

X 1 d

Additional Notes on Burial

Various districts

Also : Premature Burial

Early Notes

Burial Customs, etc.

Perth district

The spirit is simply that of a dead person. They tie his thumb and forefinger, they take the nail off his thumb, they strap him round, and always go in the opposite direction to the supposed one the spirit has taken. They tie the corpse in a sitting posture. All burial customs have for their object the prevention of the return of the dead.

Alluding to Balbuk's death :-

Goordal-winjaga - that was the last of her (the heart has ceased to beat).

Beem-el-yerruk - You're not to stay where a yungar has been sick and has afterwards died.

Boma karrongin - beating the spirit off. (This in allusion to my dream about Monnop, when I thought I saw him at corner of Hay and Barrack Streets with Clarkson and other white men, and Monop hid behind Clarkson when he saw me.) I must get some green boughs and beat Monop on the head and shoulders to beat the spirit (of Balbuk) off.

Kajaman, Polly Gentle's name. (Polly is a Didarruk, Ballaruk father)
 The Southern natives when they speared a man and saw him fall, to ensure his being dead, they went up to him and tickled him. If he laughed they despatched him. They never thought of feeling his heart to see if he were dead. Sometimes the speared native will hold his breath and become impervious to tickling, and then his enemies depart and he at once rises and goes to his own country.

The coastal and plains people bury east and west, the body being laid on its back, the face turned towards the midday sun. The earth is thrown out in two heaps, one at the head and one at the feet. Boughs and logs are placed on the body which is finally covered with earth.

Usually 4 feet long, 3 deep, and 18 inches wide, north and south directions. The legs are folded so that the heels touch the back part of the thigh. They then cut off the beard of the dead man and his hair, singeing them smooth. Then they burn off the nail from the thumb and little finger, and tie finger and thumb together. The body was placed on its right side with the head to the South, and the face to the east.

The trees in the neighbourhood were marked with rings and notches.

Baabur's wife Nembuk died from Yoondern putting mulgar into her. He went up into the clouds like a walja and threw down a little kooreer, or piece of stone like a marble which went inside Nembuk while she was asleep. As soon as she woke, Baaba found she had gone cranky (katta wagyne) and her feet got burned and the soles came off. Those got better but then her throat got bad and she developed consumption. She was buried in her booka with her face towards Koorannup. They usually put the wanna at the feet of the woman, but Nembuk had no wanna. The father and mother, brothers and sisters performed all the ceremonies attached to the burial. They made a little fire at the foot of the grave, and then left the place.

Their personal property consisted of their weapons and implements. their bookas and their dogs. When they died, these were taken by the moorurt and either given away or sold to others. The meero (if the dead man possessed more than one) was put at the head of his grave, but if he had only one, it was sometimes taken by the moorurt and exchanged away.

The country they were born in belongs to all the families and not to one person only and until the last of the family is dead, the country is their possession. All the relatives hunt over it; until the last one dies, it is theirs. It is never given away to anyone for it is family property.

The brothers, father, sister or mother, brother-in-law or wife took the weapons of the dead man. These were not sold immediately, some little time elapsing before they were bartered away, about a meeka - one moon - before the Ngooljarmata usually took the first choice.

The Perth and Fremantle people burned the nails of the dead, the Beebulmun did not.

Mode of Burial

Monnop, informant

The body is placed on its side, facing the rising sun, a half circle is made of the earth that is thrown up from the grave which is oblong in shape, dug to a depth of about 4 feet and about 5 or 6 feet in length according to the size. A fire is made in the bottom of the grave and after the fire is put out, boughs are placed on the top of the fire and on these the body is placed, covered with its booka. Everything belonging to the dead man is buried with him. Meeros and dowuks are put standing in the mound and a hut is made outside the mound covering the grave. A fire is placed about two yards from the grave and is kept alive for two months by the wife or relations of the dead man. Usually a Tondarup will carry out the funeral arrangements, but a ngunning can also do this. Charcoal is used for mourning and is kept on the face for three months. Camp is shifted, the relations will never camp there again, or at least until the grass has grown over the grave. If the brothers have long hair

Monnop (continued)

they cut it off, mother and father and wife will cut and scratch themselves to make the blood flow down their bodies. Early in the morning, the women will cry aloud and in the evening the cries will also be raised. This will occur for a week or a fortnight. After two or three days, the woman goes to her husband's brother's camp and becomes his wife.

