

## AUSTRALIAN CLASS SYSTEMS

R. H. MATHEWS

In a paper<sup>1</sup> contributed to the Queensland Branch of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia in November, 1894, I briefly showed how Australian savages having the Kamilaroi type of class system are organized into families, totemic groups, classes, tribes, and communities, and made reference to the rules of marriage and descent. I pointed out that all previous investigations respecting Australian class systems had been merely of an elementary character, leaving what appeared to me the most important part of the subject untouched. I also stated that the work which is most necessary, and that should be undertaken while there is still opportunity for doing so, is to trace out and formulate the details of the laws which regulate the intermarriage of the classes and totems, as well as the course of descent in them, together with the distribution of the totems under the four classes.<sup>2</sup>

In the present article I shall endeavor to follow this line of research, and take as an example some of the Wiradjuri tribes, who occupy the country on the Murrumbidgee river from some distance above Jugiong down as far as Hay, extending southerly to the Murray and stretching northerly up Lachlan river as far as about the effluxion of the Willandra Billabong.<sup>3</sup> These tribes comprise an important section of the great Wiradjuri community, and are included in what has been termed the "Kamilaroi organization." They are divided into four classes, the names of the men being different from those of the women. In one class all the men are called Murri and all the women Matha; in another, Kubbi and Kubbitha; in another, Ippai and Ippatha, and in another the men are Oombi<sup>4</sup> and the women Butha. These four classes have groups of totems corresponding to each.

<sup>1</sup> "The Kamilaroi Class System of the Australian Aborigines." *Proc. Roy. Geog. Soc. Aust. (Q.)*, x, 17-34.

<sup>2</sup> *Loc. cit.*, 26, 27.

<sup>3</sup> The Willandra Billabong runs out of Lachlan river and flows away across the level country toward the Lower Darling river.

<sup>4</sup> Oombi is the equivalent of the Kamilaroi *Kumbo*.

From a considerable number of totems, four which can be relied upon have been selected as examples under the head of each class, as set out in the subjoined table, which may be called A. In arranging this table the classes Murri and Kubbi are placed next to each other, and the classes Ippai and Oombi are likewise put side by side. The totems are arranged in a certain order under each pair of classes, Murri Emu being opposite Kubbi Flying Squirrel, and Ippai Mallee-hen opposite Oombi Common Fly, and so on, so that they can be conveniently referred to by and by in describing the rules of descent.

Table A

Murri and Matha.	Kubbi and Kubbitha.	Ippai and Ippatha.	Oombi and Butha.
1. Emu.	5. Flying Squirrel.	9. Mallee-hen.	12. Common Fly.
2. Red Kangaroo.	6. Bandicoot.	10. Opossum.	14. Goonhur.
3. Brown Snake.	7. Porcupine.	11. Eaglehawk.	15. Gray Kangaroo.
4. Ground Iguana.	8. Native Bee.	12. Jew Lizard.	16. Codfish.

I will endeavor to explain the laws regulating the marriage of the four classes in accordance with their totemic divisions: Murri marries Ippatha, the sister of Ippai; Kubbi marries Butha, the sister of Oombi; Ippai marries Matha, the sister of Murri, and Oombi marries Kubbitha, the sister of Kubbi. Although marriages follow this fundamental class-law to a certain extent, there are irregularities or innovations to which I referred in my former memoir,<sup>1</sup> under which a man may marry into one or more of the other classes under certain totemic restrictions. These irregularities, as I have termed them, are so interwoven with the class law that they may be said to form part of it. They are so general and so widespread that they are found in nearly all the divisions of the Wiradjuri, Kamilaroi, and other tribes having the "Kamilaroi organization" before referred to, and until they are thoroughly recorded and explained our knowledge of these class systems will necessarily be incomplete.

For the purpose of illustration, I will take the sixteen totems mentioned in Table A, and show separately how each one inter-marries with certain others. The four Murri men—Emu, Red

<sup>1</sup> Proc. Roy. Geog. Soc. Aust. (Q.), x, 24.

Kangaroo, Brown Snake, and Ground Iguana—will be taken first, giving the names of the different women from amongst whom they may lawfully choose a wife. Then the four men of the Kubbi class; next the four Ippais; and, lastly, the four Oombi men will be dealt with in the same manner. The totem names of these sixteen men will be taken in the order in which they appear in Table A.

