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AN ABORIGINAL BURIAL CEREMONY

Qoldea district

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Jajjala died at his camp near Coldea, a sufferer from venereal disease, which had gradually eaten into his whole system, rotting the beautiful white, strong, even teeth that had been the envy of many a passenger on the East-West Line. He was scarcely 25 years of age, a quick, gentle, naturally well-mannered boy, clever at making weapons and carving, a good hunter and a generous giver. Jajjala had taken kindly to Mission teaching and sang and listened with pleasure to the hymns and tunes played on the little Mission harmonium. But two days before his death, as the writer sat beside him, he signed to his brother Wailguri to show the Mamu abu (magic stone) that he believed had been sent into him and was now causing his death. It was a tiny piece of some hard substance, thin as the lead in a pencil and only half an inch long, and Wailguri said it had come out of Jajjala's breast and had been "pointed" at him from Weelurarro (west) by an emu totem man.

Jajjala died in the belief that the small object had brought poison death to him. He died quietly and peacefully as all natives do. Through the last hours of his illness, one or other of his brothers sat beside him, feeling his heart at intervals and as the heartbeats became more and more feeble, the hand was not removed until the end.

The little groups of relatives had sat in darkness, wailing loudly and continuously, but when they heard Wailguri's cry, all ran to his breakwind and a great keen went up from every member of the group for the newly dead. The men threw themselves on the ground, the women throwing themselves on top of them. Out of the struggling mass, a man and woman would rise, left hand and eyes to the skies, and with a loud cry would fall again on the struggling heap or on the bare ground, which they would beat with their hands in wild abandon. Men rising would clasp each other and cry out in their grief,

women would rise and lay their feet upon the shoulder, head or back of a male relation of the dead boy, or would clasp one another, crying and screaming the while. The men relatives were naked.

"Juni yuril" (bowels moving) is their only expression for great sorrow. The deep voices of the men mingled with the high shrill long sustained note of the women, and movement and wailing, wailing and movement went on until the violence of the first great grief was spent. Mundurr, the oldest brother of the dead man, was already busy lighting great fires East, West and South of the breakwind.

Four boomerang-shaped lines were painted in white pipe-clay across Mundurr's breast. He was the only decorated man in the group and was the leader and director of the funeral ceremonies. The body lay in darkness though surrounded by great fires. The younger brothers and two women, the wives of two of them who were to dig the grave, detached themselves from the seething mass of mourners and each taking a torch from one of the great fires, they came over in single file to the dead man's breakwind, within which the writer sat beside the body. Mundurr came and stood beside the ashes within the breakwind, rubbing a little on his face, and holding green branches in his left hand and a lighted torch in his right. The grave diggers then came along in single file and trotted three times round the breakwind crying, "Pah! pah! pah!" at intervals and waving their torches up and down. Mundurr waved torch and branches up and down and to and fro while they filed round the breakwind and also joined in the cry. After the circuit had been made, Wailguri led the file towards the spot on the northern slope of the hill where the grave was to be dug. As they trotted along, the men gave at intervals the three short, sharp shouts of the dog totem to which the dead man belonged, the two women crying, "Pah! pah! pah!" while they trotted behind the men. The men set fire to a bush or a plant as they went along.

The grave was dug in the sandy slope with weerra weerra (wooden scoops) to a depth of nearly seven feet, five feet in length and about four in width. Three fires were lighted, east, west and north of the grave. A semicircular mound was made at the head of the grave, from the sand taken out of the hole.

When all was ready, the grave diggers returned to the camp, uttering the short, sharp shout and again making the three circuits in single file round the body. This time the cry was, "Gah! gah! gah!," and then all went over to the place where the mourners were assembled and renewed their loud wailing.

Presently Wailguri came over, bringing some string to tie up the body according to dingo law. He tied Jajjala's legs and thighs together, and his left hand was tied to the upper arms, the hand resting against his cheek. The right arm was left free and lay across his breast.

The body was then wrapped in its Empire Day blanket and carried on the shoulders of four brothers. Four girl children, near relatives of the dead man, stood near the breakwind with torches in their hands and behind or near these, the women now stood, all crying, "Gah! gah! gah!," without intermission. As soon as the men had passed them with their burden, the girls and women who were to attend the funeral trotted after them, still repeating, "Gah! gah! gah!" All except the bearers carried torches.

When the grave was reached, Mundurr and his woman Nyanguera went down into it and covered the bottom with branches of thallyura (acacia). The body was then handed down and laid on its left side, the head facing and the eyes looking towards the northeast. All round the body, green branches were then pressed and trodden by Mundurr and his woman. Then Wailguri and his woman Binuga took their place and filled in every space round and on the body with the branches, as no earth must touch the body of a newly dead dingo totemist.

Irigandi and Wiwurda completed the filling in and trampled down the branches until they were firm and level with the surface. Then Mundurr and Wailguri took heavy logs that had been gathered in readiness and laid them lengthwise on top of the grave, close together and well stamped down. On top of the logs, more branches were put, the space round the grave was made clean and level, and the semicircular mound at the top was battened and smoothed with the weerra.

No one spoke at the grave except in whispers. Dingo men do not address the spirit of the dead. The green grave, the mound of white sand at its head and the clean swept patch around stood out in the now lessening firelight. There was no moon but the stars were more brilliant. Everyone stood near or round the grave.

