

Daisy Bates Papers
MSS 572.994 B32t
Series 2: 'Native Testaments of old natives'
Series 2.7, B. Nebinyan 10 p.). Transcribed by Jane Walkley.

These MS drafts A-G describe Nebinyan's memories in old age of what he was told as a child about the visit of Flinders in 1801 and the dance imitating Flinders' troops that he was taught as a young man. His people believed they were ghost ancestors visiting them from over the Western Sea. DMB also briefly notes the background and beliefs of the Bibbulmun people.

Transcription

Bibbulmun area, S.W.A. Nebinyan's group area

Flinders visit 1801-Oct.'02

Visited by Flinders in 1801, 3 weeks stay here.

Investigator was careened here.

King George's Sound

Princess Royal Harbour

Doubtful island Bay

Cape Leeuwin and Flinders Bay

Flinders must have thought to enter this bay.

His first native contact was at King George Sound.

The Koorannup Kening took the same route from K.G. Sound all round the continent, going and returning either eastward or westward. Nebinyan had only seen his father grandparents etc. performing the Kurannup dance. He took part in the Womewa dance.

Flinders visited K.G.S. 1801

Detachment of military [(??)] arrived at K.G.S. 1826.

That detachment evidently had not heard from the natives of Flinders' visit [? ?] in 1801.

Nebinyan was about 70 or more when he died at my Katanning camp in 1908.

Verso: D.M.B.s calculation of Nebinyan's age – MS notes

Further drafts of Nebinyan's story are recorded and transcribed as D, 7 p., E, 5 p., F, 4 p. and G, 4 p. and all appear to have similar content to 2.7, B.

Nebinyan was a very old man when I first met him in 1906-8 at my Katanning Camp (W.A.). He was one of forty natives, all measles patients, under my sole care and tendance, and being so old, about 86 or more, his great strength, height, fine health and strong physique somehow made him a special victim of the disease, which was carrying off young white children and adults daily in Katanning at that period. He was the only living member of the King Georges Sound area, Western Australia, whose group saw Flinders and the Investigator on the morning of December 8, 1801.

Nebinyan lay in a leafy and cosy breakwind close to my tent, his only desire a nice fire log at the entrance, always alight and this was easily managed through the day and night.

I tended him specially through his attack and when my tasks with the other patients, necessarily performed at least three times daily, enabled me to have my evening meal and quiet rest, I went to Nebinyan's fire so that he also could have his evening pannikin of tea with me.

Then Nebinyan would respond to my quiet reminiscences of his Bibbulmun groups and without questioning on my part, as he knew I had been entered into the Manitchmat phratry (white cockatoo stock) which made me his blood relation; he could talk quite freely about his group, confirming all my notes taken from living young and old Bibbulmun of the South and West of W.A. (1900-8).

Nebinyan must have been born some twenty or thirty years after Flinders' visit and perhaps before Major Lockyer arrived in Albany (K.G.S.) 1926 (?) [1826] but every little male Bibbulmun boy must begin and finish his boyhood among the men's groups and Nebinyan's young memories, "coming in spate" at times, were all of his men kind and his group and his superior attitude towards all women and his "young" place and manhood place and "old man's" place among the men of his group.

I must give a short summary of this southern "Bibbulmun" group so that their conduct and their reaction to Flinders' arrival can be fully understood and appreciated and Nebinyan's memories confirmed.

The southern "Bibbulmun" groups were the remnants of the first (uncircumcised) groups that entered Australia from the north. (I found the pronominal affinity between Nebinyan's ancestral group and the Dravidians of Upper India and the fact of the boomerang's journey to Australia, the Kyl (or Kylie) boomerang, which came to Australia via Celebes, Kattyawar (Bombay) or Thebes (Egypt). His people were evidently the first 'human' arrivals in that area, for there is no sign or token to show that any other humans had reached those southern seas. They brought with them laws and customs they were living under and practising in 1801. They were then of two types only – a fairer and darker type still showing in the few group derelicts still living in South Western Australia.

The groups "phratryes" were Manitchmat (mat means 'stock', 'family') white cockatoo and Wordungmat (black crow stock (or 'mat') were the only married and marrying pairs in the whole Bibbulmun group of those days. (North of that area, the descent was maternal.) Their descent was paternal in the Albany area and northward towards Busselton and each phratry retained its characteristic type. Nebinyan was Manitchmat and the only other old Albany area man, Wandinyil, was Wordungmat. The crow stock was a coarser, opaque flesh type; the white cockatoo stock a finer, clearer skinned group which can be observed in the photographs of the old living members whose photographs show the distinction.

They also had brought a “totemic system” with them, or they developed such a system in course of time. They called their ‘totems’ ‘elder brothers’. Borung – “elder brother”, borunggur elder brothers, and every animal, reptile, bird, fish, vegetable etc. etc. was the borunggur of groups. For their larger food totems, kangaroo, certain ceremonies were performed for the increase of such animals, kangaroo, bird, (mallee hens’ eggs) large and even small fish, edible roots and such vital foods. There were ceremonies for all these and periods of abstinence from them and these ceremonies and these periods were as old as their phratries.

The little boys were early taught these vital lessons and thus their social system was kept in being till the extinction of the group.

