

# AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATIONS

McCarthy, F. D., 1953. A circumcision ceremony and stone arrangement on Groote Eylandt. *Records of the Australian Museum* 23(3): 97–103, plate viii. [21 October 1953].

doi:10.3853/j.0067-1975.23.1953.623

ISSN 0067-1975

Published by the Australian Museum, Sydney

nature culture **discover**

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# A CIRCUMCISION CEREMONY AND STONE ARRANGEMENT ON GROOTE EYLANDT

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(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.

spear-thrower which he moved up and down very smartly from above one shoulder to across the belly. They all brought their knees together very quickly and hopped to one side or the other once or twice with feet apart, and then back again, turning at right angles to one another, and emitting *ssh, ssh, yeh, yeh, eah, eah*, and finishing on *ja, ja*. The women were seated in several groups to one side during this dance.

The men then rested for five minutes until Tatalara, representing a big Imadoija, came forward, holding a pair of clap-sticks, to join the main group of thirteen men with the painted initiates in the middle, the boys being held by their own fathers. Tatalara chanted the accompanying song. The names of the various dance movements are as follows:

Double-footed hop: *No-gwa-bitjunga*.

Knee flexed, foot lifted: *Na-dju-bitjunga*.

Two men walking around group: *Nowilja-maitia*.

Fluttering hands: *Naugwa-runda*.

The initiates are called *no-umbarunga*, their facial design *maadrunga*, and their head ornament *ubraita* after the wallaby teeth.

In the first version of the second portion of the dance, one of the two leading men remained on each side of the main group, and when proceeding one behind the other they fluttered their hands, which were held horizontally with the spear-thrower in one, to represent the movements of the Imadoija's fins; they stood with their legs apart and slightly flexed; sometimes they hopped on one leg. The boys were placed on their father's shoulders symbolizing an old Imadoija picking up young ones.

Tatalara chanted a short song about another stingray (Kalakuruma) which belongs to a trio of totems—Imadoija, Kalakuruma, and the sawfish, Ingurudungwa—and he then walked to the front of the group, the members of which emitted and ejaculated various noises. The group then paraded slowly forward for about ten feet and returned, and the two solo dancers, representing stingrays swimming along the bottom, walked across, one behind and one in front of the group, each holding a spear-thrower as the tail of a stingray; the two dancers returned to their positions on each side of the group, and each hopped upwards on one leg, the other being flexed. When Tatalara and others called out *ka-wu* (salt water) the group, preceded by the two men behind one another, and representing a lot of stingrays swimming about, paraded for a distance of about thirty feet and returned. When this action was repeated the two leaders hopped along until all stopped and Tatalara began chanting *Brr., Brr.*, indicating that many young stingrays were swimming away in all directions. The initiates were kept in the middle of the group of men, which turned about, paraded ten feet forward and returned, when all of them emitted numerous *Brrs.*

The second version of the second portion of the dance was slightly more dramatic. The two leading men, as Imadoija, carried shovel-nosed spears. They repeated the action of walking around the back and front of the group, returned to their position in front and opposite one another, pointed the spears (which should have been armed with stingray-spines, *tungurakwa*) at one another as though fighting, then held them in an arc (the spear being bent downwards at each end) above their head, and in another arc upward at waist height, to represent the Imadoija sitting down or camping during the *Aropoia* or dream-time. They then walked along in file in front of the group, as it paraded forwards, and when they bent their spears they represented two old-men Imadoija hunting another invisible one in front of them whom they could not find because he was swimming along the bottom. This action was repeated three times. The group then re-assembled, and emitted many *Brrs*, sang and clapped their hands. The boys were again hoisted upon their father's shoulders—the dispersal of the little

stingrays—the *jiraga* (drone tube) was held up over them at an angle of about 45 degrees and gently *Brr*'d in imitation of a stingray pumping sand and water through its mouth and gills as it lies or swims slowly along the bottom. The natives said that stingrays make a *Brr*. noise when in shallow water. The dance finished on a loud *yeh* shouted by everybody.

