensland, is occupied by a considerable number of Aboriginal tribes with different names. Of these tribes I am best acquainted with the Chūnkūnji people on the Batavia River. The Gamete tribe occupy the country to the north of the Chūnkūnji whilst the Tanegute tribe is to the South. The Ngerikudi language is spoken about Mapoon on the Batavia and as far south as Duyphen Point. Dialects of this language are used all the way from the Jardine River to the Archer River, or perhaps further south. In all these dialects there are two pronouns in the first person of the dual and plural—one that is used when the person addressed is included, and another which excludes the person addressed.

The community is divided socially into two primary phratries or moieties or groups—whichever of these names we choose to employ for purposes of distinction. These two divisions are named Chamakunda and Kamanutta; the former is again bisected into two sections called Lankeami and Nameguri, and

the latter into two, called Pakwikki and Pamarung. In these names there is no distinction between the masculine and feminine.

**Table 2**

| Phratry    | Husband   | Wife      | Offspring |
|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Chamakunda | Lankenami | Pakwikki  | Pamarung  |
|            | Nameguri  | Pamarung  | Pakwikki  |
| Kamanutta  | Pakwikki  | Lankenami | Nameguri  |
|            | Pamarung  | Nameguri  | Lankenami |

In addition to the partition of the community into phratries and sections, there is a further subdivision of the people into lesser groups, which bear the name of different animals, plants or inanimate objects, to which the name of totems has been given by the anthropologists of America and Europe.

Intermarriages are regulated as follows: a man of the Chamakunda phratry and Lankenami section marries a Kamanutta woman of the Pakwikki section. This is the normal rule of marriage and is the one shown in Table II. In such a case, a man's son's child marries his sister's son's child. But it is quite lawful for a Lankenami man to espouse a Lankenami woman, which represents the marriage of a man's son's child with his sister's daughter's child.

Another variation of the intermarriages of the sections allows the Lankenami man of our example to marry a Pamarung or Nameguri woman. In other words, a man of any given section can marry into one or other of the three remaining sections, or else into his own. Or, to express it in another form, a man of any given section has potential marital qualifications over all the four sections of women. It is needless to add that these facts altogether disprove the existence of exogamy among the tribes with which we are dealing.

Reference to Table 2 shows us that the children follow the phratry of their mother, but they do not adopt the name of her section. They are Pamarung, being the supplementary section of their mother's phratry. That is to say, the section name of the progeny is invariably determined through the women. The totems remain constantly in the same phratry as the women and are accordingly transmitted from a mother to her children.

Although the totems as well as the sections and phratries are perpetuated through the women, this does not constitute exogamy. We have already shown that a man Lankenami, for example, can marry into either phratry.

The totems, called by the natives *idite*, are divided between the two phratries in the same manner as the people themselves. The totems of each phratry are common to the two sections of which it is composed; thus the totems attached to Chamakunda are common to the sections Lankenami and Nameguri, and the Kamanutta totems are common to the Pakwikki and Pamarung sections.

When the boys are about 12 years old, they are taken from the control of their mothers by the chief men, and are passed through a course of initiation formalities, analogous in their main features to those practised by the Kamilaroi and Kumbainggeri tribes and described by me elsewhere. Scars are raised upon their bodies, the septum of the nose is pierced and a front tooth punched out of each youth. The novices are required to pass through the ordeal of inauguration at not less than three meetings of the tribes called for that purpose, and on each occasion fresh scars are added to those previously made on the body of each novice.

In my 'Ethnological Notes on the Aboriginal Tribes of Queensland',<sup>7</sup> published by the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, Brisbane, I detailed the sociology of a large number of important tribes in Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia. The mass of information therein supplied will be sufficient to prove that exogamy is quite impossible amongst any of the tribes dealt with in this article.

### **Gurē or Revenge Expedition**

When among the native tribes of that part of the state of Victoria through which the upper Murray, Mitta Mitta, Ovens, upper Goulburn and Yarra rivers flow, a member of a tribe was killed by anybody from a neighbouring tribe, the custom to avenge this wrong was known as *Gurē*. They believed that the soul of somebody whose death was not avenged would stray and bother relatives. In consequence of this superstition the punishment of the offender was carried out at the first opportunity presented.

