



The Ethnography of Matty Island

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THE JOURNAL
OF THE
ANTHROPOLOGICAL INSTITUTE
OF
GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND.

DECEMBER 10TH, 1895.

E. W. BRABROOK, Esq., F.S.A., *President, in the Chair.*

The Minutes of the last Meeting were read and signed.

The presents which had been received were announced and thanks voted to their respective donors.

The elections of Messrs. ORMONDE M. DALTON and GEORGE LAWRENCE GOMME were announced.

Mr. J. EDGE-PARTINGTON exhibited and made remarks upon a collection of Ethnographical objects from Matty Island.

The following papers were read:—

“The Game of Teetotum, Queensland.” By R. ETHERIDGE, Jun., Esq. (See *antea*, p. 259.)

“Stone Cooking-Holes and Grooves for Stone-Grinding, used by the Australian Aborigines.” By R. H. MATHEWS, Esq. (See *antea*, p. 255.)

“The Būrbūng of the Wiradthuri Tribes.” By R. H. MATHEWS, Esq.

“The Bora, or Initiation Ceremonies of the Kamilaroi.” Part II. By R. H. MATHEWS, Esq.

VOL. XXV.

X

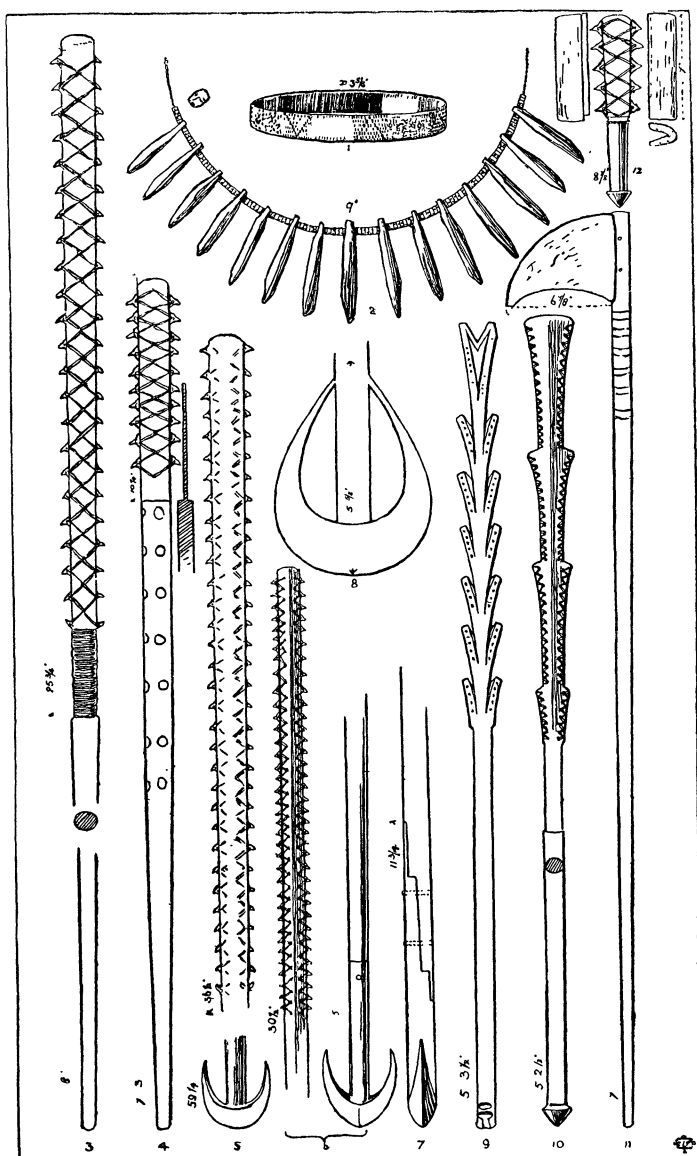
The ETHNOGRAPHY of MATTY ISLAND. By J. EDGE-PARTINGTON.

[WITH PLATES XXII-XXIV.]

