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TOTEMS

INTRODUCTORY

In the following pages,
comments made by

(1) Andrew Lang

(2) Prof. Brown

have been added.

Pencil markings, queries, etc. have
been marked on retyped pages.

TOTEMS

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INTRODUCTORY

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TOTEMS

The origin of totemism amongst savage races has not yet been fully solved, and consequently this highly interesting question continues to prove of absorbing interest to the scientific world. There is so much difference of opinion as to the origin of this problem and many and various are the hypotheses which have been framed concerning the development of totemism.

Professor Haddon's theory (Proc. British Ass. 1902) that groups of people at a very early period in the history of mankind, through their local environment had special varieties of food, is that which most nearly applies to the known totemism of the Western portion of Australia. That totemism began at a very early period of man's social development, all writers are agreed. Dr. Andrew Lang, in his latest work, *The Secret of the Totem*, states that it began in the assumption of groups of men of the names of natural objects, and as each group became conscious of its possession of the name of a plant or animal, the belief was evolved that some mysterious connection existed between the group and the animal or plant whose name it bore. In this opinion the late Dr. Howitt coincided.

With reference to the mystic connection between the name of the group and that of the animal or plant of the same name, Professor Rhys argues (*XIXth Century*, XXX, p. 566 et seq.) that amongst savage races, the name was not only a part of the man who bore it, but that it was that part of him which is termed the soul, the breath of life, and Dr. Lang, reasoning from Rhys and other writers says "if the name is the soul of the bearer, and if the totem also is his soul, then the name and the soul and the totem are all one." How far the arguments and conclusions of these and other scientific writers apply to the Western Australian system of totemism will be seen in the following pages.

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Retyped pages, 2, 11, 22, 23

Guess.

Since Western Australian totemism differs in some respects from that of the Arunta tribe of the central portion of the continent, not to mention other Central and Southeastern Australian tribes whose totemic practices had reached a more or less highly organised state, that it is considered more advisable to present the Western system in its simplicity, and as interpreted by the natives themselves than to "fit it in" with one or other of the numerous theories advanced to date on the subject. As far as been ascertained, there are in the South and Southwest no elaborate ceremonials connected with the increase of totemic animals and plants, but as all inquiries have been hitherto conducted in districts whose climatic and other conditions afford an abundance of native foods throughout the year, it cannot be positively asserted that no elaborate totemic practices occur in the so-called "desert interior" of Western Australia which adjoins the districts of South Australia where the highly organised totemic ceremonies are practised. I am rather inclined to believe that in the little known regions of the Eucla and Eastern Divisions, ^{in the South} where the rainfall is scanty and intermittent, and where animal and vegetable foods are consequently scarce, ceremonies of a somewhat similar nature to those described by Messrs. Spencer and Gillen will be found to be practised in order to obtain a magical increase of the totemic food products of those districts. I may say here however that in no known part of the West is any ceremony practised for non-edible totems. The Thaballa or laughing boy totem mentioned by Spencer and Gillen, with other non-edible totems for which such laborious ceremonies as are described are practised, have not their counterpart in the western portion, as far as known.

Again, in those works on Totemism in which some Western Australian totemic observances have been included, much of the groundwork upon which these are built starts from false premises.

For instance, the Southwestern term "kobong" has always been taken by writers to mean "a totem or crest" ever since its first mention in Grey's Journal as having possessed such meaning, and inquiries at the outset were very much hampered by the assumption that "kobong" must mean the totem or crest of the individual or

tribe in the Southwest. After much patient investigation, the true significance of the word was ascertained beyond the possibility of doubt, from the Southern natives, who stated that koo-bong, kobong, babbin, etc., were expressions used for a human friendship pledged between two young men who stood in the relation of brother-in-law to each other, the male and female relatives of these young men being also termed kobongur or babbingur (friends) by each other. The term kobong was used in the Vasse district and Southward towards Albany, "ngabbexup" being the dialectic equivalent. Babbin was the term most frequently used in the Swan district, but both babbin and koobong were found amongst the Gingin and Victoria Plains district natives. This human friendship exists throughout the State under various names, and is found in all districts (except in one part of the Murchison) to be quite separate from that peculiar and mysterious kinship between the aborigines and all natural objects which is known to ethnologists under the name of Totemism, the term being adopted from the dialect of the Ojibwe Indians.

