

Dreaming the stars

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Introduction: The world's first astronomers

The Australian Aborigines were arguably the world's first astronomers. Their complex systems of knowledge and beliefs about the heavenly bodies evolved as an integral part of a culture which has been transmitted through song, dance and ritual over more than 40,000 years, predating by many millennia those of the Babylonians (who probably developed the zodiac familiar to Western cultures in about 2000 BC), the ancient Greeks, the Chinese, the Indians and the Incas. More importantly for our understanding of their significance, Aboriginal beliefs survived, until very recently, within a complete cultural context. Even the beliefs and legends associated with Babylonian, Greek and Roman astronomy have come to us only as isolated stories, divorced from the culture of which they were an integral part so that we can not appreciate the complex meanings they carried for those who evolved them.

However, for one broad cultural group, the Australian Aborigines, we can, at least partially, reconstruct the context from which their star legends derived their meaning. Their beliefs about the heavenly bodies have been handed down virtually unchanged for some 40,000 years and hence they can show us, as no other existing culture can, how natural phenomena beyond human control can be assimilated and understood without recourse to measurement of time, distance or number.

Their star legends existed in the context of a holistic world view which both developed from, and accounted for, the nightly spectacle of the stars and moon and the daily rebirth of the sun. Astronomy, in the sense of a comprehensive and coherent body of knowledge about the stars, was an integral component of their culture to a degree, which it is difficult for us, with our specialist-oriented culture, to understand. It represented an attempt to construct a view of the universe as an ordered and internally consistent system and hence to obtain some sense of control over the natural world; but in most ways it was fundamentally different in its premises and procedures.

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What did they look for?

Because the Aborigines were not interested in positional astronomy for its own sake, but only as an aspect of something much broader, their understanding of the constellations was one of relationship, not mathematics. Indeed, traditional Aboriginal culture paid no attention to the two basic Western concepts of time and number; they made no measurements of space or time, nor did they engage in even the most elementary mathematical calculations. For the same reasons they were concerned with similarity rather than with difference, with synthesis rather than analysis, and with symbiosis rather than separation. So all natural phenomena, whether terrestrial or celestial, were seen as existing within an all-encompassing relationship, which both sustained and was sustained by traditional rituals. As we shall see, the social obligations within the community were projected on to and reinforced by their celestial counterparts.

To mark out the constellations in the 'crowded' southern sky is by no means easy, even to a trained observer, yet we know that they recognised not only first and second order stars, but even the more inconspicuous star groups. In their system of recognition, pattern, especially linear arrangement, was apparently more important than brightness. They often identified a small cluster of relatively obscure stars while ignoring much more conspicuous single stars nearby. Thus the Aborigines of Groote Eylandt named the small cluster containing the insignificant stars Sigma, Delta, Epsilon, Rho, Zeta and Eta Hydrae *Unwala*, the Crab, while disregarding the much brighter adjacent stars Procyon and Regulus which they did not regard as part of the group [Figure 1].

Members of the Boorong tribe in the Mallee District of Victoria limited their identification procedures to groups of three stars in a straight line (they were not interested in triangular or square patterns of stars) because these were so readily distinguishable in the crowded sky. (We, too, locate



Figure 1. *Unwala*, the Crab Constellation.

Orion's Belt, or the Iron Pot, much more quickly than other constellations.)

Colour seems also to have been a factor in the designation of stars. The Aranda tribes of Central Australia distinguish between red stars on the one hand and white, blue and yellow stars on the other. The bright star Alpha Scorpii (the red super-giant Antares) is classified by them as *tataka indora*, very red, and even the much less brilliant stars of



Figure 2. The V-shaped Hyades cluster – forming two rows of girls.

the V-shaped Hyades cluster are classified by them as two rows of girls, one group being *tataka* (red) and the other *tjilkera* (white). The 'red' girls are the daughters of the conspicuously red star Aldebaran [Figure 2].

Unlike the Greek join-the-dot approach to characterising the constellations, the Aborigines did not attempt to name the groups according to any visual sketch-plan of a person or animal. Rather, the whole group of stars represented a whole animal or a whole story concerned with several animals or people.

