

Ngargalula

Broome area

~~Broome~~

In the northern coastal districts, about the 90 Mile Beach, Broome, Beagle Bay, Disaster Bay, Sunday Island, babies are supposed to come from jimbin (underground Broome). Every baby is a ngargalula or spirit child, living underneath the ground and also under the sea; according to my informants "jimbin" is in all respects similar to the country above ground - it has springs, the sea, the land, animals, birds, fishes, etc., but it is ngargalula country only. No one but a ngargalula can come from the spirit country, but no ngargalula returns to Jimbin, for when it is born and grows, it ceases to be ngargalula and merges into the boy or girl as the case may be, and when the boy or girl dies, its spirit goes to Loomurn, a place beyond the sea to the west where all the dead coastal natives go.

The ngargalula that come in dreams to the seacoast men are lemmar nalma ("white haired") but they change their colour while the women are carrying them. If a man dreams of a ngargalula and his wife does not carry it he repudiates her, for the baby having come to him should have gone to his woman

4. Fin. Collected in 1901-2

who must carry it, and if therefore he thinks the baby ought to be born, and is not, then it must be because it did not like the woman and would not go to her. There is no definite time between the dream and the appearance of the real baby, but if a man has but one woman, and a, to him, lengthy time elapses and no baby comes, then it is the woman's fault.

Again, if the man has not dreamed that a ngargalula came to him and his woman gives birth to a baby, he does not believe that baby is his and his task is to find out to whom the ngargalula came, and when he has made the discovery, the man is either speared, or if of the proper marrying class, the woman may be passed on to him.

No woman can dream of a ngargalula. Her province is to carry and nurse the ngargalula, who remains a ngargalula, as the natives say, or who retains the "spirit state" until he begins to smile and talk, when the natives know that the ngargalula has merged into the boy, when it is "no more ngargalula." Yet when the "spirit baby" comes to the man, it speaks to him in his own dialect, and it usually cries and follows him home in his dream.

Again, the ngargalula can only come to the man who has a ranjee. What is a ranjee? a dream? Boogarree is the equivalent for a dream. A spirit? Soul? spirit "double"? Astral body? dream spirit? dream ancestor? Yamminga is the term for all ancestors. Ranjee may be any of these, for it is an intangible something possessed by a man, without which he will always be as unknown to the ngargalula as they will be to him. There are apparently three kinds of ranjee, 1st, that which a man possesses which renders it possible for him to dream of ngargalula, 2nd, ranjee or spirit of the lightning, 3rd, ranjee which haunt certain trees, rocks, etc., and watch over certain totems. The last is usually the spirit of some dead native who did not go to Loomurn, but returned to his own ground, and can be called upon to punish evil doers. Only jalngangooroo can see the two last ranjee; the ranjee which is inside a man cannot be seen.

There are men who are closely related to each other, some of whom have ranjee, and consequently children, others having no ranjee, and therefore no children. Only those who have fulfilled native laws appear to have ranjee.

Beejee, a Banaka belonging to Weerraginmarree (Willie Creek), north of Broome, married a Southern Didarruk woman and lived with her on the native Reserve near Canning, and one night he dreamed that he was asleep beside a waterhole in some part of his own district, and a ngargalula came to him, and soon after, the baby was born on the Reserve, but according to Beejee, its own ground was the rockhole where it came to him, and both the water and the rock were its totems. There was no difficulty about the ngargalula coming south, for ngargalula have power while ngargalula only, to go anywhere, and a man may be 200 miles away from his wife and dream of a ngargalula, and if he does not return to his wife for years, and he finds her with a baby on his return, he takes that baby as his own.

If two ngargalula, a boy and a girl, come to a man in his dreams, one of these only will go into his woman, the boy usually, and some time afterwards, the girl will come to see her mother and will probably go into another wife of the same man. A "nephew" of Beejee also married, but not having been initiated, he had no ranjee and therefore had no children. He had also married a Southern woman.

Ngargalula can only be said to be ancestral spirits in the sense of having been put jimbin by Yamminga (ancestors). Yamminga put the ngargalula into the ground along the coast, into the caves and rocks, and also into the country beneath the sea where there is bush, and ground and game. The spirits of dead children or adults linger for a period round the spot where they died, but eventually they go to Loomurn, all except those who return as ranjee and haunt certain districts. The ngargalula cannot therefore be the re-incarnation of dead people, and in this respect they differ materially from the Arunta spirit individuals in Messrs, Spencer and Gillen's work.

It has frequently happened that a ngargalula has followed a man who is not its "Class" father, but belongs to the class of his wife's brother's family, or some other class. For instance, a Paljeri man lay down in the shade and slept and was visited in his dreams by a ngargalula. He said, "Who is your father?" "Kaimera," said the ngargalula. "I am Boorong," The ngargalula however followed the man to his camp and went into his wife and when it was born it went into the Banaka Class, its father being a Paljeri and its mother a Kaimera.

