

Letters to R. H. Mathews

Moritz von Leonhardi

From the collection of the Strehlow Research Centre, Alice Springs (RM 1908-1-2; 1908-2-1; 1909-1-1; 1910-1-1). Translated from the German by Christine Winter.

Gross-Karben 9.6.1908
Hessen
Germany

Dear Sir!

Thank you very much for your letter as well as sending some offprints of articles by you. I have instructed the publisher to send you a copy of Strehlow's Aranda Legends on my behalf and will send you the next issues, too. I hope to be able to publish the second booklet in about two months; it will contain Loritja legends and the beliefs of both tribes about totemism and about Churinga.¹ I would be delighted if you closely took note of the publication and helped it to become known in Australia.

I have already read a large number of your many published articles. The ones now sent to me were, however, totally unknown to me. I was very interested particularly in the article: 'Notes on the Aborig. North T. Western Austr. etc.',² because of the important information about the natives of Western Australia, still so little known. It turns out more and more that the culture of the Western tribes is very similar to those of Central Australia (Aranda, Loritja, etc); now again with the demonstrations of near identical ideas about the Tjuringa (bull-roarer) associated with each of them; this had already been pointed out by Professor Klaatsch.³ It is a pity that in this article, as well as in some others of yours, information about new or recently ascertained facts is mostly very brief and does not provide the wording of your correspondents, and for the most part also does not give names and places of residence. With such difficult matters the *ipissima verba* [actual words] of the person reporting often matters a lot. Very interesting also for me were the notes on incarnation and reincarnation of children among the Chingalee. Differing ideas about these matters seem to exist from tribe to tribe; and also within the same tribe. Strehlow has demonstrated this, too, for the Aranda and Loritja. Recently I read an article by you in Folk-Lore and another in Americ. Anthropol[ogist].⁴ In both you try to demonstrate that the Aranda had matrilineal descent and not patrilineal descent as reported by Sp. and G. [Spencer and Gillen]. Strehlow arrives at the same result as Sp. and G: patrilineal descent. After examining the material available

before me I, however, have to say, that I cannot concede that you are right. You arrange groups in the following way:

A	B
Purula	Pananka
Ngala	Knuraia
Bangata	Kamara
Paltara	Mbitjana

But Strehlow—and here completely in accordance with Sp. and G.—gives the arrangements of groups as follows:

I	II
Purula	Pananka
Kamara	Paltara
Ngala	Knuraia
Mbitjana	Bangata

In the legends (pages 3 and 6) the first phratry⁵ is called *Alarinja* and the second Kwatjarinja. The *natives themselves thus arrange like this* and are conscious that these 4 sections belong together and not the other 4. I believe that it is not right to arrange the phratries *differently* to what *the Aranda themselves* do. Only then, when your correspondents state for certain that they have been able to ascertain the arrangements into groups published by you from the natives' own lips, would I perhaps be able to arrive at a different opinion; first of all I would perhaps have to assume—even though this in itself seems improbable to me—that in different parts of the vast Aranda territory groups were differently organised. Strehlow, by the way, discusses the matter in great detail in a later booklet.

In one of your papers in Proc. Amer. Philos. S. Vol. 39 p. 627⁶ and *ibid* Vol. 37 p. 66⁷ as well as in Jour. R. Soc. N. S. Wales Vol. 32 p. 250⁸ and in Amer. Anthropol. N. S. II. p. 144⁹ you briefly mention that during the initiation ceremonies a man was killed and eaten in a ceremonial way. 'I am preparing an article dealing fully with this and similar customs.' Unfortunately I have been unable to find out, nor was I able to ascertain from your bibliography, whether it has happened that you have dealt with this important matter coherently and extensively and by presenting your material in detail?¹⁰ For the fact, if it were really reported soundly, would be of exceptional interest. In the literature known to me I only find in addition to Science of Man, 1897 p. 91, a reference to the matter and the listing of a small paper by a W. A. Squire (Sydney) which, however, has so far remained unobtainable for me; it may perhaps be no longer available even in Australia. The information of a 'sacrifice' of a young girl during Bunya Bunya ceremonies seems to have turned out to be wrong, and would, even if it were true, have nothing to do with the ceremonial killing during initiation ceremonies. Perhaps, however, it is related to the matter reported by Mrs. L. Parker, Euahlayi Tribe pag. 72-73.¹¹ However there it is only told that disobedient boys were killed and eaten during the Bora; not that this was a

regular custom during initiation ceremonies. I would be most obliged if you would be so kind as to tell me if and where you have dealt with this matter. But should you happen not to have got round to carrying out your intention of writing about these matters, I would like to ask you no longer to withhold your material from science.

