

1. DESCRIPTION

1.1 Name(s) of society: Western Arrarnta (also known as the Aranda and Arunta) (1)

Name of the language: Aranda (with the Western Aranda dialect) (1)

Name of the language family: Australian, Pama-Nyungan, Arandic (1)

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): aer (1)

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

--Located between 132° and 139° S and 20° and 27° E (2)

--Region: Northern Territory of Australia, Alice Springs area, Hermannsburg (1)

1.4 Brief history:

--Aborigines have lived in central Australia for at least 20,000 years, although few details of their history are known. The Aranda were nomadic hunters and gatherers when Whites first came to Central Australia in the 1860s. From the 1870s onward, they steadily moved into a more sedentary (though still mobile) way of life on missions, pastoral stations, and government settlements. Relations between Aranda groups and their Western desert neighbors have ranged from alliance and intermarriage to fierce hostility. And relations with Europeans have also varied from warfare to voluntary settlement and work on their missions and cattle stations. Since World War II, development in central Australia has greatly increased and the Aranda have undergone the official government policy of assimilation. They are now experiencing the effects of the relatively new policy of self-determination, which has caused their lives to be increasingly affected by Aboriginal bureaucracies. (2)

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:

--Influence of whites: The Aranda were nomadic hunters and gatherers when Whites first came to Central Australia in the 1860s. But from the 1870s onward they steadily moved into a more sedentary (though still mobile) way of life on missions, pastoral stations, and government settlements. Also, the population fell very sharply after the coming of Whites, mainly through the introduction of new diseases. (2)

--Influence of the government: After World War II, the Aranda went through a period of official government policy of assimilation. They are now experiencing the effects of the relatively new policy of self-determination, which has caused their lives to be increasingly affected by Aboriginal bureaucracies. (2)

--Influence of missionaries: "Nowadays, much of this [tribal Aranda] mythology operates in conjunction with Christian beliefs, stories, and hymns. The borrowing and trading of religious knowledge across ethnic boundaries has always been common in central Australia." (2)

1.6 Ecology (natural environment):

--"They have mainly occupied the relatively well-watered mountainous areas of this desert region, although several groups, particularly around the northern, eastern, and southern fringes of the Aranda-speaking area, have very extensive sandhill regions within their territories. The Western Aranda lived in the best-watered section of the region, west of the mountains." (2)

--"The climate of central Australia is hot and dry. There are only two seasons a year: a long dry season and a short, irregular rainy season. It is not uncommon for no rain at all to fall for two or three years, and droughts of eight years or more have occurred. In the hottest months, January and February, the temperature may reach 112 degrees F and not drop below 90 degrees F for two or three weeks. In the coldest months, May to August, the temperature may drop as low as 20 degrees F at night, though this is rare." (4)

--"Fauna include kangaroo, wallaby, euro (a kind of small kangaroo), emu (a flightless bird similar to an ostrich), rabbits (introduced by Europeans), other small marsupials and rodents, bandicoots, snakes, frogs, and a large variety of birds, including turkeys and ducks. A variety of trees and shrubs provided wood, gums, herbs, and fruits for weapons, tools, medicines, and food." (4)

1.7 Population size:

--1,000 people (1)

Mean village size/Density:

--"Although the Aranda used to be nomadic hunters and gatherers, they had very clear notions of homelands. Within these territories there were well-trodden circuits that people would use during the yearly round. Sometimes a camp might consist of no more than a single extended family, while at other times it might be occupied by some 200 people gathered together for lengthy ceremonies." (2)

--"In recent decades, there has been an increasing use of houses in large settlement areas like Alice Springs, Hermannsburg, and Santa Teresa. They are relatively new settlements occupied by small extended-family groups at places of personal and mythological significance." (2)

Home range size:

--The size of the homeland camps varied depending on the number of people occupying them at the time.

They were usually built around well-watered areas and people spent most of their time in the open air. Temporary shelters and windbreakers were usually only built to protect them from the weather. (2)
--“Local bands each averaged only two or three families. The largest group encountered by Spencer and Gillen numbered only 40 individuals. Their territory was about 100 square miles.” (4)

2. ECONOMY

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

--In their hunting and gathering days, the Aranda would gather grass seeds (as well as other vegetables and fruits) that were ground into a flour to make bread. Now, they buy flour and bread from local stores. (2)

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

--“The Aranda were originally hunters and gatherers. Large game animals included red kangaroos, euros (wallaroos), and emus; smaller game animals included various marsupials, reptiles, and birds.” (2)

--“Today, some hunting and a little gathering take place, but people mainly rely on the meat [...] that can be bought from supermarkets and local stores.” (2)

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

--“In their hunting and gathering days the Aranda, like all Aborigines, had a fairly simple tool kit, consisting mainly of spears, spear throwers, carrying trays, grinding stones, and digging sticks.” (2)

--“The most characteristic weapons of the native are spears, spear-throwers, shields, boomerangs (all of which he carries about with him when he is on a march) and he has stone knives and axes.” (3 page 521)

2.4 Food storage:

--The Aranda carry water in a wooden trough (pitchi). The women weave bags out of string (made of fur or vegetable fiber) and they use them to carry food. They have nothing in which food or water can be heated. (3 pages 18, 26)

2.5 Sexual division of production:

--“Adult men are the main hunters of large game, while women and children, sometimes with men, hunt smaller game and gather fruits and vegetables. Women are the primary care givers to children up to adolescence, but men tend to take a good deal of interest in the training of adolescent boys. In the contemporary environment women tend to take care of most domestic work, while men often seek work on pastoral stations and the like. Many educated Aranda now live and work in bureaucratic organizations and some are beginning to question the ideology of the sexual division of labor.” (2)