In the native mind the distinction between the human friendship and the totem kinship is never confused. A pledged friendship (kobonguttuk) could not exist between a man and any object in the vegetable or animal world, now, in the Southern districts, could the terms babbinguttuk and kobonguttuk, with their dialectic variations, be applied by any native to his mysterious connection with the animal, bird, etc., which he calls his totem. The general equivalent for totem in the Southern dialects is borungur, the meaning being "elder brother", hence the relationship is an entirely different one, the kobong being the "relation-in-law" only, while the totem is the "blood relation", so to speak.

It will perhaps be desirable to furnish the various equivalents for each of these terms in order to emphasise the distinction that is in the native mind with regard to them.

The terms for "friend" are :-

- | | |
|--|---------------------|
| Goonminyoo, koominyerra, murrenmat | Balladonia district |
| Ngalloo-ngoo, yoongarl, yellarp
malba (man) | Norseman district |

Mss. P. 4

Retyped page 4, line 20

Babbin. Moora Dieri mardu ?

Mss. P. 4

Retyped page 6

The various dialectic equivalents for totem :
cf my MS.

MSS. P. 4

(Brown's comments)

Retyped P. 4

What is the difference in use between kobong and babbin?

None (D.M.B.)

lines 21-22

"Yoon'gara (man), etc. Berkshire Valley."

Do these mean "friend" specifically?

Could not say definitely, having had but one informant. (D.M.B.)

line 28 "Thammoooro"

Is this not grandfather?

P. 5, line 7

"Ngabberee (brother-in-law)"

Does this mean "friend"?

Yes. (D.M.B.)

Kobong, babbin	Esperance district
Koobong, babbin, bearding, beardingarra	Bremer Bay district
Koobong, babbin	Jerramungup, 50 m. N.W. of Bremer
Koobong, maangur, ngooljerwannee (brother-in-law)	Korrlup, 50 m. N.W. of Jerramungup
Koobong, babbin, moorurt	Albany, Denmark etc.
Koobong	Mt. Barker, Kendenup, Tamberup, Broome Hill
Koobong, habbin	Katanning, Wagin, Arthur River, Blackwood
Koobong, babbin	Warren River, Augusta districts
Koobungwunning	Bridgetown
Koobong, habbin	Busselton, Vasse, Bunbury
Koobong, babbin	Collie districts
Kobung	Williams districts
Kobong, babbin	Pinjarra district
Kobong, babbin	Beverley, York
Koobong, kobong, babbin	Swan district
Babbin, baa'bin, koobong	Gingin
Koobong, babbin	Northam, Toodyay, Meckering
Kobong, babbin	Mogumber, Moore River
Babbin	Dandarraga
Babbin	Moora
Yoongara (man), moorurdoe (relation)	Berkshire Valley (doubtful - only one informant)
Yammajee " ngabberoo (brother-in-law)	Watheroo, Marah
Ko'ro	Dongara
Yellar	Southern Cross district, also Norseman
Malba (man), yellar	Kalgoorlie, Coolgardie
Jammin	Canegrass
Ngool'yoo, wooyar	Menzies, Mulline
Thammowroo, thammoowana	Laverton
Thammaroo, tammalee	Duketon
Koomba, goomba	Nyingarree, Peak Hill district
Yajjaloo	Gullewa
Yoongara, babbin'yoo	N.W. of Mannine (Murchison district)

Babbinyoo	Lakes Ngabberoo and Mibbeean (Murchison district)
Nyowera	N.E. of Peak Hill
Goomba	Illimbirree, Sanford River
Koo'nin'garra	N.W. of Peak Hill
Koojoo, yammajee (man)	Murrum
Wannara murda	Weld Range district
Ngabberee (brother-in-law)	Sanford River
Koomba	Gascoyne and Lower Ashburton
Mallardee	Ashburton district
Maiagoo (man), marrganoo, koomballee	Roeburne district
Marrganoo, koomballee	Tableland district
Jeemarree	Fitzroy River district
Yalbooroo, jeemarree	Broome, Beagle Bay districts
Tchallanda (W.H. Bird, informant) Jeemarree	Sammy Island

Retyped page 6

What is the difference between borungur and oobaree?

None, so far as I could ascertain; oobarri was confined to the above districts and may have been the local equivalent. (D.M.B.)

