

ARANDA

Myth of the Great Father The very strong emphasis on masculine dominance in the social organization of the central Australian Aranda people is most evident in this myth: Karora, one of the great totemic ancestors, dreams and gives birth to animals and then (male) children through his navel and armpits. Presumably the protected nature of an armpit, its cupped shape, and the fact that it secretes sweat-structurally similar to a mouth, which produces saliva and words, and to a womb, which produces vaginal secretions and babies-qualify it as a source of divine masculine fertility.

The great Karora sleeps and dreams, waking only to find his new children and to inspire them with the stirring *raiankintja* call and dance, and then he sleeps again under the Australian earth for all time.

IN THE VERY BEGINNING everything was resting in perpetual darkness: night oppressed all the earth like an impenetrable thicket. The gurra ancestor-his name was Karora-was lying asleep in everlasting night, at the very bottom of the soak of Ilbalintja; as yet there was no water in it, but all was dry ground. Over him the soil was red with flowers and overgrown with many grasses; and a great tnatantja [ceremonial pole] was swaying above him. This tnatantja had sprung from the midst of the bed of purple flowers which grew over the soak of Ilbalintja. At its root rested the head of Karora himself: from thence it mounted up toward the sky as though it would strike the very vault of the heavens. It was a living creature, covered with a smooth skin like the skin of a man.

And Karora's head lay at the root of the great tnatantja: he had rested thus ever from the beginning. And Karora was thinking, and wishes and desires flashed through his , mind. Bandicoots began to come out from his navel and from his armpits. They burst through the sod above, and sprang into life.

And now dawn was beginning to break. From all quarters men saw a new light appearing: the sun itself began to rise at Ilbalintja, and flooded everything with its light. Then the gurra ancestor was minded to rise, now that the sun was mounting higher. He burst through the crust that had covered him: and the gaping hole that he left behind became the Ilbalintja Soak, filled with the sweet dark juice of the honeysuckle buds. The gurra ancestor rose, feeling hungry, since magical powers had gone out from his body.

As yet he feels dazed; slowly his eyelids begin to flutter; then he opens them a little. He gropes about in his dazed state; he feels a moving mass of bandicoots all around him. He is now standing more firmly on his feet. He thinks, he desires. In his great hunger he seizes two young bandicoots; he cooks them some little distance away, close to the spot where the sun is standing, in the white-hot soil heated by the sun; the sun's fingers alone provide him with fire and hot ashes.

His hunger satisfied, his thoughts turn towards a helpmate. But now evening is approaching over the earth; the sun hides his face with a veil of hairstring, covers his body with hair-string pendants, vanishes from the sight of men. And Karora falls asleep, stretching his arms out on both sides.

While he is asleep, something emerges from underneath his armpit in the shape of a bull-roarer [a carved piece of wood that when twirled in ceremonies produces a roaring noise]. It takes on human form, and grows in one night to a full-grown young man: this is his first-born son. At night Karora wakes up, because he feels that his arm is being oppressed with the weight of something heavy: he sees his first-born son lying at his side, his head resting on his father's shoulder .

Dawn breaks. Karora rises; he sounds the loud vibrating call known as *raiankintja*. The son is thereby stirred into life. He rises; he dances the ceremoni- al dance around the father who is sitting adorned with full ceremonial designs worked in blood and feather-down. The son totters and stumbles; he is still only half awake. The father puts his body and chest into a violent quiver; then the son places his hands upon him. The first ceremony has come to an end.

The son is now sent by his father to kill some more of the bandicoots which are playing peacefully about near by in the shade. The son brings them back to his father who cooks them in the sun-glowing soil as before, and shares the cooked meat with his son. Evening has come again, and soon both are sleep. Two more sons are born that night to the father, from out of his armpits; these he calls into life on the following morning by the *raiankintja* call as before.