The thumb nail is burnt off as if it is not, the nail grows about a foot in length and the kanya can spear any man, woman or child until the nail is burnt off. They tie finger and thumb together to prevent its hurting anything.

Tuckanarra

Kooganmurra (north) away over the sea is the Tuckanarra name for heaven.

Bardain is also a name given by a Walkaway man for heaven which is over the sea, Weeloo - west.

Mindula

Ngooragocee, weelooga, name of dead country, Ngabbaru.

Buried with face on the ground, Mogga weeloo, Jinna koggara, Knees, boeroo, bent and hands placed close to knees, heap north and south, wanna placed at feet.

Annean

Mourning - a streak of wilgee is placed down centre of forehead and nose. The mother of the deceased greases her body all over, then covers the grease with wilgee. The father of the deceased shaves off his beard and smears charcoal on his face.

There is no particular combination of marks in any one tribe, a Murchison native and an Ashburton man had similar markings, viz. horizontal lines across chest, 4 across stomach above navel, 3 vertical marks on outside of biceps.

BURIAL

When a Gingin native dies, his relations at once set to work to clean and clear the place of burial, usually a soft sandy place. The hole is dug about 5 feet in depth and 2 or 3 feet in width. The length varies according to the height of the native. Those who do not take part in the clearing sit round the corpse crying and wailing and cutting and scratching themselves. "Woorongul wardong," is the Gingin announcement of death. The spirit of the dead man being supposed to linger about the grave, a few boughs are gathered and made into a small shelter or hut between the grave and the direction of the relatives' camp. A fire is also lighted near the shelter for the spirit to warm himself at. Food and water are also sometimes placed in or near the hut, day after day, for some time. The fire is renewed until all fear of the spirit returning to do harm has passed away.

Tommy Bardill's information, obtained at RottneestWilliams district

Williams natives bury body in a reclining position. Nails burnt off and finger and thumb tied. Head south, feet yabbaroo, eyes looking east, fire between body and east. Meero is put at back (west or kunneeung side). If a woman dies, her wanna is broken and put at her head and her goota is hung on a tree above head. Spear is broken in half and stuck at the head, the broken part leaning over the grave. Sand heap placed semicircularly westward of body. A piece of wood is horizontally placed on top of the grave. Sometimes the hair is cut and shown to relatives.

At Esperance the feet are towards the South, the head to the north, eyes looking to the sunrise, otherwise the Williams method is followed.

BaaburCUSTOMS CONCERNING DEATH

My mother's brothers avenge my death and when they have done it they don't tell my mother, but they bring bushes and lay them before mother and say, "Alle dadje janga ooba." (I have got my meat, my spirit game.) My mother will keep the bush in her koota, and after a little time if the "nyungar koort" speaks, that is, if the bush makes a noise, it is the man's heart that is speaking in it and trying to make mischief, and perhaps kill some more of her children. Then my mother takes the bush and hides it in the mud so that it won't come up again and never lets anyone see it and bury it where no nyungar can pass by it and see it, only the boylya man. The bush is still alive in the water and keeps alive as long as it holds together. My people must not drink the water while the bush is there.

MODES OF BURIAL

There are three methods of burying their dead, practised by the natives, in trees, in caves and in the earth. The tree method obtains in the Kimberley district, the earth method obtaining in the Nor'West and the southern districts. Occasionally a Nor'West tribe will be encountered who bury their "doctors" only in trees, but the tree method practically ceases on the plains south of the Kimberleys. Caves have been utilised as resting places for the dead in districts where these fissures and openings are to be found, notably in the neighbourhood of the Prince Regent and other rivers in the Kimberley district, but rarely below 19° S. Latitude.

Questions asked of Jubyché, and his answers.

131. Suppose a man had been killed in Jubyché's tribe, the murderer or one of his friends must be killed too. Who would be sent to kill them? Who would send them? and would they paint themselves? How would they do so?

Jubyché's father and uncles and brothers went after the murderer and when they came upon him, even if he were amongst his tribe, they speared him, his tribe not interfering.

