

III 3b

SOCIAL ORGANISATION OF SOME WEST AUSTRALIAN TRIBES

Paper read at meeting of Association for Advancement  
of Science.

No date given - printed report not here.

I have much pleasure in complying with the kindly request of your esteemed Vice President, the Rev. J. Mathew, for a Paper on the Aborigines of W.A. to be read at your next meeting.

I have chosen for my subject a glimpse into the Social Organisation of some of the Western Tribes.

My journeys in connection with the study of the aborigines have extended during the past twelve years through most of the coastal area between Esperance and King Sound and inland through the Eastern Goldfields, the Murchison and Gascoyne Rivers, the De Grey, Shaw, Sherlock and Yule Rivers, the Ninety Mile Beach, Broome, Beagle Bay and Disaster Bay.

In every tribe within these areas, with which I have come in contact, I have found a very definite social organisation existing, the types varying in certain areas.

With regard to this system, I may mention at the outset that every aborigine is "related" in some way or other, to every other aborigine, and this relationship has a far more extended range of terms than those applied to relatives by English speaking people. There are also certain kinship terms existing in the various native dialects for which we have no equivalents. Hence, in studying the social system of any tribe, one must put aside one's conception of European relationship terms and what they signify. For instance, the terms sister, brother, mother, father, besides being used in the blood relationship, also express a class connection. "Mother" is applied by a man not only to his own mother, but also to all her married or unmarried sisters, and not only those, but to every woman who is connected with her by class or group, as will be explained later. Similarly with the other terms - a man's father's brothers are called "father" and the children of all these are brothers and sisters. There is no native term corresponding to our word "cousin", for all the relationships coming under that comprehensive term have special names applied to them.

Every tribe in the West is divided into two or more exogamous groups, called phratries, if but two, and matrimonial classes where there are more than two.



I will begin with the simplest of these, the two Southern phratries, called Manitchmat or White Cockatoo stock, and Wordungmat or Crow stock. Whether these bird names are indicative of a light and dark blooded people, I must not say. I had suggested such a theory, based on the conclusions of the Rev. J. Mathew to the late Dr. Andrew Lang who was revising my MS. and that gentleman remarked that if the light and dark blood had intermarried for such untold generations the two bloods would now be as mixed as brandy and soda.

The marriage laws and laws of descent of the Southern phratries are as follows :

A Manitchmat marries B. Wordungmat; their offspring is  
A Manitchmat

B Wordungmat marries A. Manitchmat; their offspring is  
B Wordungmat.

It is thus seen that paternal descent prevails in the Southern area, and I found that when irregular marriages took place, that is, when a Wordung man married a Wordung woman, the children went into the phratry which they would have entered had their mother married straight - they entered the Manitchmat phratry, for a Wordung woman can only have Manitch children and vice versa. In the old days, a marriage of this kind - called yoonbula - meant the death of the offenders, but white settlement has existed in the South for over eighty years and now in almost all the camps visited I have found two and three generations of persons whose marriages were irregular, immunity from punishment being due to the early application of the white man's law which punished the native law keepers instead of the law breakers.

From beyond Esperance (my furthest point of inquiry) at varying distances inland along the Southern coast to (about) the Donnelly River (about lat.  $30^{\circ}10'S$ ) these phratries obtained without subdivision. Cross cousin marriages were forbidden, that is, first cousin marriages. A Manitch man married a Wordung woman and the children were Manitch; the Manitch man's sister married a Wordung man, and the offspring of own brother and sister could not marry, although they enter the intermarrying phratries, but the blood relationship of their parents prevented the union.



There is a special relationship term applied by these children to each other, a term which they do not apply to the children of tribal brothers and sisters.