This process is repeated for many days and nights. The sons do the hunting; and the father brings into life an increasing number of sons each night-as many as fifty on some nights. But the end cannot be delayed overlong; soon father and sons have succeeded in devouring all the bandicoots which had originally sprung from Karora 's body. In their hunger the father sends his sons away on a three-days' hunt, to scour the great Ilbalintja Plain as far as Ininta and Ekallakuna. For hours they search patiently amongst the tall white grass, in the half- light of the almost limitless expanse of mulga-trees. But the vast mulga thicket is devoid of bandicoots, and they have to return.

It is the third day.

The sons are returning, hungry and tired, through the great stillness. Suddenly a sound comes to their ears, a sound like that of a whirling bull-roarer. They listen; they proceed to search for the man who may be swinging it. They search and search and search. They stab with their tjurunga sticks into all bandicoot nests and resting places. Suddenly something dark and hairy darts up and is gone. A shout goes up--"There goes a sand hill wallaby." They hurl their tjurunga sticks after it and break its leg. And then they hear the words of a song coming from the injured animal:

"I, Tjenterama, have now grown lame,

"Yes, lame; and the purple everlasting are clinging to me. I am a man as you are; I am not a bandicoot." With these words the lame Tjentrerama limps away.

The astonished gurra brothers continue on their way home to their father. Soon they see him approaching. He leads them back to the soak. They sit on its edge in circles, one circle around the other, ever widening out like ripples in disturbed water. And then the great pmoara flood of sweet honey from the honey-suckle buds comes from the east and engulfs them; it swirls them back into the Iibalintja Soak.

Here the aged Karora remained; but the sons were carried by the flood under the ground to a spot in the mulga thicket. Here they rejoined the great Tjenterama, whose leg they had unwittingly broken with their tjurunga sticks.

Today, at that new ceremonial ground the natives point out the rocks and stones which represent the undying bodies of the gurra brothers which lie on top of the round stone which is said to be the body of Tjenterama; and this Tjenterama whom they had injured, is now their new chief; and in all the present-day bandicoot ceremonies Tjenterama is represented as the great gurra chief of Iibalintja. Karora, the natives say, remained behind at his original home: he is lying in eternal sleep at the bottom of the Iibalintja Soak; and men and women who approach the soak to quench their thirst may do so only if they bear in their hands bunches of green inuruna boughs which they lay down on the edge of the soak. For then Karora is pleased with their coming and smiles in his sleep.

-T. G. H. Strehlow. *Aranda Traditions*. Melbourne: University of Melbourne Press, 1947, pp. 7-10.

KAKADU

Imberombera and Wuraka Divine fertility is also the subject of this aboriginal myth, but, in contrast to the Aranda people, the Kakadus proclaim the creative power of the feminine side of the sacred. In each place she stops on her wanderings, Imberombera, the great mother, bears children and instructs them in language and culture. Meanwhile, her giant consort Wuraka, although equally fertile, seems fatigued by his potency and longs only to rest and join the sun in the east.

WURAKA came from the west, walking through the sea. His feet were on the bottom but he was so tall that his head was well above the surface of the water. He landed at a place called Allukaladi, between what are now known as Mts. Bidwell and Roe, both of which he made. His first sleeping place, after coming out on to land, was at Woralia. He then came on to Umurunguk and so to Adjerakuk and Aruwurkwain, at each of which he slept one night.

The woman, Imberombera, also walked through the sea and landed at which is now known as Malay Bay, the native name being Wungaran. She met Wuraka at Arakwurkwain. Imberombera said to him, "Where are you going?" He said, "I am going straight through the bush to the rising sun." The first language they spoke was Iwaidja, that is, the language of the people of Port Essington. Wuraka carried his penis, or *par/a*, over his shoulder. He said to Imberombera, *ngainma par/a nungeroboama*, my penis is too heavy; *ngainma wi/a/u jirongadda*, my camp is close by; *ngeinyimma ngoro breiku/*, you go a long way.