2.6 Land tenure:

--“As individuals, Aranda people have rights in land through all four grandparents and may acquire rights by other means as well. There is a strong belief that one belongs to or owns the country of one's paternal grandfather and that one has a very strong connection to the country of one's maternal grandfather. Ultimately, land is managed and owned by rights to ritual property and this property is distributed through a complexly negotiable political framework. In precontact times, bands would wander over the territories of a local alliance network and be more or less economically self-sufficient. Today, these territorial alliance networks still exist, but the extent to which Aranda people can dispose of their own countries is made problematic by White settlement. The bulk of Aranda territory is occupied by White pastoralists, although a small amount is owned and managed (as recognized in Australian law) by Aranda people.” (2)

2.7 Ceramics:

--None found. The Aranda carried nothing on them that was capable of heating to produce ceramics. (3 page 18) All of their tools, weapons, and art are made from wood and stone. (3 pages 521-550)

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

--“Trade was, and still is, endemic to Aranda social life, since family members and groups are bound to each other through various kinds of gift and service exchange. In precontact times, long-distance trade extending far outside the Aranda-speaking area was carried out for certain specialty goods, like ochers and *pituri* (native tobacco).” (2)

2.9 Food taboos:

--Different Aranda tribes may practice a variety of food restrictions. The most common food taboo involves eating the plant or animal associated with his/her totem. While the Aranda are allowed to eat it, it should be eaten sparingly except on special occasions. There are also rules about whom a man is allowed to take food from and who he is obliged to give food to. Furthermore, tribes may also enact several rules about reserving the best things for older people, reserving certain things for men as opposed to women, and restricting certain foods from individuals at particular times (like pregnant women). (3 pages 488-494)

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

--None. The Aranda are a nomadic group of hunters and gathers that travel across land by foot. (2, 3)

3. ANTHROPOMETRY

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

--The male average was 166.3 centimeters. (This is 65.5 inches or about 5'6) (3 page 29)

--The female average was 156.8 centimeters. (This is 61.7 inches or about 5'2) (3 page 29)

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

--Specific weights could not be found but Spencer describes the Aranda as being well nourished and having hard strong muscles ("for the black fellow is always in training"), thin calves, and small hands. (3 page 35)

--For men: "His body is well formed and very lithe, and carries himself gracefully and remarkably erect with his head thrown well back." (3 page 36) And as for women: Spencer says that those between ages 14 and 20 are well formed and remarkably graceful. But after food-gathering and child-bearing, by age 25-30 she loses her graceful carriage, "her face wrinkles, the breasts hang pendulous, and the whole body shrivels up [to form] what can only be described as an old and wrinkled hag." (3 page 36)

4. LIFE HISTORY, MATING, MARRIAGE

4.1 Age at menarche (f):

--No specific data was found but Spencer and Gillen explained that initiation rights of girls mirror that of boys. They explained girls are called "quiai" up until their first menstrual period, just as boys are normally called wiai up until their first initiation ceremony. Boys' first initiations ceremonies are usually held around age 12 so it can be implied girls begin menstruation around age 12 as well. (3 pages 176, 222)

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

--Not found but women start having sexual relationships immediately after they are married (which occurs from ages 14-15). Considering this, women probably have their first child around age 15 or 16. (3 page 472)

4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

--The number of children each married couple has was never discussed in any of the sources. However, this is probably because not much importance was put on the number of children because the common domestic unit does not consist of a married couple and their children. The domestic unit "might consist of an elder man, his wife, and their unmarried children, together with a number of other relatives, such as parents, unmarried siblings, and sons-in-law working bride-service. But because of the flexibility of hearth groups, both in terms of size and composition, it is difficult to say that even this unit would be typical." (2)

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

--Not found. However, infanticide may be performed if a mother has a baby while she is still breast feeding an older child. After the baby is killed, the suckling of the older child may be continued for several years. (3 page 39) Considering this fact, it can be inferred that the Aranda do not have a short birth interval.

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

--Girls usually get married at age 14 or 15. (3 page 472)

--No exact age was found for men but they undergo a series of initiations for about 3-4 years after puberty (which usually occurs around age 14). Thus boys aren't considered marriageable men until about age 18. (5)

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

--No evidence or reference of divorce was found in any sources. However, "broken marriage promises [between families] have probably always been existing." (2)

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

--"Polygyny was permissible, but it was not the norm; today it is extremely rare." (2)

--No evidence found. Polygyny was never mention in Spencer and Gillen's entire ethnography of the Aranda leading to the assumption that polygyny was extremely rare if it existed at all. (3) While men did not take more than one wife at a time, they were allowed to lend their wife to other men and force her to have sex with them; and the husband could have sex with other women on certain occasions. (3 pages 473-476)

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry:

--"In times before contact with whites, "bride-service was normal, with a man often remaining with his parents-in-law for some time before his promised wife matured to marriageable age." (2)

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

--"The main heritable property, until recently, was land, together with the myths, ritual acts, and paraphernalia that still effectively act as title deeds to land. Rights in land and ritual property are open to intense politicking within the framework of ambilineal descent [based on ties traced through the paternal or maternal line], although descent is not the only criterion used to qualify a person's claims. Historically,

one's place of conception (or, less frequently, place of birth) has been important." (2)

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

--"To their children, [the Aranda parents] are, with very rare exceptions, kind and considerate, carrying them when they get tired on a march, and always seeing that they get a good share of any food." (3 page 38)

