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MURDERER'S SLIPPERS

(Jinna-arbil)

(Central Australia)

## JINNA-ARBIL

### Slippered Cannibals

Jinna-arbil is the term applied throughout Central Australia to cannibal raiders. Its literal meaning is jinna - foot; arbil - hidden, or covered, and every wearer of these slippers is a human meat hunter. There are two kinds of slippers made by the Central cannibals, the soft sole covering or "sandal" of the spinifex groups, and the netted "shoe" of the groups living in hilly or stony country. Emu feathers, or native cat, or feral cat fur are the only materials used. The spinifex natives take some emu feathers - one or two handful according to the size of their foot sole and these are teased and pulled to and fro with the teeth until they have become sufficiently intertwined to form a cohesive flat surface. Fur is similarly teased into the desired flatness. Blood may sometimes be used to unite the strands, to make them adhere more firmly. They are fastened on the sole of the foot until they feel firm in place. After use they are rolled up and carried as a chignon by their wearer. In the slippers used in stony and hilly areas the feathers are first teased, then netted through with hair or fur string, the string being first run to and fro through the teased feathers. Then some two or three rows of netting are made round the edge to form a sort of "upper" for the slipper. It is tied round the ankle and its wearer can travel safely with it over the rough stony areas, without fear of its falling off and disclosing his footprint. The hair of an eaten man woven into string is much prized by the Jinna-arbil for its supposed magic power to lead him to his victim and give strength and surety to his killing stroke. He may even wear a wristlet of the same hair on his spear or club arm, and thus have the strength of the dead man added to his own.

Every circumcised group in Australia was a cannibal group. From Kimberley to the Great Australian Bight the jinna-arbil have made life a constant terror through the ages. The term jinna-arbil is known throughout the greater part of inland Australia, from Oodnadatta to the Ashburton and Gascoyne areas of Western Australia, and from the Great Australian Bight to probably beyond

the Macdonnell Ranges.

The Bibbulmun of the Southwest, who were descendants of the first horde that reached Australia were an uncircumcised people and were not cannibal, but all along their northern and eastern border the circumcised cannibals were continually encroaching upon them, stealing their boys for initiation into the Central rites, but never giving a boy in exchange to the Bibbulmun. The border between the two groups was in constant unrest and terror. When I was investigating the Bibbulmun of the Esperance district in the early 1900's, Deebungul, the last of his group, told me the story of a cannibal raid made westward from Israelite Bay, when women and children were killed and eaten by the jinna-arbil raiders.

In the Eucla district jinna-arbil came down from Boundary Dam and other places north and nor'west, through the ages, leaving their dread records in the legends of the now extinct Eucla group, as their special "prey" was preferably young girls and boys.

At Meekatharra, Peak Hill and other areas in the Murchison and Gascoyne districts, specimens of cannibal slippers were given me during my research amongst these groups. Infant cannibalism was specially prevalent in those areas, sometimes attaining epidemic form, but there was no necessity for slipper wearing in these instances. As cannibalism automatically ceases on entry into civilisation, the jinna-arbil are of no further use to their owners once they enter the fringes of white settlement.

One evening in 1909, when I was camped some four or five miles northeast of Meekatharra township, where a large group of derelict natives had foregathered, not one of whom belonged to the district, the natives came in great fear. While hunting they had seen the tracks of jinna-arbil - just the pad of the slipper in the sand - "coming from the north" and though they relied on my presence and protection, as soon as they had eaten their hurried meal they banked their fires, cold and chilly though the night was. Not the slightest sound came from the camp, though many women and dogs were there. There were no children, every woman amongst them having eaten one or more of her own offspring.

My own fire was very bright and clear, for my evening meal, then and now, is my only undisturbed meal. I was preparing my tea and toast when in the twilight I saw some shadows moving amongst the trees. Every time I peered, the shadows vanished, but knowing that shadows have substance, and feeling sure they were human shadows I called out in the Murchison dialect, "Who is there? You must be cold, come near my fire," all spoken in a cheerful everyday manner, as I knew the camp occupants would hear and be comforted. Out from the shadows came a little group of seven or eight young men who walked in silence to the firelight.

"Sit down, I am going to eat. Where are your women? I will give you some flour, tea, sugar and jam."

A soft call "dhu" (the same sound also calls a man's dog) brought two poor scraggy women out of the gathering darkness. To these were given basin, flour and water, and soon a big damper was cooking in my hot ashes. Meantime the young men had shyly seated themselves round the fire.

"Where have you come from?"

"Other side Peak Hill." (Peak Hill was some ninety miles north of my camp.)

"Where are you going?"

"We heard about you and we came to see you."

"Good, you shall have plenty food to go back to Peak Hill and I am coming to see you all. Where are your jinna-arbil?"

"In a bush over there."

"Tomorrow bring them to me. Sit down quietly now and go to sleep. Here is a firestick from my fire."

They camped on the north side, the Meekatharra group being south of my tent.

The jinna-arbil were forthcoming next day. Now all these little mobs were semi-civilised and were well acquainted with the white man's law regarding murder, but these young men said, "Meekatharra jinna-arbil killed two of our brothers and we must kill them the same way."

