

"Strathmore"
North Quay
Brisbane

3

22nd Dec '97.

My dear Spence.

It seems ages since I have heard from you, and you can imagine my surprise on seeing your kindly criticism re my work on the N. W. C. Queensland Aborigines. By the bye, to prevent misapprehension I thought better to write to you at once ^{concerning} your remarks ~~about~~ totemism.

The fact is, I purposely avoided using ^{in my book} the term "totem" such as I had understood the word as originally applied among the North American Indians, though for purposes of reference the expression "Totemic Systems" is mentioned in the Glossary and Index.

My reasons were as follows:—

- (i) The only ~~special~~ association I found existing in those districts is that between a particular group of animals, and a particular group of individuals.
- (ii) The particular group of animals (as many as half a dozen in some cases) which are

collectively described as having "all the same skin, flesh", varies with each tribe (sect. 62 f.)

(iii) The particular group of individual, remains constant so far as name and identity is concerned, with each tribe (sect. 62 A). The particular group of individuals, referred to is what I have called the pseudo-matronym (specialising blood-mother, from offspring) and constitutes one of the four secondary divisions - Kooporo, Woongko, Koorkilla, Bumburi, or their equivalent which are met with in every tribe, and upon which the marriage-rules depend. These four terms, expressive of the divisions, have no independent local meaning.

(iv) The special association consists in the avoidance of an individual eating - not necessarily of killing, nor participating in killing - any of the animals "belonging" to his particular pseudo-matronymic group.

(v) Such avoidance is only binding on the individual, male or female, subsequently to the first of the initiation ceremonies i.e. at puberty.

(vi) There is no special association whatever between any one particular individual or group of individual, and any one particular animal or plant: I have

underlined these two words to emphasize the total absence of any protective or religious influence between any ^{particular} individual (or individuals) and any particular animal - my interpretation of True Totemism.

Indeed I would very much like to get evidence of True Totemism among the ~~Australians~~ Aborigines anywhere: ~~like~~ I have lately had an opportunity of going through the papers of Mein Fion, Howitt etc ^{in the Journal of the Anthropological Journal Society} etc but certainly find nothing bearing upon that protective or religious influence between individual and animal which is essentially the interpretation of a totem. Of course I may be wrong, but it appears to me that the word has been improperly applied out here.

It was to explain the above facts taken in conjunction with the marriage rules that I expressed the opinion (sect. 71 D) that the social grouping has been devised by a process of natural selection, to regulate the proper distribution of the total quantity of food available. [The Sydney Bulletin criticises so far as the only one that recognises this]. Then the husband, according to his pseudo-matronym lives on several articles of diet different from those of his wife (or wives): both of whose dietaries again differ from those permissible

to their resulting offspring which belong to a third paedomatronymic group. Hence, to put it shortly, whereas in a European community with a common dietary, the more children there are to feed, the less will become the share for the parents, in this N.W. Central Queensland Aboriginal system, the appearance of children (when once they pass puberty and its corresponding initiation ceremony) will make no appreciable difference in minimising the quantity of food available for those that give them birth etc

It may interest you to know that on the Central Coastal Districts (where I have just been spending the last four months) I came across a tribe where every individual of the tribe ~~is~~ (not of ~~any~~ particular group) is forbidden to eat certain articles of diet previously to passing certain of the initiation ceremonies. - it suggests the regulation of the food supply by the strong (the elder people) over the weak (the younger ones).

I expect to be leaving for the North Shore, where I hope to put in at least a good ten years at anthropological work - this time I propose paying greater attention to anthropometric and osteological data

Trusting to hear from you soon
always sincerely yours
W. S. Roth