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ORIGINAL ARTICLES.

Australia, South.

With Plate D.

Basedow.

Burial Customs in the Northern Flinders Ranges of South Australia. By Herbert Basedow, M.D., M.A., B.Sc., F.G.S., &c.; Local Correspondent of the Royal Anthropological Institute, London; Hon. Fellow of the Anthropological Society, Göttingen; Hon. Corresponding Member of the Geographical Society, Hamburg, &c. 26

Introduction.—As the influence of civilisation advances, step by step, into remote districts, which had hitherto lent a charm by being classed as “primitive wilds where “Nature unadulterated reigns,” so must ever be lost to science countless treasures through lack of interest and want of observation on the part of the hardy pioneers, who, in their determined struggle against drought, heat, and exposure, have, of necessity, little or no time left to think of noting facts and thus preserving valuable material for scientific research. The living thus often vanishes from the face of the earth without a record. In few instances, only, a temporary or permanent monument remains for a subsequent observer to decipher, and throw but a little light upon the characteristics and doings of the past. It was a relic of this description that I recently had the good fortune to discover in the North Flinders Ranges, while commissioned by the South Australian Government to examine that country geologically. With the exception of a small group of semi-civilised and corrupted natives, now living at the Government Dépôt at Mount Serle, none are nowadays to be found roaming about their ancient haunts; but evidence is at hand to show that, in years gone by, the country was inhabited by a powerful tribe, which I have elsewhere referred* to as the “Two-tooth” natives.

Among other things, I found two aboriginal graves during my exploration of the Ranges. These are of exceptional interest, not only because their particular method of burial has not been described from the district, but because one of the skeletons demonstrates, in a very explicit way, some of the attendant burial rites.

Locality of Graves.—Two graves were found in the same tract of country, lying between Lakes Frome and Torrens, viz., one near Bobmoony Well, about twelve miles east of Beltana, and another on Mundy Creek, about seventeen miles south-east of Lyndhurst.

General Description.—The Bobmoony grave is that of an old male aboriginal, and that on Mundy Creek is that of an aged female. A permanent natural-water exists at either site; consequently, there is no doubt that the natives used to select these places as their camping grounds, and, while they were camped there, the individuals here referred to died. In either case, the grave had been dug about one mile due west of the water, and the mode of interment was alike in both. The long axis of the grave ran due north and south. The corpse was laid on its back at a depth of about two feet below the natural surface of the ground. The head pointed to the south and the face was turned to the left, that is, towards the setting sun. In the Bobmoony case, the skeleton lay fully extended and, so far as the mutilation allowed judgment, the same was true of the female buried at Mundy Creek. The arms had been laid in a normal, lateral position along the body, but were slightly flexed in the former case so that the old man’s hands rested upon his thighs. In filling up the graves, the corpses had first been covered with leaves and other vegetable waste, and upon this had been placed a layer of short pieces of wood (which, however, at the time of my examination, had almost completely rotted away).

* *Vide Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, 1907, p. 709. The information concerning the practice of the knocking out of the incisors among these natives was given me by old residents. In several skeletons that I personally examined there was no evidence of any of the incisors having been removed *intra vitam*.

