Contributions to the Ethnography of the Australians

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Mutilations and other customs of Australian natives; their dwellings, utensils, and daily life

The Anthropological Society of Vienna has, in earlier issues, included some of my contributions, in which I have provided information about the natives of Australia, and which deal with sociology, language, initiation ceremonies and vendettas.

In this article at hand I will provide a short outline of some particular mutilations, as well as other customs, including piercing of the nasal septum; extraction of teeth; amputation of fingers; *mumbirbirri* or scarification design; and dried hands as amulets. Further, I will deal with canoes and rafts, then give an account of dwellings, weapons, utensils, clothing, games, fire-making and other customs of daily life.

All information contained in the following pages is the result of my own observations and visits to natives of various districts. Where I refer to work of other authors the location is indicated from where the relevant statement is taken. The geographic spread of the individual custom disclosed is in every case fixed.

The work at hand is intended to deliver, together with my earlier contributions, an introduction to the customs of the natives of Australia, and I hope to have rendered a service to German ethnographers and to those who live in colonies where similar races exist.

The mutilations connected with circumcision and the splitting of the urethra for men and the widening of the orficium vaginae for women, which is practised in some parts of Australia I have already described in other works and I will therefore not repeat myself here.[1]

Piercing of the nasal septum

This custom is spread very widely, and is practised in various parts of Australia. Among the native tribes of the southeast coast of New South Wales this act occurred after the initiation of a young man, during the colder months. It is generally done with a sharp pointed bone or a piece of hard wood. During ceremonial occasions a wing bone of *uroaetus audax* [wedge tailed eagle] is carried in the hole and forms part of the gala decorations.

Of course, injuring such a sensitive organ as the nose causes considerable swelling, so that the patient has to breathe mainly through the mouth. In some cases the swelling is so great that the skin stretches so far that the cartilage of the septum breaks through at the bottom side and the inserted pin is pushed out. In my youth I saw old blacks whose nasal septum showed clear signs of such a rupture.

A thin piece of wood, bone, a feather, a grass stalk or the like is put into the freshly made wound and turned at intervals over and over again—a painful operation. The hole was widened bit by bit, until it was wide enough to take in a peg of proper size, which then had to be carried constantly for ceremonial occasions or when a person was not working.

In all the regions of Australia I have had the opportunity to visit, the piercing of the nasal cartilage was customary for men and women. Looking through various works about the natives I find that nearly all observers report seeing natives who carried some ornament in the nose. It is practised in the whole of New South Wales and Victoria, also in Queensland, South Australia and in the Northern Territory. In regard to Western Australia I have asked some of my friends who reside there to inquire into this matter, and they now report that most of the tribes practise nasal piercing, although some tribes in the southern part of this state are said to have intact noses.

As already mentioned with some tribes of New South Wales, a youth cannot have his nose pierced before undergoing his initiation ceremony; but there are other areas in Australia where the operation is performed on very young boys and girls and apparently is not accompanied by any further ceremony.

Extraction of teeth

In an article published in this journal[2] I described the Mŭltyerra ceremony. In it I gave precise details of the procedure whereby a tooth is extracted by the natives. This custom prevails in the greater part of Australia without, however, being universal. Sometimes it is the right upper incisor which is extracted, sometimes the left one, and in other cases both middle incisors are removed. Then there are areas where the women, too, are operated upon, while elsewhere the custom is restricted to men. In the eastern part of the continent the operation

was usually connected with initiation ceremonies, which was not necessarily the case in the central and western regions, even though the operation is usually accompanied by some ritual.

The most southern part of the Australian mainland where incisors were extracted was the central and northern parts of the state of Victoria. I dealt with this extensively in my report on 'The Wonggumuk Ceremony of Initiation'.[3] In New South Wales we find the custom in various places, in the interior and along the coast; examples are contained in my description of 'The Bŭnān Ceremony of New South Wales'.[4]

In 1900 I mentioned the extraction of an incisor in my description of the *Toara* or *Dora* ceremony, which can be encountered along the Mary, Dawson and other rivers in southern Queensland.[5] After enquiries I made to individuals residing at various places it seems that, as is mentioned above, the extraction of teeth on the Australian continent is a common, but not a general, phenomenon.

Amputation of phalanges

Another curious mutilation occurs which is not practised universally, but it is widely spread over the Australian continent. The following short report will show the occurrence of the custom in parts of New South Wales, Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia. It was mainly in vogue amongst women near the coast, but its appearance was observed amongst individual inland tribes. As far as I am informed it was usually the little finger that was amputated, but occasionally one of the other fingers instead. Then we will see that in most cases where such mutilations have been reported they are solely restricted to women, but in some parts of Australia the loss of a phalanx is also claimed by men.

Amongst the Thurrawal speaking tribes, from Port Hacking down to the Shoalhaven River, there are certain women who are missing two phalanges, though sometimes only one, of the little finger of one hand. Mostly it was the right hand, but it also occurred that the little finger of the left hand was mutilated in this way. Out in the scrub there are large spiders that spin a strong thread from tree to tree or from bush to bush. Some of these spider's threads were collected by a native and put together as a fine string, which was wound as tight as the twine permitted around the finger at the phalanx, the amputation of which was intended. Thus the circulation of blood was stopped and the distal end of the finger died off. The wound then healed very quickly.

According to my own observations, I can state that this custom existed everywhere along the coast of New South Wales from Tuross River to the Manning. During my official travels in this region as surveyor, and also during special excursions amongst the natives, I undertook examinations into the causes of these mutilations. Insofar as I could inform myself about them from old natives,

they carried the character of magic with them, because a woman who was mutilated in this way was supposed to have more skilfulness and success catching fish than other women who were not. The amputation was carried out on very young girls in the described manner to appoint them as fishers with rod and line. It also served to distinguish the respective woman from others who had different occupations.

E. M. Curr says that in Queensland, from Brisbane to Gympie, '[m]others used to bind round at the second joint, the little finger of the left hand of their daughters when about 10 years old, with coarse spider's webs so as to stop circulation and cause the two joints to drop off.'[6] The same author reports that between the Albert and Tweed rivers the girls during childhood have the small finger of the left hand cut off.[7] He also says that at Halifax Bay the women have a phalanx of the right thumb amputated.[8] Where Curr talks about the natives of Fraser Island, from the mouth of Mary River up, he says: 'Women have the first phalanx of the little finger of the right hand amputated during their youth.'[9]

The late Edward Palmer told me that he noticed the loss of a finger with blacks around Tower Hill and the surrounding area, between Maghenden and Muttaburra. He had observed the same mutilation with tribes at Mitchell River on the Cape York Peninsula, but he was unable to remember which finger was missing there.