Some few months ago a group of about thirty men, women and children came to my camp near Ooldea out of the great Aboriginal State which has been reserved for them by the South and Western Australian Governments and every member of this mob, except the two wee babies had eaten human flesh on their way to Ooldea Water. It is only men victims who are mentioned and so far, the mob has confessed to two men whom they killed and ate on their journey from Ming-ana Water within the Reserve, but women and children had also been eaten. One of the wee babies died shortly after its arrival.

This mob was, as usual, a jinna-arbil mob. As a matter of absolute fact there is not one man or woman who has come down from the area north of the line, who has not eaten human flesh. Every one of the natives now wandering along the East-West line was a cannibal before his or her entry into civilisation. Some were given a baby sister or brother to eat. One man had eaten three little sisters and one brother, given to him by his mother to make him strong.

Only one case of cannibalism occurred within civilisation to my personal knowledge. A mob of some twenty six had come to my camp in 1920. Amongst them were two heavily pregnant women, one of whom eluded my watchfulness and killed and cooked and ate her newborn baby a mile west of my camp, sharing the dreadful meal with her child of about three years. I had tracked her for twelve miles but she doubled on her tracks and had completed her horrible meal before I came upon her. The charred skull and a few other bones of the infant are now in the Adelaide Museum. This woman is now a hopeless prostitute along the East-West Line and the West Coast of South Australia, a woman of unusual strength and vitality.

As the various loosely joined mobs leave their waters and country to come into civilisation, their way is marked with fights and subsequent human feasts, both amongst themselves and any other mobs that may be prowling about those wild areas literally "seeking whom they may devour". The most recent mob left a very bad trail behind it. Besides the two men and the unnumbered women and children eaten, there had been many camp fights along the way,

almost every woman and several of the men having many spear wounds. Those of the older members of the mob who cannot keep up with the rest are abandoned and left to their fate. Wounded are also left. Following on the heels of the mob of thirty came two men who had been speared and left. These got better and followed up the tracks, but one of them returned north to the sections of the mob that had fought and separated on the journey, and a few weeks ago another mob, numbering some thirty or forty, with only one elderly man amongst them, arrived near Ooldea Water. The speared man is with this mob and I sent his brother to persuade them to turn back to a permanent water until the cooler season came. The new mob has give killed and eaten men to its credit. Each mob has its "tally" of human meat, and the tally increases, so that not only is cannibalism active in the Great Aboriginal State, but it is increasing. The killers annex the families of the men they killed and regardless of relationship, make "wives" of every woman in the mob. There is neither group (which is an aggregate of families) nor tribe (an aggregate of lawful groups) amongst these mobs. Their ever changing relationships consequent on their acquisition of the "wives" of their victims is so new amongst them that the children are continually having to alter their form of address. One little chap, still drinking from his mother's breast, has had to change his term of address from ngoonju (mother) to oondal (daughter). This group, like the groups that preceded it, disintegrated as soon as it came in contact with the derelicts already within civilisation, and the members of the mob are, some of them, as far west as Kalgoorlie, east towards Tarcoola and beyond, and south on the West Coast of South Australia.

The procedure of all these mobs coming out of the wilds is always the same. From the mob of thirty that recently arrived and are now so widely separated, two jinna-arbil detached themselves at some point, in this instance they left their relatives at Nabbari gabbi (water root mallee area) and walked and stalked their way warily until they reached the hills where the far-famed Ooldea water "sits down".

From the high sandy hill they could see the great condiri (plain - the name Nullarbor was given by Surveyor Delisser in '65 and is derived from two Latin words nullus -arbor = no trees) of legend which is inhabited by a huge magic snake that killed and ate every native who ventured on it.

Now the Trans-Australian train crossing that great condiri was so like the ganba (snake) of the ancient legend, that when the two men saw the monster and heard its whistle of anger and could see the angry smoky breath issuing from its nostrils, they turned and fled for their lives, and did not stop in their flight until they fell exhausted. They waited in fear of what was to follow, but nothing happening, they again ventured south. They had dropped one of their jinna-arbil in their flight. They reached Ooldea water and notwithstanding the timbered wells, the machinery and other strange objects, they drank of the famous "Yooldil gabbi", and one morning, I found three slippers wound round with hair string, lying in the fork of a sandalwood tree near my camp. Investigation showed that small smokes had been made under mulga bushes here and there. They had evidently seen me. I took the slippers and put some small green branches in their place, also placed small branches on the burnt patches (a sign of friendliness) and waited events, and one fine morning Mooja-mooja-na and Windu-windu, two men (the latter the younger of the two, but as I found later the dominant spirit of the mob, reckless and lawless and without the old restraining fear of magic punishment for evil-doing) arrived at my breakwind. The morning after their arrival, a boy and a girl appeared, and by and by the remainder of the mob - only six men, amongst the thirty had reached the outskirts of civilisation. All were clothed and fed on their arrival. Their last human meal had been eaten at Goonia-ngoona water, where there had been a fight and kill and the ensuing feast.

So recent were the killings, that the men had not apportioned the women amongst them and for a time promiscuity prevailed in camp. One young woman was claimed by two men for a time, and almost every day the children and women had to learn their new

to have as  
various waters, as the  
arrived. All the men having been  
what substantial grounds exist for their .

Time and again, I have tried to induce the  
to their own country, telling them I would go with them  
the flour and tea and sugar they get to love, and remain with  
them in their own country and by their own waters.

"We couldn't go back," they say, "the jinna arbil would  
kill and eat us."

"But you yourselves were jinna-arbil."

"That's why we won't go back. We know."