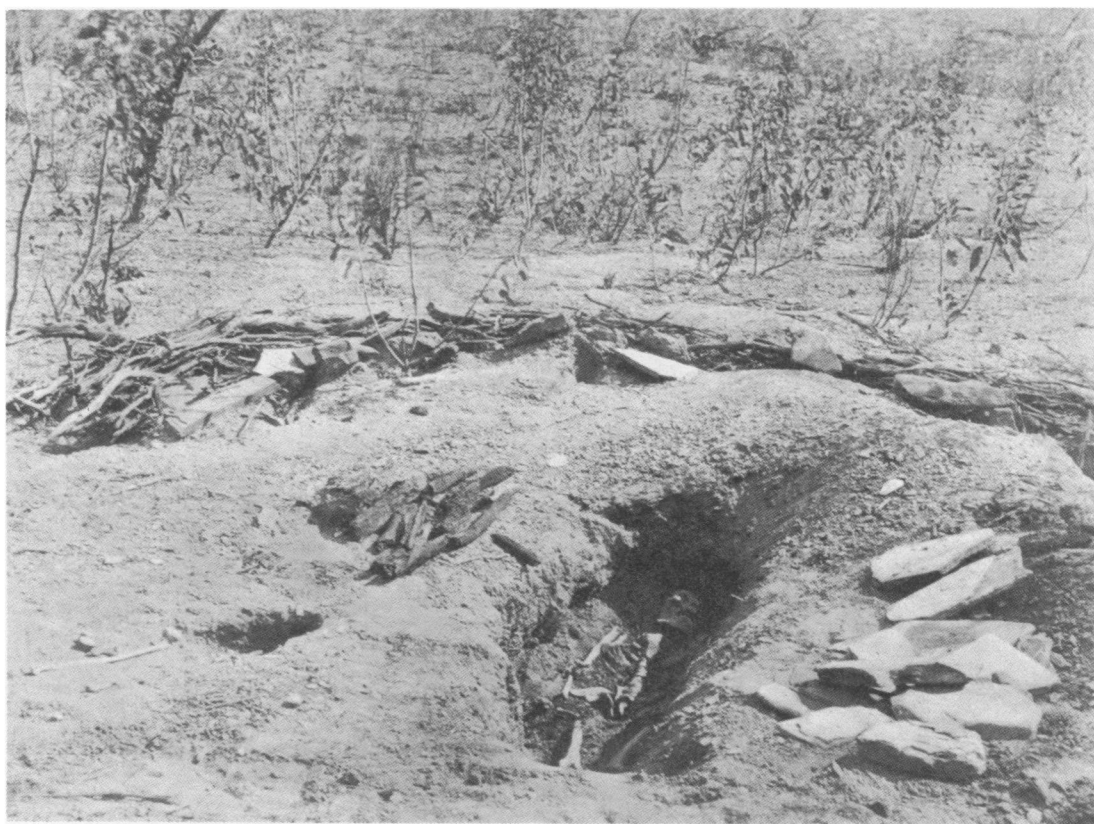


FIG. 1.



FIG. 2.

BURIAL CUSTOMS IN THE NORTHERN FLINDERS RANGES OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA.

Immediately over the wood rested a number of flat slabs of clay slate, which completely covered the surface of the grave. Lastly, earth had been thrown in. No doubt sufficient earth had originally been used to raise the surface of the grave at least up to the natural level of the ground, or possibly to build up a small mound