The fathers and other men then rubbed sweat (*ungilbilja*) from their armpits and forehead on the mouth and lips of each boy to make their food safe to eat. The old-men Imadoija did this in creation times because they did not want the young ones to die.

#### CIRCUMCISION RITE.

After their evening meal on May 19th the men rested until 9.30 p.m. when they began to paint the *alawadawara* designs on the chests and stomachs of the four initiates. About twenty-five men were seated around and between four fires in the middle of the camp, and the women had their fires in one group about forty yards away. The men wore shorts and shirts, blankets were spread out between the fires, and everyone was in a genial mood. There were two sets of musicians and singers, each with one *jiraga* and three clap-stick players, and up to six men sang under the leadership of one of the old men, one of whom, Baringwa, was particularly good—he sang for long periods in a fine voice, worked up to concert pitch the whole time. These groups moved from one position to another, frequently interchanging players. The initiates were asleep, each in a blanket, but they were awakened, laid on their backs, and without any preliminary rite the painters began their work, as follows:

Tatalara (eagleray and two fish totems) painted Nukinjuba, Gulpidja's son (north-west wind, hammerhead shark and parrot-fish). Banjo is *nungwaraka* (F, FBr.,MMBr.) to the boy who is *nanukwa*.

Mangogguna (hawk, snake and burramundi) painted Tumanala (whose father is dead but whose totems are eagleray and two fish). Mangogguna is a distant *nepaka* (MFr.Sr.Son or FFSr.Son) to the boy who is *näpura* (MFr.Dr.Son).

Mini-mini (south-east wind, *inikabiama* (?) and Tiger Shark) painted Anijuripa, Nebitjura's son (north-west wind, hammerhead shark, and parrot-fish). Mini-mini is *naninga* (FFSr.Son's Son) to the boy who is *naningjaraka*.

Charlie (wallaby, coconut, proa) painted Nejinpapa, Mota's son (south-east wind, *inikabiama*, and Tiger Shark). Charlie is *nungwaraka* (F, FBr, NMBr.) to the boy who is *nanigungwaraka* (MMBr.Dr., MMBr. Son's Son).

In some cases the painting was finished by another artist, for example, Mangogguna finished Mini-mini's, which was badly done, and Anawanda finished Tumanala, whom Mangogguna had started. Tatalara, Mangogguna, and Mini-mini all painted the north-west wind (*bara*) design, and Charlie the south-east wind (*mamariga*). They began painting at 10.15 p.m. and finished at 11.30 p.m., during which time the singing and playing increased in intensity and volume.

The songs sung belonged to the cycles of the initiates' totems and those of their guardians. They were rapid in tempo, and the voices high-pitched. All but one of the artists were gentle in handling the boys, talking to them quietly, but Mini-mini pulled and pushed his patient rather roughly. The boys were wrapped in blankets and put to sleep when the painting was finished. While one man painted, one or two others mixed the colours required, and one held a paperbark torch. They painted in the usual way with a feather mid-rib held in the thumb and fore-finger, the stroke being made away from the body, and the other three fingers held in a stiff but graceful curve. Prior to applying the pigment the skin was treated with an orchid juice (*ilmurra*) fixative.

The men slept until they began playing the drone tube (*jiraga*) and clap-sticks, and singing more songs at 5 a.m. A few of the women were seated as before. After an hour of music and songs they woke up the four initiates and laid them in a row on a blanket. One of the boys whimpered, but he was spoken to quietly and reassured. Each one was then stood up in turn, grasped under the armpits by Mangogguna, held around the ankles from behind by a seated man, and whilst Tatalara chanted a song, Mangogguna rocked the initiate backwards and forwards. The seated man represented a big Imadoija, the initiate a young one, Mangogguna a third one, whilst Tatalara sang the related song accompanied by other men. One of the latter leant forward beside Tatalara and played clap-sticks. They sang a wallaby song, and the men uttered numerous *um, um, yeh, ka, wu*: (deep) sounds. Tatalara and Mangogguna then changed places for the second boy, but Imadoija was sung by Tatalara for the other two. They were all ready now for the operation. There was a hush as the men got the boys ready as quickly as possible, one of them being very nervous as to what was going to happen to him.