When all was finished, the mourners returned in the same order, the men leading and giving the three short shouts now and again. When the camp was reached, all again threw themselves on the ground on each other again and again.

Ganbia, the mother of the dead man, would rise from the moving heap of mourners and lifting her hands and face to the stars would utter a loud heartbreaking cry, and then throw herself flat on the ground, beating it with her hands. Both Banbia and Ngugila her sister-in-law have now no more young male relatives, hence their despairing grief.

The burial ceremonies lasted about three or four hours. When their grief had temporarily exhausted itself, the group gathered their few belongings and left the now "haunted" camp, coming over to the foot of the hill near my tent, and all through the dark hours, men and women abandoned themselves to grief. The men sat in little groups crying steadily, but Ganbia and Ngugila and other mothers and sisters of the dead man ran keening and wailing along the valley, throwing themselves down on stones or bush in the excess of their grief. One long-sustained cry would go ringing and echoing into the distance, the cool, clear, dewy night sending it far amongst

the hills. The brother gathered branches and gently beat the shoulders and head of the boy's father.

When the sun rose, they went to the sheak hill south of the siding and camped there, the crying and wailing being resumed every night. All the near relatives of the dead man had their hair cut off, men, women and children, but Jajjala's hair was not cut.

The ceremony of laying or allaying the spirit (koirei) of the dead man took place a moon later.

In the early afternoon of 15th August, Jajjala's brother came with several other relations who had that morning arrived in camp from the coast. Many young children were amongst them. The near relatives of the dead man, also the two women, were naked. Men and women held green branches of the nabbari (water-bearing mallee), but the men carried also a short club covered with blood, with both ends shaved about one or two inches from the point, the shavings and club ends being left white and clean.

Mundurr led the large party to the breakwind of the dead man, and all cried, "Gah! gah! gah!", the men now and then giving the three shouts of the dead man's totem. Mundurr, Wailguri and Mungu Mindil, three dingo men, stood within the breakwind besides Jajjala's dead fire. While all the others trotted round in single file, crying, "Gah! gah! gah!" and waving their branches up and down and to and fro, Mundurr and his brothers cried, "Pah! pah! pah!" and swished their branches and waved their clubs. The circuit of the breakwind was made three times, and then all trotted off to the graveside along the same track the body had been carried, everyone crying, "Gah! gah! gah!" all the way.

All stood close round the grave, the men waving their branches and clubs towards the grave. Then all the young children, boys and girls, were laid in turn across the grave on top of the logs and their bodies and faces rubbed with sand from the sides of the grave by their mothers or fathers

or sisters. When all the children had gone through or been passed through this ceremony, the initiated young brothers lay across and the elder brothers rubbed faces, legs and arms with sand. Then all the branches were thrown on top of the grave, and Mundurr and Wailguri going to the grave's head pulled the logs from the east end so that they now stood upright at Jajjala's head. The branches fell into the hollow thus made, and then the decorated clubs were thrown in, and with weerra and hands, the grave was partly filled in with sand. The clubs and branches thrown into the grave took with them any evil that might be about camp or grave, which was buried and done with.

The blood, the shavings, the bared ends of the club, all had reference to Jajjala's initiation into manhood and the part his blood brothers had taken in it. The body was now barndee mannainyu, smelling good, and the children and young men who had lain across it and were rubbed with the sand would grow up strong and clean.

While the grave was being filled in with sand, the women and children sat on the hill, wailing and crying. The men filled the grave in silence, but when they joined the group, all broke out into fresh and loud wailing.

The koirdi (spirit) of the dead man always walked about during the interval between the actual burial ceremony and the final one of burying any evil magic the koirdi might have left in the air or on the ground. In the interval between these two ceremonies, if there were a personal desire to avenge the death, a great friend of the dead man might catch the koirdi in the following manner :-

The friend went alone to the grave of his dead friend, taking spears and miro with him, and lighting a fire beside the grave, he placed his miro close beside the fire. While the fire is burning, he thrusts his spear into the ground on either side of it, thereby announcing to his dead friend his willingness to avenge the death. As the spear is drawn out of the soft

ground, the koirdi of the dead man sits on the miro. The friend and brother now catches the miro in both hands and pressing it against his breast, holds it there for a moment. The koirdi goes from the miro into the living man, and makes his search for the murderer easy. Whether vengeance is carried out by spearing or poison bone, the result is fatal.

This ceremony requires great bravery on the part of the young man who undertakes the revenge of his friend, for the fear of spirits is ineradicable from the aboriginal mind. If it should happen that in thrusting the spear into the ground it breaks through meeting with some obstruction, the young man drops the weapon in fear and horror and rushes frantically through the bush, feeling that he is being pursued by a "sulky" koirdi, until he drops from exhaustion. He never returns to his camp, but remains on the ground where he has fallen and pines away and dies. His relations shift camp when the time for his return has come and passed. They make no effort to track or find him, owing to their fear of the koirdi.

The writer has taken part in the burial of three members of the dingo totem and has found the ceremonies similar in each case.

In connection with the "mamu abu", the small object which the dingo men believe was the cause of Jajjala's death, Wilwurda, who was the only wilurarra and emu totem man in camp and who was most assiduous in his devotion to Jajjala during his illness, deemed it wise to return for a while to the Kalgoolie district so that the bone pointing of the ilga dhugurr (dingo totem) might have more than one target to pass through.