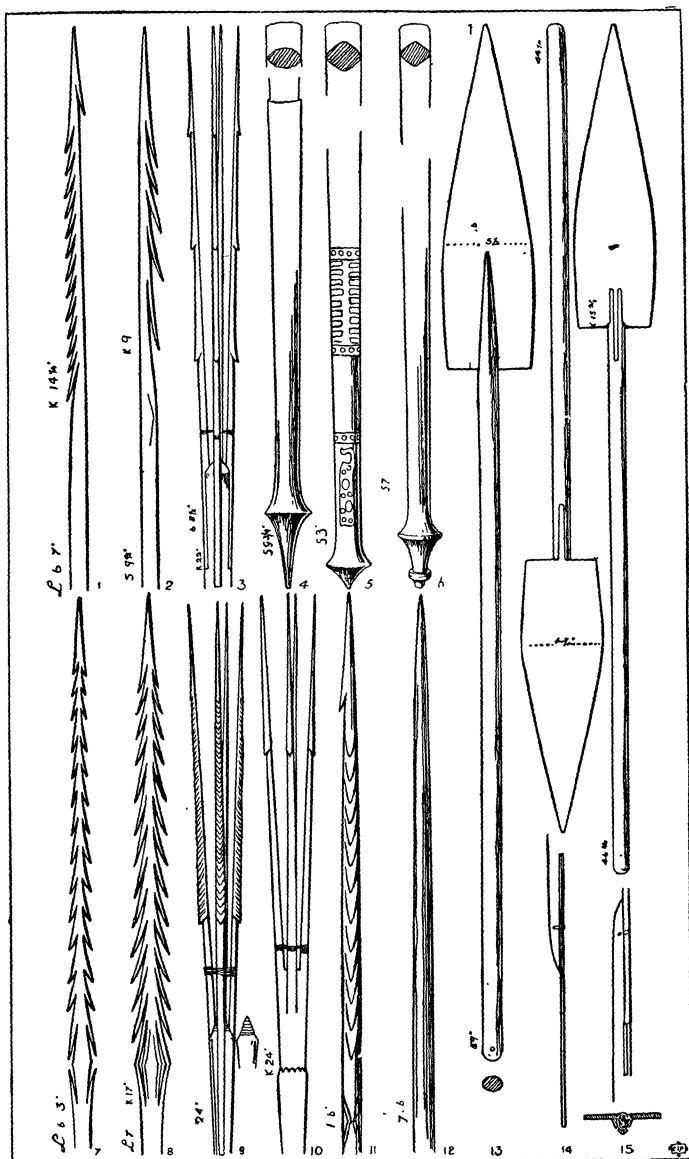
FRESH surprises are ever in store for the ethnologist and collector, but it is almost impossible to realise that in this nineteenth century there could exist a new world and new people with, to us, fresh surroundings, but this till quite recently has been the case. Matty Island, the subject of this notice, was discovered by Carteret on September 19th, 1767 ("Hawkesworth," i, p. 606), if seeing the shores of some unknown land by night can be called discovery. Captain Bristow in 1817 sailed through this part of the archipelago in the "Sir Andrew Hammond," and gave his account to Mr. John Purdy, the hydrographer. He gave the name of Tiger to the island, I presume on account of the inhabitants, whom he described as "a ferocious race of savages." I think there can be little doubt that these two names refer to one and the same island. Nothing further was known of this island or of its inhabitants until 1893, when Captain Dallman visited it for the purpose of collecting coolies for the German New Guinea Company, and the specimens and information he then obtained formed the subject of a sketch by Dr. Von Luschan of Berlin in the "Archiv für Ethnographie," vol. viii, 1895. Dr. von Luschan gives a very full and graphic account of the island and the specimens lately presented to the Berlin Museum; he is, however, wrong in imagining that no specimens from this locality existed in other museums. Granted that their localities were unknown, still there did exist specimens in the British Museum, and in others also. These, thanks to Dr. von Luschan, we have now been able to place in their right section.¹ Dr. von Luschan is also wrong when he states that the axe figured by him Taf. V, Fig. 4, has never yet been described, for similar specimens are in the Turvey Abbey Collection, one of which is figured in the Album (Plate 132, No. 2).