The Aborigines certainly differentiated between the nightly movement of the stars from east to west and the more gradual annual shift of the constellations. From this latter they devised a complex seasonal calendar based on the location of the constellations in the sky, particularly at sunrise and sunset. Aranda and Luritja tribes around Hermannsburg in Central Australia (Maegraith, 1932) also noticed that certain stars, lying to the south, notably their constellation *Iritjinga* (the Eagle-hawk) and the Pointers of the Cross, were visible throughout the year, although their position in the sky altered with the seasons. This amounts to a realisation that stars within a certain distance from the south celestial pole never fall below the horizon.

What is knowledge for?

What the Aborigines did with their astronomical knowledge was intrinsically different from what modern astronomers do with observational data. Fundamentally their observations of the stars were conducted not out of scientific curiosity about the stars for their own sake, but for essentially subjective and pragmatic reasons. Either they were an attempt to discover predictive correlations between the position of the stars and other natural events important to the survival of the tribe, such as the availability of particular foods or the onset of particular weather conditions, or they provided a system of moral guidance and education in tribal lore

– a function which was perceived as equally necessary to the continuation of the tribe's identity.

Predictive correlations

Being hunter-gatherers, dependent for their survival on predicting environmental changes, the Aborigines noted in particular the correlation between the movements and patterns of stars and changes in the weather or other events related to the seasonal supply of food. As might be expected, the significance attributed to these sidereal occurrences varies with the diet and lifestyle of different tribes. Thus, on Groote Eylandt, an island in the Gulf of Carpentaria off the east coast of Arnhem Land the appearance in the evening sky towards the end of April of two stars (Upsilon and Lambda Scorpii) in the 'sting' of the European constellation Scorpio [Figure 3] indicated that the wet season was about to end and that the dry south-easterly wind *marimariga* would begin to blow. Whereas at nearby Yirrkalla on the mainland, the visibility of Scorpio in the morning sky in early December signalled the arrival of the Indonesian and Malay fishermen who came in their praus to collect trochis shells and trepang (*bêche-de-mer*) which they dried and sold to Chinese merchants (Mountford, 1956, Crawford, 1968).



Figure 3. Aspects of the constellation Scorpio indicate changes in the weather.

In winter, the most spectacular individual stars in the southern sky are Arcturus and Vega. When Arcturus could be seen in the eastern sky at sunrise, the Aborigines of Arnhem Land knew that it was time to harvest the spike-rush or *rakia*, a reed valuable for making fish traps and baskets, and a local legend about Arcturus serves as a reminder of this. On the other hand, among the Boorong people of the Mallee country of western Victoria, Arcturus is personified as *Marpeankurrk*, an old woman who is celebrated as the one who showed them where to find pupa of the wood ant, *Bittur*, a staple item of diet during August and September. The reminder for this is the appearance of Arcturus, a red giant and the brightest star in the winter sky, which represents the red head of the *Bittur*, while arcs of smaller stars mark out its antennae and hind legs [Figure 4].



Figure 4. Bright red star Arcturus represents the head of the *Bittur*, the wood ant, with smaller stars indicating its antennae and legs.

The bright star Vega, in the constellation of Lyra, represents the Ancestral spirit *Neilloan* who taught the people when to find



Figure 5. Constellation of Lyra, associated with meteor showers.

ated with the Lyra constellation [Figure 5]. The meteor showers are said to represent the sticks and sand flying through the air as the male *Loan* prepares a nest in the sand for the female to lay her eggs (up to thirty in one season). This is a reminder to watch for the disappearance of Lyra/*Neilloan* in October because that is the time to search for the *Loan* eggs. If they fail to notice when Lyra disappears from the sky they will miss out on the eggs.