In Notes Aborig. N. S. Wales you present p. 33 two songs: Dhurramooloon etc.¹²

Are the words not translatable? It would be highly interesting to know the meaning. We are still lacking good texts in the original language with interlinear translation; of course the texts would have to have been recorded with the greatest precision. Such texts, though, would be more pertinent at the moment than grammars and vocabularies, which the scholar in the end—if the texts are only somewhat extensive—could derive from them himself. How much there is still to do on the ethnography of Australia and how soon it will be forever too late!

Most respectfully and humbly Yours
M. von Leonhardi

Gross-Karben 27.9.1908

Dear Mr Mathews!

I have received your letter of the 16th of last month; thank you very much. I have also got the offprints you had sent me which I have read with great interest. I am very sorry about your accident and hope that in the meantime you have been completely restored to health!¹³ In regard to the marriage laws I regret not to be able to convert to your point of view, and that for the following reasons:

I. The arranging of the two phratry (cycles) in I. Perula, Kamara, Ngala, Mbitjana and II. Pananka, Paltara, Knuraia, Bangata *comes from the natives themselves*. Thus as long as it has not been demonstrated to me that other natives arrange groups differently I have to assume that Strehlow's information is right, who in this point concurs exactly with Schulze, Gillen and Spencer, and who definitely asserts that *the arrangements of groups was that of the natives themselves*.

II. That this arrangement of groups is that of the natives is in my opinion also evident from the legends from time immemorial. The most curious division into land and water dwellers (which perhaps points north to the Islands of Torres Strait; something similar occurs there) is *part of the legend* as well as the classes, which belong to each division.¹⁴

III. Your own examples seem to me to speak against matrilineal descent. If the children from the marriage: Paltara *male* = Kamara *female* ... are Knuraia but the children from the marriage: Paltara *male* = Mbitjara *female* are likewise Knuraia, then it seems to me that only the father determines the class of the children irrespective of which woman from which class he has married.¹⁵

IV. The marriages which you call II, III, and IV seem to me to be clear products of disintegration.¹⁶ One surely has to assume that only Marriage I was original. How could the origin of this strange institution otherwise be imagined, if one does not assume a specific system? Had all or even only some of the presently existing 'irregular' marriages existed together with the 'regular' ones from the beginning, then such an institution would be completely incomprehensible to me. In my opinion the so-called marriage-classes are age levels and originally I was only allowed to marry into the age-level of the other half of the tribe which corresponded with mine. I was therefore never allowed to marry into the levels to which respectively my father and mother or my children and their cousins belonged. When this was no longer practicable as time went by, the presently existing phenomenon of disintegration¹⁷ emerged. I can pass no judgment in regard to the Chingalee as I have no other information about them than yours and that of Spencer. But in my opinion it does not follow necessarily that what is in force with the Aranda also has to be in force with the Ch. [Chingalee] and vice versa. Concerning this tribe perhaps you are right in regard to the

arrangement of phratries. My conclusions in III and IV, however, are valid for this tribe, too.

I think it would be very rewarding if you presented your obviously very rich material about this interesting tribe of the Chingalee to us coherently and extensively; it is impossible to gain a good impression on the basis of scattered information and notes.

What you write about 'boy companions' was very interesting for me; but here I would also urgently wish that you would precisely name all tribes, where this occurs and precisely what actually occurs. Your information about this is really a bit too brief and does not go into enough detail. Obviously, among the Aranda such relationships between man and boy do not occur. But it seems that this type of pederasty is prevalent across the board in the north and Western Australia.

I was also very interested in your statement on *how* Spencer and Gillen conducted their research.¹⁸ That such a way of proceeding had to have existed one could only suspect; but it is not scientifically honest of the two gentlemen not to convey the details openly.

In conclusion, could you tell me to whom I have to turn to regularly receive the journal *Science of Man*, published in Sydney? Until 1904 I got it through my bookseller; since then he has tried in vain in London and Sydney to resume it. In the past there was quite often good material in the journal.