In the Northern Territory Reverend Donald MacKillop observed this custom at Daly River. Talking about the women he said: 'When young girls they remove the two first joints of the right forefinger. The operation is most artistically performed, judging by results. Yet they use no knife or, as when circumcising, sharp stone. They find in the jungles a very strong cobweb, and with a thin skein of this they tie tightly round the joint. The circulation is, of course, stopped, and after a time the dead joints fall off. This custom is far from universal.'[10]

From Beagle Bay in Western Australia Captain J. L. Stokes reports on the appearance of the natives: 'All of them had lost one of the front teeth, and several one finger joint; in this particular they differed from the natives seen in Roebuck Bay, amongst whom the practice of this mutilation did not prevail.'[11]

Mumbirbirri or scar drawing

Raised scars as a consequence of incisions into the flesh on the shoulders, breast and arms is a custom widely spread amongst the natives of Australia. The effect of the scarification is so conspicuous and noticeable on the nude body of the savage, that nearly every author who met Australian natives observed the scars, but their meaning has not been secured and remains unknown.

I was lucky to be the first to discover the interesting details of this custom and reported them in a paper presented to the Royal Society of New South Wales on 5 October 1904. I have reprinted this article together with a number of others in the form of a book titled *Ethnological Notes on the Aboriginal Tribes of New South Wales and Victoria*. I can therefore refer my readers here to this work, where a short report of the *Mumbirbirri* ceremony can be found.[12]

Dried hands as amulets

A universally practised custom amongst the natives of New South Wales and Victoria was also to carry the dried hand of a deceased person around, in some cases of a friend or relative, in other cases of an enemy. Indeed, all Australian tribes I have met have an unshakable believe in the helpful influence of some part of a human corpse in everyday life as well as during hunting undertakings or raids on their enemies. First the results of my own observations are recounted, followed by reports of early colonists, which go back to the 1860s and 70s.

Some old men of the Darkiñung and Thurrawal tribes in New South Wales have told me that their forefathers used to have the firm belief that the wearing of dried or preserved hands was an effective protection against their enemies. Such an amulet was carried in a small bag, which was tied over one shoulder and hung under the armpit of the other. Sometimes a dried hand was tied to the neck with a string and hung down to the chest. Another dried hand could also be attached to the neck band and hung on the back of the wearer between the shoulder blades.

When an evil-minded individual or a hostile gang of several people came to inconvenience the wearer of this amulet, he assumed he was scratched by the preserved hand, or had the skin made mangy, on the side of the body from which the enemy had come. For example, if a man thus equipped was scratched by the dried hand which he wore on his chest, then he knew that an enemy was somewhere in front of him. If the hand hung between the shoulder blades pinched the wearer, then the enemy was somewhere at the rear. Then, if the amulet he carried under the armpit showed signs of agitation, an adversary was nearing from this direction, and so forth. A sudden twitching of the muscles or an irritation of the skin, the blacks would understand to have been brought about by the preserved hand, and it gives them a warning towards that side. If a man wears only one such appendage it is believed that it has the power to give him the signal, from whichever side of the body danger might come, without him being aware that it has moved from its usual place as its movements are regarded as invisible.

These dried hands in the same way have the power to give warnings about harmful magic of a hostile wizard, whether he is located far or near, and enable the wearer of the amulet to fend off the intended misdeed. When the wizard

performing the magic is near, the hand is clearer in its warning than when he is far away. The proximity of game and its direction are also indicated in the same way.

It is not absolutely necessary that the amulet consist of a hand; parts of a foot or a hand, parts of flesh from arms and legs or the back are regarded as a very effective protective magic in different ways, as is reported below.

Searching for usable grazing land in Gippsland, Victoria, A. MacMillan suddenly came upon an old black, who was not to be got rid off. 'The only ornaments he wore were three hands of men and women, beautifully dried and preserved.'[13]

W. J. Mollison from Pyalong, Victoria, learned that '[t]here are traditions of portions of the body, usually hands or fingers, being observed in the lubras' bags … Certainly, in conversation, they admitted the fact'.[14]

Hugh Jamieson[15] from Mildura, Victoria, said under a report dated 10 October 1853, but concerning much earlier experiences amongst the natives: 'On some occasions, in accordance with superstitious rite, they carry about with them the legs, arms, and pieces of the skin of their victim, not for the purpose of eating these, but with the view of distribution as charms for fishing operations.'

Dr J. Fraser from Maitland said in his report about the murder of some white shepherds many years before at the upper Williams River, New South Wales: 'One old gin [woman] carried about with her in her shoulder-net a hand of one of these shepherds; she would bring it out at times, and pulling the sinews make the fingers move, and say ''Bail (no) you make doughboy any more''. For this murder one of the blacks was afterwards hanged at Dungog.'[16]

Canoes

When bark of the red gum tree is available it is always used for canoe making because it withstands the weather without rolling or splitting. A canoe is mostly made from one single sheet of bark. When trees are available with a natural bend these are chosen, because canoes thus attained do not require so much work to give them the peculiar shape. When the bark is peeled from the tree, spreaders are at once inserted at intervals of a few feet to avoid rolling in, for as long as sap is still in the bark. Short props are also stuck under the bow and stern so that they might not drop too much under their own weight.

Then the vessel is left to dry for about 14 days, and when it has dried properly it keeps its shape. After a duration of two or three years such a canoe becomes heavy and macerated and accordingly inflexible; then it is necessary to replace it with a new one. The tree from which the bark is taken is chosen according to the size one wants to give the canoe.

The pole or oar that drives the canoe is about 10 or 12 feet long and two or three inches wide. At the other end three sharp tines are attached, two of which have barbs. With one side of this instrument the native drives his boat through the water; with the other he spears a fish coming his way. The oar is made out of pine wood if such is attainable, or from other light timber.