Figure 6. The Pleiades, known more often as the Southern Cross.

the western desert, the appearance of the Pleiades in the dawn sky in autumn [Figure 6] was particularly important; it signified that the annual breeding season of the wild dogs or dingoes had begun. Fertility ceremonies were then performed for the dingoes and some weeks later the hunters raided their lairs, culling and feasting on the young pups (Tindale, 1974).

the eggs of the Mallee hen or *Loan*, an important source of food in October. Vega appears in the sky from April to September but is most conspicuous in late winter, when there are also meteor showers associated

Other notable events, like the ripening of tubers and bulbs and the appearance of migratory birds and animals, were correlated with specific positions of Orion, the Pleiades or the Southern Cross at different seasons of the year. For the Pitjantjara tribe in

Tchingal, the Emu, is the largest Aboriginal constellation, stretching right across the sky. Unlike most constellations which focus on the stars, this one focuses on the dark patches between visible stars. To see it you have to look for the dark nebulae outlined against the Milky Way. The Coal Sack (a dark nebula of dust) is *Tchingal*'s head and beak, the Pointers of the Southern Cross form his long neck, and his body is the dark space between the neck

and Scorpio [Figure 7]. Below his body is a clutch of brilliant eggs – the stars of the constellation Scorpius. Emus form breeding pairs but separate after the eggs are laid and the male incubates and rears the young. The Boorong people know that when the Emu's legs are folded up under him (in April and May) egg laying has begun and the male is sitting on the nest, so there will be many emu eggs

to be found [Figure 8]. When his legs are visible, stretched out to the horizon, he has left the nest so the chicks are hatched and there are no more eggs.

Such stories, triggered by the appearance of the constellations, clearly evolved to ensure that these nutritional associations were remembered and handed down through generations as oral tradition, important for the ongoing survival of the group.

Now that Aboriginal people don't need such connections to acquire food, do these myths still have any value?



Figure 8. The outline shows *Tchingal* with her eggs, as appears during April and May.

The moral function of myth

Aboriginal sky legends also had a purpose beyond the immediately pragmatic one of food collection. The intimate relationship the Aborigines saw between natural phenomena and social behaviour was as important to the preservation of the tribe as a *cultural entity*, as the predictive potential of astronomical events was for its physical survival.

Myths and legends are essentially metaphors which integrate the strange, the frightening, the Other, by relating it to the familiar. The sky is a reservoir of power on the largest scale. It is the source of life, light, warmth, rain, lightning and thunder – all powers beyond the ability of hunter-gatherers to control. Thus the celestial legends were particularly important in attempting to domesticate the power of the heavens. The recognition of order is a form of power over the environment.

An essential part of this domesticating process was the finding of earthly counterparts for events in the heavens and in particular the relating of the cyclic *pattern* of such events to a corresponding social and moral order. Since many of the legends emphasising this connection involved the constellations, the night sky served as a recurrent reminder of the moral lessons enshrined in the myths. Like



Figure 7. Dark nebulae outlined against the Milky Way, forming *Tchingal* the Emu.

the stained glass windows of medieval cathedrals, they provided, in effect, an illustrated textbook of morality and culture, during the tens of thousands of years when the only means of relaying the accumulated wisdom of the tribe was oral tradition.

In common with most thought systems, including Western science, these legends, which were sung, danced and mimed by the Australian Aborigines, represented attempts to understand, predict and control the natural world. However, unlike scientific method, which is analytical, materialistic and particularising, the underlying premise of all the Aboriginal myths concerning the origin of the sun, moon and constellations is a belief in the essential and *continuing* spiritual unity of humanity, not only with other species, but also with inanimate objects.

Unlike the myths of origin of most religions, Aboriginal creation stories locate the creative power not remotely in the heavens but deep within the land itself.

Aboriginal beliefs about the night sky were only a small part of their philosophical framework and the legends of the Dreaming emphasise the close parallels between the personified heavenly bodies and their earthly counterparts, humanising and integrating natural phenomena with tribal structures and customs.

Unlike the myths of origin of most religions, Aboriginal creation stories locate the creative power not remotely in the heavens but deep within the land itself. Originally, it is believed, the land was flat and featureless, and the sky was always dark but, during the Dreaming, the Ancestors, creative spirits, emerged

from the land or sky, taking the forms of men and animals or even inanimate elements such as fire and water. By their presence and actions, and particularly by their epic journeys, they created the landforms, the celestial bodies, and all the living creatures we know today. The Dreaming is not confined to the past but is eternally present, and hence the land, sky animals, plants and human beings are united spiritually through the continued indwelling and re-creation of the Ancestors.