Yours very faithfully and humbly
Freiherr v. Leonhardi

The second booklet of Strehlow's research is ready and I will send you a copy in the next days.

Gross-Karben 23.7.1909

Dear Sir!

I still have to thank you for your letter of 15 March. I am delighted about your favourable assessment of the two booklets and the Aranda and Loritja.¹⁹ The 3rd booklet is now in preparation, but will hardly be published before next spring. The preparation required a lot of checking on the spot by Mr Strehlow and studies of the relevant literature by me. We only want to publish work which has been very carefully prepared; there have been more than enough superficial things written and printed, which only cause scientific harm. I will send you the 3rd booklet when it is ready and later also the 4th and 5th booklets. In the latter we will also try to thoroughly present the question of marriage rules, which you have discussed so often; the 4 and 8 sections, and the 'irregular' and 'wrong' marriages. *Very extensive* genealogies are needed for this which are only partially completed. But I can already now say with certainty that your views are *not* supported by the Aranda and Loritja. The arrangement of the 8 sections as given by Spencer and Gillen is *absolutely* right; I particularly draw your attention to the fact that these groupings can be found in legends. How do you want to explain that? There are certainly 'wrong' marriages—the natives themselves call them that—but these marriages were and are simply seen as 'wrong', bad, and were punished in the past. It is fact that among the Aranda, the children always belong to the clan²⁰ of the father's father, no matter whether a man married the right or a 'wrong' woman. This is also apparent in the short genealogies you cite, which you probably all got from Strehlow. Unfortunately you have made alterations to these genealogies, for example Am. Anth. 1908 p. 90 Tab. D.²¹ It should be Arkara male²² = Tjupuntara female, children are Kamara, and the father of Tjupuntara = Bangata, and so on. You arrive at these arbitrary changes because you erroneously believe that there are not 8 sections in Hermannsburg and surroundings. That is totally false and you actually admit this yourself when you write: 'When we get into the extreme northern limits of the Aranda territory, *say northwest from about the 24th parallel* we find ... 8 intermarrying sections.' For Hermannsburg lies north of the 24th parallel. The northwestern Loritja, too, have 8 sections. This is only briefly to state my point of view more precisely; I regret to have to refer to your counter reasons as inconclusive.

Most respectfully yours
M. v. Leonhardi

Gross-Karben 22 June 1910
Hessen, Germany

Dear Sir!

Thank you for your letter of 16 May this year as well as for sending various offprints. A while ago I sent you an essay by Missionary Siebert about the Dieri from the 'Globus'; I had prepared it for print from information by Siebert.²³ 14 days ago I sent you the III part of Strehlow's work about the Aranda and Loritja. About 2-3 booklets will follow, which I will likewise send you.

In the various articles you sent me I was particularly interested in what you report about 'ceremonial stones'.²⁴ As far as I know these objects are mentioned in the literature only in the Edge-Partington Album of the Natives of the Pacific Islands III p. 132/4; there they are called 'phallus'—'tribal debt-stones probably phallic'.²⁵ The shape suggests understanding them as such. What a pity it is that we will now probably never gain certain information about the true nature of the objects.

The genealogy of Inkara published by you in R. Soc. N. S. Wales 42 p. 341²⁶ I know very well. For you have received this from Strehlow, and it constitutes a small part of the very extensive genealogies of the Aranda which are awaiting publication by me. I am sorry to have to tell you that I still cannot understand your conclusions about maternal descent among the Aranda, and regard your argument as absolutely wrong. It is beyond doubt—and before you do not provide proof to the contrary—also not contested by anybody that an Aranda arranges:

I. Cycle: Purula, Ngala, Kamara, Mbitjara

II Cycle: Pananka, Knuraia, Paltara, Bangata.