Early in this year a shipment of specimens from Matty Island reached this country and were dispersed by auction in London, and a portion of them was purchased by Sir A. W. Franks, and presented to the Christy Collection in the British Museum. At the same time I was able to add a selection to my own collection, and these I have since exhibited to the members

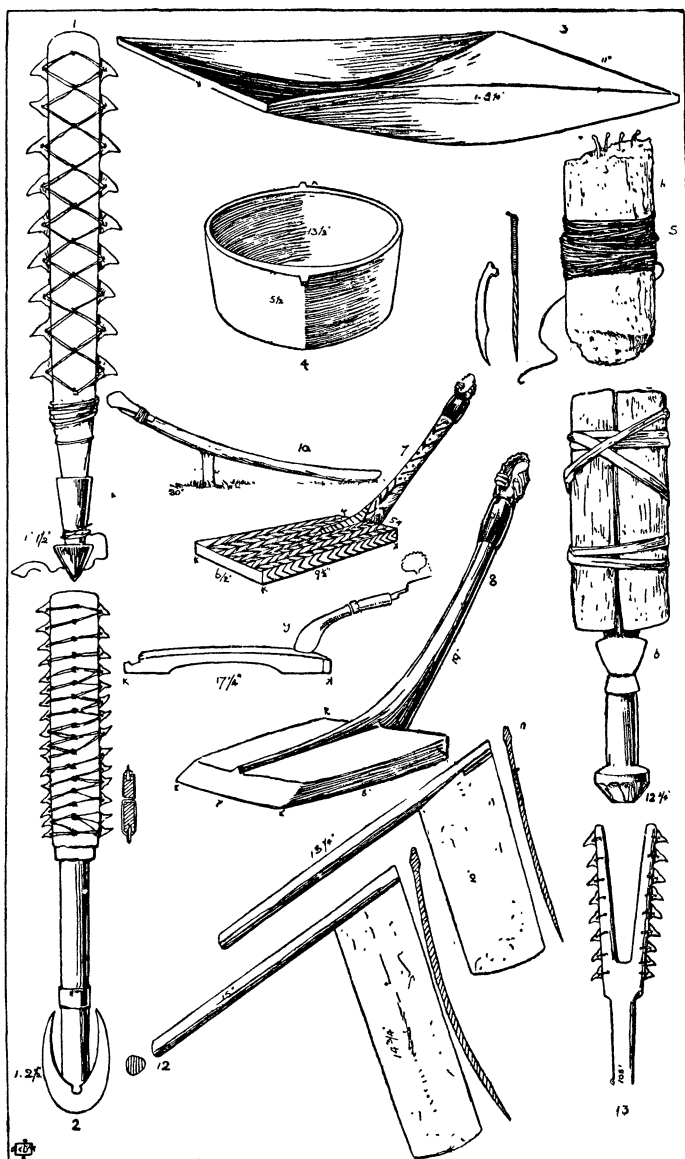
¹ Foremost amongst these specimens are the ones figured in the Album, Plate 54, Nos. 1 and 2, Plate 237, No. 2; Plate 271, No. 12, and 2nd Series, Plate 37, No. 5, the latter a specimen which has since Mr. Brown's death been purchased for the British Museum. "An Ethnographical Album of the Pacific Islands." By Edge-Partington and Heane. Manchester. 1890-1895.



No. 1. Grass armlet, Christy Coll. No. 2. Shell necklace, Christy Coll. Nos. 3-7. Shark's tooth weapons of hard red wood, Christy Coll. No. 8. Butt of shark's tooth weapon, Edge Partington Coll. No. 8. Shark's tooth weapon of brown wood, Christy Coll. No. 10. Shark's tooth weapon of pale reddish wood, Christy Coll. No. 11. Battle axe of turtle bone, stained design on shaft, Christy Coll. No. 12. Small shark's tooth weapon—pith sheath, Christy Coll.



No. 1. Javelin of hard wood, Christy Coll. No. 2. Dart of hard wood, Christy Coll. No. 3. Fish spear, shaft of light pale wood, hard wood points, Christy Coll. No. 4. Club of heavy brown wood, Christy Coll. No. 5. Club of heavy red wood, stained design, Christy Coll. No. 6. Club of heavy brown wood, Christy Coll. Nos. 7, 8. Javelins of hard wood, Christy Coll. No. 9. Fish spear, shaft of light pale wood, hard wood points: Edge-Partington Coll. No. 10. Fish spear of heavy brown wood, Edge-Partington Coll. Nos. 11, 12. Javelins of hard brown wood, Edge-Partington Coll. No. 13. Paddle of hard pale wood, Christy Coll. Nos. 14, 15. Paddles of hard brown wood. Christy Coll.



