

The Bundandaba Ceremony of Initiation in Queensland

R. H. Mathews

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The *Bundandaba* ceremony of initiation was practised by the aboriginal tribes who inhabited a part of southern Queensland, situated along the coast from the boundary of New South Wales northerly to the vicinity of Port Curtis, extending inland to comprise a zone from 150 to 200 miles wide. This area contains the country drained by the Burnett, Mary, Brisbane and other rivers, as well as the valley of the Dawson and upper portions of the Condamine River.

The native inhabitants of the tract of country approximately outlined had two forms of initiatory rites. The preliminary rite was called *Toara*, and the final rite *Bundandaba*. A brief description of the *Toara* ceremony was published by me in 1900,¹ but no account of the *Bundandaba* has ever appeared in print. I shall therefore give a short report of the principal parts of the latter, obtained by me direct from the mouths of old natives of the region indicated, who had themselves passed through all the stages of the *Bundandaba* ceremony. Every novice who graduated by means of the *Toara* was required to undergo the further ordeal of the *Bundandaba* before he is qualified to take his place as a full man of the tribe.

About six months or a year after the *Toara* ceremony, preparations are made for putting the candidate through the final rites. The whole community need not be summoned, it being sufficient to invite the initiated men of one or more of the surrounding tribes. This is done by means of messengers in the usual way, appointing the time and place of meeting. The local mob—that is the tribe who sent the invitation—in due time repairs to the agreed place, but no circle or ornamental ground is required. The people who have been invited also journey to the appointed rendezvous, and meet each other before they present themselves to the hosts. The messengers have so arranged matters that the different mobs get within a few miles of each other on the same day.

The visitors are conducted by the messenger to a common camping ground, each mob locating itself on the side nearest the place they have come from. That

evening some of the principal men of each contingent set off to the hosts' camp, which they make a point of reaching an hour or two after dark. On coming into sight of the camp fires they sit down and tap their boomerangs or other weapons together, accompanying this with singing. The men in the local camp give a shout of welcome, but remain where they are. The strangers do not approach any nearer and in a short time they clap their hands as a signal that they are going away.

Next morning the fathers, uncles, and other relatives of the novitiates gather them out of the camp and, after appointing a guardian for each, they go over and find the place where the strangers were sitting the night before. They now bend the heads of the novices down and proceed along the men's tracks for a couple of miles or so, where they come to a row of men lying on the ground side by side, their feet being towards the men who are approaching. The head man of the Barrang section is standing at one end of the prostrate row and at the other end a Balgoi man is standing. These men represent the Kappaian cycle, which will be explained at the end of this paper.² A guardian takes a novice who is a Barrang by the arm and they both go up in front of one of the erect figures—a Barrang man—but owing to the novice's head being bowed upon his breast, he sees nothing at first. The guardian slightly raises the boy's head saying, 'Look at the man's feet!' The guardian moves his head a little higher and he sees up to the man's waist. He pulls the youth's head up quite straight, and then he observes the whole man in front of him, who is standing quite still. The guardian then gives the youth a piece of stick, picked up off the ground, and tells him to throw it at the Barrang man's chest. He does so and the man pretends to fall back dead.

Another guardian takes a Balgoi novice and leads him to the other side of the row, where the Balgoi head man is standing. He raises the youth's head until he sees successively the feet, waist and entire figure. The guardian then gives him a piece of stick, which he throws as directed, and the Balgoi man falls on his back, apparently dead. The guardian then says to the two novices in question, 'You have killed those two great men, you are bad boys and will perhaps marry wrong women.' The row of men now rise to their feet, jumping and singing before the novices, whose heads have been straightened up.