A range of hills in the southern area was called Borungerup and were the ‘Shrine’ ‘Home’ ‘Sanctuary’ of all ‘borunggar (totems plural). In this range of hills, a great magic snake called “Woggal” dwelt and kept watch over all the groups and totems so that their great foods would be preserved and the due ceremonies for their preservation be performed at the proper times. The whole range of mountains were thus made sacred and any kangaroo, emu or other large beast who took sanctuary from his human borung (brother) hunter was never followed and no native ever entered those ranges.

This then was the law of existence amongst the humans and their living foods and these laws were so strongly impressed upon the children (boys) that they were kept religiously until the passing of the groups.

Their belief in a life after death was universal. The Home of their dead lay beyond the great Western Sea and was called Koorannup and every dead man’s “spirit” (called Jangga) the moment it went out from him through his windpipe went immediately westward under the sea to the Home of all his kin, Koorannup.

Half way through the sea a great Karrak or nest (black cockatoo, white tail) tried to stop the spirit and this obstacle had to be overcome by the “Jangga” of the dead man. He passed through and went on his way through the floor of the sea until he was reaching the Koorannup shore. He tried to catch a fish or some kind of food to take to his people who had gone to Koorannup before him and as he reached Koorannup, he saw his own people waiting on the shore and all of them were Jangga or “white spirits”. They welcomed him and gave him food which he ate and then went to sleep and while he slept, his Jangga Kalleepgur (home or fireside or his own group) pulled off his dark skin and when he woke from his sleep he was a Jangga like them (a Koorannup spirit).

The few Jangga who did not, or could not, overcome the Karrak’s obstacle, returned to their earthly Kalleep (home) and became evil “Jangga” haunting caves and dark places, and this is when Flinders and his “gentlemen” (as he rightly called his crew) became the first ‘white Jangga’ group to come back from their Koorannup Home to revisit their own Kalleep and where Nebinyan’s story to me of the return of their “Bibbulmun Jangga” [came from] and how they were at once accepted by the living men, his own ancestors who saw them come out from the Kobbara (ship?, boat?) and walk about their “earthly Kalleep”.

“They were shy but not afraid” wrote Flinders. They (the heavenly visitors) walked about without fear or halting just like their living Kalleepgur (“home folk”) and the living men watched them from bushes and tree trunks, until they, especially the elders of the group, lost their fear in the great

wonder and delight that came to them as they realized that they were seeing “Jangga Yungar” (spirit “men”) belonging to their own “kalleep”, who had returned to their old ground. Every movement of those “heavenly spirits” was noted; every face was studied and some ‘resemblance’ to a dead brother or father, was noted and commented on. They came towards the tents, unafraid.

“The man,” (writes Flinders) when communication had been made, “was admired for his manly behaviour and they gave him a bird that had been shot and a handkerchief.” They made signs that Flinders’ interpreter as “a desire from them that his group should return to the place from whence they came.”

When they approached the tents ‘with caution’ “Mr Purdie, assistant-surgeon, going up unarmed, a communication was brought about”.

Next day (23rd Dec.) “Formed a party to visit lakes behind West Cape Howe, walked N.W. of Princess Royal Harbour and thence west. Had not gone far when a native was seen running before us, soon after an old man, he was anxious for us to go no further, was not able to prevail. We accommodated him so far as to make a circuit round the wood where it seemed probable his family and female friends were placed – the old man followed us, hallooing to give information of our movements and when a “parquet” was shot he experienced neither fear nor surprise.” (This was probably a ‘general’ camping area where the women and children and old people had a semi-permanent camp near some “women fishing” small estuary.)

On the 30th wooding and watering of the ship was completed and sails repaired.

Only a limited number of natives was seen; they were shy but not afraid, and during the stay of the ‘Investigator’ no disturbance whatever occurred although they visited the tents daily.”

Writing a few days before his departure from King George Sound, Flinders says, “Our friends, the natives, continued to visit us and the old man, with several others being at the tents this morning, I ordered the marines on shore to be exercised in their presence. The red coats and white crossed belts were greatly admired, having some resemblance to their own manner of ornamenting themselves and the drum, but particularly the fife, excited their astonishment, but when they saw those beautiful red and white men with their bright muskets drawn up in a line, they absolutely screamed with delight, nor were their wild gestures and vociferations to be silenced but by commencing the exercises, to which they paid the most earnest and silent attention.

Several of them moved their hands involuntarily, according to the motions, and the old man placed himself at the end of a rank with a short staff in his hand which he shouldered, presented, grounded, as did the marines with their muskets, without, I believe, knowing what he did. Before firing, the natives were acquainted with what was going to take place, so that the volleys did not excite much terror...

The native women were kept out of sight, as the men appeared to think there must be women in the ship and that a similar jealousy actuated the company of the Investigator.

The belief that there must be women in the ship induced two of the natives to comply with our persuasion of getting into the boat to go on board, but their courage failing, they desired to be re-landed and made signs that the ship must go on shore to them.”

Our frequent and amicable communication with the natives of this country has been mentioned. The women, however, were kept out of sight, with seeming jealousy.

Newspaper cutting titled *Race and Colour prejudice* by Bertram R. Wyllie, no date