Naginjimpa cut Nukinjuba, Gulpidja's son; Gulpidja calls Naginjimpa *nanukwaraka* (son).

Naginjimpa cut Mobana's son; the latter calls Naginjimpa *nanukatu-omera*.

Nangapianga cut Nejinpapa, Mota's son; Nangapianga calls Mota, *nungwaraka* (FF or MF).

Nangapianga cut Anijuripa who calls the former *nepaka* (MMB or Fb). Anijuripa and his father, Nebitjura, both call Nangapianga by the term *naningapitjaraka*.

The foreskins were given to the initiate's father, placed in a tin and kept for some time until buried in the bush away from the camp.

While the operation was in progress a bright song was sung with the clapping of hands throughout. The boys' loin-cloth (*naga*) was removed, his penis placed between the operator's fingers and the testicles were pushed back; the operator then pulled out the foreskin and severed it with a safety razor-blade. This was done quickly and efficiently, but two of the boys cried. Immediately after the operation each boy sat up and smelt the sweat of his guardian. This rite protects both the boy and his parents, permits him to eat his food without danger, and safeguards his parents from being speared when in the bush. After this rite, the initiates were stood up and nursed by their fathers. The bleeding was not stopped, nor was the cut cleaned, but large flat leaves from the *amirda* tree were picked, warmed by the fire, and applied to warm the groin and ease the pain. They were also used to wipe away the blood. No attempt was made to keep flies away from the wound until the bleeding stopped, when the boy was covered with a blanket and let go to sleep.

After the tenseness of this period the men relaxed and joked, and some went away to their jobs on the settlement. When we thought everything was finished two men, Nangiljana and Iningarukwa, walked about twenty foot away from the group, both wearing white-cockatoo feather-plumes in their hair. They ran forward for another twenty feet, where Iningarukwa began to wheel around in a forward bent position, and Nangiljana walked around him, with his hands on his companion's back, now and again leaping in the air with his hands up and feet flexed under him, and dragging his feet in a circle which left grooves in the sand. This continued for a few minutes, when two more men, Tungalia and Nangowia, ran along the same path as the first two and began circling around them with their hands on the backs of each other, the whole four wheeling in this manner for some minutes, during which two more men, each carrying a spear-thrower, walked around them, but about ten feet away. The first pair were trevally fish (*kongruna*), the second pair hammerhead

sharks (*munuana*), and the third pair sea-eagles (*iniwakada*). The sharks were chasing the fish, but the latter were caught by the sea-eagles. The whole ceremony then finished abruptly.