Sometimes a lump of clay is put on the bottom of the canoe to serve as a stove on which a small fire is kept; it serves the double purpose of keeping the native warm and of cooking some of the fish caught. The canoe is, for the natives who live in the vicinity of rivers or great deep expanses of water, a highly prized possession.

Although trees with a natural bulge are preferred, they are not always available, as mentioned above. Stringybark and the bark of the tree known by the name of 'grey box' are often used. When the bark is stripped from the tree some of the outer, rougher layer is split off at the end for a width of about a foot, so that only the flexible inner bark remains. The thus thinned out endings of the bark piece are then folded lengthwise and wrapped with a strong string, which is made out of the fibres of kurrajong or stringybark. Firm ropes made from this tough stringy bark or from thin tendrils are then tied at two or three locations from one side to the other across the vessel to prevent expansion sideways. Spreaders of the same number are attached at the inside of the canoe to serve as ribs and secure the sides of the boat from falling inwards. The folding of the bark does not only hold it straight, but causes it to bend upwards, so that when the binding is finished and the vessel is launched, the ends are a little higher than the sides of the canoe and jut above the water line.

In New South Wales, Victoria, southeastern Queensland and South Australia, and in parts of the Northern Territory, one piece of bark is used to make a canoe. In certain parts of the north the natives use two, three or more pieces of bark, and it is notable that such craft are made more skillfully than those usual in the south, a fact from which one might surmise foreign influence, such as Malays and Papuans, in relatively recent times. In my opinion the canoe made out of one piece of bark is a pure Australian development, as I was unable to detect its occurrence in any other region. The thick, smooth trunks of the eucalypt trees in Australia might easily have suggested to the mind of the natives the use of the bark for huts and canoes. Owing to the warmth of the climate the saps are, during a large part of the year, in ascending and descending circulation, so the stripping and removal of the bark from the trunk becomes a simple and easy task, even with so rough a tool as the stone axe.

Rafts

Along most of the bigger rivers of Australia as well as in the bays of the sea coast the use of rafts was known to the natives. On the Shoalhaven River on the

southeast coast of New South Wales the trunk of the cabbage tree palm, a light and strong wood, was used for building rafts. Usually two, sometimes three, dried beams of this wood 15 to 20 feet in length, selected straight, symmetrical and of the same size, were tied together with ropes from stringybark fibres or with tough vines and thus had the ability to carry two or three people over rivers, small bays, and the like. The raft was moved by a paddle or rod, which the boatman, standing on the vessel, plunged into the water on both sides. In shallow waters he drove his raft forward by setting the rod against the bottom of the river.

Occasionally I have seen young boys using one dry plank on which they were sitting with sprawled out legs, feet in the water, and paddling with their hands or a piece of bark. On the Lachlan River, New South Wales, where big reeds grow amass, these were dried and used for building rafts. Bundles of these reeds were tied together with cords, and then three, four or more such reed bundles were treated like the above-mentioned planks by attaching them together with stronger ropes. From weeds or green grass covered with moist soil a place was prepared on which a small fire could be kept. Moving forward was done as with the wooden raft.

The rafts of the natives are frequently in their general principle of construction the same in all parts of Australia and Tasmania where they were observed and described, and likewise the mode of moving forward. The use of rafts is known amongst various primitive peoples across the whole world, and many of these rafts do not differ significantly from those of the Australians.

Although the canoe is used for the same purposes as the raft, the latter has the advantage that it is not so exposed to damage during an accident. To hit a sharp rock or a simple obstacle may damage a plank or bundle, without seriously impeding the raft's ability to float. With a canoe such an accident can, however, cause damage, which cannot be repaired and can even lead to its sinking. Perhaps this is the reason why rafts are so widely in use.

The catamaran and dug-out used by the natives of the Cape York Peninsula, Port Darwin and other northern parts of Australia are not mentioned here, as I do not regard them of pure Australian origin, but as Malayan and Papuan imports. I refer in this regard to works about the Malayan Archipelago and New Guinea.

Camps and dwellings

Their huts are of the roughest kind, rarely more than windbreaks or shelters. First a frame of sticks was put up, to which twigs, reeds or grass were fixed angularly. During wet weather this rough building was covered with bark, if it could be easily obtained from trees at the respective place. Bark can of course only be stripped during the season when the saps are in circulation. A part of

one side, or a whole side of the roof, was left free as an entrance, which was always situated on the opposite side from where the wind came. In front of the entrance a fire was kept.

Their dwellings were rarely lived in for more than a few days, as the stay depended on the fecundity of the location. When camping at a river or lagoon, or at an estuary where fish were plentifully available, or during a season when affluence of vegetable food abounded, they stayed longer than when sustenance was sparse.

Along the Hawkesbury, Shoalhaven and some other big rivers, the shores of which consisted of Hawkesbury sandstone, the natives often dwelt in caves or under rock eaves, where they found easy and comfortable accommodation.

As soon as that offered by nature as food was depleted, they were forced to move to a new camping place. Or when a death occurred in one part of the camp everybody had to leave and hurry to another location. During these travels from camp to camp the men usually take a detour or an irregular course, travelling in individual sections,[17] to reach the envisaged camping place by different routes. It would not be advantageous for hunting game or finding any other food if they all travelled together. The women were led in as direct a march as possible, as they were burdened with the children and the luggage.

The location of the huts or roofs in the camp is regulated by certain laws. When a camp is chosen at the shores of a waterhole or river, the older people begin taking up land for their dwellings at the water, while the others put up camp a bit further back. The entrances to the dwellings are situated to the north or northeast, so as to admit the rays of the morning sun, unless the wind comes from that direction. If there is a meeting of the community for a corroboree, or for an initiation ceremony, the local people set up camp first, and the visiting tribes take that side of the general camp for themselves which lies in the direction in which their home is situated. As far as the condition of the ground allows, they take exactly the same position to each other as in their own land, in a kind of miniature depiction of the home camps.

When the men are not searching for meat, which naturally occupies the greater part of their time and thoughts, their main occupation is the production of weapons and utensils or the preparation of skins for sheltering against the weather. The women have the task of searching for plant food, collecting wood for the fire, and creating nets, bags and the like.

Boomerangs, clubs, containers, bags, and so on, are left somewhere on the ground around the dwellings of the owner, but spears are either leaned against a nearby tree or stuck vertically into the soft ground to avoid the danger of injury to the shaft or spearhead.

