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THE CULT OF THE BULL-ROARER IN AUSTRALIA AND SOUTHERN NEW GUINEA

The purpose of the present paper is to demonstrate that in Australia and in the southern part of New Guinea the bull-roarer has to be interpreted as a phallic symbol and, consequently, its cult as a phallic cult. It is hardly necessary to that end to enter into a detailed description of the instrument: a flat, lancet-shaped slab of wood, sometimes resembling a long, flat fish, more often just a lancet, with, at one end, a hole with a cord passing through it. When whirling the instrument at the end of the cord, the operator gives the bull-roarer a spinning movement of its own, e.g. by making one side touch the ground ever so lightly, thus causing it to produce a surprisingly loud noise, which, — dependent upon the size of the instrument — varies from howling to whining, perfectly fitting the purpose of frightening people who are unaware where the noise comes from.

Older students held the opinion that the primitive people who first discovered the potentialities of the bull-roarer could not but ascribe the noise to a spiritual being. In their opinion, the terrifying noise of the bull-roarer explains the origin of the cult. Marett would even have the origin of the Supreme Being derived from the bull-roarer (Marett, pp. 145 sqq.) and among later anthropologists Zerries (1942, pp. 193, 199) does not doubt for a moment but that the awful noise of the simple instrument is in itself sufficient reason to ascribe it to a ghost or demon. The fact that in most areas, in Australia and in New Guinea as well as in Africa and, in an isolated case, even in America (cf. Zerries, pp. 5—160, 176—190) the noise of the bull-roarer is said to represent the voice of a demon, is generally accepted as an argument in favour of this view.

Personally, I think these far-fetched theories somewhat naive. There are also primitive peoples who are less impressed by the bull-roarer's voice, and use the object as a mere toy or as a scarecrow. Evidently, those who know how the instrument works need not necessarily be

frightened. That holds true even in rituals where the bull-roarer is said to represent the voice of a demon. It is only the non-initiated who are frightened. Often we find that their fright is a source of amusement to the initiated, who know where the noise comes from. Less often, but still frequently enough, we find proof that the uninitiated who are said to be frightened (and certainly the older people among them) only pretend to be scared, being perfectly well aware of the true character of the secret. The deceit need not distract from the respect due to the demon, not even from the respect for the instrument with which the deceit is committed. Especially when the bull-roarer is an old one the instrument may be venerated, and yet be a source of amusement because of its instrumentality in deceiving the outsider.

Actually, the facts do not justify the opinion expressed i.a. by Zerries that the use of the bull-roarer as a toy is a recent development, a deterioration of its ritual use. On the contrary, playing man is a phenomenon far more fundamental than that of superstitious man who projects the voice of a demon into a slab of wood which he swings at the end of a cord. Those who have dogs know that dogs will play. All animals play. It is simply unacceptable that, in his early youth, *homo sapiens* would not have played, that man would have developed his faculty for play from ritual, to put it bluntly, after Sunday morning service. Whoever feels in need of a theory on the origin of the bull-roarer may well start from *homo ludens* who amused himself swinging a flat slab of wood which made a weird noise, and then had a brain-wave that he might use the object either to frighten other people or to warn them not to come near the place where the thing was manipulated. Here is a startingpoint from which a variegated theory of origin may be developed, leading to the point where the instrument is used by the community of males to frighten the community of females.

We will not enter into a discussion of the interesting problem why it is always the community of males which sets out to frighten the community of females by the use of quasi-supernatural means. For our present purpose it is enough to give a picture of the general context in which the bull-roarer is used as a cult instrument. That context can be described as a cultural situation in which the difference between the sexes is given special emphasis by organizing ceremonies which may be attended by men only. The exclusiveness of the rites is secured by their secret character. Whatever the actual history of the bull-roarer, one thing is certain and that is that its weird noise is a perfect means, not only to warn off and to frighten the uninitiated, but also to be made

the core of the secret which secures the exclusive character of the rites. The secret character of the rites has still another consequence. The admission of new members has to be ritualized in order to safeguard the secret. Of course there may be many other motives for emphasizing the secrecy of the cult, such as its specific sacredness, the deep meaning to be attached to its religious symbols, and so on. For our present purpose these motives need not be elaborated because they easily detract from the general setting: a community of males stressing its exclusiveness by the use of quasi-supernatural means. It is evident that, for that purpose, the bull-roarer is an expedient instrument.