--Infanticide was most likely practiced on rare occasions. It only occurred when the mother thought she was unable to rear the new baby because she had another young child that she was still feeding. In this case, the baby may be killed right after birth to favor the health of the older stronger child. (3 page 39)

--"Twins, which are of rare occurrence, are usually killed immediately as something unnatural. (3 page 39)

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

"Although the many anthropologists knew about it, very few recorded details of homosexual activities among the Aranda. Some recorded sex play among children which included homosexual postures and activities. The most frequently reported however was the practice commonly referred to as "boy wives". In this, boys were often given to older men with whom they served as intimate servants until they reached the age of initiation. This "boy bride" relationship only ever occurred between an uninitiated male, usually younger than about 14 or so, and an adult man. The only sexual activity reported by anthropologists was a form of masturbation wherein the boy would insert his penis inside the subincised penis of the older man and then masturbate both together. Some reports say that anal intercourse was not acceptable. But this was not just a sexual relationship: the boy slept and ate his meals with his mentor and went hunting with him, so this was in effect a master/apprentice relationship. Generally speaking, attitudes towards sex between men in tribes of the subincision area were fairly matter-of-fact with little attention paid to casual encounters. However, kinship restrictions came into play when a more institutionalized form of relationship, characterized by the "boy-wife", came into effect. After puberty, boys were separated from the women and children and for three or four years underwent a series of initiations, including the circumcision and later subincision." (5)

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

--EXOAMY in traditional times (marriage was still within the Aranda people but it had to occur with a partner who was *outside of their specific sub-section and moiety*): "Marriages were originally arranged between families on a promise system. The prescribed marriage category for a man is mother's mother's brother's daughter's daughter." (2)

--EXOAMY in modern times (*outside the Aranda*): "Marriage between dialect groups or between Aranda and non-Arandic Aborigines is common, and there is also a certain amount of marriage Between Aborigines and Whites, usually between Aboriginal women and White men." (2)

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these "other fathers" recognized?

--"Souls of legendary ancestors associated with totems floated through the air and impregnated women, and their souls were thus burn again. Except for Roheim, fieldworkers among the Aranda claimed that they denied the role of males in paternity." (4)

4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., "receptacle in which fetus grows")

--In older times (around the 1930s when Spencer and Gillen published their Aranda ethnography), it was believed that totems entered into the bodies of women and impregnated them. Therefore, ancestral spirits were responsible for the conception; the mother was responsible for birthing the baby. (3 page 76, 78)

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (semen builds up over time)?

--No. --In older times (around the 1930s when Spencer and Gillen published their Aranda ethnography), it was believed that spiritual totems entered into the bodies of women and impregnated them. Therefore, ancestral spirits were responsible for the conception of children. The conception was caused by a single event of the spirit entering the body, not an incremental process. (3 page 76, 78)

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape

--"Many infringements of law, usually to do with ritual property or marriage and access to women, are solved by mobility and asylum, but there are also different types of violent punishment (which have historically included the death penalty, the spearing of limbs, and *rape*)." (2)

--Women are also forced into having sex with other men besides their husband. See 4.18.

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin)

--OLDER TRADITIONAL TIMES: The Aranda social organization was based on exogamous intermarrying groups. The Aranda people are divided into two halves or *moieties*. These moieties are called "Mberga oknirra" and "Mberga tungwa". The moieties are then also divided into two groups, forming four *sections*. Each of these four sections can be again divided into two groups, forming eight *sub-sections*. Males in one moiety must marry females from a select sub-section from the other moiety and vice versa. Another way to

look at this is to say a man marries the daughter of his mother's mother's brother's daughter. The systems practical result is to prevent close interbreeding and to bring about the mating of men and women belonging to different localities and different families. (3 pages 41-49)

--"Marriages were originally arranged between families on a promise system, although this system has been increasingly eroded up to the present time. Today, people are just as likely to marry "sweethearts" as they are to marry into the "correct" families. The prescribed marriage category for a man is mother's mother's brother's daughter's daughter, but other categories have always been allowed." (2)

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?

No. Women are often forced into sexual relations with men other than their husband:

--"At times, a man will lend his wife to a stranger as an act of courtesy, always provided that he belongs to the right section" (the same section he belongs to). (3 page 473) In the normal marriage, "the woman is private property of one man and no one without his consent can have access to her, though he may lend her privately to individuals who stand in the same relationship to her as her husband does". (3 page 476)

--"In the case of women who attend the corroboree [a meeting ceremony of several people], it is supposed to be the duty of every man at different times to send his wife to the ground" in which other men are allowed to have sex with the woman. "The individuals concerned have no choice." (3 page 476)

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring.

--This does not occur. Extramarital sex does not even frequently occur. It only takes place when: a husband gives another man "sexual access" to his wife as an act of courtesy or appeasement; or when a husband gives several men sexual access to his wife at a meeting ceremony. The act of sex in both cases is viewed as a duty or social contract. See 4.18 for more details about extramarital partners.

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

--No information was found regarding the fate of the children. However, due to the Aranda's strict system of kinship, it is likely that the father and other members of the children's moiety and sub-section would look after the children as there is a strong sense of family identity in the lineages. (2,3)

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females

--Not found. Recent reports estimate the Western Arrarnta population is about 1000. (1) There were only about 300-400 people left in 1927 when Spencer and Gillen published their ethnography. (4) However, no statistics have been reported about the number of males and females.