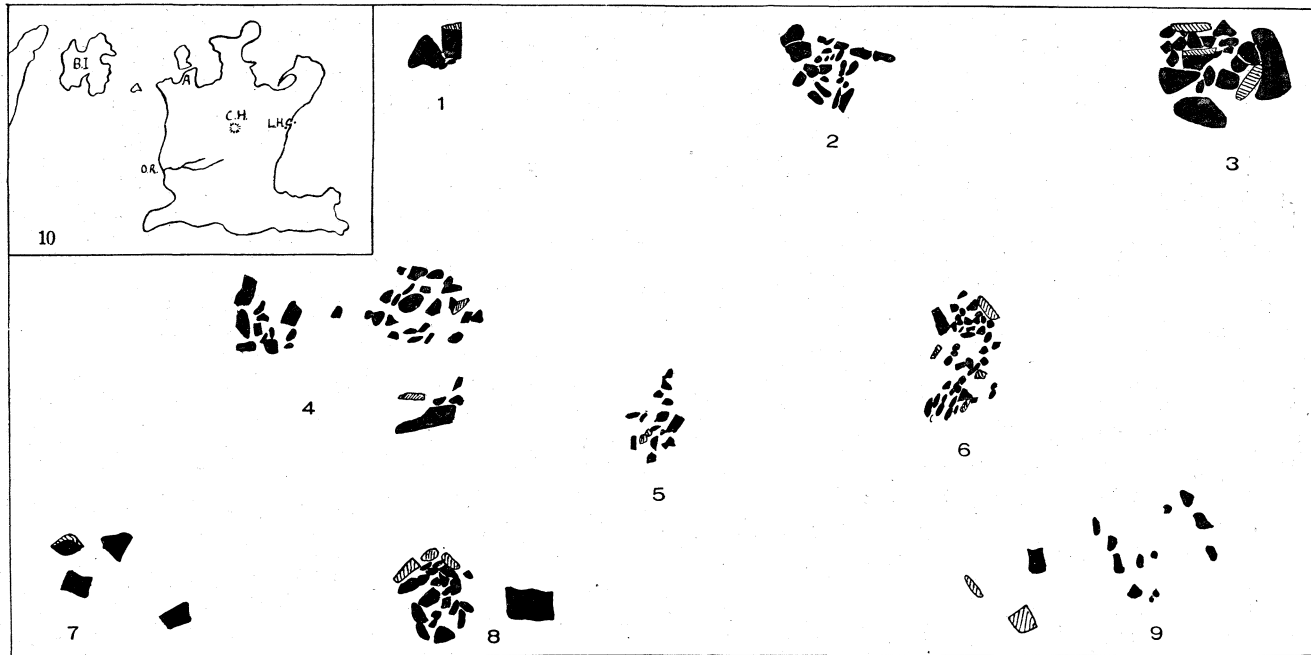
#### THE STORY OF JUNDURRUNA.

In the Aropoia or dream-time, an ancestral being named Jundurruna and his family journeyed from the mouth of the Roper River along the west coast of the Gulf of Carpentaria to Bunmara-kaitja on the northern shore of the Blue Mud Bay, where he made a large waterhole. During this journey to Groote Eylandt, Jundurruna created Bickerton and other islands, including Groote itself. He stayed on Bickerton at a place called Aru-ura, the secret name of which is Banu-pamba, a camp on the east coast marked by two standing stones. They went on to Amalipa, an old ceremonial ground on the shore of Bartalumba Bay, Groote Eylandt, where two more standing stones called Wonidjua mark the site. Here they lived for some time in the caves containing paintings (including a small representation of Jundurruna with his wife under his arm). During this time Jundurruna taught the old men how to dance and sing, and to circumcize initiates. Jundurruna and his family left Amalipa and walked through a valley, formed by a break in the range between Amalipa and Mantalingamadja Point, situated directly north of the ceremonial ground. He went on across the flats, which form most of the northern half of the island, and camped for a little while at an outcrop of rock about halfway across called Numbarilja. Continuing his journey he created Central Hill, known as Jundurruna by the natives, which became his home and the spirit-centre of the stingray, Imadoija, a "big mob" of which live there. He and his family are now represented by large boulders at the totem-centre, Nanbarinja, near this Hill.

There is either some confusion in thought here on the part of my informants or different versions of the legend are in existence. Nangapianga and Turunga told me that two Imadoija men came from the Roper River, sat down at Bickerton Island and then at Amalipa, and journeyed across the flats as above and made Central Hill. Gulpidja, however, said that an Imadoija man came from the same place on the mainland as Jundurruna, with a sawfish (*ingurudungwa*) man who cut out the channel of the Onguruka River with his saw. The Imadoija man followed him, and they met Jundurruna in Lake Hubert. All informants were agreed that these personalities were originally men who are now stingrays and sawfish. Gulpidja, however, depicted fish in his bark painting of the legend (Pl. viii, fig. 7), and fish are portrayed in the caves at Jundurruna to represent the Imadoija and Ingurudungwa. Their journey was apparently at a later date than that of Jundurruna.