Stretching or bending of wood is often necessary for the making of weapons or utensils. Green wood is put into hot ash to make it bendable. Rubbing with fat or exposure to fire has the same effect on dry wood. Softening in water is also used to bend wooden things into shape.

Body painting

The beautification recipes of the natives consist of ochre, pipe-clay, charcoal and fat; the latter constitutes the base of all artful lines and scribbles with which they decorate their person. As a protection against the cold in winter and against the bites of mosquitoes, ants and other insects in summer, the fat proves to be very useful. Its application during very hot weather also provides relief. The pipe clay is made from plaster [gypsum] which is burned in the fire and then mixed with enough water to form a tough thin paste.

During the preparations for a corroboree one of the very important moments in the process of the ceremony is the 'arranging' or 'making up'. The men adorn face, body and limbs with lines and fantastical drawings in white and red. This requires some hours of patient work and great care and effort are spent on the details. The men carry a feather quill or a piece of grass or bone in the nasal septum and their heads are decorated in a tremendous and wonderful way.

Corroborees

These national dances are performed on ceremonial and festive occasions. The night was always the time chosen for these entertainments, and the light for it was given by the moon or the campfire or both. During these friendly meetings one party from every tribe takes turns performing a nightly corroboree, while the other tribes form the audience. Mixing of members of different tribes amongst the performers was never admissible.

The women represented the orchestra beating with their flat hand onto a folded skin-blanket. An old man conducted the music by performing songs peculiar to this performance and clapping two short dry sticks or boomerangs. Occasionally the songs were indecent and the performance obscene.

The corroboree was always held on a level spot of earth, free of trees and bushes, after all loose sticks, stones and the like had been diligently removed. The different tribes present took their seats around this cleaned place, each on the side turned towards its territory.

Games and entertainment

Amongst the amusements of the men, wrestling always takes a pre-eminent place and is also practised during ceremonial meetings. According to native legends this game was common among the mythic ancestors. Another game is performed with a ball consisting of pieces of wallaby or possum skin, tightly rolled and

sewn together with sinews. Before the game starts two or three parties are formed, each of which consists of those men and women who belong to a particular range of companions. The ball is thrown in the air and the aim of the game is to keep it continuously moving without touching the ground. When somebody catches the ball he throws it to one of his party, while the opposing team tries to catch it in mid-flight. The game continues until the people are tired or become too hot.

Wity wity throwing is another game. The wity wity is made from an oblong piece of wood, five or six inches long and one inch thick in the middle, petering out towards both ends into a point. A thin, tough rod about 20 or 30 inches long was fixed to one end with string or gum. The player throws the wity wity in such a way that it touches the ground a few feet before him and then jumps away for some distance in the grass. The person who is able to throw his projectile the furthest in that way is the winner. Often a *nulla nulla* [club] was used as a wity wity and the game played in exactly the same way.

Spear exercises are conducted as follows: a disc of green, hard bark, about a foot in diameter, is removed from a tree. The participants are placed in a row, all facing the same direction and one strong man takes his place about 10 or 15 yards in front of one end of the row. When all men are holding their spears in balance a signal is given and the man throws the bark disc on its edge over the ground in front of the participants and parallel to them. When it is rolling along like a boy's hoop, every man hurls his spear at it as soon as it passes his sight line. The best hit is rewarded by the applause of the audience.

During the warmer months of the year swimming in deep waters offered a good pastime. Most of us have entertained ourselves as boys by seeing who, during diving, could stay longest under water. The young blacks do the same as well. On a given sign the competitors dive at the same time, while some old men wait for their resurfacing. The blacks always dive with their feet ahead, just the opposite to the European way of diving.

Weapons

(a) Spears The spear is without doubt the main deadly weapon of the natives, and its manufacture often requires a great deal of time, especially when the wood has to be hewn off from one side of the tree with a stone axe. Fighting spears are made from thin small trees of hard wood, seven or more feet long, put into hot ash and prepared to the same thickness. The thick end of the small tree was hardened and sharpened in the fire. Sometimes on one or both sides of the spear barbs were attached close to the tip.

Hunting spears were lighter, about seven feet long, made out of firm reed or from the trunk of the grass-tree. The spearheads were produced from hard, heavy wood and carefully tied to the shaft with string and gum. There were

two types of spear used to kill fish. The one used for spearing flathead, bream and such like has three or four prongs on one end. A bigger spear made from a small tree with only one head, or perhaps two, was used to kill the kingfish, the *cossyphus* or other big fish.

During hunting the spears were usually hurled with a *wommera* or spear thrower, but some heavy ones made from hard wood were thrown directly from the hand by balancing them in the middle. Serrated spears were used for fighting and spearing emus. A deep hole was made at the blunt end of the spear into which the tooth of the spear thrower was inserted when the hunter aimed at a distant object.

When the natives make a spear, a wommera, a shield, a boomerang or any other weapon for which lightness is an important requisite, they first carve it raw into the form wanted and then let it soak for one or two days in water to extract the saps and thus make it lighter. This is particularly so with the long spears made from hard wood, which more than once during the period of their making have to be soaked in water.

(b) Wommeras The *wommera* or spear thrower is a piece of wood little more than two feet in length, two thirds of an inch thick and two or three inches wide in the middle, running out at one end in a long rough handle, while the other end thins out into a hook or protrusion at the upper side. The surface of the shaft of the wommera is held horizontally when it is put against the end of the spear ready for hurling. The above mentioned hook is sometimes completely cut from the wood like a normal crochet hook. In other cases it is formed from a special piece of hard wood or bone, which is fixed into place with gum and entwined by sinews from wallaby, kangaroo or other animals. When a piece of human bone is used as the hook the natives believe this increases the accuracy and might of the spear.

Apart from being used to throw spears, the wommera also serves in some districts as a chisel and its upper surface is used as a container for blood or other liquids. For the former use the gripping end is furnished with an adze-sharp stone, while, for the latter, the middle part of the utensil is shaped as a leaf, wider in the middle than at the ends. The flat upper side on which the hook is attached is slightly hollowed. Finally, the handle of the weapon can serve to loosen the ground when searching for roots or digging out small animals from their burrow.