Perhaps a few kinship terms will best illustrate the different relationships in the Southern area. A Manitchmat is speaking :-

Sister (Manitch)	jook
Brother "	ngoont
Father "	maan, mān
Father's sister (own) (Manitch)	man yog (tribal), mān woondung-guttuk
Father's brothers "	māngur
Mother (Wordung)	gaiung or ngank
Mother's sisters (Wordung)	gaiung or ngank
Mother's brothers "	konk
Father's sister's sons (Wordung)	(own) dem, demgur, (not own) kordmat
Mother's brother's sons "	(own) dem, demgur, (not own) kordmat.
Husband or wife	kord
Husband's <sup>or</sup> /wife's sister "	ngooljar yog (yog = woman)
Husband's or wife's brother "	ngooljar wuni

A man therefore must not marry true demgur.

There are also two general terms designating "blood relations" and "relations in law" respectively and which correlate to the phratries. These terms are "ngunning" and "ngoy-yung". If I am Manitchmat ngunning is my side of the house, my own blood relations, my ngunning-gur, while the Wordungmat are ngoyyung-gur, the stock into which I marry. All along a narrow strip of the Southern coast these two phratries obtain, with agnatic descent and male descent of the totem also.

The names of the tribes following this system are : the Minung, kaiali, kūrīn and kūrīn Bibbul. Marriage appears to be within the tribe but outside the phratry and totem.

Other names that the Southern people apply to themselves are : Waddarndi or Gēbungur, seacoast people; bīlgur, river people; booyungur, strangers or people "from beyond the hills";



Kalleepgur, home people, belonging to the same "road" or "fire".  
 (Waddarn = sea; geba = water; bīl = river; boya = stone, rock  
 hill; kal = fire, home, hearth.)

I must here give a brief outline of the totem system of  
 the Southern people.

Totems are hereditary descending from Manitch father to  
 Manitch son and from Wordung father to Wordung son. Totems  
 appear to be localised and to belong to one or other of the  
 phratries in the local group. For instance in the Ngāmalup  
 (Plantaganet) district the ngau or native pheasant was the totem  
 of the Manitchmat of the local group. At Ellen's Peak (Stirling  
 Range) the local Manitchmat had the swan (called mā'le) as their  
 totem. In a local group at Kin'gil'yil'ing (Albany district)  
 the dīdar (spearwood) was the totem of the Wordungmat, who  
 called themselves dīdar bōrungur or dīdarwuk (spearwood totem),  
 (Borongur, cobarri and wuk, are the three Southern equivalents  
 for what European scientists call "totem".)

In the Mungup (Plantaganet) local group the Wordungmat were  
 wej (emu), the Manitchmat in the same group being ngau borungur  
 (native pheasant totem). At Karrgainying in lat. 33°20' (about),  
 long. 118°10', there was a local group, the Wordungmat members  
 of which were jennuk borungur (jennuk = spirit of dead native),  
 or ghost totem. (The term jennuk and its northern equivalents  
 is now applied to white men.)

There are only nineteen spirit or "ghost" totem members now  
 living and eighteen of these are half caste.

Personal names in many instances <sup>are</sup> connected with the totem.

Ngau totem	Nguan	(n.)	Nguan = ngau's nest on bank of winding creek.
" "	Kēnian	"	Kēnia gunning = treading on a ngau.
" "	Warin	"	Wuri = a high ngau's nest
Swan totem	Jamborit	"	Jambar-jambar = swan flapping its wings.

Of the totems belonging to each phratry, the eaglehawk,  
 native pheasant, male and female kangaroos, swan, dog, "rock"  
 kangaroo and "tamar" were some of the hereditary totems of the  
 Manitch moiety, and spear, opossum, gum, iguana, emu and bandicoot  
 were totems of the Wordungmat moiety. All these totems were



strictly hereditary within the phratry to which they belonged, but two friends (kōbonggur or babbingur) of opposite phratries frequently exchanged totems with each other.

As will be seen, no marriages could take place within the totem, as the totem itself was within the phratry and local group. Nor for instance could a man of the māle (swan) totem marry a woman of the walitch (eaglehawk) totem, as both belonged to the Manitchmat phratry.

Edible totems were the food of those whose totems they were and this fact distinguishes the Western totems from those of the Eastern aborigines. On the death of a member of, say, the kangaroo totem (yongar borungur) his borungumat (fellow totemists) refrained from eating their totem for a season, but members of the other phratry within the same local group hunted and ate the kangaroo during the period of abstinence.