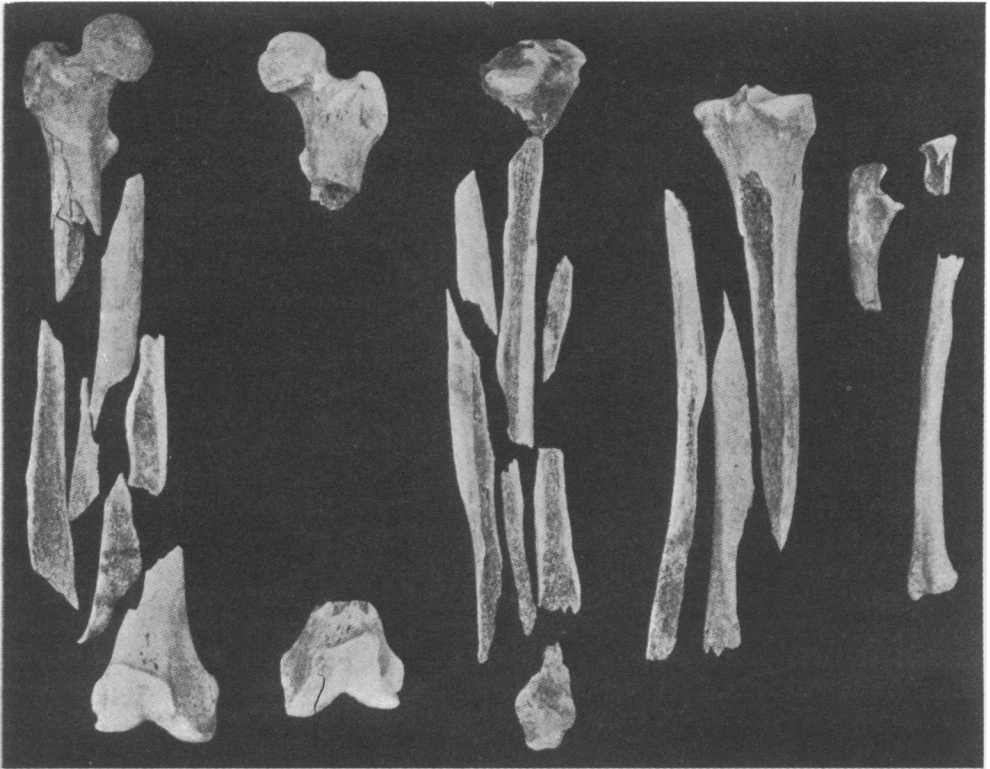


FIG. 1.

to indicate the spot. Time had, however, obliterated all traces of such, and the surface of the grave now actually lay a little beneath that of the adjacent ground. No implements, or personal belongings, were found either in or upon the grave; but old residents told me that it was customary to lay the spears, spear-thrower, water-carrier, or other favourite articles, upon the completed grave. It was still apparent that a circular space, about 15 feet in diameter, had been cleared around the grave and swept clean. This space, I was informed, used to be inspected occasionally by the aborigines, for the purpose of detecting any tracks or footprints likely to have been left by a visiting foe or evil spirit (the so-called "devil-devil"). At the southern end, that is, the head end, a semi-circular shelter of branches, brushwood, and stones skirted the cleared space. Its construction was quite similar to the shelter often built at the head-end of camping places in other parts of Central Australia.

Mutilation of Body before Burial.—With the exception of a fibula and a few metatarsal bones, which had been removed to the surface by burrowing rabbits, the skeleton of the old man at Bobmoony Well belonging to an individual over six feet high was quite intact and complete. It was not so with the Mundy Creek specimen. This skeleton plainly showed that the body of the old woman had been mutilated before it was finally buried.

Although none of the continental Australian tribes are cannibals in the strict sense of the word, it has long been known that certain tribes, if not all, practise

man-eating when opportunity is afforded. That is to say, no tribe goes out specially to kill its own kind for the purpose of eating the slain, but if perchance the body of a fallen enemy can be secured the natives do not hesitate to make a meal off the same. During prolonged drought it may happen that an infant is purposely killed by its parents and an elder child fed with its flesh to keep the latter from starvation. By far the most common practice is, however, to select for eating particular parts from the body of a living captive, slain enemy, or friend who died from natural causes or otherwise. In this respect the kidney fat seems to be the most favoured; it is removed by a dorsal incision from either dead or living. Several of these cases have lately come under my notice from the south central districts of Australia. When, moreover, a noted warrior or otherwise distinguished identity dies, privileged members of the tribe may during the mourning ceremonies cut certain parts from the corpse and eat them. By so doing they hope to acquire the special qualities of the deceased.

Whether we have such a case before us in the Mundy Creek discovery, it is impossible to say. The body of the old woman had been literally bisected above the pelvis, and the spinal column severed between the fourth and fifth lumbar vertebræ. The pelvis and the long bones of the legs had been unfleshed in a manner that reminds us of the customs of other primitive people. The bones of the pelvis and the lower limbs had been isolated with the exception of the fibulæ and those of the feet. Whether the soft parts belonging to these detached bones, and the contents of the pelvis had been feasted upon during the obsequies is a matter of conjecture, but in view of what follows it is probable. Every one of the long bones of the legs (with the exception of the fibulæ) had been purposely broken and split open with an instrument before burial. There is little doubt that the object of this procedure was to procure the marrow from the medullary canal in order to eat it. The instrument used was one with a sharp cutting edge and must have been of fair weight to shatter the bones by impact. A tomahawk might well have been used to effect the purpose. Nowadays a grinding stone or "miri" is usually carried about by the natives in their kit, and this is used, among other things, to crush the bones of kangaroos and other game at meals.