In parts of Queensland and at other places the shaft of the wommera is held vertically during use. When such use is intended the hook or pin, which grips into the hollowed end of the spear, is attached on the upper edge of the shaft of the wommera at the distal end (in contrast to the weapon described previously). In North Queensland my son saw some wommeras of a kind that show a bend

similar to that of a boomerang with the pin or hook attached to the concave edge of the weapon.

(c) Shields There are two kinds, one for defence during spear fights, the other for skirmishes with clubs. The former consisted of a light piece of wood or bark with a special handle, which was attached on the back in the middle. Sometimes the handle was also carved from the same piece of wood as the shield.

The club shield was thick and hard and made from fine-grained tough wood so that it did not easily crack. The timber left for the handle was cut out from the whole and recessed all around to take in the hand. Some shields, the ones for spears as well as those for clubs, were roughly ornamented with differing recessed patterns cut into the surface. The spear shields were of oval shape with a convex outer and flat inner surface.

(d) Clubs Clubs are of varying kinds and size and can be used in scuffles (hand to hand fights) or for throwing after game. The proximal ending is slightly curbed to provide a firmer grip for the hand.

(e) Axes The stone axe was an indispensable tool. Some of these axes were artfully beaten into shape from pieces of rock formed by the influence of weather and picked up by the native for their appropriate shape. Others were apparently only well-rounded smooth pebbles of the desired size and form, found in the bed of a stream or river. In every case, however, the stone was ground on one end into a cutting edge.

The grinding and sharpening of these axes was done on sandstone rocks at places close to water for easing the work. The grooves resulting from the grinding of the axes on the rocks can be seen at numerous places in different parts of the country. The blacks often also carried a flat piece of sandstone or other suitable stones with them, five to six inches long, three to four inches wide and about one inch thick, which they used as a whetstone to renew the blades of their axes.

The handle of the utensil was made from a flexible wooden slat of any kind or a piece of creeper, cut flat on one side. It was heated up in warm ash, oiled, and then wound around the stone like a sling. The two loose ends of the wood or vine were placed on top of each other and firmly tied together with a string or some animal sinews. A strong coat of putty prepared from gum over and around the wooden sling served to fasten them. When the gum loosened due to the beating it was softened over the fire and pressed back in its place.

To give the handle a better grip the upper part of the axe where the handle was wound around was roughened up. This was usually done by pecking or beating with a piece of sharp stone, which the worker held in his hand. In some cases this was continued until a groove was formed all around the end of the axe, the depth of which—for a width of one inch—varied in the middle line

from about one-eighth to half an inch. A piece of flexible wood or vine was wound around this groove or around the roughened part and bound as already described.

With these rough tools the native gained the material for his shields, spears, clubs, and so on; he peeled bark with it for his *gunyah*; he cut the branches for his wind-roof; he climbed trees and hewed holes into them to get out animals or bees' nests. Occasionally the axes were also used as weapons during fighting. When the hunter hewed holes into the trunk or cut branches of trees he always hit parallel to the grain of the wood instead of across the grain as the European would, widening the opening sideways until it was big enough for the desired purpose. This method was followed because it was easier to remove splinters in this way than when hitting across the grain, which would also have been harder with such a primitive tool.

(f) Boomerangs The returning boomerang is a unique weapon. The natives of India and some other regions produce a weapon somewhat similar to the boomerang, which they use for hunting or during war,[18] but no other region in the world has the quality of this instrument, that, after it is thrown, flies through the air and comes back to within a few feet of the thrower. The returning boomerang mostly serves as a toy, but sometimes it is used to kill ducks and other small animals. Keep in mind, however, that the boomerang, in order to return, must not touch anything after it is thrown; as soon as it touches any object it ceases to turn and falls to the ground.

The feature of returning is created by a light, but very distinct, turning on both ends. It can be characterized by imagining that the maker grabs the boomerang at both ends and then turns it, the left hand to the front, the other to the back. In practice the swinging is produced, if it is not already present naturally in the grain of the wood, by heating one side of the weapon, so that it curls in the desired direction. The maker helps the process by using his hands. He scrapes and polishes the wood, testing it repeatedly and altering it until the boomerang is ready. The finished weapon is flat on the underside, the upper side is slightly rounded. The edge of the outer curve, the back of the boomerang, is slightly thicker than the inner edge.

The turning of the wood, together with the flatness of one side and the convexity of the other, produces a difference of air pressure at specific places, which serves to work against gravity so that the boomerang, when the force given to it by the thrower is spent, continues its flight, but in a course towards the point of origin in a downward direction.

There is another kind of boomerang used for hunting and fighting, which in no case returns to the thrower. It is considerably bigger and heavier than the returning one and has a more open curve. It reminds one of the blade of a sabre

and its inner edge is sharp and dangerous. It is a very effective weapon when thrown amongst some animals or used in war; it bounces back in a straight line.

The late Edward Palmer stated in his report concerning natives along the Mitchell, Palmer and Walsh rivers of the Cape York Peninsula, that boomerangs are used 'more for killing wild fowl than for fighting; they are made with only a slight curve, and do not return as do those used by the Wide Bay blacks'.[19] One of my correspondents living on the peninsula wrote to me that the returning boomerang was not produced between the Mitchell River and Cape York. They were unknown there until they were brought in as trading goods during the occupation of the area by whites.

The *warridilla*, a hunting boomerang about two feet long, is produced by the natives from Sturt Creek and Victoria River in the Northern Territory. It consists of a bent, flat piece of wood with a protruding hook on the end of the convex edge (the back) of the weapon. The hook, which is about five inches long, goes backwards, forming an angle at the nadir of about 30 or 40 degrees. This utensil is in use by the tribes from the Western Australian border, through the Northern Territory and into Queensland, where it was encountered by Dr Roth.[20] It is then mentioned by D. W. Carnegie, who saw it amongst the natives of Western Australia.[21] I myself have described this weapon previously in 'Ethnological Notes on the Aboriginal Tribes of the Northern Territory'.[22]

Utensils

(a) Yam sticks This utensil, used solely by women, was made from a small hard tree and was about four or five feet in length and about one or two inches in diameter. The thick end was cut to a wide, sharp, cutting edge hardened in fire; the thinner end terminated as a point. The main function of the thing was to dig out yams and other roots, or to rummage out small animals that dwell in the ground. With the help of their yam sticks the women provide the vegetable food of the camp. During domestic scenes in the camp the yam stick was a terrible weapon.