The word borungur means "elder brother".

No ceremonies were performed by the Southern people for the increase of their edible totems, all of which appeared to have been plentiful in the various districts. Should a kangaroo or other totem be found dead and no wound was visible, it was believed that a member of that totem would soon die.

The next division dealt with is that of the Southwest. From (about) Donnelly River, along a very narrow strip of the Western coast to (about) Jurien Bay (lat.  $30^{\circ}15'$ ) the two Southern phratries Manitchmat and Wordungmat still obtain, but the descent is changed to maternal and subdivisions of the phratries occur.

The marriage laws run thus :

	m.	f.	
A Manitchmat	=	B Wordungmat;	offspring B. Wordungmat
B Wordungmat	=	A Manitchmat	" A. Manitchmat

The principal subdivisions are :

Tondarup	} A Manitchmat	Ballarruk	} B Wordungmat
Didaruk		Ngagarnook	

These subdivisions do not interfere with the laws of marriage and descent. Of the phratries, Manitch man marries Wordung woman, and



the children are Wordung. Tondarup man may marry Ballarruk or Ngagarnook or both and his children are Ballarruk or Ngagarnook, as the case may be, so also with Didarruk.

These subdivisions extended inland into the Minung tribe where descent is paternal. An approximate line of demarcation between the S. and S.W. tribes whose descent thus varies, is drawn on the accompanying map. The series of hills and ranges running parallel with the coast appears to have been the "dividing line" between the two forms of descent. Nevertheless at many of their great ceremonies, Exchange and Barter, Initiation, etc., the tribes mingled and not infrequently infant betrothals, called "dajeluk" in the S.W., were entered into between members of two local groups, in one of which descent was maternal, while in the other group paternal descent prevailed.

The South Western kinship terms show the variations in phratry kinships consequent on female descent. A Manitchmat is speaking :-

Sister (Manitch - subdivision Tondarup),	jookan
Brother "	" ngoondern
Mother "	" ngang'ga
Mother's sisters	" "
Mother's brothers	" kong-gan
Father (Wordung, subdivision Ngagarnook),	mamman
Father's brothers	" mamman mata
Father's sisters	" mungart (own) mamman yogga (not own)
Father's sister's sons	" demangur, daelung-kootajung, deetagunji (own) kordamata (not own)
Mother's brother's sons	As above
Husband or wife (Wordung, Ngagarnook)	korda
Husband's or wife's sister	ngooljar yogga
" " " brother	ngooljar wuni

When a child is made dajeluk to a young man and she has not reached the age of puberty, the potential son-in-law provides her mother and father with food and presents of hair string, etc. but he must never look at or speak to his potential mother-in-law



after the dajeluk has been arranged. A special term - winnaijung (avoided, forbidden) - is applied to her from this time, and she always remains winnaijung to her son-in-law. As soon as the child has reached the age of puberty, she is handed over to the young man, without further ceremony and enters his local group. The young man continues to provide food etc. for her parents as long as he is in their vicinity. He may later on obtain another dajeluk from the girl's parents. A man may have more than one dajeluk from the same family and he may also have dajeluk given him in different districts. All dajeluk must however be of the proper intermarrying phratry. True demmangur (own "first cousins") could not be dajeluk to each other.

The terms ngunning-gur and ngoy-yung-gur were also in use amongst the Southwestern people, in the same kinship sense as obtained in the Southern tribes.

Daelung-kootajung - the term applied to the offspring of own mother's brother and own father's sister - is derived from dael = thigh, and koota = bag (or womb), "ung" = belonging to, meaning that the offspring, although belonging to the intermarrying phratries, are from the same demman (grandparents), "belonging to the same thigh and bag", hence marriage is forbidden between true demmangur.

Cross or first cousin marriages were however allowed when a "mother's brother" obtained a "father's sister" from a "far away" tribe, that is, from some distant local group with whom there was no close blood relationship.