Let us now turn to actual fact. Wherever, within the area under discussion, the bull-roarer is used as a ritual instrument, its use is connected with initiation. The initiation may include circumcision, homosexual abuse and/or ill-treatment, but the displaying of the bull-roarer is always an important event, very often even the ultimate clue to the initiation ritual. We may summarize its use as follows: the bull-roarer is employed first to warn off (and frighten) those persons who should stay away from the rites (the women and children); secondly to frighten the neophytes, more particularly by swinging the instrument in their presence whilst they are prevented from seeing it; and thirdly to be shown to the neophytes, after which each of them is given one which will be his own and which he is encouraged to swing himself. It is evident that a bull-roarer, wherever applied in such a way, may easily become associated with the male sex or male community, and, indeed, with the symbol of the male *par excellence*, the male genital. The fact that initiation into the cult of the bull-roarer is associated with the acquiring of the status of manhood combined with that other conspicuous fact that every neophyte receives a bull-roarer of his own as a token of his initiation and acknowledged manhood, not only makes such an association possible but even probable. From this point of view the bull-roarer is so evidently predestined to become a phallic symbol as to inspire the present author with the uncomfortable feeling that he is forcing an open door with his argument. Nevertheless, it may be worth while to demonstrate that in the area under investigation the people actually associate the bull-roarer with a phallus. In particular with regard to Australia, where a number of tribes denies the physiological effect of the sexual act, such a demonstration might be of value.

In the New Guinea area among three of the four tribes on which data were gathered, the phallic symbolism of the bull-roarer is fairly

evident. We will start with the Kiwai, then to proceed to the Trans-Fly people and the Marind-anim, to round up with the Elema of Orokolo. Among the Kiwai the name given to the bull-roarer is *madubu*, I am a man (Baxter Riley, p. 202). It is used mainly in agricultural rites aiming at furthering the growth of the yams. It is also used in connection with turtle-fishing, but we will confine ourselves to the agricultural rites. An initiation-ceremony is connected with the latter. This initiation takes place in the open, in a clearing made in the forest. Here the community of male initiates assembles, arranging themselves in the form of a bull-roarer, with every man putting his bull-roarer behind him (see fig. 1). The neophytes take up their stand in the centre, viz. in the centre of the bull-roarer formed by the community of males (Baxter Riley, p. 204). In the yam-field the swinging of the bull-roarer is preceded by sexual intercourse between a man and his wife. The secretion is collected and smeared on the bull-roarer. Then the instrument is swung, causing the "medicine" to be spread all over the field (cf. Landtman 1927, pp. 75, 76, 81, 82). Though our authors fail to refer to it, the rite reminds the observant reader of the myth of origin of all vegetables. As a matter of fact, the magic applied on the

Fig. 1. From E. Baxter Riley, *Among Papuan Headhunters*, p. 204.
(By courtesy of Seeley, Service & Co. Ltd., London)

occasion refers to the relevant myth, which runs as follows: *Soido* had killed his wife. From her dead body all the vegetables sprouted, but *Soido* collected them all and swallowed them. He did so in such a hurry that they were not digested but passed through his body into his genital. Then he set out to find himself a new wife, in which, at last, he succeeded. When he copulated with her he withdrew his genital and all the vegetables which were in his genital were scattered over the field where the pair cohabited. That is the origin of vegetables (Landtman 1927, pp. 73 sq.; id. 1917, nr. 44).

Another myth associates the bull-roarer with *Maigidubu*, a snake-

Plate I.

Nrs. 1 and 3: Bull-roarers of the Marind-anim (coll. Royal Trop. Inst., nrs. 520/74 and 2834/54).

Nrs. 2 and 4: Magical object of the Marind-anim (coll. id., nrs. 2563/56 and 2541/45).

