

V. 7.

TOTEM BOARDS AND MAGIC STONES

Their Significance

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The circumcised groups of aborigines who followed the first (uncircumcised) comers into Australia, brought with them many laws and customs which were essentially cruel, especially to the young, and to the women of the groups. Practically all these laws were associated with the food supply, and in order to terrorise the young men and boys into keeping these food laws, many wooden and stone and bone objects were used as "magic judgers" and "magic killers" in cases where breaches of the food (and marriage) laws were suspected. The laws were made by the older men, and there were so many restrictions and tabus which affected the women and youths only that every camp possessed magic objects to terrify the younger members and the women, and so make life comfortable and easy for the older men.

Cannibalism prevailed amongst all the circumcised groups of Western Australia (and that portion of South and Central Australia of which the writer has intimate personal knowledge), more or less according to the supply of large meat food - kangaroo, emu, etc. in the group areas; but there was no board or stone object connected with this human meat food, though most of the totem boards represented the principal meat or other food of the group. Some of these totem boards were over fifteen feet in length - the writer measured the totem boards of the porpoise group in Northern Kimberley in 1901, the "male" board being fourteen feet in length and six inches in width, the "female" porpoise being nine feet long and seven inches wide. The boards are grooved in conventional designs which to the native mean the emu, kangaroo, or other animal whose spirit goes into the totem board. These markings are crude and rough amongst the Central Australian groups, but gain in artistry North and Nor' West where the Malay mixture brought precision in drawing and grooving.

The sacred and secret names of these totemic objects must never be heard by women or uninitiated boys, nor must they visit the "shrines" of emu or kangaroo, or mallee hen, or other totem, where the boards may be stored. The initiated boy has to pass

several "degrees" before he is entitled to open an arm vein and sprinkle his group totem board with his blood, or before he can make his own totem board, or join with his initiated mates in making a board grooved with their joint totem markings. With his first blood he establishes a "rapport" with the spirit of his totem and becomes identified with it along with his fathers and grandfathers and brothers. The writer has been present at these ceremonies where the young initiates' first blood has been poured over their totem boards, for it is many years since the first received the "Freedom of the Totem" from groups of associated totemists.

Several names may be given to these totem boards, but in some cases one name will follow a board or other magic object from north to south of the continent.

A small board, about two or three feet in length, but of similar shape to the large totem boards, had a hole in one end to which a string was attached. When this board was whirled round, a booming sound resulted which the white people called "bull roaring". This board was called kalligooroo by the Kimberley aborigines, several specimens being given to the writer in the early 1900's. In 1913 the same kind of board, with markings, was found amongst the Boundary Dam group, the board having the same secret name, "kalligooroo", which belonged to it in the Kimberley area. (Boundary Dam, discovered and named by Giles in '75, is about 300 miles north of Eucla.) This board, in both areas, is the first "sacred" magic board shown to the young initiate. It is made for him and given to him by father or elder brother after his initiation, and he and his young mates during their isolation, daily swing these boards and sleep with the board as their pillow.

Another board, of similar size but without the hole at the end, was called "larra" and the name and use of this board was the same amongst the S.A.-W.A. Border groups as in its Kimberley home. It is given to the initiate after he has passed some more degrees of his initiation (there are nine degrees amongst the Kimberley and other groups which must be passed before the initiate becomes a full "man") and is worn at the back of his "chignon" of hair string

emu feather and plumes etc. Other boards were made and marked with the personal totems of their makers, and if these personal totems were poisonous snakes, the owner "blooded" the board with his own blood, "sang" incantations into it and turned it into a very powerful magic weapon which he "sent" on various occasions to destroy an enemy. The board returned from its journey, covered with blood, showing that it had executed its human "brother's" orders.

Another board given to the writer in 1906 had markings representing the ming-ari (mountain devil) totem. This totem, a female emblem, occupies an important position amongst the constellations. It is V in Taurus, and also the Pleiades all of which are women who never mated, and who have dogs (Canopus, Achernar, etc.) round and about them to keep off Nyeeruna (Orion) and others who continue to chase them in the sky as they did when on earth. This board and totem has an important significance amongst the groups whose initiation ceremonies usually take place when Orion and Mingari are rising during the small hours. Many boards and stone objects were given the writer by groups from Kimberley to Central Australia. The older men who brought the objects told the writer their groups were "finishing" (dying out) and they wished her to take the objects and "look out" for them as she had seen them do. Their kordorn (Central Western Australian term for "totem") "spirit" was inside the board, but when the last totem man was finished the spirit of the totem would leave the boards and the writer would know when she looked at the boards and saw them dry and rotting away, that the totem spirit had gone away with its human kin.

From the Munjinja wong-ga group, west of the border of South and Western Australia came many totem stones and boards: The Kalbari (edible root) totem stone, dark with white spots all over it; the ngang'i (frog) stone, eggshaped with grooved concentric rings; the wong'unu (edible grass seed) stone with transverse lines of white pipeclay and wongunu's "mate" dark stone with dark concentric rings.

At one camp there were over forty long and short boards and many stone totem emblems. Many were the totem boards of groups who,

coming into civilisation, had brought their boards and magic objects with them from their waters hundreds of miles north. None of these groups ever returned to their own waters again. They died on the new ground until finally but a few men - each a member of a separate totem - were left. These died one by one, and each as he passed out, asked the writer to take his totem boards. As there were no means of bringing the huge bundles away from the "storehouse" where they had accumulated, they were left in their hiding place, but the Central Australian derelicts who have been in civilisation for some years, not only lose their fear of handling the totem boards of dead groups, but seek the hiding places and barter boards and stones with any white man, lineman, railway man, telegraphist, who cares to possess these objects and who will pay for them in food or money or drink. As the thieves say, the totemists are all dead, and the boards are only boornoo (wood) and their own totem boards will also be "no good" when they themselves "finish". The civilised native will part with one and all of his magic safeguards for a price, his reasoning being that now he is within the shelter and protection of the white man, he no longer needs the magic totem boards and stones to ensure his food supply.

All totem boards hold the spirit of the totem and the sprinkling of blood upon them is partly a propitiatory offering to the totem spirit so that the totem food may not fail or "finish", but the spirit of the totem is never confused with the ko-irdi (spirit of the newly dead) or wee-urn (spirits of dead people). Amongst the groups of Western and Central Australia amongst whom the writer has lived for a quarter of a century, and the removal of these totem boards, or their sale to the white man does not affect ko'irdi or wee'urn in any way.

The special spots, stone, hill, rock etc. in which little spirit ~~souls~~ reside awaiting re-birth, are located near waterholes of emu, dingo or other totem, but these little spirits are not associated with the totem boards of the groups. In these stones and rocks the little human spirits "sit down" awaiting re-incarnation. (Little Wilgidi, whose spirit emerged from Yoollain great white stone, was the reincarnation of a grandmother and brought name and totem (mingari - mountain devil) with her, and Ban'juru a boy came from another stone

in another area, as the reincarnation of his grandfather Banjuru. Legend and myth surround the older totem boards but not the newer ones made by initiates, and all totem boards are unspiritual in the human sense, as they contain the spirit totem only of the emu, kangaroo etc. to which they belong.