The following is a short description of a *Gurē* expedition, as it was told to me by a native of the Mitta Mitta River in northeast Victoria.

The brothers and friends of the murdered person, accompanied by the older respected men, congregated at the *Ngulubul* or secret meeting place of the men and deliberated on the best way to retaliate against the guilty party. Some hair, or perhaps some skin taken previously from the body of the murdered person, was shown at this meeting to awaken in the souls of those present the desire for quick vengeance.

The population of a particular locality often consisted of a number of families who were sufficiently independent that they could be called sub-tribes. Sometimes there were feuds between these families, and occasionally murders. And when such injustice was done to a weak sub-tribe who were not able to take revenge, a messenger was sent with information concerning the incident to other familial groups, to ask for their assistance.

The messenger had a flat stick about 18 inches to two feet long and about one-and-a-half inches wide, decorated with lines and symbols inscribed with a

marsupial tooth, and painted with red ochre. Instead of a wooden message stick, sometimes an emu tarsus or a kangaroo thighbone was used, decorated in the same way as the wooden one by use of a flint.

The neighbours so called upon usually answered because one day they might request similar help themselves. When the shared meeting ground assigned by the messenger was reached, a party of warriors was selected who had to advance into the territory of the offender. Then the spears were busily greased, straightened and sharpened; boomerangs, clubs, shields and other weapons were carefully checked, and all necessary preparations made for the planned attack.

Some of the most skilled sorcerers made ready with their magic decorations and deadly instruments. Every man took his beard into his mouth and bit on it making wild antics. When all these preparatory things had been finished, the chosen troop specially besmeared and painted left for their mission. The smaller details of the expedition are so similar to that of the 'Pirrimbir', which I have described elsewhere,<sup>8</sup> that I will only have to hint at the most important aspects here.

The party travelled on until evening and set up a night-camp with the fires covered in such a way that they were not noticeable from a distance. Early the next morning a tree was inscribed with zigzagging irregular lines and ovals of the usual native patterns from near the ground to as high up the trunk as the men could reach by standing on the shoulders of one another. The signs were carved into the bark with sharp sticks, stone splinters or axes. A gum tree, or especially a grey box, was preferred if available, because of its smooth bark.

Every man of the contingent participated in drawing on the tree in order to transmit as much magic as possible into it, until it was, so to speak, overloaded with harm. Another reason for the common participation in marking the tree was to strengthen the bond of unity between them so that no one felt any regrets or could give warning to the convicted man, so that he might be able to escape. While the work progressed, some of the prime sorcerers rubbed the signs with bullroarers, quartz crystals and human fat to enhance the effectiveness of the procedure.

When the marking of the tree is finished, the men dance or jump around it singing several times '*wure bunnungandha dumballadha*'. The purpose of the whole ceremony is to bewitch the victim so that he does not leave the resting place where he normally resides, but remains kept there by the magic until his pursuers reach it. At every camp place during the ensuing trip the very same procedure is repeated, and a fresh tree is marked every morning.

When they have reached their goal and discovered the place where the wanted tribe resides they get as close as they safely can and put up their camp at a somewhat distant spot where they are not likely to be observed. Two skilled

men are now sent ahead as spies to undertake precise and careful observations of the enemy camp, to find out in which part of it the man they are seeking has his quarters, and in order to ascertain the numerical strength of the tribe, discover advantages, and so on.

While these spies are away on reconnaissance the remaining men mark a tree and clear the ground around it as usual. They paint their faces and chests white and make spots of the same colour on their upper arms. Furthermore, they erect around and over their small fire a shield of branches so it cannot be seen from a distance after the onset of darkness. This cover is made in the following way: some small trees are cut off and stuck into the ground with the cut end around the fire which is in the middle while the leafy ends lean against each other so that they form a pyramid or cone over the fire. Another leafy branch is then set on top with the end of the branch facing up.