Nrs. 5 — 8: Bull-roarers from the Papua-Gulf (coll. id., nrs. 2670/359, Wapi; 2670/365, Era-delta; 287/17, Kaimair; 2670/364, Urama).

Plate II. — Ambilia-Ekura Ceremony.

From Spencer and Gillen, *The Arunta*, Vol. 1, fig. 106, facing p. 288.
(By courtesy of MacMillan & Co., Ltd., London).

man (Landtman 1917, nr. 414; Baxter Riley, p. 96). The relation between snake and bull-roarer is of interest because of the widely-spread association between snake and phallus. Among the Kiwai, too, the snake is a phallic symbol. The snake that enters into a woman's genital is a fairly frequent motif in Kiwai folktales (Landtman 1917, nr. 413 with alternate readings A - E).¹ Apart from these interesting associations the actual myth of origin of the bull-roarer is disappointingly trivial. Its discovery was made by a woman. When cutting a tree a chip of wood flew off with a buzzing sound. She secured the splinter and that night Maigidubu revealed to her in a dream that she should give it to her husband, and gave her the necessary instructions on his behalf. Though by no means uncommon, it certainly is remarkable that the origin of the bull-roarer is attributed to a woman. We will refrain from speculations upon its deeper meaning; there is only one conclusion which may be drawn without eliciting controversy. That is that among the Kiwai, as among other people, the bull-roarer is not such a strictly guarded secret as it is said to be. Though the women are supposed to be ignorant, they nevertheless have something to do with it.

Even more evident is the relation of phallus and bull-roarer among the Trans-Fly people. Here the bull-roarer is the central secret of the homosexual initiation rites, in other words: it is very closely associated with the male sex. The aspect of fertility is not lacking either. Sodomy is said to favour the rapid growth of the neophytes, the overt aim of their seclusion. Where continued heterosexual intercourse is thought to be indispensable to the prosperous development of the foetus in its mother's womb, we may look upon homosexual intercourse as a form of feeding the neophyte in order to further his intended growth (cf. Williams 1936 (2), p. 204 jo. p. 172). The bull-roarers are identified with the mythical snake and crocodile (Williams 1936 (2), p. 185). The name of the first bull-roarer, *Tokujenjeni*, is used in war magic. When he has a go at the enemy the warrior cries out: "Tokujenjeni is copulating with you" (id., p. 183). Particularly interesting is the story of Tokujenjeni's birth (id., pp. 307 sq.). The wife of *Tiv'r* or *Kambel*, the originator in tribal mythology, is pregnant of the bull-roarer. *Tiv'r* hears a soft whining in his wife's abdomen and is highly intrigued.

¹ It should be noted that a similar behaviour is ascribed to fishes (Landtman 1917, nrs. 23, 199 and 438). The motif of a fish entering into a woman's genital is of interest with regard to the shape of the Marind-anim bull-roarer, and also in connection with a now obsolete rite of the Trans-Fly people suggesting the identity of fish and bull-roarer (cf. Williams 1936 (2), pp. 331-333).

One bird after another is sent out by him to extract the mysterious something. At last, while the woman is stooping down with legs wide apart, brooming the place, a bird manages to get hold of the protruding thing and extract it. It is the first bull-roarer, at the same time the first child of the divine couple. The identity of man and bull-roarer is evident.

An alternative reading of the story is found among the Marind-anim. Here, too, the bull-roarer is associated with a homosexual initiation-cult which the Marind-anim share with the Kanum-anim tribes who, in turn, are close relatives of the Trans-Fly people described by Williams. The name of the mythical initiation demon, *Sosom*, is identical with the word for bull-roarer (*sosom*). The demon is a giant, a close relative of the demon of the sun (cf. Van Baal 1934, p. 167). He is depicted as a brute who, like the demon of the sun, one day could not disengage himself from copulation with a girl he had met. The girl's mother cut off *Sosom*'s penis, which was left in the girl's vagina. Later a stork succeeded in extracting it. *Sosom* went eastward; his genital malformation did not permit him to partake in other than homosexual intercourse (Wirz III, p. 39). Nothing is said about the girl nor about the further effect of the stork's activities.