Nos. 1, 2. Small shark's tooth weapons of hard pale wood, Edge-Partington Coll. No. 3. Food dish of hard brown wood, Edge-Partington Coll. No. 4. Food bowl of hard brown wood, Edge-Partington Coll. No. 5. Fishing line and gorges, Edge-Partington Coll. No. 6. Small shark's tooth weapon in sheath, Christy Coll. No. 7. Cocoanut scraper of heavy red wood, stained design, Christy Coll. No. 8. Cocoanut scraper of heavy brown wood, Christy Coll. No. 9. Cocoanut scraper of hard pale wood, Perak, Christy Coll. No. 10. Cocoanut scraper, Ladrone Is. No. 11. Hatchet of turtle bone, Edge-Partington Coll. No. 12. Hatchet of turtle bone, Christy Coll. No. 13. Shark's tooth weapon, Turvey Abbey Coll.

of the Institute. Together with those now in the British Museum, they are figured at the end of this notice.

I think it may be of interest if I give a short epitome of Dr. von Luschan's paper.

He fixes the position of Matty Island at 15 kilometres N. of the coast of New Guinea, opposite the mouth of the Bastian and Hochstetter River, lat. 2° S. long. between $142'$ and $143'$ E. Carteret fixes it at $1^{\circ} 45'$ S. lat. $145^{\circ} 2'$ E. long. The dimensions of the island are somewhere about 20 sq. kilometres. It is flat, covered with cocoanut trees, and, so far as is known, surrounded by reefs. It is thickly populated, and the natives are timid, and at the same time, inquisitive. "They are considerably lighter in colour than any Melanesians, some even possessing a ruddy flesh tint. Their eyes are slit, much like the Chinese, noses narrow, and hair black and smooth, generally hanging in loose curls." This description also applies to the natives of the Anchorite Islands. "Their heads, judged by the hat-like head-dresses, Taf. VI, Figs. 19, 20, are rather large, showing a circumference of 21 to 22 inches."

Dr. von Luschan's informant, who was well acquainted with the Malay tongue, as well as others spoken in German New Guinea, says their language was entirely strange to him.

With regard to their dress, the men go absolutely naked, the females wearing only a "fig leaf"; as against this there are in the Berlin Museum head-dresses of pandanus leaves, figured in the "Archiv," Pl. VI, Figs. 19, 20, and there fully described.

Dr. Von Luschan continues, "after studying the foregoing data and examining the thirty-eight specimens in the Berlin Museum, we now arrive at the following conclusions, viz.:

1. That the natives are not Melanesians.
2. That their weapons and other implements are entirely original, and that the resemblance of some few of them to modern Micronesian specimens is merely superficial and external.
3. That in all probability the inhabitants have for many generations held no communication with the outer world.
4. That it has probably taken at least ten generations, viz., at least 300 years, and very likely a vast deal longer, to produce so high a grade of characteristic cultivation in such complete isolation.
5. That with the little knowledge we possess it is impossible to range the Matty Islanders in their correct ethnographical position; but it is probable, however, that they are not descendants but brothers of the Micronesians

"Herr Ludwig Kärnbach, the donor of the specimens, speaks," says Dr. Von Luschan, "with much enthusiasm of the workmanship of the Matty Islanders' canoes. No iron or building material of any kind is used in their construction; nothing whatever but wooden nails." Unfortunately no specimen or model was sent home, "but from a sketch they are outriggered, and carry a large spur at bow and stern with an erection fore and aft in each case ornamented with a bunch of hair." Curiously enough he makes no mention of any paddles.

The specimens mentioned and figured by Dr. Von Luschan consist of (1) Pandanus leaf head-dresses; (2) Battle-axes; (3) Long and short weapons edged with sharks' teeth; (4) Spears; (5) Clubs; (6) Four-pronged fishing spears; (7) Bone-bladed hatchets; (8) Wooden bowls and baskets; (9) Cocconut scrapers. All of these are represented in the Christy Collection with the exception of the head-dresses and basket, and the collection possesses, in addition, paddles, shell necklaces, armlets of grass, and a few other small items.