4.22 Evidence for couvades:

None. Men are believed to play no role in the process of conception and pregnancy so this does not apply to them. The spiritual totems are believed to enter into a woman's body and impregnate her. The male only takes on a fatherly role after the child is born. (3 pages 76, 78)

4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)

--No references about more potential fathers or more than one father figure. While totem spirits are responsible for conceiving children, only one man is responsible for raising the child as a father. The Aranda have a very strict kinship organization in which children belong to the moiety of their one father.

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?

--Great respect is given to elder kin. "There is no such thing as doing away with aged or infirm people; on the contrary, such are treated with especial kindness, receiving a share of the food which they are unable to procure for themselves." (3 page 39) This attitude is learned early on. "In early childhood, one learns an ethic of generosity and compassion for one's fellows, which leads to a generalized sense of family identity. As a person grows older, he or she learns that certain relationships should be marked by respect." (2)

4.24 Joking relationships?

--None found in the Western Aranda/Arrarnta people.

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations:

--Following the intermarriage system of the Aranda, the husband and wife will always be from the two different moieties. Children that the couple produces automatically belong to the father's moiety. But the children belong to a different section (or sub-section if sections are divided in two) within the moiety. In short, children share their father's moiety but have a different sub-section. Therefore, descent is counted in the *indirect male line*. (3 page 43)

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

--Incest within a family is always avoided. Most Aranda people still follow the strict traditional system of exogamous intermarriage described in 4.17. The system's practical result is to prevent close interbreeding and to bring about the mating of men and women belonging to different localities and different families. (3 pages 41-49) Furthermore, "wife stealing, *taking a wife from an improper marriage section (incest)*, and

accusation by a shaman of causing another's death (usually from a different local band), were all likely to result in one's death. Blood revenge and duels were the modes of these executions." (4)

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

--When a girl arrives at the marriageable age, which is about 14 or 15, an operation called *Atna-arilta-kuma* is performed on her in the bushes in which her *vuvla* is cut. This ceremony is an initiation ceremony. After this is over, certain men "have access to her". Then, during the daytime, the men assemble on the meeting ground and the woman's is decorated with headbands, necklaces, and paint. Then the woman becomes her husband's "special wife" to whom no one else has right of access". (3 pages 472-473)

4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?

--"Every individual in the tribe is born into some totem—that is, he or she belongs to a group of persons, each one of whom bears the name of some natural object [usually a plant or animal]."

--"Every individual has his or her totem name. In the first place, no one totem is confined to the members of a particular section or sub-section; in the second place, the child's totem will sometimes be found to be the same as that of the father, sometimes the same as that of the mother, and frequently it will be different from that of either parent; and in the third place, there is no definite relationship between the totem of the father and mother." In short, there is no defined structure when it comes to totem names. (3 page 69)

--"A child must belong to the totem of the spot at which the mother believes that it was conceived. Its totem never changes." (3 page 79)

4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)

--OLDER TRADITIONAL TIMES: The Aranda social organization was based on exogamous intermarrying groups. The Aranda people are divided into two halves or *moieties*. These moieties are called "Mberga oknirra" and "Mberga tungwa". The moieties are then also divided into two groups, forming four *sections*. Each of these four sections can be again divided into two groups, forming eight *sub-sections*. Males in one moiety must marry females from a select sub-section from the other moiety and vice versa. Another way to look at this is to say a man marries the daughter of his mother's mother's brother's daughter. The systems practical result is to prevent close interbreeding and to bring about the mating of men and women belonging to different localities and different families. (3 pages 41-49)

--RECENT TIMES: "Today, people are just as likely to marry "sweethearts" as they are to marry into the "correct" families. The prescribed marriage category for a man is mother's mother's brother's daughter's daughter, but other categories have always been allowed. Marriage between dialect groups or between Aranda and non-Arandic Aborigines is common, and there is also a certain amount of marriage Between Aborigines and Whites, usually between Aboriginal women and White men." (2)

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?

--In older more traditional times, marriages were arranged based on the strict and detailed classificatory system of exogamous intermarriage. It was set up between parents and kin. (See 4.29) (3 pages 41-49)

--"Marriages were originally arranged between families on a promise system, although this system has been increasingly eroded up to the present time. Today, people are just as likely to marry "sweethearts" as they are to marry into the "correct" families. The prescribed marriage category for a man is mother's mother's brother's daughter's daughter, but other categories have always been allowed. There has probably been a general increase in "wrong" marriages since Contact with Whites." (2)

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

--If the Aranda people chose to go by the classificatory system of exogamous intermarriage explained above, men and women must marry a partner from within a specific sub-section. Limiting their choices even more, the marriages are usually arranged by their families. (3 pages 41-49) However, in more recent times, this system has become eroded and other marriage categories are also allowed. Now, young people experience more freedom when choosing a partner. Marriage between dialect groups or between Aranda and non-Arandic Aborigines is common, and there is also a certain amount of marriage Between Aborigines and Whites, usually between Aboriginal women and White men. (2)

WARFARE/HOMICIDE

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

--No specific data found. "Wife stealing, taking a wife from an improper marriage section (incest), and accusation by a shaman of causing another's death (usually from a different local band), were all likely to result in one's death. Blood revenge and duels were the modes of these executions. *But it cannot be said that organized fighting or warfare of any kind existed.* Relations between local groups were generally amicable,

and people were able to travel over wide areas without fear.” (4)

4.15 Out-group versus in-group cause of violent death:

IN-GROUP: Within the Aranda people, breaking the law can lead to physical injury or death:

--“Many infringements of law, usually to do with ritual property or marriage and access to women, are solved by mobility and asylum, but there are also different types of violent punishment (which have historically included the death penalty, the spearing of limbs, and rape).” (2)

OUT-GROUP (Out-group in the sense that there are conflicts between different Aranda kinship groups and also between the Aranda people and other Western desert people):

--“Conflict usually arises over sexual relations and access to ritual property, land, and locally generated wealth. It may manifest itself in sorcery accusations and violent feuding or “payback” killings. In many areas, particularly where populations are relatively dense, conflict has increased, partly because of the indiscriminate placing together of different tribal peoples and partly because of access to alcohol.” (2)

4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:

--See 4.15. Causes include breaking the law and conflicts over sexual relations, wealth, and land.