(b) Stone knives The production of the knives is essentially the same as that of axes, only the stone need not be as hard, and smaller pieces can be used. When they had been beaten into the right shape a sharp edge was produced by grinding. Smaller knives simply consisted of pieces that had broken off during the production of the cutting edge by beating. Handles were not attached, but one held the stone tight between the thumb and the other fingers. These knives were used for skinning and eviscerating animals, for scraping and marking wooden utensils, for cutting scars on the human body and for any other purpose.[23]

(c) Chisels The chisel was produced by attaching onto the end of a short stick with string or gum a sharp flint, a quartz splinter or a piece of hard stone

sharpened to a cutting edge. It was of great use for sharpening spearheads, for cutting grooves into shields and clubs, for the making of wooden water containers and for various other tasks. Sometimes the whole chisel was made from a long bone of the leg of a kangaroo, which was sharpened at one end to a cutting edge. A double bladed chisel is used on the Victoria River in the Northern Territory. This tool is made from a piece of hard wood, one end of which is equipped with a small cutting stone while at the other end a stone with a wide blade is attached. Both then serve different tasks.

(d) Containers Bark containers to take in water, honey, food or other things are obtained in the following way. The native seeks a small tree with a natural bend and from the convex side a piece of bark about 18 inches long and nine inches wide is peeled off. This is done in such a way that the bark is severed with an axe around the edge of the selected piece of bark and is then lifted off by sliding a pointed stick between bark and wood. The stripping of the bark can only be undertaken at the season when the saps are circulating in the trees. When no suitable tree with a natural bend could be found a piece of thin bark was cut from a straight tree and tied together on both ends in the same way as the canoes were made.

Wooden containers are often also made in the following way. When a tree or branch is found which is hollow and has a well-marked bend, a container is hewn out from the convex side with an axe. Rotting or disintegrating wood that might be sticking to the inside is cut out and the whole is smoothed through scraping and rubbing. The outside is usually decorated with carved parallel lines going around the container.

(e) *Berl-ye* A small wooden utensil called a *berl-ye*, about the size of a pencil, and similarly pointed, is used for combing hair and to eradicate vermin on the head.

(f) Awls Awls, used for pricking or drilling, were generally made from the fibula of the kangaroo or emu, which was ground to a fine point.

(g) Bags Bags, neatly woven from strings, twisted bark fibres, tough grass and vines, were used to carry small animals, roots, small utensils and odds and ends of all kinds. Nets with different patterns for catching fish were made of similar materials. Two or three kinds of stitches are employed for weaving bags or nets.

(h) Calabashes Calabashes cut from wood as already described serve for storing and carrying water. Cleaned human skulls, the seams of which are clogged with gum, are used for this by some tribes. Sacks for transporting water over greater distances are made from the skin of the kangaroo, wallaby or similar animals, with the fleshy side of the skin turned inwards. With some coastal tribes of New South Wales and Queensland water sacks are also produced from leaves of the bangalow tree or from palm leaves sewn together with animal sinews.

Bigger bags or satchels consisted of a rough net made from fibres of bulrushes or from bark of certain trees and were hung over the shoulder or carried on a breast band diagonally across the chest. In these diagonal sacks heavy utensils, such as stones for grinding seeds, stone scrapers or knives, tools, and such like were carried.

(i) Fishing hooks In the coastal districts of New South Wales, from Sydney southwards, the natives formerly fished with fishhooks they made themselves. It is reported by Collins that at the time of first occupation of the area by Governor Phillip the natives in the vicinity of Sydney used lines from the bark of small trees and hooks from the shell of oysters, which they rubbed on a stone until they obtained the desired shape.

Presently, the steel hooks of the whites are used by all natives, but I have spoken to old men and women in native camps who still knew how the hooks were made and occasionally manufactured them when the hooks of the whites were not available. They took the shell of the *dhūlla* (*turbo stamineus*) [heavy turban shell] and struck the outer part off until only the firm spiral part remained, which was formed as a rough hook. By rubbing on a stone it was ground until it obtained the right thickness. It was simply pointed without barbs. The hook was usually swallowed by the fish together with the bait, and was then hauled in.

Fire-making

The natives produce fire by means of two pieces of dry wood, of which one, that can be described as the 'stationary board', is mostly soft, and the other, the 'drill stick', consists of a piece of harder material. Into a totally dry, soft piece of wood, maybe half of a split branch, a small notch or dent is cut. This is then put flat on the ground, notch up, and the fire maker, sitting in the usual posture of the natives, holds it firmly with his feet in front of him.

A round, straight stick, roughly tapered at the thick end, is put upright onto the notch or cut in the 'stationary' piece of wood. Now this vertical 'drill stick' is vigorously whisked forwards and backwards between the palms of the hands with the hands constantly pressing firmly down. By exercising this pressure the hands can easily glide down the drill stick, but the man then lifts them up immediately to the upper end of the stick and continues to whisk.

In the course of one or two minutes smoke rises from the point of contact of the woods, followed by red glowing of rubbed off dust particles on which the tinder, made from rolled up bark fibre, dry grass or any other easily flammable material, which had been wound around beforehand, can now easily ignite. Careful blowing produces a flame. Usually two men sit opposite each other; one turns the stick quickly, and the other one organises the tinder.

Another method of fire making consists of putting a piece of soft wood on the ground, which is split at one end. Into this split, which is kept open by a wedge jammed in, finely ground bark or dried grass is placed. A transverse notch is cut into both sides of the split wood and a piece of harder wood with an angular edge fitted into the notch is quickly rubbed in a sawing motion with some pressure through this notch, back and forth. The wood in the notch is pulverised by this and heated up, and by falling down onto the tinder in the split can easily be blown into a flame by the man making the fire.

When the natives travel anywhere they always carry a burning stick in their hand. In a hunting party there will always be one or two thus equipped, so that all the culled game can be roasted. But to safeguard against any mischance with this kind of fire making, some men also carry the rubbing wood.