Subsequently, two old men Imadoija from Central Hill went down to the east coast of the island, to a sea beach north-east of the Hill, where they made Lake Hubert. One made the eastern shore, the other one made the western shore of the lake. They then followed a track in the sea cut by Ingurudungwa out to a small rocky islet (Liraba) which he also made, where they lived for a long time in the deep water. One of the Imadoija and Ingurudungwa returned to Lake Hubert, where the former is now represented by a prominent sandhill (Mandangopa) on the northern shore.

The other Imadoija was killed by Tumunga-manduma, a man who lived on Liraba, who cut the stingray up into pieces which he cooked and took to a sandhill (called Uraitamadja by Gulpidja and Inuragwatina by Nangapianga and Turunga) on the southern headland of the lake. From this sandhill the view embraces Central Hill and the whole of the lake. Here Tumunga-manduma gave some of the pieces to an old man named Nanunga-gokwa, his wife and children, who ate the food. This family came from the first point south of this sandhill along the coast. Tumunga-manduma took the remaining pieces with him to a place marked by a prominent rock to the south.



Figs. 1-9 represent the series of stone arrangements called Imadoija on the sandhill at Lake Hubert. In Fig. 10 A is Amalipa; B.J., Bickerton Island; O.R., Onguruka River; C.H., Central Hill; L.H., Lake Hubert.

## THE STONE ARRANGEMENT.

On the sandhill Uraitamadja is a stone-arrangement called Imadoija connected with this stingray legend. It consists of nine small heaps of lumps of ironstone, in some of which are from one to four small upright slabs of sandstone or quartzite (Plate viii, and Text-figs. 1-9). There are five flat slabs set in the ground in heap 6, one is set up singly in heap 5, and two in heap 1. The heaps are from 1 foot 6 inches by 2 ft. 6 in. to 2 ft. by 3 ft. 6 in. in area, and up to 1 ft. 5 in. high. They are from 8 to 29 feet apart, and lie on a comparatively flat area now partly overgrown with long grass and scrub. They represent the pieces of Imadoija and those who ate them. One hundred yards to the south-west is a heap of lumps of ironstone and four upright slabs of sandstone which represent Nanunga-gokwa and his family.

## BARK PAINTING.

The bark painting shown (Pl. viii, fig. 7) was made for me by Gulpidja both to portray the story of Jundurruna and Imadoija, and as an example of composition in contrast to the single-figure bark paintings which predominate in collections from this island. From right to left it depicts a rectangle representing the cave painting site at Amalipa where Jundurruna and his family lived; a longer rectangle which is the route of Jundurruna to Central Hill, including the rock, Numbarilja, at which he camped on the way; an oval which is the totem-centre Numbaringa on Central Hill; the swordfish and stingrays, the former cutting out the channel of the Onguruku river followed by the latter.

*Acknowledgments.*

I have pleasure in expressing my thanks to Mr. F. M. Setzler, Head Curator of Anthropology, United States National Museum, for assistance in recording the stone arrangement, and to Mr. C. P. Mountford who supplied several place names in the legend. This work was carried out in 1948 when I visited Groote Eylandt as a member of the Australian and American Arnhem Land Expedition sponsored by the Commonwealth Government of Australia and the National Geographic Society of America.

## EXPLANATION OF PLATE viii.

- 1.—General view of the sandhill Uraitamadja. The stones are arranged near the far edge of the white sand area.
- 2.—Heap 8 showing standing stones.
- 3-4.—Heaps 3 and 4.
- 5.—Relationship of several of the heaps.
- 6.—The separate set of stones representing Nanunga-gokwa and his family. The two taller stones, 2 feet high, are the old man and his wife, and the two shorter ones, 1 foot high, are their two children.
- 7.—Bark painting made to portray the story of Jundurruna and Imadoija.