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):

--“Relations between Aranda groups and their neighbors (mostly Western Desert people) have varied from friendship, alliance, and intermarriage, on the one hand, to enmity and hostility on the other. Relations with European interests have also varied greatly over the years, ranging from guerrilla warfare and cattle stealing to enforced or voluntary settlement and work on missions and cattle stations. European attitudes and practices towards Aranda people have also varied greatly—from tolerance to bigotry, from laissez-faire to paternalism, and from protectionism to murder.” (2)

4.18 Cannibalism?

--There is very clear evidence that cannibalism was a well recognized custom. At ceremonies, there are often performances that reenact cooking and eating dead bodies. “These ceremonies may be regarded as probably indicative of what took place in past times amongst the ancestors of the present Arunta tribe.” (3 pages 494-495)

5. SOCIO-POLITICAL ORGANIZATION AND INTERACTION

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

--“The size of camps changed dramatically from time to time as members left in order to visit relatives or new people joined. Sometimes a camp might consist of no more than a single extended family, while at other times it might be occupied by some 200 people gathered together for lengthy ceremonies.” (2)

--After the contact with the whites, the Aranda became more sedentary and “were divided into a number of small local groups or bands, each with its own territory. Local bands each averaged only two or three families. The largest group encountered by Spencer and Gillen numbered only 40 individuals. Their territory was about 100 square miles.” (4)

5.2 Mobility pattern (seasonality):

--The Aranda used to be very mobile nomadic hunters and gatherers. Within their territories, they had well-trodden circuits of camps that people would use during the yearly round. (2)

--“The principal reason for selecting a site when a group was traveling was the availability of water. A camp would be set up near a water supply, the area would be hunted and collected until it was exhausted, and then the group would move on. Each band moved within a circumscribed ancestral territory.” (4)

--However, since contact with whites in the 1860s, the Aranda have steadily moved into a more sedentary (though still mobile) way of life on missions, pastoral stations, and government settlements. (2)

5.3 Political system (chiefs, clans, wealth or status classes):

--“There were no chiefs of units above the local bands. The highest official was the Inkata, who was the hereditary totem chief. His main responsibility was the care of the sacred storeroom, which contained each individual's totemic spirit object (churinga). Each local group had its own Inkata. His power came mainly through influence. He also led ceremonies. This office was inherited from father to son, or to a brother or brother's son if the chief's son was too young, incapable, or of the improper totem.” (4)

--The Aranda are still politically autonomous and elder men (the Inkata) govern them. They are also governed by elder women but to a lesser public extent. “This authority tends to be land-based. An elder's jurisdiction relates to ritual property belonging to the places in which he has acquired rights and to younger relatives who might handle that property. Male initiation was and still is an important disciplinary procedure in which elder men over many years exercise power and influence over younger men. Initiation is

also the channel by which juniors may themselves become respected elders.” (2)

--“Political organization as a whole is coextensive with the organization of kinship and marriage, with territorial groupings or dialect groups (or “tribes”) being more or less synonymous with local alliance areas. This system now meshes with local and federal government systems in the Australian state.” (2)

5.4 Post-marital residence:

--“Marital residence was predominantly virilocal with respect to these bands. Local bands each averaged only two or three families.” (Virilocal means located near the husband’s father’s group). (4)

5.5 Territoriality (defined boundaries, active defense):

--Elderly men (and sometimes elderly women) govern the Aranda and their authority tends to be land-based. “Territories are first of all agnatically defined [inherited from the male’s side], although one can inherit rights in them through women. An elder’s jurisdiction relates to ritual property belonging to the places in which he has acquired rights and to younger relatives who might handle that property.” (2)

5.6 Social interaction divisions? (age and sex):

--“The major sources of social differentiation are sex and age. Outside of this there is little specialization, although some individuals might be recognized as being more skillful than others in certain respects. There is a strong egalitarian ethic, with an emphasis on individual autonomy relative to sex and age.” (2)

--Only elder men (and elder women to a lesser extent) govern the Aranda territorial groups. (2)

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

--None found in the Western Aranda/Arrarnta people.