No. 1, Murri Emu, marries Ippatha Eaglehawk, Ippatha Opossum, Kubbitha Native Bee, and Matha Brown Snake.

No. 2, Murri Red Kangaroo, marries Ippatha Opossum and Ippatha Eaglehawk.

No. 3, Murri Brown Snake, marries Ippatha Opossum, Ippatha Eaglehawk, Matha Emu, and Kubbitha Native Bee.

No. 4, Murri Ground Iguana, marries Ippatha Mallee-hen, Ippatha Jew Lizard, Butha Codfish, Kubbitha Flying Squirrel, and Kubbitha Bandicoot.

No. 5, Kubbi Flying Squirrel, marries Butha Goonhur, Butha Gray Kangaroo, Butha Codfish, and Kubbitha Porcupine.

No. 6, Kubbi Bandicoot, marries Butha Goonhur, Butha Gray Kangaroo, Butha Codfish, and Kubbitha Porcupine.

No. 7, Kubbi Porcupine, marries Butha Goonhur, Butha Gray Kangaroo, Butha Codfish, Kubbitha Flying Squirrel, and Kubbitha Bandicoot.

No. 8, Kubbi Native Bee, marries Butha Common Fly, Ippatha Jew Lizard, Matha Emu, and Matha Brown Snake.

No. 9, Ippai Mallee-hen, marries Matha Ground Iguana, Kubbitha Flying Squirrel, Kubbitha Bandicoot, and Butha Codfish.

No. 10, Ippai Jew Lizard, marries Matha Ground Iguana and Kubbitha Native Bee.

No. 11, Ippai Opossum, marries Matha Emu, Matha Brown Snake, Matha Red Kangaroo, and Ippatha Eaglehawk.

No. 12, Ippai Eaglehawk, marries Matha Emu, Matha Brown Snake, and Ippatha Opossum.

No. 13, Oombi Common Fly, marries Kubbitha Native Bee.

No. 14, Oombi Goonhur, marries Kubbitha Flying Squirrel, Kubbitha Bandicoot, Kubbitha Porcupine, and Butha Gray Kangaroo.

No. 15, Oombi Gray Kangaroo, marries Kubbitha Flying Squirrel, Kubbitha Bandicoot, Kubbitha Porcupine, Ippatha Mallee-hen, and Butha Goonhur.

No. 16, Oombi Codfish, marries Kubbitha Flying Squirrel, Kubbitha Bandicoot, and Kubbitha Porcupine.

There may be other totems not included in Table A into which each of the totems mentioned could marry, but as I am dealing only with the totems given in that table I do not at present wish to go outside of it.

In the tribes under reference descent is reckoned through the mother, the class and totem names of the father having no influence in the matter, and may therefore be left out for the present. Ippatha's children—it matters not whether she be married to a Murri, a Kubbi, an Ippai, or an Oombi—are always Oombi and Butha; the children of Butha are always Ippai and Ippatha; Matha's children are Kubbi and Kubbitha, and the children of Kubbitha are always Murri and Matha.<sup>1</sup> The children also inherit a totem name in accordance with strict customary laws, which will be dealt with presently.

This descent of the class names will be better understood by an example. Ippatha marries, but the descent of her children is not affected by the clan of her husband. Her children are Oombis and Buthas, as just stated. These little Buthas grow up to womanhood and marry, and their children are Ippais and Ippathas. This generation of Ippathas would grow up and in turn produce Oombis and Buthas. It is therefore apparent that the class Ippai produces Oombi, and Oombi produces Ippai in the next generation, and so on continually. An analogous result takes place with the other two classes. Matha's daughters are all Kubbithas, and Kubbitha's daughters are all Mathas. In other words, the class Murri produces Kubbi, and Kubbi produces Murri in continuous alternation. It now becomes evident that the men and women belonging to the pair of classes Ippai and Oombi are more nearly related to each other than to the members of the other pair, Murri and Kubbi, and the latter are more closely connected among themselves than with the Ippai and Oombi people.