A comparison with the story of Tiv'r is fully justified; both stories explain the origin of the bull-roarer in what is more or less the same ritual, the homosexual initiation cult common to all these tribes. Moreover, the two myths have a characteristic trait in common: the extraction of a something from a girl's genital by a bird. The silence of the Marindese myth on both the girl and the extracted penis makes the whole passus meaningless, unless we conclude that an important detail has been left out, viz. that the cut-off penis is the bull-roarer (*sosom*).

Other evidence corroborates the suggested interpolation. The Marindinese bull-roarer has two forms; one unadorned, lancet-shaped, which is apparently the bull-roarer for ordinary use; the other carved and these carved instruments have the shape of a fish. They share their fish-shape with fully identical objects which are used in magical practices. Therefore, we may consider the fish-shape to be the accomplished form of the Marind-anim bull-roarer. Its characteristic shape is demonstrated in Pl. I, where the Marind bull-roarers are compared with similar instruments from the Purari delta. The latter represent a human being with the head near the string-hole; the fish-head of the Marind object is at the other end and the string is fastened either through or

onto the tail. These details, seemingly meaningless, become significant when considered in the context of the Marindinese myth of origin. The latter explains how the first human beings were *anda*-fishes which emerged from the underworld in a muddy water-hole. The stork (again the stork!) extracted them from the hole and put them in a dry place where, through the interference of another mythical being who made fire, they developed into real human beings. Years ago the Rev. P. Vertenten published a sketch drawn to illustrate the native concepts on this point. The sketch (from Vertenten, p. 128) is reproduced as fig. 2. The similarity of the *anda*-fish to a Marindinese bull-roarer is striking. We conclude that there is reason to presume that the identity of bull-roarer and penis plays a part in Marind-anim thought. The conclusion is by no means surprising: phallic symbolism is prominent in Marind-anim religion. In Marindanim mythology we also meet with the association of snake and penis, viz. in the story of the man with an elongated member which was cut off and changed into a snake. This story, however, has nothing to do with Sosom. Its main character is a man belonging to the other moiety (cf. Wirz II, p. 140).

Not everywhere in South New Guinea is the phallic meaning of the bull-roarer as evident as it is among the tribes discussed this far. Among the Oroko its phallic aspect is obscure. Still, it has not been obliterated. The bull-roarer may represent a snake or a crocodile, an ancestor or a totem (Williams 1936 (1), pp. 29, 31 sqq.). In his Bull-roarers of the Papua Gulf Williams is rather hesitant on the identification of bull-roarer and snake. In his Drama of Oroko he is more outspoken. His conclusion, based on linguistic arguments, that snake and bull-roarer may be identified is well documented (see Williams 1940, pp. 164—168) and the same may be said of his suggestion that the bull-roarer represents an ancestor (id., p. 204). More important, however, is his hypothesis that the magnificent, up to 20

A: representation of an *anda*-fish.

B. the appearance of man as he emerged from the water-hole.

Fig. 2. Reprinted from P. Vertenten, M. S. C., *Vijftien Jaar onder de Koppensnellers*, p. 128. (By courtesy of the Sacred Heart Mission).