P. 59

135. Did the natives ever take the fat from the people they killed, and rub themselves with it? P. 18

Jubyché's tribe never took the fat from the slain enemies; they killed and left them. Sometimes if they killed a "big man" they buried him, but burying their enemies was a personal matter.

P. 59

136. Can Jubyché remember anyone of his tribe being killed by magic? P. 19

Yes.

P. 59

152. Does Jubyché believe that the spirit of a dead man can visit his people? P. 19

"Kaanya", the spirit, when the man dies his spirit goes away to another country beyond the sea, a country where there is plenty of game for the men to hunt and julal (yams) for the women to find. The kaanya rests some time in the trees, and presently a bird's voice is heard and the parents or relatives of the deceased go and say to the bird, "What is it? Where are you, my son?" and the bird or spirit, as it really is, answers "I am going away."

P. 61

153. Where does Jubyché think his people who have died have gone? and where do their enemies go? P. 20

The dead all go over the sea to the same place, bad people and good, all must go the same way.

P. 61

154. Did they ever burn the bodies of their dead people? P. 20
They burned the bodies of their enemies, but still their spirits all go the same road. P. 61
155. Will Jubyche describe a burial? and the ceremonies? P. 20
No answer given here. (See account in later MSS.)
156. Have they any ceremonies in connection with birth or matrimony? P. 20
The girl, assisted by her mother, makes the hut and builds a fire and says to her chosen man, "There's your fire and hut," and he presently goes and occupies it. Then the girl will cook some food at her mother's camp and take it over and join him. There is not much ceremony connected with their marriages.
(This is out of place here; but similar account is found in Marriage Laws.)
157. Did they ever kill their very old relatives when they became unable to travel? P. 20
They have never killed their old relatives; these have lived their full years, tended and cared for by the men and women of their more immediate families. P. 61
158. What did Jubyche's tribe think when they first saw white men? What did his father say? and his mother? P. 20
They were very frightened at first, but when they saw the white men had the same number of hands and feet, etc. as they had, and that they differed from them in nothing except colour, and when they saw them eat kangaroo just as they themselves did, they gradually ceased to be frightened, and the taste of the white man's tea and flour put a final end to their fears. P. 62
159. Do they bury all the dead man's belongings with him?
The wommera must be buried with him, as his ghost would come and inquire about it. The spears may be taken by his brothers or friends. P. 62
160. Do the widows of the dead man carry any "relic" of their husband after his death, or of their children? P. 20
No, they bury their dead and leave them there. They swept and cleaned the graves as long as they came to the district. P. 62

161. What are Jubyche's beliefs concerning janga or ghosts? P. 20
 He believes the kaanya or spirit goes away over the sea to some country. Jubyche believes that his kaanya will join his father's and mother's kaanyas. P. 62

162. When a woman who has just given birth to an infant, dies, is the baby buried with her? P. 20

No. "Auntie" takes the baby. The live baby has never been buried with its dead mother ? P. 62

163. Did Jubyche's tribe have any special places for burial purposes?

No, there was no special place of burial. P. 62

164. Does Jubyche remember his father's burial? or his mother's? If so, describe both. P. 20

As soon as his father died, the women began to wail, and then the body was laid out nearly straight and the grave having been dug to the depth of about 4 feet, a fire was lighted in the bottom of the grave and the smoke and the flame were watched to see which way the boilya lived who has caused his death. After the fire went out, green boughs were placed at the bottom and the body was put on these, stretched almost straight, and then small boughs and sticks were placed across the body, completely covering it, and then sand was put over all. A little hut was made over the grave to keep the rain off. A fire was made a little distance from the grave, for the kaanya to warm itself at. A piece of opossum string was rolled round and placed on the middle of the body and as this untwirled at night, the next morning all went to see in which direction it pointed and also to see if there were any tracks about of boilyas. If the string had become unwound, and the straight piece was lengthy, then the offending tribe lived some distance away. If it unwound very short, it was a tribe close by that had killed the native; whichever direction the string pointed in, that direction lay the murderer. Sometimes the dying man will see the kaanya of his slayer in a dream and will mention his name. The opossum string and the fire will be still tried to make sure. The boilya (Nebulwur, a Tondarup) who killed Jubyche's father, was killed by a Beverley boilya man." P. 62-3

165. Was anyone died by evil magic of the boylyas in Jubyche's tribe? P. 20

See 164.