As soon as the spies get a first look at the common camp of the enemy they hunch in a hole in the ground or hide behind bushes. Then they begin to quietly sing the words of a song called *guggarga* which is said to have the magic power of making smoke rise from the camp fire of the offender and thus show his whereabouts. While the men continue singing, they wait tensely until they see smoke come from any part of the camp. Then they creep closer to the camp towards the side indicated by the smoke until they can make out the man they are looking for and can locate the position of his camp fire. Should the real murderer not be present in the camp then the spies identify one of his elder brothers or his father; the respective person then has to endure the punishment instead of him.

After the messengers have identified the place of the convicted man, they return to their companions and report with the usual formalities about the state of the matter. After some refreshments have been distributed, some small pieces of wood are placed on the fire to give sufficient light so that the people can see what they are doing. All dance around the fire where the main sorcerers sit singing with quiet voices and executing some magic onto the enemy to destroy his chances of escape. After some time most get to sleep, but some of the older members keep watch continuously. A few hours before dawn everybody is woken and they move silently towards the enemy camp; the men hold small branches in front of themselves in order not to be discovered. The voice of the first bird greeting the new day is the sign for the attack. The attackers separate, one half marching on one side around the camp, the other taking the opposite direction, until they all unite at the opposite side of the camp in closest proximity to the prospective victim.

The details of the attacks are similar to those I described concerning the '*Pirrimbir* Expedition' to which I refer readers. When the victim falls, the executors secure pieces of his skin, flesh and fat, and sometimes the hands are

cut off and taken away. When one of the friends of the man tries to interfere in order to protect him he is subjected to the same punishment.

Then the attackers retreat to their camp of the previous night, where they dance around the marked tree and spit in order to drive out the magic power it had acquired through their earlier magic. After this they take all the food and luggage they had left there and begin their trip home. When they return to their tribe a detailed report is given concerning the events of the expedition.

Amongst the tribes described here, the Magellanic Clouds are taken for two native companions,<sup>9</sup> with the bigger cloud representing the male and the smaller the female. When the stars have their lowest culmination and therefore cannot be seen easily in the densely forested areas, the natives superstitiously believe that the neighbouring tribe might organise a *Gurē* expedition to avenge some real or imagined grievance. During such times the young men exercise an unusual vigilance in observing the movements of their enemies.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> RHM 1903, 'Das Kumbainggeri, eine Eingeborenen-sprache von Neu-Süd-Wales', *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft*, vol. 33, pp. 321-8.

<sup>2</sup> RHM 1904, 'Die Sprache des Tyeddywurru-Stammes der Eingebornen von Victoria', *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft*, vol. 34, pp. 71-6.

<sup>3</sup> RHM 1904, 'Die Mültyerra-Initiationszeremonie', *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft*, vol. 34, pp. 77-83. Reproduced this volume.

<sup>4</sup> I published a grammar and vocabulary of the Kurnū language in 'Languages of some Native Tribes of Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria', *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales*, vol. 36, 1902, pp. 154-79. [A more detailed description of the grammar was published as 'Langage des Kurnu, tribu d'Indigènes de la Nouvelle Galles du Sud' (1904). Reproduced this volume. Note—Editor.]

<sup>5</sup> RHM 1905, 'Sociology of some Australian Tribes', *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales*, vol. 39, p. 117.

<sup>6</sup> RHM 1904, 'Ethnological Notes on the Aboriginal Tribes of New South Wales and Victoria', *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales*, vol. 38, pp. 207-16.

<sup>7</sup> RHM 1904-5, 'Ethnological Notes on the Aboriginal Tribes of Queensland', *Queensland Geographical Journal*, vol. 20, pp. 49-75.

<sup>8</sup> See RHM 1904, 'Ethnological Notes on the Aboriginal Tribes of New South Wales and Victoria', *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales*, vol. 38, pp. 239-52.

<sup>9</sup> The native companion is *grus australasianus*, an Australian crane.