feet high masks, produced during an extremely long-drawn and complicated ceremonial, are magnified bull-roarers (id., pp. 204 sqq.). These masks, an impressive number of which is turned out, have individual names. With few exceptions these names are the names of ancestors or refer to mythical events. Though innovations are possible, most masks have a history going far back; they are inherited and each man has a number of masks which are his specific property (Williams 1940, pp. 250—263). The masks are subject to progressive development: they are associated with magic, and events interpreted as manifestations of the supernatural may inspire a person to design a new mask. In spite of such innovations masks referring to ancestors belonging to the mythical age prevail. These masks refer to the same beings as are referred to by the bull-roarers, which are, in fact, also identified with these beings. We may conclude that, among the Elema, the cult of the bull-roarer has developed in a direction involving a reduction of the phallic aspect with simultaneous emphasizing of the identification of bull-roarer and mythical ancestor. The revelation of the high *hevehe*-masks, the magnified bull-roarers, has the meaning of a re-enacting of the mythical past. When, after years and years of preparation, 100 to 120 of these masks descend from the imposing arch of the gothic men's house to parade through the village, the sensation experienced by the onlookers is more than a sensation of aesthetic delight. In greater or smaller numbers the masks are going to descend every day during a whole festive month. People are deeply touched by the sight of the masks and the women are the first to demonstrate their feelings. In the masks the mythical age is represented in a temporary revelation of all that the past means for the present. Stripped of all accidental traits there is a fundamental similarity with Australian rites. There, too, myths are re-enacted by performers who, in a disguised form, bear a phallic symbol identical with the ancestor who is represented. This may be exemplified by two cases, taken from northeast Arnhemland and from the Aranda.

To W. L. Warner and R. and C. Berndt we owe an elaborate description of ritual in northeastern Arnhemland. Among the cycles described the more important are the rites connected with *Djanggawul* and those of *Kunapipi*. The *Djanggawul*-cycle deals with a mythical hero, *Djanggawul*, who comes from the east with his two sisters, an older and a younger one. *Djanggawul* has a long penis which touches the ground; the two sisters have a similarly elongated clitoris. They carry sacred poles, *rangga*, which they occasionally plunge into the ground. In those places

a tree sprouts or a spring wells up from which water gushes forth. The Djanggawul siblings give the country its shape. The rangga are also used in ritual as the sacred symbols of the ancestors. There is no doubt as to the phallic character of myth and ritual. The man copulates repeatedly with his sisters, who are continuously bearing children. On the one hand the three together constitute a typical Australian headman family, consisting of a man with an old and a young wife. On the other hand, all three, the women too, are living phallic symbols. Phallic symbols, too, are the rangga which are used in the *narra*-ritual. They are hidden in sacred pools, the pools from which the spirit-children come which cause pregnancy, the pools, too, whither at death the souls return. Man comes from the rangga-well and returns to it (cf. Warner, pp. 21 sqq., and R. Berndt 1952, ch. II and III). For procreation the sexual act, though its effect is understood, is of no importance when compared to the significance of the rangga-well.

The ritual connected with Djanggawul does not make use of bull-roarers, but the Kunapipi-ritual does. In the relevant myth we meet again with an elder and a younger sister who are swallowed by the python living in a well. The python is a male symbol, the fertilizing rain-bringer (cf. Warner, pp. 386 sqq.). Swallowing the women, the *Wauwalak*-sisters, means that the snake is copulating with them: "and when the *Julunggul* (i.e. the snake) swallows the *Wauwalak*, that is like a penis being swallowed by a vagina, only we put it the other way round" (Berndt 1951, p. 39). The bull-roarer used during the ceremonies is the snake himself (Warner, p. 291).

Even more interesting is our second case, that of the Aranda, the people said to be ignorant of the physiological effect of the sexual act. Here the bull-roarer is called *tjuringa*, a word used for a variety of sacred objects.² The most sacred among them are certain flattened slabs of stone or wood, often carefully decorated with elaborate engravings (Spencer and Gillen, pp. 99 sqq.). In form these most sacred *tjuringa* rarely resemble a bull-roarer. Their flatness and often recurring oval shape, however, tend to give substance to the identity in name with the bull-roarer. In one way or another these *tjuringa* should be considered as related to the bull-roarer.

Definitely obscure is the identity of bull-roarer and phallus. A slight indication — but certainly not more than a very slight one — may be found in the peculiar shape of the *nurtunja*, the sacred object worn in

² The word is also used to denote certain sacred ceremonies (cf. Strehlow 1947, pp. 85 sq.).

ritual by performers who represent the mythical ancestors. The *nur-tunja* is described as a sacred pole, usually made out of one or more spears, wound with human hairstring, and decorated with down (Spencer and Gillen, p. 74). Often a few *tjuringa* are attached to it or combined with it in some other way (id., pp. 208, 276, and various illustrations). Turning over the leaves of Spencer and Gillen's *The Arunta* in order to study the illustrations is highly instructive. The number of phallic decorations made for the successive ceremonies is amazingly great. The most suggestive among them is without doubt the *kawwa-auwa*, the sacred pole along which the first ancestor of the *atjilpa*-clan climbed up to heaven (id., pp. 293, 298, 360). All this, however, does not make a phallic cult, unless it appears that these objects are meant to represent a phallus.

