

FRAZER  
Melbourne

(64)

March 18-04

My dear Frazer

I am afraid that you must have thought me very negligent in not returning earlier your ms. relating to the 'Religion' of the Antichrist & the theory of the meaning of circumcision & subincision. Since returning from New Zealand I have been head over ears in work of various kinds - which had to be done. To my regret I have had to take the Presidency of the Professional Board and as you can imagine this means an exasperating waste of time in routine work. However at length I have been two or three times through your ms. & have written a few notes but am afraid that I can help

you but little. Just of all  
in regard to the extract from the G. B.  
on religion. The whole of it I

thoughty give with save me or  
two small points asked in red ink.

In the letter quoted on p. 6. I have  
altered two things. That from  
was 'illiterate' is quite true but it is  
one thing to say this in a letter &  
another in print. In broken English  
I have deleted because I do not ~~actually~~  
know how far it is actually true.

If you are agreeable I would like  
these changes made. Jason supplied  
the information that only certain of  
the men were suborned & that only  
those who were purposely left alone  
could beget children. Smith had  
this in his first draft but has  
now I think omitted it. It is  
absolute nonsense & makes me read  
from as very unreliable especially when

taken in conjunction with his  
Mura-mura. At the same time  
as you say he did some valuable  
work.

If I have not told you of it  
before you will find the red ink  
account of how Herr Strehlow of the  
Hermannsburg mission discovered the  
existence of a high food amongst the  
Arunta rather interesting & instructive.

It will probably be published in  
formary and quoted & requested as  
the evidence of one who knows the  
nation intimately. I cannot think  
how it was that I missed Schudej's  
paper & in some future publication  
must give him credit for what so  
far as it goes is a good piece of work.

The little bit of indirect evidence  
as to the meaning of 'altjira' is  
excellent. If you should happen to  
see Strehlow's letter published will you  
at me know as I should like to  
have a word on the subject. I

has sent me Strehlow's letter which were given in 'Empire' &  
please do not take any notice of them or my remarks thereon unless  
publication takes place.



wrote to Lang fully about it but naturally the thing that struck him most was its agreement with certain other accounts. Sheldon's is certainly quite wrong & one wonders now how far the other similar ones are wrong.

When Howitt's work is published I intend to go carefully through the whole of the Australian evidence in detail. I have been elected the next President of the Aust. Ass. for Adv. of Sci. (the modest counterpart in these antipodean wilds of the Brit. Ass.) & thought of taking for my subject that of the 'religion' of the Australian natives. My fear however is that I can have little to say which you will not have said much better in the new G.B.

Now as to your theory of the significance of circumcision etc. It is certainly attractive but what I

March 18.04

feel most at present is the extremely slender nature of the evidence.

The use of blood to strengthen individuals by whom it is drunk, or on ulme bodies it is smeared is surely wide spread and does not seem to me to have any special significance in regard to your theory.

In regard to the disposal of the fresh in the only tribe I think in which its disposal can be regarded as supporting your theory directly is the Kaitish + even there may we not suppose that the placing of the skin in (according to Alchemija tradition) the nauja is simply associated with the fact that the nauja is most intimately connected with the individual & therefore a very natural place in which to deposit any part of himself. In the southern



Arumta the spin is buried in the ground at a spot quite apart from the Nariya. In one or two tribes it is actually eaten by certain relatives, as in the blood, and in this case cannot be supposed to have anything to do with ensuring the reincarnation of the individual.

The facts seem to be always the same (when they are known) towards the southern alcheringa camp not towards that of the individual. Might this not be equally well supposed to be a custom associated with the blood which is to show the woman that the youth has passed from the control of the women & has entered the hands of the men.

It is curious that it should not in your theory be ~~found~~ shown towards the women alcheringa camp which it never is.

In regard to the blood at submission

I cannot call to mind any custom which supports your theory. There is one aspect of the matter which seems to me to be rather important.

Men, women & children are all supposed to undergo re-incarnation & yet neither the children nor the women take any precaution (except on your theory in the sporadic case of tooth extraction\*) to secure re-incarnation.

The foranyi believe that women do not undergo re-incarnation & yet they perform upon them exactly the same ceremonies as do the Arumta.

You speak of the 'fickle soul'. Now I do not think that the native regard the soul of a dead person (except possibly in the case of very old people amongst the Kaitika) as being in any way fickle or requiring to be strengthened. In most of the tribes I think that they

\* Both exclamation and a curse taken care to have any sense significance as in this tribe in which it has ceased to have any contradictory use.

regard the soul or spirit part of every individual when he or she dies as anything but feeble. When we were working amongst the Wanamunga there was one old man who was almost decrepit but a great repository of tribal lore and often + myself were much afraid on one or two occasions that he might die in which event our work would have come to a close as not one of the natives would have stayed near the spot at which his spirit part was hovering around. There was not the faintest idea of his soul or spirit being feeble or of its needing any strengthening in order to undergo reincarnation.