The reader will now be able to show whom any man given in Table A may marry and what will be the class and totem names of his children. In order to do this, however, we must know the class and totem names of the woman he selects as his wife. As

---

<sup>1</sup> Proc. Roy. Geog. Soc. Aust. (Q.), x, 29.

soon as this point is determined we can at once give the names of the children. Assuming that a man of the class Kubbi and totem Porcupine wishes to marry, a reference to the preceding pages will show that he has the choice between (1) Butha Goonhur, (2) Butha Gray Kangaroo, (3) Butha Codfish, (4) Kubbitha Flying Squirrel, and (5) Kubbitha Bandicoot. As already shown, the children take the class and totem name of their mother's mother, their father's names not being taken into consideration.

If the Kubbi of our example elects to marry No. 1, Butha Goonhur, it is found that the mother of that animal is the Opossum, of the class Ippai; therefore the children of the Goonhur are Ippai and Ippatha Opossum; if he marry No. 2, the children are Ippai and Ippatha Eaglehawk; if he marry No. 3, the children are Ippai and Ippatha Jew Lizard; if he marry No. 4, the children will be Murri and Matha Emu, and if he marry No. 5, the children will be Murri and Matha Red Kangaroo.

According to the strict class law already stated, the wife of a Kubbi of any totem should always be a Butha,<sup>1</sup> but owing to the irregularities which I have explained his choice of a wife is regulated by his totem as well as by his class name. Had the Kubbi in the above example been a Native Bee, he would have had the choice, among others, of an Ippatha or a Matha of certain totems, which would have altered the names of his children accordingly. If a man have more than one wife, which is permissible, and they happen to be of different totems or classes, this will further vary the names of his offspring. The foregoing examples will apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to the marriage of all the men of the other classes.

Having now given the names of the classes and totems and explained the complicated laws which govern marriage and descent under them, it is hoped that this information, which has cost me much time and expense to obtain, may facilitate the labors of others who may be tempted to embark upon the same line of investigation in regard to other tribes, or who may already be involved in the tangled mazes of the subject.

Before laying down the pen, it may be interesting to state that among the Wiradjuri tribes, whose class system has been explained in this paper, there is a ceremony of initiation called

---

<sup>1</sup> Proc. Roy. Geog. Soc. Aust. (Q.), x, 29.

the *Burbung*, by means of which the youths of the tribes are inaugurated into the status of manhood. During this ceremony they are taught the sacred traditions of their forefathers, their duties and responsibilities as tribesmen are inculcated, and they are instructed in the laws relating to the class and totemic divisions of their tribe. The whole ceremonial of the *Burbung* is described with considerable fullness in three papers contributed by me to the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain,<sup>1</sup> the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia,<sup>2</sup> and the AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGIST.<sup>3</sup>

In connection with their class systems may be mentioned the widespread custom among these tribes of painting and carving representations of their totems on the walls of caves and on the smooth surfaces of rocks. For descriptions of these totemic drawings the reader is referred to my papers on this subject already published in the AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGIST<sup>4</sup> and in other scientific journals.<sup>5</sup> The class and totemic divisions are strongly manifested in all the principal ceremonies of the Australian aborigines; hence it is of the utmost importance that any one studying the customs of these people should have a knowledge of their class systems.

---

#### BOOK REVIEW

*Die Maya-Sprachen der Pokom-Gruppe. Zweiter Teil: Die Sprache der K'ekchi Indianer, nebst einem Anhang: Die Uspanteca. Von Dr. Med. Otto Stoll, Professor in Zürich. Leipzig, K. F. Köhler, 1896, viii-221 pp.*

The numerous dialects of the Maya family are spoken throughout Yucatan and Guatemala, and even adjacent territories, like Chiapas, harbor Indians belonging to the Maya race. About sixteen dialects have been determined by competent linguists to be clearly affiliated with the Maya of Yucatan, the only one of them which has been benefited by an extensive literary "cul-

---

<sup>1</sup> "The Burbung of the Wiradithuri Tribes," Journ. Anthropol. Inst., vols. xxv and xxvi.

<sup>2</sup> Proc. Roy. Geog. Soc. Aust. (Q.), vols. xi and xii.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. ix, No. 10, October, 1896.

<sup>4</sup> "Australian Rock Pictures," American Anthropologist, viii, 268-278.

<sup>5</sup> "Aboriginal Rock Paintings and Carvings in New South Wales," Proc. Roy. Soc. Victoria, vii, N. S., 143-156.