In Fig. 1 I have shown the component fragments of the shattered long bones replaced. A point of percussion is clearly visible on the right femur at a distance of about one quarter its length from the upper end. No fragments belonging to the left femur were found. The inferior extremity of the left tibia and the sacrum were also missing.

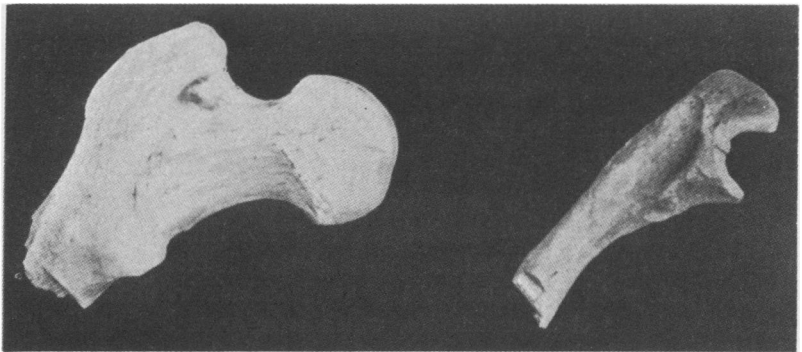


FIG. 2.

It is impossible to say whether any of the missing fragments or *ossa* had been purposely retained by the tribe to carry about with them as amulets. This is done by various Central Australian tribes living to-day. There is also, in this case, a possibility of subsequent removal by burrowing rabbits.

The upper half of the skeleton, from the fourth lumbar vertebra upwards, is practically complete. The only bones that were not found in correct position and that had been artificially broken with an instrument are those of the right fore arm. The radius was smashed at its neck and tuberosity. The ulna was cut with a sharp instrument in the region of the nutritious foramen; the distal segment could not be found.

Fig. 2 figures the superior extremities of the left femur and right ulna, with clearly-defined cuts by a sharp instrument. None of the bones show any evidence of having been laid on the fire or hot ashes; it is therefore surmised that the marrow was taken from the bones raw.

The position and order in which the bones of the pelvis and lower extremities were found is deserving of notice. The tarsals and metatarsals, together with the phalanges, were in their correct places. Adjoining them lay the fibulæ, also in normal position. Above these, however, existed a gap, corresponding to the space originally occupied by the thigh and hip-bones. Where, under ordinary circumstances, the pelvis would have been found, lay a heap of bones and bone fragments arranged not altogether without order. The ossa coxæ had been placed one over the other, and surmounted a vertebra and the epiphyses of the broken long bones. The long splinters of the broken bones, however, projected outwards from the obturator foramina, into which they had been stuck by human agency.

Summary.—This discovery of ancient burial customs of a practically extinct tribe in South Central Australia is valuable ethnographically, since it teaches us of a yet unrecorded method of interment from a locality that is (and is likely to remain) a *terra incognita* to the anthropologist. I could find no record in the district of "tree-burial," either concrete or traditional, and that agrees with my observations in the Musgrave Ranges lying to the north-west of the Flinders Ranges. This method of disposal of the dead on platforms in trees or elsewhere is, or was, practised by most of the tribes in the north and the south of Australia.

Further, we have the positive evidence of a most interesting mourning custom consisting in the mutilation of the dead body, and in the probable eating of certain parts of it during the attendant ceremonies of burial. The latter affords further proof that this tribe practised man-eating, as most of the Australian tribes have now been proved to do. It is doubtful, however, whether we should be justified in calling any of the continental Australian tribes cannibals.

In conclusion I beg to here acknowledge the courteous and able assistance tendered me by Mr. W. A. Fergusson, of Moolooloo, in the location and exhumation of these scientifically so valuable specimens.

DESCRIPTION OF PLATE AND ILLUSTRATIONS IN TEXT.

PLATE D.