5.8 Village and house organization:

--Within their territories there were well-trodden circuits that people would use during the yearly round. Camps were normally made at named places, well watered, and usually very closely associated with mythological beings. (2) “All permanent camps were divided into four main sections: north, south, east, and west for each of the sections of the tribe. Each of these sections was itself divided into two subsections. Individual family dwellings were spread throughout each section. Each of the four sections had its own men’s club, on the outside edge of the circular camp, and a women’s club on the inside.” (4)

-- In recent decades there has been an increasing use of houses built of more durable materials (like cement and brick) and the provision of electricity and reticulated water. These houses and facilities may be found in large settlement areas like Alice Springs, Hermannsburg, and Santa Teresa, or at outstations, which are relatively new settlements occupied by small extended-family groups at places of personal and mythological significance. (2) “The main camps had a very definite organization, reflecting the moieties, sections, and subsections of the tribe.” (4)

5.9 Specialized village structures (men’s houses)-

Totem Centers and Sacred Storehouses:

--Churinga are sacred objects that are connected with totemic spirits. “At the present day the whole country is dotted over with Knanikillas, or local totem centers and each of there has one or more sacred storehouses in which the Churinga are kept under the charge of the head man of the local group.” (2)

--“The highest official was the Inkata, who was the hereditary totem chief. His main responsibility was the care of the sacred storeroom, which contained each individual’s totemic spirit object (Churinga).” (4)

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

--At their camps, the Aranda sleep on the ground. They usually sleep in completely open air if the weather is nice or behind a windbreaker or within a temporary shelter to protect them from wind and rain. (2)

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc:

-- The Aranda people are divided into two halves or *moieties*. These moieties are called “Mberga oknirra” and “Mberga tungwa”. The moieties are then also divided into two groups, forming four *sections*. Each of these four sections can be again divided into two groups, forming eight *sub-sections*. Males in one moiety must marry females from a select sub-section from the other moiety and vice versa.

--“In hunting and gathering times the Aranda were organized into nomadic bands of bilateral kindred. The size and composition of these bands fluctuated greatly over time. Today, small settlements are organized along similar lines and mobility is very high. Larger settlements tend to be organized as neighborhoods, again reflecting the importance of extended family structures.” (2)

--“In certain respects, descent is cognatic; in others it is ambilineal, but with a patrilineal bias. People regard themselves as part of a single, territorially based, cognatic group, descended from one or more common ancestors, but for certain purposes they also recognize separate lines of inheritance through males and females, often affording a kind of priority to agnation.” (2)

5.12 Trade:

--“In one sense, trade was, and still is, endemic to Aranda social life, since family members and groups are bound to each other through various kinds of gift and service exchange. In precontact times, long-distance trade extending far outside the Aranda-speaking area was carried out for certain specialty goods, like ochers and *pituri* (native tobacco). Today the Aranda produce arts and crafts for the local and national tourist and art markets.” (2)

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

--“There were no chiefs of units above the local bands. The highest official was the Inkata, who was the hereditary totem chief. His main responsibility was the care of the sacred storeroom, which contained each individual's totemic spirit object (*churinga*). Each local group had its own Inkata. His power came mainly through influence. He also led ceremonies. This office was inherited from father to son, or to a brother or brother's son if the chief's son was too young, incapable, or of the improper totem.” (4)

--Other than the Inkata, “the major sources of social differentiation are sex and age. Outside of this there is very little specialization, although some individuals might be recognized as being more skillful than others in certain respects, such as traditional healing, and thus would be accorded more prestige. There is a strong egalitarian ethic, with an emphasis on individual autonomy relative to sex and age. Some kindred groups can become more powerful or expand at the expense of others over time. Racial and ethnic differences can sometimes be very important in the organization of social life in the wider context.” (2)

6. RITUAL/CEREMONY/RELIGION (RCR)

6.0 Time allocation to RCR:

--Not much time is but into RCR by the Aranda on a daily basis. The primary form of RCR takes place with participation in passage rituals [described in 6.3], marriage rituals [described in 4.27], increase rituals [described in 6.4], and meeting ceremonies (large gatherings with lots of different families). (2, 3, 4)

--The main spiritual leaders who devote their entire lives to RCR are the Inkata chiefs who guard the sacred totem centers, medicine men who heal people, and spiritual mediums who communicate with spirits. (4)

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

--“Besides the Inkata chief, the only other positions of high status were those of medicine men and spirit mediums, who were able to communicate with the *Iruntarinia*, the spirits associated with the Aranda. The medicine men were curers who, through various procedures, removed the magical causes of illness from a patient and determined who was responsible for the malady. While every group had its own Inkata, the other two vocations were more irregularly distributed, and were not hereditary.” (4)

--“Traditional healers, who may be male or female, rely almost exclusively on shamanic arts, although there are a great many local medicines that are known and generally used. Today, the traditional system of healing operates in tandem with the provision of Western medicines and healing techniques. Most women now give birth in hospitals.” (2)

6.2 Stimulants:

--“In precontact times, long-distance trade extending far outside the Aranda-speaking area was carried out for certain specialty goods, like ochers and *pituri* (native tobacco).” (2)

--“The leaves and small twigs of the *pituri* plant are used as a narcotic.” They are dried, broken up, packed tightly into woven string bags, and traded across long distances. Then the leaves are dried in the sun, the twigs are burnt to ashes, mixed with a little water, and made into a plug. They chew the plug to get a soothing effect. (3 page 20)

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):

--For boys: There is a sequence of four initiation ceremonies-

1. Painting and throwing the boy up in the air (*Alkirakiwuma*)

Occurs between ages ten and twelve. Boys are painted and tossed in the air several times by the men, who catch them as they fall. When dance around the circle, swinging their arms and shouting loudly. (3 page 177)

2. Circumcision or *Lartna*:

Occurs at the age of puberty. Involves the boy being taken in the middle of the night by specific kin. A very long journey filled with chanting, dancing, and totem ceremonies follows. Then the operation is conducted. *Lartna* lasts for several days. (3 pages 179-204)

3. Sub-incision or *Arilta* (Slitting the ventral surface)

Occurs five to six weeks after *Lartna*. It is viewed as equally important as the circumcision. Unlike all the other ceremonies, women are completely excluded. It involves lots of singing, chanting, and revering totems prior to the operation. Men also embrace the boys

to prevent any pain or fear about the operation. After it has been completed, he follows a strict diet, rests until he recovers, and then undergoes more celebratory ceremonies. (3 pages 207-212)