It is significant in this regard that the Aborigines had no myth of alienation from Nature such as the Judaeo-Christian story of expulsion from Eden. On the contrary, they believed that whenever they evoked in dance and ritual the Great Ancestors of the Dreaming, as they were obligated to do, they were co-creating the natural world, humanising its non-human elements (including the heavenly bodies) and, in the process, entering into it universally.

So, let us look at some of the stories that are available to us, the non-initiated.

The Sun and Moon

There are many variations of the Aboriginal creation story, but in most versions the life-giving spirit is the Sun. Amongst the Murray River tribes of South Australia, the origin of the sun is linked to the tossing of a giant emu egg into the sky where it struck a heap of dry wood and burst into flame, bringing light to the hitherto dark world. Thereupon, the Great Spirit *Baiame*, seeing how much the world was improved by sunlight, decided to rekindle the woodpile each day (Elkin, 1964).

Unlike the ancient Greeks, the pre-Columbian Amerind tribes of North America and the Quechua Indians of Peru (amongst contemporary Quechua Indians of Peru, the Sun is called

Intitayta ('Sunfather') and the Moon is called Quillamama ('Moonmother'), all of whom represented the Sun as male and the moon as female, the mainland Australian Aborigines ascribe feminine gender to the Sun and a masculine character to the moon.

In most areas, the Sun [Figure 9] is a woman who daily awakes in her camp in the east and lights a fire to prepare the bark torch she will carry across the sky. This fire provides the



Figure 9. The Sun is represented as a woman who decorates herself lavishly with bright colours.

first light of dawn. Before beginning her journey she decorates herself lavishly with powder made from crushed red ochre, colouring the clouds red in the process. At evening, having travelled across the sky to the western edge of the world, she renews her paint, spilling red and yellow in the sky again before beginning her long passage through the underground world back to her camp in the east. During this subterranean journey she has only the glowing end of her



Figure 10. For the people of Arnhem Land, at sunset the Sun becomes a great Warrukay fish.

smouldering torch to light her way. It was probably this underground journey which was instrumental in determining the gender of the sun as female, for her torch is thought to bring warmth and fertility to the interior of the earth, causing the plants to grow. However, in Milingimbi, Arnhem Land, where the sun sets in the sea, she becomes a great *Warrukay* fish and swims under the earth to return in the east next morning (Mountford 1956) [Figure 10].



Figure 11. The Moon is a male figure. In an eclipse of the Sun, the Moon-man unites with the Sun-woman

The Moon, being male, is generally accorded greater status, and in many areas powers of death and fertility are ascribed to him. An eclipse of the sun is usually interpreted as indicating that the moon man is uniting with the sun woman. In addition, diverse legends have evolved to account for his waxing and waning [Figure 11]. Aborigines in coastal areas noted the correlation between the phases of the moon and the movements of the tides. At Yirrkalla in Arnhem Land and on Groote Eylandt, when the moon is new or full and sets at sunset or sunrise respectively, the tides are high; when the

moon is in the zenith at sunrise or sunset, the tides are low. The Aborigines believe that the high tides, running into the moon as it sets into the sea, make it fat and round. (Although the new moon may appear thin, they deduce from the faint outline of the full circle that it too is round and full of water.) Conversely, when the tides are low, the water

pours into the sea from the full moon, which is subsequently drained and shrinks to a crescent (Mountford, 1956) [Figure 12].

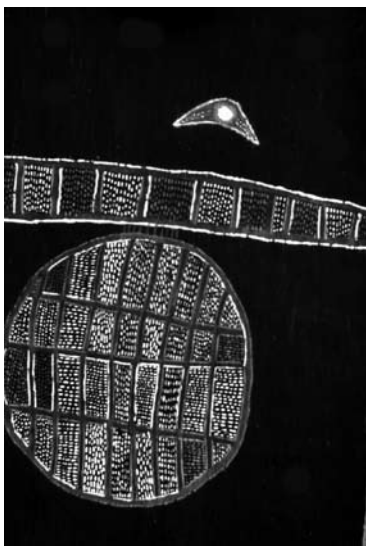


Figure 12. The relation between the phases of the moon and the movements of the tides is recognised.