Fig. 1.—Grave of a male aboriginal, Bobmoony Well, east of Beltana. Note the small heap of short pieces of wood on the left of grave, and the flat slabs of rock on the right; both materials covered the skeleton in distinct layers. Near to the heap of wood is the entrance to a rabbit burrow, in front of which lie a fibula and a few bones of a human foot, which were unearthed by the rabbits, and led to the discovery of the grave. Note also the semi-circular shelter of branches and slabs of rock surrounding the head-end of grave.

Fig. 2.—Grave of a female aboriginal, Mundy Creek, south-east of Lyndhurst. Note, as above, the flat slabs of rock that covered the skeleton, and semi-circular shelter at the head end; also the derangement of the bones of the pelvis, from the foramina of which projects splinters of the long bones of the legs. In both cases head is facing the west.

ILLUSTRATIONS IN TEXT.

Fig. 1.—The shattered long bones of the legs and fragments of an ulna and radius, all of which have been artificially broken to secure the marrow. A point of percussion is seen below the head of the right femur. The fragments and splinters were replaced into their respective positions after exhumation; many were missing.

Fig. 2.—Superior extremities of left femur and right ulna, showing clearly-defined cuts by a sharp instrument.

India.

Hodson.

Seasonal Marriages in India. By T. C. Hodson.

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The announcement in the English press of the celebration on the 15th February, 1913, of the marriages of the Kadwa Kanbi caste touches a subject of considerable interest. The best account I know is given in the *Baroda Census Report* for 1911, pp. 173-4. The intervals in the case of the Kadwa Kanbis (a large cultivating caste also in Bombay) are nine, ten, or eleven years. There is a strong movement afloat to reduce it to five years, and thence gradually to one. The Bharvads, a small shepherd caste (Guzerat and Kathiawar), admit longer intervals—twelve, fifteen, or twenty-four years. These intervals depend on astrological calculations. To obviate difficulties, they practise substituted marriages in which the part of bridegroom is played by a bunch of flowers which is thrown away, leaving the girl free to marry by a simpler form. Sometimes an elderly relation is the nominal husband. It is also “one” of the reasons for “child marriage.” Motala Brahmans (Baroda) celebrate marriages every four years on a fixed day. Ahirs and Rabaris have marriages once a year on a fixed day. Dhodias in Bombay (*Census Report*, 1911, p. 255) only marry on Thursdays. Gait in the *Bengal Census Report* for 1901, p. 254, remarks that “it is the fashion amongst Tirhutia Brahmans to meet for the purpose at certain regular assemblies held for the purpose towards the end of the *lagan* or marriage season. The largest of these gatherings is held at Sanrath and extends over a week. Carpets are spread under the trees and the Brahmans assemble gaily clad in crimson with flowing turbans. The occasion is one of unwonted rowdiness. . . . When a marriage is decided on the ceremony is at once performed.” In a valuable note to p. 250 he refers to the favourite months for marriage both among Hindu, Hinduised and non-Aryan groups, and to the superstitions attaching to certain months. It is notable that the eldest son and daughter may not marry in Jaishtha, nor may a couple marry in a month in which either was born, nor within twelve months of a death of a parent, nor in an even year of one’s age.

The Puvaththukudi Chettis marriages are, it is stated by Thurston (Vol. II, p. 93), for reasons of economy only, celebrated at intervals of many years.

“Concerning this custom a member of the community writes to me as follows:—
“In our village marriages are performed only once in ten or fifteen years. My own marriage was celebrated in the year Nandana (1892-93). Then seventy or eighty marriages took place. Since that time marriages have only taken place in the present year (1906). . . . Another Chetti writes that this system of clubbing marriages together is practised at the villages of Puvaththukudi and Mannagudi (district, Tanjore), and that the marriages of all girls of about seven years of age and upwards are celebrated.” The talikettu ceremony is often performed for a number of girls at one and the same time “once in ten or twelve years” (Thurston, Vol. V, p. 319, quoting Mr. N. Subramani Aiyar for Travancore and Cochin Castes, Vol. II, p. 22). Regard has in these cases to be had to astrological details, as if the horoscopes of the tali tier and of any one of the girls did not agree that girl would have to be left out. The exact “value” of the tali tying ceremony is not quite