The answer is given in the elaborate myth of the *Atjilpa*-ancestors to which Spencer and Gillen devoted two chapters (XIII and XIV) of their book. The *Atjilpa*-ancestor is the culture-hero of the story, the creator of all *tjuringa* and all *kuruna* (germs of life) which, when emanating from the *tjuringa* harbouring them, are the cause of pregnancy of the mother and the life-principle of the new individual, destined to return at his death to the *pertaltjira* where the *tjuringa* belongs. The idea of a closed life-cycle beginning and ending in the *pertaltjira* where the *tjuringa* are deposited, is closely related to the ideas connected with the *rangga*-well among the north-eastern Arnhem-landers. The same may be said of the way in which the *Atjilpa*-ancestor is presented. Like *Djanggawul* he has two wives, an older and a younger one, with whom he sits down, one to his right and one to his left, causing all *kuruna* to enter into them from a kind of pouch where he kept them. The name given to the pouch is *ambilia-ekura*, which means litt. baby-bag and is, "in fact, the name actually given to the bag, really the amnion in which the unborn child lies within his mother" (Spencer and Gillen, p. 225). It is not actually said that the *Atjilpa*-ancestor copulated with his women, but the suggestion to that effect is obvious enough, unless we adhere strictly to the assumption that the function of fatherhood is unknown. The story, as it runs, makes it rather difficult for us to uphold that. Time and again we are told that the *Atjilpa*-ancestor arranges the *tjuringa* in pairs and once it is stated that in doing so by tying them two and two together, care is taken that the female *tjuringa* are the lower ones (id., p. 365). But there is more. One day the ancestor takes two pairs of *tjuringa* and, discarding the upper ones, changes the lower *tjuringa*, which are female, into male

tjuringa. From these changed tjuringa the *Twanyirrika* originate, the two initiation-demons whose voice is the bull-roarer. The *Twanyirrika* circumcise the boys. The symbolism is undeniable: by circumcision the boys are, like the *Twanyirrika*, changed from women into men. In a society where everybody goes naked circumcision necessarily implies an explicit affirmation of masculinity; the glans penis, up to that time concealed by the foreskin, is now shown as a sign of readiness to indulge in sexual activity.

The close association of the initiation-demon *Twanyirrika* with circumcision and bull-roarer suggests an association of penis and bull-roarer. The suggestion is corroborated by the frequent use of the bull-roarer in love magic (cf. a.o. Spencer and Gillen, pp. 408 sq.). Far more convincing, however, is the *Engwura*-cult, the great initiation-ceremony which brings in its different phases a re-enactment of the total mythical history. Before the final corroboree closes the long series of ceremonies by a fortnight or more of organized exchange of women, a very impressive ceremony takes place in which the story of the Atjilpa-ancestor is re-enacted. The performer personifying the Atjilpa-ancestor is the headman himself. He kneels down with some great object in front of him, made out of two tjuringa which are bound together and decorated in such a way as to suggest an enormous phallus (cf. the highly suggestive photograph in Spencer and Gillen, fig. 106, reproduced by courtesy of the editors, as Plate II). Its lower end is held in front of his abdomen and he slowly moves it up and down. He is assisted by two men, one kneeling to the right and one to the left, who hold his arms and help him to move the phallus-like object up and down. The two men belong to opposite moieties and represent the two wives of the Atjilpa-ancestor. In the meantime the initiates lie down on the ground in respectful silence. A small group of old men surround the actors, singing softly. All night long the monotonous rising and falling of the mysterious objects goes on incessantly. Its significance is unmistakable: it is the first ancestor manipulating his phallus with the assistance of his two women. It is a symbolic copulation. And the most remarkable of all is the name given to the mysterious object: *ambilia ekura*, amnion, womb. We remember now that the first ancestor sent the kuruna, the life-germs, into his two women from the *ambilia ekura* he had near at hand. In other words: his phallus is called amnion and emptying the amnion simply means copulating.