Amongst the Tiwi, it is believed that during the Dreaming the Moon-man, Tjapara, had fought with Purukupali and ascended to the sky with the wounds on his face, which he had received in the fight. He decreed that all living things, once dead, would remain dead, but the Moon-man escaped from this fate because, although he dies for

three days each month, he comes back to life again [Figure 13].

The people of Millingimbi believe that at the time of creation the Moon-man, Alinda, had two wives who each bore him a son. One day when the wives were out gathering food, Alinda sent the boys out to catch some fish for him. The boys failed to catch any fish but they did catch a whistling duck, which they ate at the lagoon. When they returned home and their father asked for fish, they said they hadn't caught any. However, he noticed the duck grease on their fingers and asked them how it came to be there. Fearing a punishment they refused to admit catching the duck. In his anger, Alinda pushed them into a carrying bag, loaded it into his canoe, paddled into the centre of the lake and dumped the boys overboard.

When he got home the wives asked where their sons were. Alinda said they had gone hunting and would return at evening. However, the wives became suspicious and following the boys tracks soon realised what had happened. They then went and set fire to the hut where Alinda was sleeping, rejoicing at his cries of pain as he burned to death.

But, even as they watched, the women saw his body come to life again as a thin crescent which grew into a large sphere such as we know, and climbed into the sky. From there he announced that from that time the whole of the creation, except for himself, would die, and once dead, would never live again. He would die for just three days each month but would always come to life again. At full moon the Aborigines point to a mark across his middle, the scar from the burn he received from his wives [Figure 14].

The formation of a ring or halo around the moon [Figure 15, next page] usually indicates the onset of rain and the ring is interpreted as the Moon-man building a shelter around himself as protection before the downpour. The Tiwi connect the phe-



Figure 13. Following a battle with Purukupali, the Moon-man ascended into the sky.

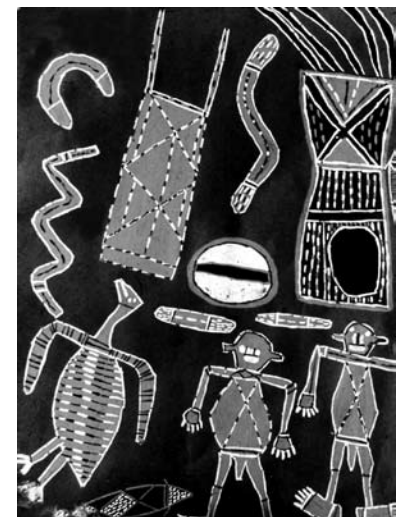


Figure 14. The Moon-man had two wives, who each bore him a son. Following the sons' disobedience he drowned them, and was punished by the women.



Figure 15. A halo around the moon was interpreted as Moon-man protecting himself from coming rain.

nomenon even more closely with their own tribal customs insofar as they believe that the Moon-man is taking part in a kulama ceremony, that the ring is the mound of earth around the ceremonial circle

or milimika and that inside it the star people are dancing and singing the kulama songs, just as the Tiwi do on Earth.

The moon is usually regarded as more mysterious, and hence more dangerous, than the sun and thus functions as a warning against potentially immoral activities. Because of the association of the lunar cycle with the menstrual cycle, the moon was linked with fertility and young girls were warned not to stand gazing at the moon unless they wished to become pregnant. Indeed, in Western Australian legends and in Arnhem land, staring at the moon may bring death.

The Southern Cross

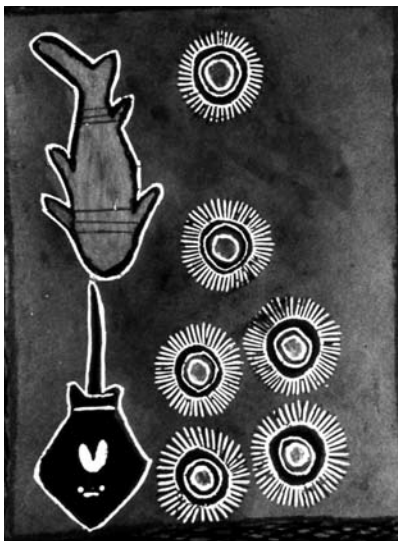


Figure 16. For people around Caledon Bay, the Southern Cross and Pointers represent a stingray pursued by a shark.