Differing from any of these is the "axe" described and figured by Dr. A. B. Meyer¹ sent in 1855, by Von Schierbrand, then resident in Java, to the Historical Museum, and transferred to the Dresden Ethnographical Museum in 1875. This is armed on two sides with four blades of the carapace bone of the turtle fitted into the shafts and fixed with pegs. The shaft is of the wood of the *Canophyllum onophyllum*.

In the Turvey Abbey Collection there is a long spear-like weapon with bifurcated head, the outer edges armed with sharks' teeth. Possibly this specimen may come from Matty Island. [Plate XXIV, No. 13.]

Dr. Meyer says that the inhabitants appear not to be Papuans or pure Melanesians, but of Micronesian origin like the inhabitants of the Anchorite Islands, and thinks that a consideration of the oceanic currents will confirm this.

It is evident from the different woods appearing in various specimens that the island possesses some timber other than cocoanut trees. It is worthy of notice that with the exception of some slight carved ornamentation on the sharks' teeth weapons, when the natives wish to decorate anything they do it by means of stain rather than by engraving, showing that even if they have engraving tools they make little use of them.

In this island we have almost the only instance of joinery occurring in the whole of the Pacific. The savage generally cuts from the solid. A good instance of this is the copy of a

¹ "Zwei Hauwaffen von Matty, bei Neu Guinea." Von A. B. Meyer. Berlin. 1895.

Windsor chair, now in the British Museum, made by a Zulu. No fish hook of any kind is mentioned by Dr. von Luschan. The specimens, No. 5 figure on Plate XXIV, are I think used for this purpose.

I have shown that specimens from Matty Island do exist in this country, and as far as we know all without history. How and by whom were they obtained?

With regard to the pandanus leaf hats figured by Von Luschan is it certain that these come from Matty Island? There is in the British Museum a woman's cap of similar style and manufacture obtained by Parkinson at Nusa in New Ireland.

The following is a full list as far as I know of types which have reached this country from Matty Island.

Foremost both in finish and importance is the battle axe with long cylindrical shaft of hard reddish or pale brown wood to the upper end of which is fixed in a groove, by means of wooden pegs, a triangular shaped blade of the carapace bone of the turtle [Plate XXII, No. 11]. Dr. Meyer says this weapon is used more to cut the flesh by drawing it inwards than for dealing blows.

Another and almost as effective weapon of warfare is the long staff with the upper end edged with sharks' teeth and covered with a coating of lime. Of this there appear to be two at least different types, the one [Plate XXII, No. 5], in which the shaft is of uniform thickness during its whole length; the other in which that part edged with sharks' teeth has been abruptly thinned off to a spatulate blade. [Plate XXII, No. 4.]

In addition to these there are three specimens which have been in this country for some considerable time without any history, two [Plate XXII, Nos. 6, 10] in the British Museum, and the third [Plate XXII, No. 9] in the collection of the late James Brown. This specimen has been purchased from his executors by Sir A. W. Franks, and presented to the British Museum (Christy Coll.). The butt of the first-mentioned is crescent-shaped of a different wood from the rest of the shaft, and neatly morticed on.

A specimen in my collection has a butt differing in that the points of the crescent are not detached from the sides of the shaft [Plate XXII, No. 8].

Next in importance may be placed knives of similar manufacture and with spatulate blades, edged with sharks' teeth. In this group there appears to be different types. The first [Plate XXII, No. 12], with short circular grip terminating in a conical button, the teeth fixed in a hollow cut to receive

them, and lashed on by fine cord. For this purpose each tooth is perforated, and there is a central row of holes in the blade. The whole is covered with a coating of lime.

In a second type [Plate XXIV, No. 1] the blade is much longer and does not expand to the same degree towards the point, and the teeth are lashed in the same way but fixed in a groove cut the whole length of the blade. The grip is a short and oblong section with rounded corner terminating in a conoidal butt.