The cases which you cite of 'burying' the fresh in or the bones by the side of water pools certainly indicate a belief that the parts thus buried have vital energy which will assist the growth of such things as ~~the~~ lilies on which



March 18-04

the natives feed. This is on all  
fours with the general belief that  
the natives can control the food  
supply by magic but it does  
not seem to me to have any  
association, of necessity, with  
securing the reincarnation of the  
spirit.

Every individual's nama is  
sacred and nothing deposited  
there may be touched. I rather  
think that the placing of the  
tooth or foreskin, as the case may  
be, in such a place is a precaution  
against any evil minded person  
saining possession of such a  
detached part of the individual for  
the purpose of ~~soil~~ working evil magic.  
At the same time it is quite true

that the central tribes do not think that anyone, nowadays, can work evil magic by means of the possession of the tooth or hair of any individual.

If the natives had the slightest idea of intercourse having any connection with procreation then it would be much more easy to understand the association of the idea of vital energy with such a part of the body as the severed fore skin but as they have not I cannot understand how the idea arose.

They do however imagine in some cases that there is some special connection between a man and his extracted tooth. Huxlett gives an instance of a man walking some 200 miles to secure from him the tooth which

he (Huxlett) had in his possession and which belonged to a man who was, I think, ill. I further think that the idea at the bottom of this was that evil magic might be worked in connection with the tooth. On the other hand the central natives distinctly held in that they were not at all frightened of anyone getting hold of their teeth after they had been thrown toward the western alchoringa camp.

The objection to your theory so far as I see at present are (1) that young persons of both sexes who have not undergone any rite of initiation are supposed to be reincarnated without any difficulty. (2) that women do the same without any special provision being made to supply their spirits with a store of vital energy and (3) that the natives have no idea whatever of the soul or spirit part of the individual



being in a feeble state + requiring  
any strengthening in order to secure  
reincarnation.

The general idea amongst the natives  
is that the older a man is the stronger  
is his spirit part + except perhaps in  
the one instance noted amongst the Kaitish  
I feel sure that they have no idea of a  
"feeble ghost."

In addition to this I can see no  
relation between your theory and the  
practices at sub-incision. Nothing, so  
far as I can remember, is done with  
the blood which could indicate any  
idea of using it as a receptacle for  
vital energy or as in any way  
associated with reincarnation.

It is a difficult thing to understand  
why a tooth should be selected as the  
storehouse of energy: one could understand  
a lock of hair better. Also though I  
do not know that this is actually the  
case, it would be somewhat natural  
for a savage to regard the penis, ~~as~~ <sup>owing</sup>  
to its excrete property, as something different

Nulbome, FRAZER  
 March 18.04 <sup>64</sup>

from every other part of the body which again would tell in favour of your theory as he would, or might, regard it as especially endowed with life. I wish now that we had inquired into the matter but even a savage has certain ideas of what we should call 'decency' & does not talk to a white man readily on such subjects. It is however rather significant that the Arunta have only one term 'pura' which they apply in common to the penis & a tail.

There are two features ~~in~~ common to the two typical initiatory ceremonies (1) that the operation is a painful one & requires a certain amount of endurance & (2) that it leaves a lasting and visible mark so that the individual can easily be recognized as an initiated man. I fancy that the latter is a feature of some importance.



In regard to the navel string +  
after birth I am afraid that we can  
help you but little. I cannot call  
to mind a single case in which  
any special custom was connected with  
the after birth though I remember  
making inquiry. The Kaitiā +  
Wamamanga + Bimbinga ceremonies in  
regard to the navel string are described  
in "Northern Tribes" col. 238. Chap. XXI. under the  
heading "Childbirth".  
I fear as I can  
remember the afterbirth is always buried.

As to wishing any information of  
ours - I hope you will always feel  
perfectly free to do this when & however  
you think best - whether it has been  
published or not. Howitt will  
be here on his way through before  
long so that you will probably see  
him shortly as he is now to go to  
Cambridge. I do not know whether

he sent you a copy of his "Totem"  
chapter but it was not a very long  
one as unfortunately he had not in  
the early days devoted much  
attention to the subject other than from  
the 'social' side - in fact the tribes which  
he knew best - those of Victoria - were  
too highly civilized to have very much  
of the magical or ceremonial aspects  
left amongst them. I think that

I told you that in an address which  
I gave on Shamanism in New Zealand  
I treated it under three aspects  
(1) social (2) ceremonial or dramatic  
(3) magical.

I hope the new G. B. goes on well.  
You will soon have it in 6 vols.  
With best wishes to yourself & Mrs.

Trayer  
Yours very sincerely

W. A. R. Spencer.