The women, too, carry a piece of smouldering wood from the grass tree or honeysuckle or another suitable tree so as to be able to make fire immediately when the troop halts. This was done partly for comfort, partly to cook any provisions; it was also totally independent of the temperature. The fire was carried on the hottest summer day as well as in winter.

Cooking

A usual way of cooking the flesh of animals was to make a round pit in the ground, varying in depth and diameter depending on the size of the animal to be cooked in it. Stones were put onto the ground and within the sides of this pit as a kind of pavement or tiling on which a big fire was lit. Further stones and the soil gained by excavating the pothole were likewise placed beside the fire to heat. When the fire had burned down, the ash and the superfluous stones were scuffed out. Damp grass was put onto the hot stones at the bottom of the pothole and onto it the animal together with its skin, and over the top more damp grass was scattered. Then the superfluous heated stones were first piled onto the grass layer, and the excavated hot soil was piled up as a cover. The heat of the stones and the closed-in steam combined to cook the meat. When the steam rising from the stones and the grass was considered insufficient for cooking, holes were made in the upper cover with a pointed stick, into which water was poured, thereby improving the conditions for a build-up of steam. With this kind of cooking the roast retains all its juices and when it is taken out of the oven the skin peels off easily. At places where stones were scant, clay was used as a paving for the bottom and the sides of the pothole to keep heat and steam enclosed. When there was no grass available, leaves were used instead.

Small birds, fish, opossums and all lighter mammals and reptiles were roasted simply by putting them on top of the coals. Roots, tubers, shellfish, eggs and so on were dug into hot ash until they were cooked through. In some localities the natives wrap small animals into a thick coat of clay and put them into the ashes

of a big fire and keep them covered with hot ash until cooked. When they were taken out, the skin or feathers stuck to the hard clay crust while the animal remained clean and juicy.

Clothing and adornments

The only cover worn by the natives were the skins from animals, such as kangaroo, wallaby, opossum, bear, and the native cat. Blankets were mostly made from opossum fur, sewn together with the sinews of the animal from which they came, with a sharpened bone serving as needle or awl. The blankets held together with a string or pin were worn across the chest so that the right arm stayed free, very similar to the Roman toga, and reached mostly down to the knee. The hairy side was worn inside during cold weather, and during other weather the smooth one. During rain the hairy side was turned outside, as the coat otherwise, if the flesh-side got wet, would have become stiff and hard when later dried by the sun. Usually the men and women walked around in Adam's and Eve's costumes; the blankets were only used around the camp and at night time.

Significant work was required for the preparation of these blankets. About 30 to 40 opossum furs were needed for one blanket for an adult. When the fur is skinned from the animal it is put flat on a dry hard piece of earth and fastened around the edges with stakes, the fur being strenuously pulled to stretch it. When it is dry it is taken away and cut with a stone knife into a square shape by keeping the best part and throwing away the damaged edges. The surface of the skin is then worked with a stone scraper to remove all pieces of flesh, which might still adhere, in order to make it soft and flexible. Then it is rubbed with fat and red ochre.

When the necessary number of furs has been collected they are stitched together with sinews gained from the tails of marsupials; a sharp bone or wooden pin serves as an awl to make the holes through which the end of the sinew is pulled by hand. Some furs were decorated with rough drawings on the flesh side with a shell or sharp flint; the treatment with fat and ochre served to proof it and protect it against the influences of the weather.

The furs of the kangaroo, native bear and wallaby were prepared in a similar way and a smaller number of those were sufficient for this purpose. I have seen men who wore cloaks made from only one or two kangaroo furs with which they protected themselves during damp days against the rain. The skins of large birds, such as the pelican, emu and swan were occasionally used for the same purpose. Skins were also used as mats on the damp ground.

Instead of pegging the skin on the ground, as described above, the pelts of smaller animals were sometimes stretched on a smooth barked tree or a piece of

bark forming the *gunya* or shelter. In both cases the nails used were made of hard wood or pieces of splintered bone.

Necklaces are made from short pieces of reed or grass stalks, which are cut up with a sharp shell or a stone knife into the length of about half an inch or more and are threaded onto a fur string like the necklaces made from tube pearls by our white children. At some places shells are strung together, at others quandong kernels.[24] At other places kangaroo and dog teeth are carefully attached to a fur string or a strip of kangaroo fur. The material of the necklaces changes with the locality.

During the making of shell necklaces a hole is ground or pierced into each shell and the string is pulled through the artificial hole as well as through the natural opening of the shell; because of this the shells are in symmetrical order to each other, but hang randomly on the string.

Around Moulamein, Swan Hill, Balranald and other nearby places, the natives make necklaces from the feelers of the Murray lobster, which, when cooked, have a light red coral color. They are broken into pieces half an inch in length and strung on the sinews of a kangaroo tail. All necklaces mentioned form a pleasant contrast to the ebony coloured necks and shoulders of the wearers. Some of these are worn singly, but more often in two or three windings around the neck. Fur string necklaces are only occasionally worn.

Headbands, made from tightly plaited strings or human hair, coloured with red ochre or pipe clay, are worn around the forehead. Sometimes feathers of birds are included in the head ornament. White downy feathers are often stuck to the forehead or to other parts of the body. Often a head frill was made from kangaroo teeth neatly and firmly strung together. The tip of the tails of wild dogs were also worn attached to the hair with gum-like tassels or tied together with strings.

Armbands were worn around the biceps. These were made from strips of animal fur, the hairy side turned outside. Strings were tied around the knees and ankles, under which leaved twigs were inserted hanging down.

Belts or girdles, worn around the hips, were made from opossum skin, human hair or plaited or twisted strips of skin. An apron or pubic tassle was made by cutting a kangaroo rat fur into small strips, nine to 12 inches in length, depending on the size of the fur used. On one end of the fur a seam or band was left uncut from which all strips originate. This uncut seam was put under the hip girdle and the strips hung down over the male member like great tassels. The apron was so small that it rather served to draw attention to the pubic area than hide it. A similar cloth was placed at the back of the girdle, and one on each side, to make four in total. That is the custom of the Wirraidyuri; with the Thurrawal

and related tribes only two loin cloths were worn, one at the front and one at the back over the crack between the buttocks.

During travels the men often carried some of their weapons, such as a boomerang, axe or other pieces of equipment deemed necessary in the hip girdle. Unmarried girls wore girdles around the hips, from which fringes of fur strips about a foot long and of a width of eight or nine inches hung down to cover the pudenda.