4. The Engwura/Inkgura or fire ceremony

This could last for several months and is the final initiation even. It is held as a gathering of the clans whenever the local area could sustain a large group for a long time." (2)

--For girls: "It is clear that there are certain ceremonies which are evidently the equivalents of the initiation ceremonies concerned with the men. The first one takes place when the girl's breasts are rubbed with fat and red ochre, and the second when the operation of opening the vagina is performed. The first ceremony may be regarded as the equivalent of the throwing up and painting of boys. The second is regarded as the equivalent of sub-incision in the male. There are no equivalents of the Lartna or Engwura ceremonies of men". (3 page 222)

--"Traditionally, death was followed by burial and this still occurs, usually with Christian ceremony." (2)

6.4 Other rituals:

--"One historically important ceremony, which has become less significant recently, is the "increase ritual"—a rite guaranteeing the fertility of a local area associated with particular totemic beings." (2)

6.5 Myths (Creation):

--Most common creation myths involve Totemism: "There are a great many myths (or "dreamings") which tell of totemic ancestors who originally created the universe and everything within it. Some of these myths are secret and known only by a restricted group of men or women." (2)

--"The totemic ancestors are regarded as being embodied in the ground and their spiritual essences pervade the land. The environment is also populated by various types of bad spirit beings and ghosts." (2)

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

--"Largely, though not exclusively, restricted to ritual contexts, the arts include body decoration, ground paintings, incised sacred boards, singing and chanting, dramatic acting, and storytelling. Favored mediums for artistic expression include feathers and down; red, yellow, black, and white paints; clap sticks; and small drone pipes. In the 1930s many Western Aranda very successfully took up watercolors and that tradition remains strong. Today many Aranda are connoisseurs of country and western music, as well as adventure movies. Quite a few play guitar and some are learning to make their own videos." (2)

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

--"There are no religious specialists, although the most senior men in local groups are often singled out as being religious "bosses." A few men are now Christian priests." (2)

--"All adult men and women traditionally had the right to act out or sing or to supervise the acting and singing of certain "dreamings" in ritual." (2)

--"Men and women used to have their own ritual spheres and to a certain extent still do." (2)

--Only elder men can serve as Inkata chiefs within a local bands. (4)

6.8 Missionary effect:

--The whites came to central Australia in the 1860s and many of their religious beliefs have been mixed with traditional Aranda myths involving totemism. "Nowadays, much of this [totemism] mythology operates in conjunction with Christian beliefs, stories, and hymns. The borrowing and trading of religious knowledge across ethnic boundaries has always been common in central Australia." (2)

6.9 RCR revival:

--None found. Totemism beliefs and rituals have been passed down for generations. Just recently, the Aranda religious practices have become mixed with Christian beliefs and practices. (2)

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

--"At death one aspect of the spirit can be completely annihilated, although it may first wander about as a ghost. Others say that this spirit ascends to the sky, sometimes to be with God, but sometimes to be banished to an evil place. Another part of one's spirit, which originally came from a totemic ancestor, goes back into the ground to become the land. This spirit may be reincarnated in another human being, but this is not regarded as personal survival or immortality." (2)

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

--There are no taboos associated with naming. The Aranda are named according to their totem. (3 page 67)

6.12 Is there teknonymy (the practice of referring to parents by the names of their children)?

--No. "Every individual in the tribe is born into some totem—that is, he or she belongs to a group of persons, each one of whom bears the name of some natural object [usually a plant or animal]." (3 page 67)

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems):

--The Aranda believe in totemism. "The totemic ancestors are regarded as being embodied in the ground and their spiritual essences pervade the land. The environment is also populated by various types of bad spirit beings and ghosts." (2) Plants and animals that are believed to have ancestral spirits dwelling inside of them are referred to as totems. Some Aranda people view their totem as part of themselves; other Aranda people view their totem as a close relative. Regardless of their perception, the Aranda either never eat or only sparingly eat their totem. (For example, if one's totem is a kangaroo, they would never consume kangaroos.) It is also believed that totems can enter women's bodies and impregnate them; if a woman conceives a child near a particular totem, the child born then takes on that totem. (3 pages 67-87)

7. ADORNMENT

7.1 Body paint:

--The Aranda often cover themselves with grease or red ochre during ceremonies. (3 page 30)

7.2 Piercings:

--Every native typically has his or her nasal septum pierced. Nose bones called Lalkira are frequently worn. The most common form is a bone pointed at one end and measuring as much as 40 cm in length. Kangaroo and hawk bones are often used. The ends may be ornamented with a tuft of feathers or tail tips or decoratively carved. (3 page 513)

7.3 Haircut:

--In males, hair on the head is always well developed. When fully developed, it falls down over the shoulders in long, black, wavy locks. With the periodical cutting of the hair, the amount of hair on individuals varies in quantity. It frequently becomes tangled and matted in knots. (3 pages 30-31)

--There are a number of customs associated with hair cutting. Hair is made into hair-strings which are very valuable possessions. Men must have their hair cut periodically because it is his duty to present it to certain individuals. At initiation ceremonies, the boy's older sisters cut his hair and keep a few locks. (3 page 486)

--In women, the hair is generally worn short. This is due to the fact that each woman has to present her hair to the man who is betrothed to her daughter (her son-in-law) to make him a waist-belt. (3 page 32)