One of the most easily identified constellations in the southern sky is the Southern Cross and its two Pointers, Alpha and Beta Centauri. Because of its distinctive shape, it is linked with various characteristic objects in different areas. Thus around Caledon Bay on the east coast of Arnhem Land, the Cross represents a stingray being pursued by a shark – the Pointers [Figure 16]. On Groote Eylandt, where fish is the staple diet, the four stars of the

Cross represent two brothers, the *Wanamoumitja* (Alpha and Beta Crucis) and their respective camp fires (Delta and Gamma Crucis). Here they cook a great black fish *alakitja* (the Coal Sack), which they have caught in the sky river (the Milky Way). The Pointers are their two friends, the *Meirindilja*, who have just returned from hunting [Figure 17]. The two stars on the left are the *Meirindilja* brothers with their boomerangs. The two circles in the

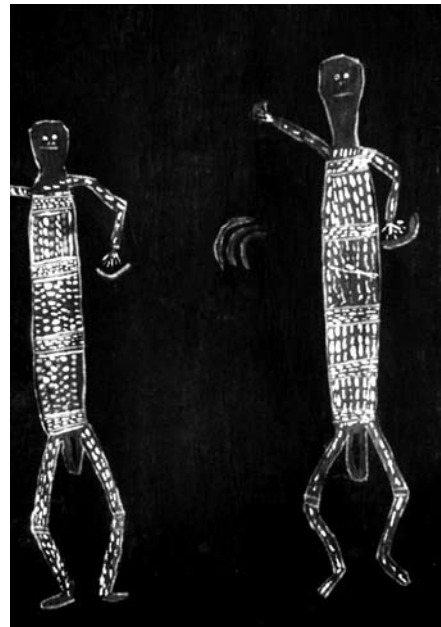


Figure 17. On Groote Eylandt, the Pointers in the Southern Cross represent the *Meirindilja*, two friends of the *Wanamoumitja* brothers.

centre are their cooking fires and the two stars on the right are the *Wanamoumitja* Brothers with their fish [Figure 18].

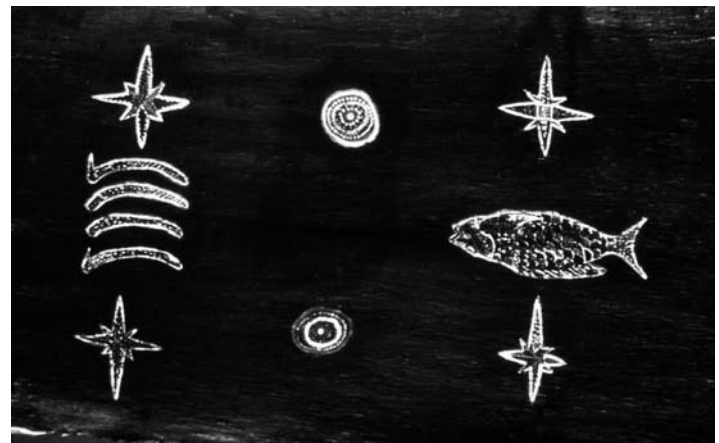


Figure 18. The four friends, with boomerangs and fish, and their two campfires.

On the other hand, tribes of the Central Desert see in the kite shape of the Cross the footprint of the wedge-tailed eagle *Waluwara*, while the pointers represent his throwing stick and the Coal Sack his nest.

Another legend concerning the Southern Cross relates it to the sanctity of animal life and the advent of death in the world. It is said that the Great Spirit *Baiame* created two men and a woman and taught them what plants to eat and how to dig for roots. When a drought came and the plants withered, the woman urged the men to hunt an animal for food. One man agreed and killed a kangaroo but the other man refused to eat any of *Baiame's* creatures. He went off alone into the desert and fell exhausted beneath a white gum tree. The *Yowi*, spirit of death, reached down from the tree and dragged him up, disturbing two white

cockatoos nesting there. Thereupon the whole tree ascended into the heavens. The four bright stars of the Southern Cross, Yaraan-do, are the eyes of the man and the Yowi and the two pointers of the Cross are the two cockatoos trying to return to their nest in the gum tree, a perpetual reminder not to eat forbidden fruit.

