

Melbourne. Frazer

(3)

Sept 27. 97.

J. G. Frazer Esq
Minty Collyer.

My dear Sir,

Since writing last I have heard from Mr. Gillen with regard to the question of a man changing his totem in special cases. After enquiry he can find no evidence of this ever taking place in the Central Australian Tribes. The old men of the Arunta tribe assured him that such a thing was not possible now though it was possible in the case of the 'alcherimga' or far away ancestors. The opportunity of writing to him has come + I am sending him up fuller particulars than was possible in a klypam. The mail which has just come in

from him but one also pulls information with regard to eating the Totem as certain of the ceremonies concerned with these have taken place - that is the *intichiuma* ceremony performed by the members of the Totem the object of which is to increase the supply of the particular animal or plant after which the Totem is named.

The following account of a certain totem called *Uduwringita* (to which Mr G. & myself belong) will give you some idea of the actual state of affairs.

In the case of this Totem the totem is 'Tabu' & may not be eaten at all during the period which follows immediately upon the performance of the Ceremony until such time as it becomes numerous & fully grown

otherwise the ceremony would be of no effect & the supply small. In this particular group of natives there also do not belong to the Totem & did not attend the ceremony may eat the totem at any time but it must in all cases be brought into the camp to cook & must on no account be cooked out in the bush like any ordinary food may otherwise the members of the Totem would be angry & the totem would vanish.

When, after the ceremony it becomes plentiful (as b. the ceremony is held just before the usual time of appearance of the totem - three times being well enough in Central Australia when everything is plentiful depending upon the rainy season) the totem men & their wives & children go out together in large quantities which they bring in

to camp, cook + store up in
'pitchis' (wooden bowls) + bark. At the
same time the other members of the
local group who are not of the
Totem are also collecting. After the
short season of plenty has passed (that
is when the grub, chrysalis) all the
collected store is taken to the men's
camp (this is a special spot to which
the women do not go). Here in
the first place the men who are not
of the Totem place their stores before
the Head man (he is head of the Totem of
that locality). The head man takes
one pitchi full + with the help of
other men of the Totem grinds up its
contents between stones + after he +
the other men of the Totem have
taken + eaten a little he hands all
back to the other men. Then he
takes another pitchi full. This time
from his own store + after grinding
it up he + the men of the Totem eat

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a little & pass the greater part of what has been collected on to the other men. After this the individuals of the totem eat sparingly of the grub if they eat too much then the effect of the ceremony would be injured & there would be few grubs.

In the case of the Iriiakura (a small cyperus bulb) totem, after the performance of *Seri utichiuma* by men of the totem the bulb is not eaten for some time. Men men who are not of the totem bring a quantity in to the camp where it is handed over to the Head man of the totem & he & other Iriiakura men rub the bulbs between their hands to get rid of the husks & then the men take some of the

bull in their mouths + blow them out again in all directions after which the *Wichaywa* people may eat sparingly.

I fancy that though the details vary from *toTem* to *toTem* the essential part of the ceremony so far as the taking in concerned + the restriction upon eating are closely similar in all.

Further ceremonies of which *Mr. Gillen* has sent me accounts contain evidence of the curiwin relationship, so far as eating is concerned, which tradition says existed between their alchemists + ancestor + their *toTem*. The ceremony for example related to an *Oruncha* (a kind of 'devil') man who had killed a man belonging to a *prub toTem*. A

curiwin cross arrangement carried on the head of the performer was supposed to represent the body of the dead man which the *Oruncha* was carrying about + on this were hung little rat-tails which again represented *prubs* (of his own *toTem*) which the *prub* man was carrying about to eat.

We have of course a lot more details but I think that the above represents the gist of the matter so far as eating of the *toTem* is concerned in the *Arumta* tribe.

We can find nothing out about either sex or individual *toTem* - such as I think of very rare + limited occurrence in Australia - especially the second one.

A man becomes associated in a special way with *toTem* other than his own by reason of his inheritance of *churwija* ('bull-owners')

belonging to other totems — such he may inherit from his father — & by reason also of his inheriting the right to perform ceremonies concerned with other totems. With regard to this matter we have a considerable amount of information.

We have traditions dealing with the origin of men, of the dividing of the men & women into 'classes' & of the institution of the present marriage system but can find no trace of the totems having ever had anything to do ~~with~~ with regulating marriage.

In a week University lectures cease & after that I shall set to work, & rewrite the present rough draft of our work & hope to send it home before the end of the year.

Dr Taylor has kindly promised to help us in the matter of finding a publisher but I can see that there will be great difficulty in this, though I feel sure that the work contains



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much that will be of interest to anthropologists & I doubt if any one Australian tale has been dealt with in anything like so full a manner before.

There is one point which I wanted to mention to you. We have a most elaborate ceremony in reference to mourning & in the case of the Arunta tribe I feel convinced that the daubing of the body of the widows with pipe clay is not done with any view of confounding the returning spirit of the dead man but rather with the opposite idea of (1) rendering the woman easily visible & (2) of showing her that she is properly mourning for him as

for a certain time he is supposed to
visit his camp & even to lay down
beside her at night. The funeral

ceremony of mourning includes the fasting

of the wife & the performance of
certain rites at the grave the object of
which is to restore the spirit of their

prof at her loss but at the same
time to intimate that the husband
came for him to go away & return to

his ancestral camp - that in the
spot where the Churinga with which he
is associated was deposited in the
Aboriginal.

He may subsequently
enter the body of another woman & so
under reincarnation.

I see that Mr Ley is anxious that
you should accept the term 'sex-totem' in
lieu of 'sex-totem'. I trust that you
will do us such thing. The term 'totem'

is only of very local application & is the
native name for what we call totem
in a limited area only of Western
Australia where no such thing, so far as
myself knows, as a sex-totem occurs.

With all reference to Mr Ley I do not
see what harm is done by using the term
sex-totem so long as it is understood that
it is only of limited, local application.

I do not see also how the idea
associated with the word totem can be
defined except in very general terms as
a special relationship of some kind or
another existing between an individual or
group of individuals & some particular
animal or animals, plant or plants.

If
we are going to define in any thing like a
precise way what is the nature of the
relationship then it seems to me that we
shall have to say much more, so far as
we are concerned in Australia, the use of
the word totem & its various terms.

The
contrast between the totem of two tribes in
Central Australia is striking in regard to
features which I gather that Mr Ley would
look upon as fundamental. In the one the
totem is never taken out of the marriage, in the

Other it is eaten + has nothing whatever to do
with marriage.

Apologizing once more. particularly you
with such a long letter
behind me

Yours sincerely

W. Baldwin Spencer.

+ and yet a man belonging to a particular
totem in one tribe + going into the other
is at once + without any remark regarded
as belonging to the same totem in the new
tribe.