The various dialectic equivalents for totem are :-

Borongur (elder brother), wuk, wak	Balladonia district
Borongur, wuk	Israelite Bay district
Borongur, billanga, bittungal	Norseman district
Borongur, wok, barl	Thomas River, Southern coast
Borongur, wak	Albany .
Borongur	Korrlup
Borongur	Mt. Barker, Katanning, Wagin
Borongur, borogurt	Arthur River
Borongur, oobarree	Bridgetown, Vasse, Bunbury, Pinjarra, Collie
Borongur, oobarree	Swan district, Perth, Guildford, etc
Borongur, oobar	York, Beverley, etc.
Woobarree	Gingin
Borongur, yoongara (?)	Berkshire Valley, Carnamah
Borongur, oobarree	Northam, Toodyay, Meckering
Borongur	Dongara
Bittangal, bittungin, billanga	Southern Cross, Mt. Jackson, etc.
Bittangal	Coolgardie, Kalgoorlie
Koondai, koonda, koondeen	Kookynie, Morgans
Ngalloongoo	Laverton, Lawlers, Duketon, Lake Way, etc.
Ngalloongoo, ngaa'loongoo, ngaalee	Murchison district, Nannine, Weld Range, Peak Hill, etc.
Ngalloongoo,	Sanford River
Ngalloongoo, walarree (E. Cornally, informant)	Gascoyne, Ashburton
Ngajaala, ngadhalee	Cane and Robe Rivers, Ashburton district
Thaaloo, jaaloo	Roeburne
Jaaloo, wooraroo	De Grey district
Koombellee	La Grange Bay district
Koonee	Fitzroy River district
Jalnga	Broome, Beagle Bay, Derby, Sunday Island

It will be seen that, with a few exceptions, which may be the result of the natives misunderstanding the nature of the question, the terms for a pledged friendship and the totem are entirely distinct.

In the Social Organisation of the Southern Group, the two primary phratries possess bird names, White Cockatoo and Crow, Marriage is exogamous between these two phratries, and as every Crow man has the Crow as his "phratry borungur" (this term being almost universal amongst the Southern tribes) and every White Cockatoo man's phratry borungur is the White cockatoo, no marriages should lawfully take place within the phratry borungur, since a Crow man of the Crow phratry borungur should only marry a White cockatoo woman of the White cockatoo phratry borungur, and vice versa, the children of the Crow man going into the Crow phratry in the Southern district and into the White cockatoo phratry in those parts of the Southwest where maternal descent obtains. All Manitchmat (White Cockatoo) were Manitch borungur, and all Wordungmat (Crow) were Wordung borungur, the bearers of each of these borungur constituting an exogamous class. All the members of the Southern group belonged to one or other of these borungur mat (totemkins).

As the totemic system of the Southern people appears to differ from that of the eastern and northern neighbours, the native term borungur will be used instead of totem, until it has been decided that the Southern borungur are totems.

There was no superstitious respect for Crow or White Cockatoo amongst the Southern people, the White Cockatoo being generally eaten. Crow, however, was not a usual article of food except in certain districts, and then only as a matter of necessity. An old Gingin district Wordungmat stated that his people did not eat crows "because they were all the same as self." In Gingin, too, "wordung" is the dialectic equivalent for "dead", but the Gingin dead go over or under the sea to the western country of the dead, and do not become wordung. With this exception the crow may be eaten in all parts of the Southwest where the primary names obtain. The crest and other feathers of the white cockatoo are frequently worn at dances and other ceremonies (described elsewhere) and from their gay colouring, they form valuable articles of commerce, but apart from the wearing of the feathers as head decorations, there is no evidence, traditional

or otherwise, that a totemic ceremony was ever performed in the South or Southwest, for either crow or white cockatoo. Crow feathers were too sombre in colour to be worn as decorative ornaments. Eaglehawk feathers were worn on the arms, in the head band, and at the back of the waist band to form a tail, and an eaglehawk quill was used as a nosebone by the beedawong (initiated boy), and they were also objects of exchange or barter, but the crow feathers have no commercial value whatever.

The question usually asked in the South and Southwest when a visitor who is not well-known arrives at a camp is "Yinnok māta naitch?" (What "stock", "family", "leg" are you?) "Wordungmat" or "Manitchmat", as the case may be, is the answer generally given. In the districts where the phratry names have continued in use and have not generally been subdivided, the question "Yinnok naitch borungur?" (what is your totem?) is sometimes put in place of "family" as the borungur in these districts belongs to the phratry, Manitch or Wordung, as the case may be.