The combined contingent of *koorbeengoor*³ and strangers now go away through the bush to hunt for food. The novitiates are brought along by their guardians, and at midday are laid down on the ground, where they must remain silent. Late in the afternoon a camping place is reached where the youths are put into a bough enclosure and fed. At night by the camp fires the *koorbeengoor* perform an obscene dance as follows: a man stands in a slightly stooping posture with his hands clutching his genitalia; another man in the same attitude stands behind him at the distance of about a couple of feet, and so on, until perhaps a

score of men are all standing in a line one behind the other. The first man, followed by the others in single file, tramps along in front of the camp fires, moving his loins as in the act of copulating. The novices have been sat down, so that they can have a good view of these men filing past between them and the light of the fires, every man going through the same gestures. When they have gone past into the darkness on one side, they turn round and come back in the same order on the other side. This dance, which is called *toongbirraman*, is kept up for half an hour or more, after which all the party goes to sleep.

Next morning after breakfast the youths are brought out of their yard again and the *toongbirraman* is repeated for a short time. All hands now leave the camp, hunting as they go, until midday, when a halt is made to cook such game as may have been caught. In the meantime, the novices are treated to another exhibition of the *toongbirraman* dance. They go forward to a new camp, hunting until near sundown, and that night the men play at wrestling. Before commencing, the two combatants rub ashes from the camp fire on their hands to enable them to grasp each other's greasy skins. They do not use their feet to trip one another like white men do in this exercise. At first there is only one pair of wrestlers at a time, but towards the finish several couples may join in. After the wrestling one or more pairs of men may engage in fighting with clubs and shields. The evening's program terminates with singing and beating time.

Next morning the *toongbirraman* is again enacted, after which the novices are made to lie down and are covered with rugs or bushes. Presently they hear the sound of the Bundandaba or smaller bullroarer coming nearer and nearer. The guardians say, 'Here they come! They will eat you!' and help the boys to their feet. Within about 20 yards, two head men, a Bunda and a Dyerwain, representing the Deawai cycle, stand swinging the implement. It is tied to the end of a string about three feet long which is fastened to the thin end of a pliable rod that serves as a handle, and it is used in the same way as the *Moonibear* amongst the Wirraidyuri tribes.⁴ The Bundandaba is rubbed on the penis, navel, and under the arms of each novice, and he is cautioned never to divulge this secret to any person who has not passed through the necessary ceremonies. A bundle of Bundandabas, equal in number to the novices, is now produced, and an instruction given to each, again warning him to keep it out of reach of the uninitiated.

It may be explained here that if the two old men, Barrang and Balgoin, supposed to have been killed by the novices, had instead belonged to the Bunda and Dyerwain sections, then in that case the two old men who exhibited the Bundandaba would have been Barrang and Balgoin. In other words, if the men of the Kappaian cycle discharge the first function, then the men of the Deawai cycle must exhibit the bullroarer, and vice versa.

This important business being over, the novitiates are greased and dressed, after which they are marched away to the *Bunyunggan* or women's camp, with the same ceremonial I described in my article of 1900 on the Toara. During the afternoon, the *koombeengoor*, novices and guardians go to meet a strange mob of men, who have come to act the part of *poopoon*⁵ and there is a sham fight, in which the novices, as newly admitted men, are entitled to participate.

It often happened that the *poopoon* mob had some junior recruits of their own, admitted at a Bundandaba held in another tribe's territory. In such a case the two lots of fresh men were opposed to each other, while the elder warriors looked on and applauded. When the novices finished, the men of maturer years engaged in the contest. If a man or a youth were killed in these encounters, by accident or design, the body was eaten; the same course was followed in the event of more than one casualty.

This finished the Bundandaba and the visitors dispersed to their own homes, as already particularised in regard to the Toara. If the novices are old enough, they are now entitled to claim their promised wives, but this matter is regulated by the old men. The candidate for a spouse must have acquired a man's voice and have a sufficiently developed beard before his claim will be recognised.

In the foregoing pages I have dealt only with the most important portions of the *bundadaba* and my descriptions are much abridged, in order to keep the paper within reasonable limits. It is hoped, however, that the account is sufficiently full to enable a comparison with ceremonies of a similar character in different parts of Australia.