When the baby (a boy) had reached the balgai stage (the 3rd stage in initiation, the two previous being nimmamoo and nimmanimma, nose piercing and tooth extraction) the Paljeri father met his brother-in-law who came to attend the balgai ceremony, and said to the Kaimera man, "That is your boy, I stole him when he was a ngargalula. He followed me home," The Kaimera man from that time took a special interest in the boy, and the boy having been told the circumstance of his change of class, was particularly attentive in the matter of presents to his Kaimera uncle (mother's brother), the uncle's children (Boorong) being tchallal, whom he could not marry.

The ngargalula knows its booroo (ground, country) when it is ngargalula, when it becomes a baby it knows nothing. As the boy or girl grows up, the father will tell them where their own booroo is, or perhaps the children will dream where their own booroo and own totems are.

Totems and ngargalula come from jimbin. The ngargalula either shows its totem to its father, or he will see the totem near the ngargalula in his dream. When the death of a native occurs, his totems die too. A Broome Kaimera had the pajjalburra (porpoise) as his ngargalula totem, his father having seen the pajjalburra with the ngargalula, and just before he died, several pajjalburra were found dead on the beach, and the man knew that he would soon die. These dead pajjalburra went with his spirit to Loomurn, they did not go jimbin.

When a seed totem man died, that year's seed harvest went away with him, and if no one else had that particular seed as their totem, it ceased to flourish, since there was no one to dream its increase. (Seed totems are dreamed, flesh and fish totems sung.) If a ngargalula had a certain totem, bird or animal or seed, that only appeared at certain seasons, the totem was then supposed to go jimbin and return again in its season.

The ngargalula always know the class of the man they follow, and when asked, "Yanga babba jooa?" (Whose son are you?) will reply, "Ngai Kaimera, jooa ngabboo," (I am Kaimera, you are my younger father), or he may say, "Ngai Paljeri jooa kogga," (I am Paljeri, you are kogga). When he follows the man home he goes into the proper class.

The ngargalula are special friends of the koolibal (turtle) and are often seen playing with them on the beach. The turtles were once womba (men - all birds, fish and animals were human beings in yammainga time) and are amongst the totems (jalnga) of the natives, but a koolibal jalnga womba (turtle totem man) does not believe that he was once a koolibal, as his totem came to him through the dream of his father who saw the ngargalula playing with the koolibal. (There is a certain dance in which the male and female turtle are represented.)

Innimburarraga = the totem dying before or with the man.

It is only the totem that is seen near or with the ngargalula that is his personal totem and that dies with him. These totems are called ngargalula jalnga and belong exclusively to the child only and neither to its father or mother.

The inland ngargalula are nimberr nalma (black haired)

The coastal babies are lammar nalma (white haired) and after the first few days are continuously rubbed with reerrga (powdered charcoal), and fat.

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Jilling-jilling is the Broome name for the spirit of a dead baby which goes inside its mother and bites and tears her until either the jalngangooroo (<sup>father</sup> medicine man) takes it out or the mother dies.

Weerra ngeeringa nilerr - no good, showing sharp teeth, is what is said when the spirit of the baby is seen. <sup>she has come back</sup> Its spirit shows it thin to attenuation, having claw-like fingers, and exceedingly sharp teeth. Its desire is to make its mother jooarree (dead) like itself.

A Boorong man from the De Grey district lived at Beverley for some years, and his jandoo (woman) was away from him. This man had a ranjee because one night he dreamed he saw a little ngargalula beside him, Next morning when he woke, a little bird alighted near him and talked to him. He said to the bird, which was the spirit or bilyoor of the ngargalula, "Tho'a meejala beebee ngan jeea!" (Shoo, go and stay with your mother!) and the bird flew away and his jandoo carried the ngargalula. These little bird spirits are called jeera-jeera to distinguish them from the ordinary birds, beerajoon.

The ngargalula booroo is dream country and jimbin (underground), the <sup>heavenly spirit</sup> ranjee booroo is real country ~~and kalbeo~~ (above ground). You avoid the ranjee booroo because it is forbidden ground, but you walk over the ngargalula booroo.

The ngargalula of Sunday Island are, according to W.H. Bird, supposed to have their home in two small islands called the Twins, which lie between Swan Point and the Island. There is a cavernous blowhole on one of these islands in which the ngargalula play and sing amongst themselves. These fairies, Mr. Bird states, constitute the pre-natal form of existence, and all babies owe their existence to the ngargalula.

*see last portion (vii)*

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