7.4 Scarification:

--"A very striking feature of both men and women are the boy scars in the form of great ridges of keloid tissue. Every individual has a certain number of them raised on his body and arms, but rarely on the back. They are made by cutting the skin with a piece of flint or glass when obtainable." They then rub ashes into the wound. This is done to promote healing. As a general rule, scars are more numerous and longer on men than on women. Men and women also cut themselves to mourn deaths of relatives. (3 pages 32-34)

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates):

--The Aranda wear headbands that consist of a fur-string with attached resin and kangaroo teeth ornaments. It is worn on the head with the pendant hanging down on the forehead. (3 page 511)

--Occasionally certain groups wear flaked sticks (called Inkulta) as head ornaments. (3 page 512)

MEN ONLY:

--Men decorate by wearing a Chilara or forehead-band. It is flattened opossum skin that is plastered with kaolin or gypsum. A design is drawn on it with red or yellow ochre. (3 page 511)

--Men frequently wear a pad of emu feathers called Imampa. It is made by stabbing the feathers together with bone pins. It is worn on the back of the head and is fastened on partly by fur string and partly bone pins. A tuft of bird feathers is attached to a stick at each upper corner. (3 page 512)

WOMEN ONLY:

--Women may wear neckbands. They are ornamented with animal tail tips or bones. (3 page 511)

--Women wear necklaces made of seeds of *Erythrina vespertilio*. (3 Figure 157)

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

--Especially during times of corroborees (ceremonial meetings), the men wear black and white tail tips (called Alpita) as ornaments suspended from the waist girdle. Women usually wear these suspended from their ears. Men may also wear shell pendants from their waist girdle. (3 page 512) They also wear many of the other adornment pieces mentioned in 7.1, 7.2, and 7.5.

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

--As for clothing, women are usually always naked. Some may wear small aprons. (3 page 510)

--As for clothing, men only wear pubic tassels. Pubic tassels are usually very small among the Aranda and inadequate as a covering. Pubic tassels consist of a few tassels tied together with a string. A tassel is formed from several strings densely attached to a strand about three inches long; the two ends of the tassel are then

tied together, making a circular shape. They are frequently coated with white pipeclay. The string joining all the tassels is made out of opossum fur and it is tied to the pubic hair. (3 page 510)

**See 7.5 for other adornment sex differences.

7.8 Missionary effect:

--Whites and their missionaries have been in contact with the Western Aranda since the 1860s. However, the most current adornment information found was published in 1927 in Spencer and Gillen's famous Aranda ethnography. Up until this time at least, contact with whites had not appeared to affect the adornment practices of the Western Aranda. They had not adopted any European fashions; they continued to practice decorations and adornment that had been passed down from their ancestors. (3 pages 510-520) However, after World War II, the Western Aranda experienced an official government assimilation policy so it is not certain to say how this may have impacted their adornment practices. (2)

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

--No evidence found. As stated in 7.8 the Western Aranda clothing, haircut, and adornment practices have been passed down for generations. This explains why they are still a very primitive people because there has been very little change and adaption in their lifestyle. Based on this information, it appears that there has been no cultural revivals since their practices stay steady over the years. However, it should be noted again that the last information on Aranda clothing and adornment gathered was in 1927. (3 pages 510-520)

8. KINSHIP SYSTEMS

8.1 Sibling classification system:

--No evidence was found of any sibling classification system existing. It appears they are all treated equally.

--"To their children, [the Aranda parents] are, with very rare exceptions, kind and considerate, carrying them when they get tired on a march, and always seeing that they get a good share of any food." (3 page 38)

--The only potential findings of preferential treatment may have occurred with the practice of infanticide. Infanticide was most likely practiced on rare occasions. It only occurred when the mother thought she was unable to rear the new baby because she had another young child that she was still feeding. In this case, the baby may be killed right after birth to favor the health of the older stronger child. (3 page 39)

--"Twins, which are of rare occurrence, are usually killed immediately as something unnatural. (3 page 39)

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

--None found.

8.3 Other notable kinship typology:

--"In hunting and gathering times the Aranda were organized into nomadic bands of bilateral kindred. The size and composition of these bands fluctuated greatly over time. Today, small settlements are organized along similar lines and mobility is very high. Larger settlements tend to be organized as neighborhoods, again reflecting the importance of extended family structures." (2)

--"The Aranda have given their own name to a kinship type in which marriage is enjoined with a classificatory mother's mother's brother's daughter's daughter. At the time of contact some Aranda groups employed a subsection system (with eight marriage classes), while most employed a section or Kariera system (with only four classes). The subsection is used by the majority of Aranda groups. Moieties are recognized." (2)

9. OTHER INTERESTING CULTURAL FEATURES (LIST THEM):

SOCIAL CONTROL: "Learning to behave correctly is largely a matter of kinship obligations and these are learned throughout a person's lifetime. In early childhood one learns an ethic of generosity and compassion for one's fellows, which leads to a generalized sense of family identity. As a person grows older, he or she learns that certain relationships should be marked by respect or shame and that he or she has different responsibilities." (2)

OBTAINING FOOD: The Aranda lived by collecting whatever vegetable foods they could find, especially a large variety of plant bulbs, seeds, and tubers. Yams were the favorite. Lizards, honey ants, grubs, caterpillars, mussels, and land snails were also collected. All of this was women and children's work. The men hunted all of the previously named animals. The only weapons were spears and boomerangs. Tracking and stalking played major parts in hunting. Native dingos were valuable for stalking, but Basedow claims that the European dogs that replaced them were not used for anything but companionship. It was said that each family had up to 15 dogs. (4)

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