The real secret of the rites is the symbolic inversion of the male genital. The penis is called a womb and the womb is moved up and

down like a penis, all the time ejecting the germs of life which will impregnate the two women represented invertedly by two old men. We remember the words of Berndt's informant: "when the Julunggul swallows the Wauwalak, that is like a penis swallowed by a vagina, only we put it the other way round". Inversion is used here to indicate the deeper meaning of the sexual act. It is more than mere copulation; it is the secret of life itself.

If it is accepted that the bull-roarer is a phallic symbol, then not only does the main scene of the Engwura-ceremonies become significant, but many other traits of Aranda belief and ritual can be placed in a meaningful whole, such as the form of a very small bull-roarer, sometimes ascribed to the ratapa (the word used by Strehlow for kuruna); the function of the bull-roarer in erotic magic; the all-pervading attention paid to the male genital and its ritual deformations; the sub-incision and the use of genital blood as what might be both an approximation of menstrual blood and a semen-substitute (cf. Berndt 1945, pp. 239 sqq., a description relevant for Aranda sub-incision).

The foregoing is a mere outline of a theory with regard to the bull-roarer and certain aspects of the religion of Australian tribes. It is given without pretence, simply to bring the matter up for discussion. With regard to the Aranda references were restricted almost exclusively to the work by Spencer and Gillen. Though relevant data could have been borrowed as well from the works of C. and T. G. H. Strehlow, I preferred to draw on the older work to demonstrate that the present conclusions are not necessarily the result of newly acquired knowledge. In doing so, discussions on discrepancies between various sources were duly avoided. They do not belong within the scope of the present article. To prove the theory an extensive analysis of a number of Australian cultures is required. Instead, a few data were selected from only a few books, in order to demonstrate that the theory does not wholly lack support by actual fact. With this restriction in mind, two remarks may be added.

In the first place this. When a senior officer writes a letter of which he thinks the contents are important (a junior officer has not the right to think he does something important) he will have that letter classified as confidential, i.e. as secret. Of course it is not true that all important letters should be kept secrets. But the reverse is certainly true. Things secret are, in one way or another, always important, at least to those who emphasize their secrecy. If the bull-roarer and its phallic meaning

are kept a secret, and if, among the Aranda, the fertilizing effect of the sexual act is kept a secret, it is perfectly certain that these secrets are valued truths. As to the latter, the meaning of the sexual act among the Aranda, it is suggested that the act is so important, so sacred, that sexual intercourse can only be practised if its sacred meaning is dissimulated in symbolic forms and the act itself desacralized into a profane act of pleasure. It is a desacralisation destined for failure. The sexual act is hedged in with irksome taboos. How much they are experienced as irksome appears on occasions of ritualized sexual promiscuity: among the partners then to be approached are sometimes those most strictly tabooed in normal life (Berndt 1951, p. 49; Spencer and Gillen, pp. 474, 475). The Australian aborigine has his sexual problems too, and these problems doubtlessly contributed to the weaving of the symbols of Eros into those of life and death as expressed in the cycle of life itself, originating from the totemwell to which it returns.

A final remark is concerned with the relations between southern New Guinean cultures and Australian cultures. Our discussion holds the suggestion that there are significant similarities. To them could be added the apparent similarities found between the totemism of the Marind-anim and the Orokelo on the one hand and that of the Australian tribes on the other, as well as the functional similarities between the Australian system of sections and totem-relationships and the organisation of over-all-clans in southern New Guinea. In the absence of a detailed investigation of the mass of relevant data any discussion of these similarities is a hazardous undertaking. The similarities demonstrable are counterbalanced by significant differences and without a preceding analysis of the cultures involved any discussion of the relations between Australian and Papuan cultures is decidedly premature.

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