Mention has incidentally been made of the social divisions, *De-a-wai* and *Kap-pai-an* during the progress of the rites, and it will therefore be necessary to give a brief explanation of them. The people are collectively divided into two primary cycles⁶ or groups, Deawai and Kappaian; the former is again divided into two sections⁷ called Dyerwain and Bunda, and the latter into two called Barrang and Balgoiin. The feminine of the cycles and sections are made by the suffix *gan*. The following table will make the matter clearer:

Cycle	Wife	Husband	Son	Daughter
<i>Deawai</i>	<i>Dyerwaingan</i>	<i>Balgoiin</i>	<i>Bunda</i>	<i>Bundagan</i>
	<i>Bundagan</i>	<i>Barrang</i>	<i>Dyerwain</i>	<i>Dyerwaingan</i>
<i>Kappaian</i>	<i>Barrangan</i>	<i>Bunda</i>	<i>Balgoiin</i>	<i>Balgoingan</i>
	<i>Balgoingan</i>	<i>Dyerwain</i>	<i>Barrang</i>	<i>Barrangan</i>

Each cycle has perpetual succession through its women; eg. Dyerwaingan has a daughter Bundagan, and in the next generation Bundagan has a daughter Dyerwaigan, and so on alternately for ever. Moreover, as the totems, *moorang*, descend through the women it necessarily follows that they must belong to both sections of the cycle. A man may have more than one *moorang* or totem, but he inherits them all from his mother and his mother's mother.

The above table shows the normal or usual marriages, but there are variations. Taking Balgoin, the first name in the 'Husband' column, we observe that he marries Dyerwaigan as his normal or No. 1 wife; or he takes a Bundagan of a certain lineage as his No. 2 spouse; or he mates with Balgoingan as No. 3; or with Barrangan as No. 4 wife. The section name, and the cycle of his children, would depend entirely, in every case, upon their mother, quite irrespective of their father's section name or cycle.

Among the natives of Burnett, Mary and Dawson rivers, the common bat, *deering*, was the friend of all the men, while a small owl or night hawk, *boorookapkap*, was the friend of the women. T. Petrie reports that the blacks of Brisbane river believe that the bat, there called *billing*, made all their menfolk, and that the *wamankan*, or night hawk, made the women.⁸ In 1834, Rev L. E. Threlkeld reported that the tribe at Lake Macquarie, New South Wales, had a belief that a certain small bird was the first maker of women, and that the bat was venerated on the same grounds by the men.⁹ J. Dawson in 1881, describing the customs and beliefs of the Aborigines of western Victoria, states that the common bat belongs to the men, and the fern owl to the women.¹⁰

ENDNOTES

¹ RHM 1900, 'The Toara Ceremony of the Dippil Tribes of Queensland', *American Anthropologist*, vol. 2 (new series), pp. 139-44.

² [Editor's note] As the table shows, Mathews refers to the two primary kinship groups as 'cycles', although more often he called them 'phratries'. The common contemporary term is 'moiety'.

³ *Koorbeengoor* is the native name for the group of men who, during the initiation ceremony, had to look after the novices. The orthography of the English original was kept. Note—German translator.

⁴ RHM 1896, 'The Būrbūng of the Wiradthuri Tribes', *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, vol. 25, p. 298, plate 26, fig. 39. [*Moonibear* was the name of a bullroarer. Note—Editor]

⁵ *Poopoon* is the name for men who have come to participate in a sham fight.

⁶ *Phratry*. Note—German translator.

⁷ Clan, class. Note—German translator. [In English Mathews most often used the term 'section' to describe the subdivisions of what he referred to at different times as a 'phratry', 'cycle' or 'moiety'. Other authors referred to them as 'clans' or 'classes'. Hence the original translator's explanation. Note—Editor.]

⁸ Petrie, Constance C. 1904, *Reminiscences of Early Queensland*, Brisbane, p. 62.

⁹ 'An Australian Language, p. 49.' [L. E. Threlkeld's *An Australian Language as Spoken by the Awabakal* was not published until 1892. Mathews is possibly referring to Threlkeld's *An Australian Grammar* of 1834. Note—Editor.]

¹⁰ 'Aborigines of Victoria', p. 52-3. [Mathews is apparently referring to James Dawson's *Australian Aborigines: The languages and customs of several tribes of Aborigines in the western district of Victoria* of 1871. Note—Editor.]