Trading

Meetings for exchanging articles and products occurred between tribes, which were scattered over a very significant stretch of land. Journeys to the region of neighbouring tribes were usually undertaken in connection with initiation ceremonies or they were linked with dances, songs and corroborees to increase game or induce rain or good weather. The travel routes taken on these occasions seem to be fixed and recognised from time immemorial.

In the territory of one tribe there might be an abundance of hard wood suitable for making certain weapons, while at another place there would be a great amount of stone for producing axes and knives or grinding seeds, and in such a case the mutual exchange of goods would be of benefit to both peoples. Those whose territory produced red ochre or other pigments, animal skins and so on, might exchange with tribes which had a wealth of rare feathers, grass tree wood for making fire by rubbing, or other products.

Craft products formed an object of trade exchange in the same way or were given away as presents. One group, for example, who were present at the big ceremonial meetings, might have had opossum fur strings, hip girdles from human hair, wristbands, grass necklaces or the like; others perhaps brought magnificent shields, stone knives and weapons of all sorts, while again others had dilly bags,[25] kangaroo teeth, fish nets and the like.

As a result of this trade, different articles found their way into areas that were relatively distant from their place of production or origin. The Murawarri natives from Culgoa River would, for example, attend a ceremonial meeting at the Darling River in the region of Brewarrina, where they would meet with the Ngeumba tribe from the Bogan, and numerous articles would be exchanged between them. We could assume that a boomerang cut from a special kind of wood, produced on the Culgoa River, came upwards along the Bogan to Nyngan. In the course of one or two years the then owner perhaps went to a meeting of the Wongaibon at Willandra Billabong and there traded the weapon with a man. The new owner could now carry it to a ‘fair’ at the Lachlan River and later it might perhaps be brought further to the Wirraidyuri tribe at the Murrumbidgee River.

Although the transactions at these native 'fairs' were for the most part restricted to the exchange of specific articles for others of a different kind, such as necklaces for boomerangs, it nevertheless happens, not too rarely, that some men, who had friendly relations with each other, or between whom a kind of kinship existed, exchanged similar articles, such as a shield for a shield, a spear for a spear, apparently as a memento. Also, here and there presents are made to relatives or men who have undergone particular rituals, without a counter gift.

These trade meetings also provided a suitable occasion for exchanging and spreading folklore of different tribes, as well as their superstitions, songs and corroborees. The traditional beliefs were transmitted from tribe to tribe over great distances, and even when the details were heavily altered so as to be in accord with the changed surroundings, the essential elements of many of these stories seem to have preserved the imprint of their shared origin.

In most of their legends there is a tendency to explain some peculiarity of animal burrows or particular characteristics, as well as to give reasons for unusual shapes of lakes, rivers, trees or other natural phenomena. In this way ideas were exchanged between distant tribes, which never associated with each other. Single words of a language could also be spread from district to district over long stretches of land.

ENDNOTES

[1] [Editor's note] See RHM 1900, 'Phallic Rites and Initiation Ceremonies of the South Australian Aborigines', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 39, pp.622-38.

[2] RHM 1904, 'Die Multyerra-Initiationszeremonie', *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft*, vol. 34, p. 77-83. Reproduced this volume.

[3] RHM, 'Some Initiation Ceremonies of the Aborigines of Victoria', *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, vol. 37, 1905, p. 874.

[4] RHM 1896, 'The Būnān Ceremony of New South Wales', *American Anthropologist*, vol. 9, p. 338.

[5] RHM 1900, 'The Toara Ceremony of the Dippil Tribes of Queensland', *American Anthropologist*, vol. 2 (new series), pp. 142-3.

[6] Curr, E. M. 1886-7, *The Australian Race, etc.*, John Ferres, Government Printer, Melbourne, vol. 3, p. 139.

[7] Ibid., p. 231.

[8] Ibid., vol. 2, p. 425.

[9] Ibid., vol. 3, p. 144.

[10] Mackillop, Rev Donald 1892-3, 'Anthropological Notes on the Aboriginal Tribes of the Daly River, North Australia', *Transactions and Proceedings and Report of the Royal Society of South Australia*, vol. 17, p. 257.

[11] Stokes, J. Lort 1846, *Discoveries in Australia with an Account of the Coasts and Rivers, etc.*, Boone, London, vol. 1, pp. 92-3.

[12] RHM 1905, *Ethnological Notes on the Aboriginal Tribes of New South Wales and Victoria*, F. W. White General Printer, Sydney, pp. 60-8.

[13] Bride, Thomas Francis (ed.) 1898, *Letters from Victorian Pioneers, etc.*, Trustees of the Public Library, Melbourne, p. 258.

[14] Ibid., p. 184.

[15] Ibid., p. 273.

[16] Fraser, John 1882,'The Aborigines of New South Wales', *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales*, vol. 16, p. 207. The expression of the women during the apostrophising of the dried hand means that it would bake no more bread. Perhaps this is an allusion to the fact that the man was busy baking at the time when he was killed, and had dough stuck on his fingers.

[17] [Editor's note] The reference to 'sections' (*Abteilungen* in German) suggests that the men formed groups according to their kinship affiliation.

[18] The British Museum keeps an ancient Egyptian boomerang, which is very similar to the Australian variety.

[19] Palmer, Edward 1884, 'Notes on some Australian Tribes', *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, vol. 13, p. 287.

[20] Roth, Walter E. 1897, *Ethnological Studies among the North-West-Central Queensland Aborigines*, Edmund Gregory, Government Printer, Brisbane, p. 145, fig. 353.

[21] Carnegie, David W. 1898, *Spinifex and Sand*, C. Arthur Pearson, London, p. 343.

[22] RHM 1900-01, 'Ethnological Notes on the Aboriginal Tribes of the Northern Territory', *Queensland Geographical Journal*, vol. 16, p. 84.

[23] Occasionally the returning boomerang was used to skin larger animals. After the skin was opened with the stone knife, one end of the boomerang was pushed between skin and flesh and the skin thus flayed.

[24] *Santalum acuminatum*. Note—German translator.

[25] *Dilly* is the name of all small bags carried by the blacks; the word probably originates from a native language of the Sydney area.