166. When a native became too old to accompany the tribe, what did they do with them? Did they leave someone in charge? Suppose he or she died while the rest were away, were those in charge told what to do? P. 20

Some of the tribe - his own friends, sister, etc. look after him or her until they die. If they died during the absence of the tribe, those who were left in charge were blamed for his death and a quarrel ensued. P. 63

167. Was there any difference in the manner and ceremony of burial of a man, woman or child? P. 20

No.

168. When a man, woman or child died, did they cease to mention their names? Why? P. 20

They never mention the name of the dead. If a boy or girl is a namesake, they are called Noor-rar or burnap. P. 63

169. How did Jubyche's tribe mourn for their dead? Did they paint themselves? P. 20

They wilgied and charcoaled themselves, and all the men of his family who had beards cut them off and cut their hair off. They did not shave, but burnt the hair off. Some Didarruks who were friends would mourn in a similar manner. Women put white chalk on their foreheads and scratched their noses and cheeks and foreheads and then got some wilgie or chalk and wet it in their hands and rubbed it over their foreheads and said, "Oh, come back again. We wish you were alive again," and other expressions of lamentation. P. 63

171. When Jubyche's people died, where did their spirits go? P. 21

Over the sea. P. 63

PREMATURE BURIAL

Among the Bibbulmun of the South West, ground burial was the only method of disposing of their dead, and as in all Australian tribes where ground burial was the rule, the grave is always dug immediately after the breath has left the body. When the near relative seated beside the dying person feels the heart and finds it has ceased to beat, no second test is made, the sign of death - a curious quick "tilt" of finger and thumb - is made, and the male relations at once hurry away to dig the grave and bury the body, often while it is still warm.

In this rapid disposal of the body, premature burial must occasionally have occurred, but as the mourners leave the vicinity the moment the grave is filled in, the man or woman who might be buried in a trance would scarcely survive for very long the awful horror of finding themselves in their grave.

Only one authentic instance of a woman having apparently died and come to life again was known to the now extinct Bibbulmun groups of the South West coastal area. Nebinyan, the last of the Two People Bay group and Munggal, the last Ravensthorpe district male, told me the story of Yoordingan their grandmother, who "died and came to life again." Yoordingan had evidently been a fine strong agile woman with more individuality than the average Bibbulmun female. She was the best swimmer and diver and tree climber amongst all the estuary and forest groups. She would climb the highest tree with the aid of her koj (native axe) a large chipped flint attached with blackboy gum to a stout short handle, chipping toe holds up the tree as she climbed and inserting her great toe in the notch she made, and always her catch of opossum or young eaglehawk she secured.

Women were not allowed to wear string belts - these were men's apparel - but Yoordinya had invented some sort of network of strings round and over shoulder and trunk in which to put the necks of wild fowl caught when diving in the estuary.

Whenever a flock had alighted Yoordinya had reached them and was pulling them under almost before they had settled down to feed, and she always returned with her body hidden by the

dangling wild duck.

One day after arriving in camp heavily laden with many estuary birds, Yoordinyan threw down her game and suddenly fell back and died.

There was great commotion in camp as some local ceremonies were being held at the time and friendly visitors from other groups were present. Yoordinyan's heart when felt gave no movement and the death sign being made, the male relatives hurried to dig the grave, the women following and gathering fresh branches to place within it. The grave was usually four or five feet deep, the branches covering two or three feet of the space within. The earth taken out of the hole was piled in a neat semicircle round the head of the grave.

Yoordinyan was wrapped in the kangaroo skin cloak and when she had been gently laid on her bed of fresh green leaves, with her face and eyes towards the sun, her body was covered with more branches until within a few inches of the surface.

No earth was thrown on the body, as the throwing of earth in each other's eyes was a usual custom in women's camp quarrels, a few logs were placed lengthwise over the branches to guard the body from dingoes and a spirit fire (called "beemb" in the South West) was lighted some few yards away from the grave and between the grave and the direction the mourning relatives would take when leaving the vicinity immediately after the burial. When Yoordinyan's soul or spirit emerged from its body it would see the fire and resting for a while beside it, would not follow or molest the mourners.