The phratry totem is therefore hereditary and exogamous. For example, an Esperance Manitchmat and Manitch borungur married a Dolyup woman, a Wordungmat and wordung borungur; their children entered the Manitchmat phratry, descent being paternal, and became also Manitch borungur. A Swan district Manitchmat (Tondarup or Didarruk - subdivisions) and manitch borungur, married a Northam district woman, a Wordungmat (Ballarruk or Nagarnook) and wordung borungur, their children entering the Wordungmat phratry, and having the wordung as their phratry totem, their descent being maternal.

The eaglehawk is credited with the formation of the two primary phratries, and is traditionally supposed to have been the father of all the Southern birds, but there is only legendary evidence that the eaglehawk formed "himself", and at the present day the eaglehawk has no tribal, class or local significance. It was the inherited totem of some people east of York and Beverley districts, but these are now all dead. If it ever formed one of the principal phratries or Class divisions

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in the South it was at a period so remote, that all record is lost, and only the legends giving the eaglehawk precedence of all the other birds have been preserved. It occasionally forms an individual totem in many parts of the State, the totem being given from some incident in connection with the bird happening at the child's birth. It has also been made an hereditary totem within recent times amongst certain families.

In a Vasse legend, the union of the eaglehawk and crow is shown, and from this legend also it appears that the eaglehawk made the fresh water accessible to all the natives, and particularly to his own people, therefore judging from legendary evidence there was apparently an eaglehawk phratry which allied itself with the crow phratry. In almost all the other legends it is the crow which obtains the fresh water that the eaglehawk tried to keep for himself, the crow eventually killing the eaglehawk. In the Vasse narrative, the eaglehawk and the crow are husband and wife; in the Beverley and York districts he is the uncle of the crows; in the Perth version of the story the eaglehawk dies but leaves two sons behind him. Perth district had three distinct legends of the eaglehawk, one showing him at enmity with the crow, another typifying him as the playmate of the young white cockatoo, and a third in which he calmly annexed the honour of having brought fire to the natives, which had in reality been taken from the kweenda (bandicoot) by the kwidderuk and watta (sparrowhawk and pigeon). These legends show the important place the eaglehawk holds in the myth of the aborigines which credit him with forming the phratries, bringing fresh water, and obtaining fire.

The phratry borungur is obviously an outcome of the phratry name. "Of course, if we are Manitchmat we are Manitch borungur," the Southern natives say. The borungur system of the Southern phratries does not appear to have been developed with the names in the sense in which totemism is understood at the present day. There were no magical practices connected with them; no special tribe amongst them, nor individuals, held totemic ceremonies in honour of their phratry bird names. There was no singing for the increase of either bird since the white cockatoo was a general and supplementary article of food, and not a special food which might be allowed to some members and forbidden to others, and the crow was seldom eaten. In all the southern districts, if either Manitchmat or Wordungmat died, no special abstinence from the phratry borungur was observed.

These bird names then, may have been first applied (1) from colour, and (2) to form exogamous intermarrying groups, so that a group bearing one bird name could only marry into a group bearing the other bird name. It is evident from the legends that the two phratry names White Cockatoo and Crow, were not applied to the two primary groups by themselves, but were bestowed upon them by the eaglehawk - that is, from outside. No magic could be worked upon these names to injure the phratry or any member of it, since the names were familiar to all. Each phratry however appears even at the present day to have a certain fear of the magic of the other. If some Manitchmat are seated at a camp fire and one or more crows alight in their vicinity, they believe these are booyungur (strangers from a distant tribe) come to work some evil magic upon them, and the bulyaguttuk of the tribe will, on his own initiative, "blow" the magic away in the direction from which the crows came. In the same manner a Wordungmat will be careful not to mimic the cry of the manitch that flies shrieking over his head, feeling certain that should he do so, the manitch would resent the mockery by "putting bulya" into the offender.

The phratry borungur of the Southern people are but two; there are no magical ceremonies performed for their increase; they do not

represent a special article of food, and there is no particular regard shown to them, nor is there any "tabu" respecting them. The crow is not generally eaten, because its taste is not pleasing to the native palate, but a hungry native whether Manitchmat or Wordungmat will eat crow wherever and whenever he can get it. The phratry borungur follows, or is merely the outcome of the exogamic division of the two groups into Crow and White Cockatoo; it bears no other signification. The two birds are neither specially used nor specially forbidden as articles of food. The phratry borungur only means that the men of either group feel that there is a peculiar blood tie between them and the bird whose name they bear, and to whom they therefore apply the name "elder brother". Each man is proud of his group name and proclaims his phratry on all occasions, but interprets the blood tie to mean only that marriage between two members of the same phratry (and phratry borungur) must not take place.