A third type [Plate XXIV, No. 2] has a blade with parallel sides with square shoulders and edged with much smaller teeth, fixed in a groove and lashed as in the other types. The grip is long and oblong sections with rounded edges with raised band near blade, and higher up the grip the butt terminates in a crescent. The whole blade is covered with lime.

No specimen has reached us exactly similar to the one figured by Dr. von Luschan, Taf. VI, p. 11, with the cleft between the teeth.

In each case these specimens were encased in a sheath of pith divided down the centre into two pieces and kept in position by a cord fastened at one end to the grip.

An important class of weapons, one of which was in the British Museum, but in the Solomon Island section, is represented by long clubs, the heads terminating in conical knobs, the section of the shaft differing somewhat in each type as shown in the accompanying illustrations. [Plate XXIII, Nos. 4-6.]

The shafts of these clubs have in several cases a painted design upon them.

Their javelins are all more or less alike, differing only in number and position of barbs. *Firstly*, entirely plain without a barb of any kind [Plate XXIII, No. 12.] *Secondly*, barbed on one side only with the lowest barb turned upwards [Plate XXIII, No. 2.] *Thirdly*, similar to the last but with one single barb at point on the other side [Plate XXIII, Nos. 1, 11.] *Fourthly*, those barbed on both sides, with the two bottom ones turned upwards [Plate XXIII, No. 7.] Among specimens of this type are some where the two last pairs of barbs, facing one another, have ceased to be divided at the points (Plate XXIII, No. 8), and others where they are only indicated by means of scratches on the shaft.

In addition to these javelins are small darts with flat barbs on one side only (Plate XXIII, No. 2). This class of weapon appears to be made of hard wood, but in all cases smeared over with a dirty brown material of an earthy nature.

There were in the British Museum two specimens of this class of weapon, but without any history.

Four-pronged spears, probably for fishing, with points variously barbed. These again are divided into two distinct types, those in which the prongs are neatly morticed into the head of the shaft [Plate XXIII, Nos. 9, 10] and those in which shaft and prongs are cut from the solid [Plate XXIII, No. 3]. In the former case the points are bound together, a short distance above where they spring from the shaft, by fine string, to keep them from spreading on striking the object aimed at.

Hatchets with blades of turtle bone, neatly fitted to the handle by means of slots, grooves, and pegs [Plate XXIV, Nos. 9, 10].

There are in the British Museum two hatchets of somewhat similar materials, but with the blades set at right angles to the shaft, and, fitting into a groove in the handle, are lashed on by sinnet. One collected by Brenchley at Nukulaelae in the Ellice group, and the other a Cook specimen labelled "a small hatchet from the Friendly Islands." Other specimens coming from the Gilbert Islands are figured in the Album, 2nd series, Plate 94, and in the University Museum at Glasgow is a specimen labelled "Savage Islands," on the authority of the Rev. George Turner.

Dr. Von Luschan says that it is Kärnbach's opinion that these hatchets are used for canoe building, and this seems the more likely, as up to the present no stone implement has reached this country, nor does Von Luschan make mention of any; the peculiar curve of the blades would be of advantage in working the rounded sides of a canoe.

Utensils.—Bowls of pale coloured wood, used evidently for food. They are either round or slightly oval in form, smaller at the bottom than at the top, projecting from two opposite sides at the extreme top edge are two knobs, evidently to prevent the bowl slipping through the hands; from each of these a slight ridge extends to the bottom edge.

Shallow dishes, oblong in form, with a curved bottom, the sides being at right angles. This type resembles somewhat our old cheese dishes, and is probably from its appearance also used for food.

The manufacture of string is thoroughly well understood, and that which appears on the different specimens is of the neatest description.

I have in my collection a specimen of whip cord of the very finest manufacture, consisting of a centre piece of fibre round which is wrapped very neatly some vegetable fibre; it takes a strong glass to see how it is made [Plate XXIV, No. 5]. This was wrapped round a piece of pith similar to that used for sheaths to the sharks' teeth knives, and in it were inserted

several minute sharp pointed fish spines, evidently used as line and gorges for fishing.