The Southwestern totem system is much more varied than the Southern system, owing to the change of descent, but the same laws are attached to them in that marriage is forbidden within the totem, and the edible totems are eaten by their totemists.

The Southwestern borungur are phratry, hereditary and individual.

Some hereditary borungur appear to be localised in certain areas, as in the Southern tribes, but instead of the descent of



the totem being strictly male, there are some totems whose descent alternates with the classes, that is : the hereditary localised borungur of a Manitchmat father will descend to his Wordungmat son and from the son to his Manitchmat offspring.

There are other hereditary borungur which are confined to one matrimonial class only, Tondarup or Ngagarnook as the case may be. The S.W. genealogies contain both these types of borungur.

Individual borungur are given from some circumstance attendant at the child's birth, the child's name being taken from the action of the borungur when seen. One instance will suffice in illustration.

A child was born in a camp during the absence of one of the members. On his return he asked for some meat food. Dāj wā (meat where?) dāj eejil (meat on top of the tree) - the baby was called Eejil and the small animal which had been placed in the tree for the man's food, became the child's individual totem.

The South Western system possesses therefore two exogamous phratries, with subdivisions, female descent <sup>in phratry and</sup> and subdivisions, male descent in some localised totems, alternating descent in others. Individual totems not hereditary.



The difference in descent of phratry also made for difference of descent in the totem.

(Not all South Western men agree as to the law against cross cousin marriages, but those who differ are amongst the lawbreakers. All the older men and women who were familiar with their own laws stated that cross cousin marriages were forbidden, except when the mother's brother had obtained a far away father's sister by capture or raid, when a cross cousin marriage became lawful.

These phratries with their subdivisions I found obtaining as far east as about Meckering. Along the approximate border line separating the two forms of descent I found the families mixed, some having paternal and some maternal descent.

Marginal note : 2 phratries, 4 or more subdivisions, not affecting phratry organisation, female descent, descent of the totem. In the border land between those phratries the tribes intermarried the children going into their own groups.)

At Southern Cross I came upon a most remarkable system. The natives in that area and within a certain radius N., S., E., and W. had but two phratry bird names, Birungumat or Birungu and Juamat or Joouk, these names representing two species of kingfisher, the Birungu which nests in trees and the jua which tunnels its nest in sandy soil.

The curious marriage system obtaining here, which is borne out by the genealogies obtained is as follows :

A Birungumat m. marries A. Birungumat f.; offspring Juamat  
 B. Jooukm. marries B. Joouk f. " Birungumat

A man of one moiety marries a woman of the same moiety and their children belong to the other moiety. It is probable that this system is derived from the 4 class system of the neighbouring tribes. Unfortunately my time in this district was so limited that beyond obtaining the genealogies of all those with whom I came in contact in order to verify the peculiar system with their totem (bitangal) I could not stay to pursue this interesting subject, much as I desired to investigate. That it is of intense interest, the late Andrew Lang and several well-known European ethnologists have testified. The system makes certain Birungu



men and women brother and sisters and certain other Birungu men and women the intermarrying pairs.

Somewhere near this area the Eastern Goldfields Divisions come in, and the local tribes are also friendly with their Southwestern neighbours, some of whom were adopted into the group, and circumcised. The boundary of the inland circumcised area is somewhere between Southern Cross and Kellerberrin. (Have I got the Kurgordi or Southern Cross vocabularies?)



Place this later

Each tribe fitting in with the neighbouring tribe.

Although the Southern Cross tribe appears to have but these two divisions, yet in its classification of those members of neighbouring tribes who may be adopted into it, there seems to be a certain definite system obtaining, by which, say, a member of one of the Southwestern subdivisions is placed in one or other of these two divisions Birungumat and Juamat.

When I mentioned the S.W. and S. division into which I had been adopted and the Northern division/<sup>into</sup> which I have also been adopted, (I am Manitchmat in the South, Tondarup in the S.W. and Boorong throughout the whole of the Northern area.) I was placed in the Birungumat moiety, my children and my brother's children entering the Juamat moiety.