

Daisy Bates Papers

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Series 2: 'Native Testaments of old natives;

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From Nebinyan's memories of Flinders' visit to their group area, the following notes were compiled by me from Nebinyan at the Katanning Camp in 1908-10, one hundred and three years after Flinders' visit to his people's country. The group which contacted with Flinders occupied the whole of that Southern and S.W. area, one of the most fertile areas in Western Australia; and as far as I could ascertain from the two derelicts remaining in or near their "old homes", (Nebinyan and Wandinyilmurnong too old to question), their "Kalleep" (from "Kal" or "Kala", -' fire', 'home', 'hearth') there had been no other group or people in that area before their own occupancy. They belonged to the uncircumcised hordes that entered Australia from the north (?) coast, making their fires (Kala) at the various waterholes etc. and continuing their wanderings southward and perhaps eastward. How far inland did they go? They rested at permanent waters but the sea was always west of them, near or far, but west. The first comers travelled perhaps more quickly than the hordes that came after them but their faces were turned south and they wished to have a long long distance between themselves and those who might follow after. There were evidently inhabitants before their entry and in the long long time they travelled – perhaps always within "smell of the sea" the group journeyed until it reached the S.W. and South Sea.

The "Borongurups", a chain of mountains running roughly east and west were named by them and the meaning of the word given by all the South Western and Southern Coast groups dialects meant the "Home or place of their "borung" which means the "place of "borung" (elder brother, "borunggur" elder brothers)(called by the American Indians 'Totems'). 'Up' means "place of" as distinct from their "Kalleep" – 'fire', 'hearth', 'home', each group having its own group area and 'Kalleep' where they sat down or travelled over in game hunting and over which they travelled from end to end and which then other groups visited and exchanged visits. Borunggurup was never occupied by any "Kalleep" (family) group, as far as I could ascertain. It had not been explained up to the time of my investigation in 1905-8 and beyond its name, nothing more of it was known by Nebinyan or the very old man Wandinyilmernong who clung to his old Kalleep at Middleton Beach which had been the Kalleep of his own family group, and probably was their camp when Flinders gentlemen were turned aside from penetrating into their Kalleep, their gesture being quickly accepted by the gentlemen making a circuit round its vicinity.

Boronggurup was a sacred place throughout its whole group area. Big game that took shelter in the Boronggurup area was never followed – it had taken sanctuary and was sacred. Boronggurup was the abode of "spirits" only, "totem" spirits only and was left sacred for those spirit totems to dwell in. Here and there along its length there were places where childrens and babies voices could be heard and sometimes these baby voices would be heard by a young girl wife who wanted a little baby and she would go softly and stand in front of the Baby Rock and taking some little branches with her would hold them to her young breast and the little boy or girl baby would see her and come to her and by and by the little baby would come from her body where it had hidden itself and perhaps while she was loving it she might have seen a small animal or bird near the baby rock and she would tell her people and the bird or animal would become the baby's own borunggur, which

she would never hurt or kill or eat. Borungurup was therefore not a place to fear, except when or if any large edible totem was killed and eaten without the proper ceremonies attendant on its eating. Borungurup was therefore a sanctuary for everything that sought refuge in its hills and caves.

It must be emphasized here, that all 'first comers' amongst the Western Australian aborigines brought their group laws and customs with them and I have some evidence in stating that the Southern uncircumcised men were Australia's first arrivals (?vide my Folios in Commonwealth Archives)

They were a fairer and darker type and were divided into two marrying classes. The fairer called themselves Manitch-mat (Manitch-white cockatoo; 'mat'- stock, "family" blood relations to each other; Wordungmat also blood relations to each other (black crow) stock. These groups were the marrying pairs' but no first cousin ('cross' cousin) marriages were allowed in that primitive group 'until the white people came'. Nebinyan and his "father in law" "Wandinyil" both stated most emphatically to me: amongst all those southern groups along the south and south west coasts and eastward from Albany area I found only the group at Willilambi (Twilight Cove) whose lawful marriages had been "cross cousin". There were only three men alive when I visited Willilambi area. Wirrgain, his own mother's own brother, and his own mother's own brother's son – all three belonging to the fairer (white cockatoo) and the strongest "family" likeness between all three. [illeg.] between Wirrgain and mother's [?]brother' son and Wirrgain (sister's son)

Nebinyan's group kept their own strict marriage laws throughout and were, to the end, fine types, yet always showing "family likeness of fairer and darker". The only two photographs of these old Albany area groups Nebinyan and Wandinyil, show the two distinctive types, and very curiously to me, I found amongst all the South Western groups, including every part of the country where they had 'settled' there was a distinct feeling among the white cockatoo men that they (and even their "women kind") were "superior" in type and colour to the crow men. With 'modern' white cockatoo men and women, I would be asked to observe their clear skin with the fine red blood coming through their faces and bodies, the opaque skins of the Crow men and their "stocky" bodies being contemptuously alluded to. Wandinyil felt this inferiority to the last and preferred his old Kalleep at Middleton Beach until his death (about 1911) at enmity with both white and black.

These were the people Flinders met in December 1801, a strong fine looking type of men – having and observing their own laws which were in the care of their elders. Death was the penalty for a breach of their marriage laws and the punishment was carried out, so that they were a fine sturdy and intelligent body of men and women. "They were shy but not afraid" wrote Flinders, and indeed and in truth they were not afraid for they saw in these white men the spirits of their own dead men, coming back from the Koorannup the Home of their own dead which lay beyond the Western Sea.

Margin note: "Kobbara jangga" Kobera meaning 'boat', ship or 'carrier' of spirit people

The young Navigator and his men confirmed that belief throughout the stay of the "Investigator" and every man on that boat "lived up" to that Kurannup (heavenly) belief "in the memory of Nebinyan's father's group".

After the departure of the "Investigator" all set to work to learn the movements and the designs on the Janggas' bodies and every "musket movement" was also repeated - Nebiyan's "dowuk"

reproducing probably every motion made by the Mariners in their musket exercises of those days. How they reproduced the noise of the fife could not be ascertained but as, according to Flinders, they "screamed with delight" at the sight of the mariners, there must have been some (imitative attempt) faint semblance to some old ceremony of their own. Aboriginal "drums" were circular earth mounds, piled up about (and about) two feet in height at the top. Round these, men sat with short thick clubs with which they pounded the mound keeping time with their clubs to their songs. This drumming sound could be heard a long distance away-seeming to come from beneath the ground.