Yoordinyan awoke from her trance or faint, probably due to her great effort to make a great catch of wild duck, and feeling about her, realised with horror that she was in a grave. In a moment she had burst the strings that lightly tied her arms and thighs and was out of the grave. She saw the spirit fire and the tracks of her people and ran frantically along their tracks and away from the dreadful grave.

It was late evening when she came within sight of her people. Someone saw her and her "spirit" as they thought, and with a fearsome shout the group ran fast and fast with poor Yoordinyan running behind and calling aloud, "I am alive, I am alive," but still they ran on in the twilight. Yoordinyan sank down exhausted, but with the peep of dawn she was up again, and again running and calling to her people, and finally some of her older fathers stopped and tremblingly waited her coming. She still cried out to them, "I am alive, alive," and presently she was amongst her own dear alive people again. The old men felt her body and smelt her breath and said, "She is alive, she wasn't dead," and there was great rejoicing amongst them all, as Yoordinyan was a great economic asset to her group owing to her cleverness in always obtaining abundance of food for them.

Her father gave her a new name, "Goomulit" meaning "a successful food provider," and she was also credited with magic powers after her weird experience. She soon regained her vitality and lived and climbed and dived until she was a very old woman, but from the day when she sprang out of her kangaroo skin shroud, Yoordinyan never wore a bwokka (cloak) again, and when she really died she was laid naked in her bed of sweet smelling leaves.

239. Did Fanny have to go into mourning for Kyanga?
How long did the mourning last, and could she speak during
this period? P. 25

Fanny put pipeclay on her forehead and across her temples, cheeks and nose. Then she rubbed some pipeclay on her breast and made some balls of skin (wallaby or opossum) tied with string. These she attached to her hair and then her mourning was complete. She scratched her face on the forehead between the eyes, on the cheeks and on the nose. The mourning lasted a very short time. Fanny could speak during the period of mourning.

Page 101

When a white man dies and he has been well-known to the natives they refrain from mentioning his name in just the same way as they do that of the natives who have died.

The natives of the Southern district from York and Toodyay to the Vasse are buried with their faces to the East, lying on their side, the thumb and little finger are tied together, and the body is not stretched out to its fullest extent, but rather in a slightly curved position, the grave being round or slightly oval.

Jubyche says again that the Vasse natives are tied in a sitting posture and buried in that manner with their faces towards the sunrise. Jubyche will be buried after the manner of the Bunbury natives.

P. 112

Jammereek, the recipient and teller of the news of the death of a brother.

MANNER OF COMMUNICATING DEATHKOJONUP

In communicating a death to relatives, a messenger comes to the district and approaching the camp of the family to whom he is to give the message, he seats himself some distance away - some chaings - and remains seated there for some little time. He then rises, comes into the camp and going to the oldest man (a relative, an uncle perhaps), he clasps him round the waist but says no word. All in camp know who is dead from the relationship of the person clasped.

PREMATURE BURIAL

An instance of premature burial occurred in the Gascoyne district in the neighbourhood of Lander Creek, a tributary of the Gascoyne, Lat. 25°, Long. 117°. An elderly woman presumably died, and was buried by her people in a sitting posture, with her hands and arms resting on her knees, and her face turned upwards to the midday sun.

The hole was some four or five feet deep. The Gascoyne natives frequently disjoint the limbs after death, but in this case they did not do so. They simply placed the body in the grave, filled in the spaces with sand, and lighting a fire near by, returned to their camp. The woman recovered consciousness some hours after her burial, and, her limbs not having been tied, nor any logs of wood placed on her body, (owing probably to scarcity of wood or some other cause) she was able to make her way out of the grave, by scraping away or pushing up the sand from off her head and shoulders.

As soon as she rose from her temporary grave, she looked about for the camp, and when she saw it she started towards it. Her relations suddenly saw her running towards them, and believing her a spirit, one and all rose up and fled. The woman ran also until she became exhausted, but sinking down for only a moment's rest, she continued her chase, calling out to her relatives that she was not dead.

For a long time her cries were unavailing, but at length some of the older members were prevailed upon by her earnest cries to stop, and the woman soon joined them. She lived for many years after her premature burial, and until her "second death" she was considered to be possessed of great magic powers from her having returned to her people and lived with them instead of going away like all other spirits of dead natives.