

A CIRCUMCISION CEREMONY AND STONE ARRANGEMENT ON GROOTE EYLANDT

By FREDERICK D. MCCARTHY, Dip.Anthr. (Syd.).

Curator of Anthropology, The Australian Museum, Sydney.

(Plate viii; Text-figures 1-10.)

On the evening of April 19th, 1948, a circumcision ceremony began at Umbakumba (Fig. 10), Little Lagoon, in the north-eastern corner of Groote Eylandt, and each night afterwards the whole camp held a dance on the beach beside the lagoon until May 19th, when the ceremony continued throughout the night. The operation was performed on the initiates at dawn the following morning. I witnessed this ceremony from beginning to end, and visited a group of cave paintings known as Jundurruna at Amalipa, and a stone-arrangement at Lake Hubert connected with it. The Groote Eylandt natives are distinguished as the Ingura tribe.

PRELIMINARY DANCES.

The initiates, all of whom were about seven years of age, sat on a blanket in front of the musicians who played wooden drone-tubes (*jiraga*) and used fluted non-returning boomerangs* as clap-sticks. The faces of the initiates had a broad yellow band painted across the middle, one over the nose and up to the forehead, and one just below the eyebrows. The bands were outlined with white dots and bore a median white stripe. The initiates also wore the following ornaments; a white-cockatoo feather head-plume; a head circlet of ruddled possum cord on each end of which is suspended up to five wallaby incisor teeth in one set and a number of shell-valves in the other set; armlets of plaited cane covering the greater part of the upper arm. They were seated in the same way as a rule but appeared to reverse their individual positions on each alternative night.

One *jiraga*, whose distal end was placed in a hollow petrol-can resonator †, and three pairs of clap-sticks were employed, but sometimes only one *jiraga* and one pair of clap-sticks were in use. One stick was long and was either laid on the ground or held upwards, the other a short one used as a striker. The clap-stick players sang the songs. The musicians were usually seated at right angles to the dancers and about fifteen yards from them. The drone-tube rhythms varied considerably but they were generally short and sharp in character.

For evening after evening the stingray (Imadoija) totemic (*alawadawara*) dance was performed by fifteen men led by Tatalara, one of the most influential men on the island, who lives at Onguruku. Although this was the only dance performed, the songs played and sung included both Imadoija (stingray) and Mamariga (south-east wind) cycles. The dance was repeated a number of times during the evening and the performance usually took from an hour to an hour and a half. On each night the first portion of the dance was the same, but on alternate nights one of two variations of the second portion was performed.

In the first portion of the dance the main group of thirteen men flexed their knees forward and lifted their feet alternately for some time. Then two men, who acted as leaders in front of the group, walked around the group, one at the back and one in front, then back again, and repeated the movement; each carried a lath

* These are obtained by trade from the *Nungubuju* tribe on the mainland, who get them from the natives further south.

† Normally a bailer shell is used for this purpose.