It is herein absolutely certain, that eg. a Purula calls all other Purula, and all Ngala, Kamara, and Mbitjara nakarakia, while he calls all Pananka, Knuraia, Paltara, and Bangata etnakarakia. Nakarakia, though, means=we, the fathers and all=our whole family. Etnakarakia=they, their fathers and all=their whole family. This statement really says it all; you would have to remove these facts, if you wanted to be right. As I have written to you before, nearly all of your examples show no matter which woman from which class a man has married, the children always belong to that class which complies with the general rule. Exceptions are only the examples: Paiarde *male*=Ndatjika *female*; Thomas=Katharine; and now Inkara=Ruth. But these are only apparent exceptions. In these cases the men involved have immigrated from the southern territory of the Aranda into the northern and with that a shift into the neighbouring class occurs. Here I can only hint at this and will explicate it more extensively in an essay shortly. When you emphasise that in alternative marriages the child belongs to the class of the mother's mother, then this is right, but what

does it prove? For it belongs to that of the father's father, too. And with the marriages which you call, I believe, No. III—this is not and never was the case. E.g.,



You could then accordingly conclude, for example, patrilineal descent among the Kamilaroi, because



But this you will rather not do, will you? I think you really have to give up your theory!

Yours most faithfully and humbly
M. v. Leonhardi

ENDNOTES

- ¹ A sacred object, now spelled 'tjuringa'.
- ² RHM 1906-07, 'Notes on the Aborigines of the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Queensland', *Queensland Geographical Journal*, vol. 22.
- ³ Hermann Klaatsch (1863-1916), German ethnologist who visited Australia.
- ⁴ RHM 1908, 'The Sociology of the Arranda and Chingalee Tribes (Northern Territory Australia)', *Folk-Lore*, vol. 19; and RHM 1908, 'Marriage and Descent in the Arranda Tribe, Central Australia', *American Anthropologist*, vol. 10 (new series).
- ⁵ Refers to *moiety*.
- ⁶ RHM 1900, 'Phallic Rites and Initiation Ceremonies of the South Australian Aborigines', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 39.
- ⁷ RHM 1898, 'Initiation Ceremonies of Australian Tribes', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 37.
- ⁸ RHM 1900, 'Marriage and Descent among the Australian Aborigines', *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales*, vol. 34.
- ⁹ RHM 1900, 'The Toara Ceremony of the Dippil Tribes of Queensland', *American Anthropologist*, vol. 2 (new series).
- ¹⁰ Mathews never fulfilled the promise of a detailed discussion of cannibalism.
- ¹¹ Parker, K. Langloh 1905, *The Euahlayi Tribe: A study of Aboriginal Life in Australia*, Archibald Constable, London.
- ¹² RHM 1907, *Notes on the Aborigines of New South Wales*, Government Printer of New South Wales, Sydney.
- ¹³ A riding accident. See Mathews to Hartland 10 August, 1898 (this volume).
- ¹⁴ 'Class' refers to *sub-section* and 'division' to *moiety*.
- ¹⁵ The = sign indicates that people of these sections intermarry.
- ¹⁶ Germ. *Zersetzungsprodukte*.
- ¹⁷ Germ. *Zersetzungserscheinungen*.
- ¹⁸ Mathews claimed that Spencer and Gillen artificially prolonged the ceremonies they observed at Alice Springs by supplying large quantities of food. See RHM 1907, 'Notes on the Arranda Tribe', *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales*, vol. 41, pp. 157-8.
- ¹⁹ Strehlow, C. 1907-20, *Die Aranda- und Loritja-Stämme in Zentral-Australien*, Joseph Baer & Co., Frankfurt am Main.
- ²⁰ 'Clan' refers here to *sub-section*.
- ²¹ RHM, 'Marriage and Descent in the Arranda Tribe'.
- ²² Where we put *male* or *female* Leonhardi used the symbols for male and female, arrow over a circle, and cross under a circle.
- ²³ Otto Siebert (1871-1957), Lutheran missionary who worked with Diyari people at Killalpaninna.
- ²⁴ In 1909 Mathews had published three papers on ceremonial stones: 'Ceremonial Stones used by the Australian Aborigines', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 48, 1909; 'Further Notes on Ceremonial Stones, Australia', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 48, 1909; and 'Some Australian Magical Stones', *American Antiquarian*, vol. 31, 1909. Further publications followed in 1910-11.
- ²⁵ Edge-Partington, J. 1890-8, *An Album of the Weapons, Tools, Ornaments, Articles of Dress, etc. of the Natives of the Pacific Islands*, James Edge-Partington and Charles Heape, London.
- ²⁶ RHM 1908, 'Vocabulary of the Ngarrugu Tribe N. S. W.' *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales*, vol. 42, 1908.