Last but not least important come the cocoanut scrapers [Plate XXIV, Nos. 7, 8]. They somewhat resemble in form beaters used by workmen in laying turf, being an oblong block of wood, having at one end a rod, cut from the solid, rising at an obtuse angle; the end of this rod is armed with a mussel shell, and below it is a band or ring formed from a section of a diminutive cocoanut. It is evident that the person using this sits astride it, and it is very improbable that the heavy base could be used to press out the oil from the shredded nut, as described by Kärnbach. He says, "The natives showed us the method of using these implements. The grated cocoanut is placed on a strong deeply indented block, which is fastened to the broad end of the beater with wooden clamps. A man then stands upon the broad end, and rocks himself up and down. A certain amount of oil was produced, but not much." If this description is right, it seems a pity that he should not have sent home a complete implement, as certainly there is no mention of any block or clamps by Dr. Von Luschan, and the specimens in the British Museum show no signs of any having been used in the manner described. Dr. Meyer in speaking of these scrapers says that Herr B. Geisler, of the Dresden Museum, thinks that the flat wooden part cannot be for expressing oil, as the pressure thus exerted would not be sufficient; but used more probably for sitting on, and that he has seen similar specimens in Ceylon, Java, and the Bismarck Archipelago.

Freycinet (vol. ii, pp. 318–447) describes a somewhat similar implement from the Ladrone Islands, which he calls a "kamdjoo," and figures it in his Atlas, Plate 79, Fig. 2. This specimen has a turtle shell point. There is in the British Museum a specimen, but with an iron point, from Perak called "*kukor* by the Malays, and used in preparing Santan." Wawn in his "South Sea Islanders," p. 221, figures another in use in the New Hebrides, and Dr. Von Luschan mentions that the Swahili of East Africa use a similar implement called *mbusi*.

There are two types of paddles, the one with the blade morticed on in the same neat way as the points of the fish spear [Plate XXIII, Nos. 14, 15], and the other with blade and shaft cut from the solid. Those of the latter kind are of rather a larger and rougher make [Plate XXIII, No. 13]. Both types have pointed blades with square cut shoulders, and stout cylindrical shafts. They are of brown or pale coloured but hard wood.

The only personal ornaments that we at present know are flat grass arm bands, and necklaces of shell; the former have an ornamental covering of plaited grass, with various designs in

black. [Plate XXII, No. 1.] Several of these were received wrapped in a grass covering as if used for trade.

The necklaces consist of long pieces of bright orange-coloured shell, ground down from the outer lip of the *Cassia cornuta*, and alternating with small fish vertebrae, the whole threaded on the fine string found on other specimens from this island. [Plate XXII, No. 2.]

Now that more light is being thrown on these interesting people, it is to be hoped that further specimens may be found in either museums or private collections, and that while there is yet time some one either in Australia or New Guinea will be able to glean from the islanders themselves an account of their antecedents, so that at no very distant date ethnologists will be able to determine with some degree of certainty their origin and history.

The BŪRBŪNG of the WIRADTHURI TRIBES.

By R. H. MATHEWS, L.S.

[WITH PLATES XXV-XXVII.]

THE tribes who attended the Būrbūng described in this paper were some of those belonging to the Wiradthuri community, which in former times was both numerous and important, occupying a wide tract of country in the interior of New South Wales, extending from somewhere about the Murray River northerly nearly to the Barwan river, where they were joined by the great Kamilaroi tribes. In a paper contributed by me to the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, I have dealt with the wide geographical range of the social organisation common to these two powerful communities, and also with the variations in their class systems¹; and in the "Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain," vol. xxiv, pp. 411-427, I have described the Bora, or initiation ceremonies of the Kamilaroi tribes. The Būrbūng is the name of the equivalent ceremonies among the tribes of the Wiradthuri community, a detailed account of which forms the subject of this paper. As this is the first description of the Burbung ever published, it is hoped that it may prove of interest to anthropologists and others studying the customs of the Australian races.

In March, 1893, the remnants of the native tribes particularized in subsequent pages, in answer to a summons from the headman of the Macquarie river tribe, commenced to assemble on the Bulgeraga Creek, for the purpose of holding a Burbung

¹ "The Kamilaroi Class System of the Australian Aborigines," "Proc. Roy. Geog. Soc. Aust.," Q. Beh., X., pp. 18-34, Plate I.