Venus



Figure 19. Venus, the Morning Star.

Venus, the Morning Star, which has had significance for many cultures, was also an important sign to the Aborigines, who rose at dawn to begin their hunting [Figure 19]. It, too, was personified and frequently associated with death. Arnhem Land legends identify the home of the morning star, *Barnumbir*, as *Bralgu* the Island of the Dead. It seems that *Barnumbir* was so afraid of drowning that she could be persuaded to light her friends travelling across the sea at night only if she were held on a long string by two old women who at dawn would pull her back and keep her in a basket during the day. Thus Venus is pictured here as a shining light held in a mesh basket and tied to *Bralgu* by a string of light. Because she is tied down by her string



Figure 20. Two women hold the brightly shining Morning Star by a string of light.

[Figure 20] she cannot rise high in the sky but remains near the horizon. In Arnhem Land, because of this connection, the morning star ceremony is an important part of the ritual for the dead. It is represented by a totem stick to the top of which is bound a cluster of white feathers or down, denoting the star, and long strings end-

ing in smaller bunches of feathers to suggest the rays. When a person dies, his spirit is believed to be conducted by *Barnumbir* to its last resting place on *Bralgu* (Mountford 1956).

Meteors

Meteors are variously interpreted. Because of their speed and unpredictability, they are believed, in north-eastern Arnhem Land, to be spirit canoes carrying the souls of the dead to their spirit home in the sky. To the Tiwi tribe of Bathurst and Melville Islands, each is the single eye of the spirit men, the *Papinjuwari*, who steal bodies and suck the blood of their victims, their evil eyes blazing as they streak across the sky looking for their prey. In other legends, meteors are associated with fire and linked to the waratah plant, *Telopea speciosissima* [Figure 21], a member of the Protea family, which



Figure 21. The waratah.

is resistant to fire and whose brilliant red flowers seemed to the Aborigines like sparks from a fire, as each petal is shaped like a miniature meteor. This was why, in the early years of white settlement, some Aborigines brought waratahs to the European blacksmiths: they identified the sparks from the anvil with meteors and hence with the waratahs.

Conclusion

From this sample of celestial legends it is clear that, with the possible exception of meteors (and even they can be regarded as recurrent events), the Aborigines were not interested in extraordinary occurrences, but in the regular patterns of natural phenomena. This is understandable since one of the main functions of the mythology was to overcome the sense of helplessness inevitable in a people so completely dependent for their survival on the cycles of the natural world and devoid of any technological means of controlling their environment. The legends served this purpose by integrating an unfathomable universe into the moral and social order of the community - 'humanising' natural

objects and cosmic phenomena by ascribing to them behaviour patterns and motivations which accorded with those of the tribal unit.

Such a belief system serves a number of important social functions. In the first place it engenders a level of confidence and predictability about humans' place in the universe, not as superior beings but as equal partners; in this it fulfils a role comparable to that of technology, which also permits a degree of control over the environment. Secondly, it cultivates respect for the inanimate as well as the animate, for all partake of the same spiritual framework as humanity itself. Thirdly, the legends provide a sanction for the customs, rites and morality of the tribe, since these are reflected and enacted in the Sky-world.

The most radical difference between the vitalist beliefs that underlie these myths and the materialistic philosophy of Western science concerns the relationship of the observer to the observed. In the framework of Newtonian science, we have a convention (and we sometimes forget that it is only a convention, not a truth) that the observer is independent and distinct from what is being observed; hence, in this system, the relationship between physical objects can be expressed in mathematical terms, which remain true irrespective of the observer. The Aborigines, on the other hand, did not conceive of themselves as external observers of Nature but as part of it in every sense. The meaning of the stars, as of everything else in Nature, was neither self-evident nor independent of the observer; rather it depended on the degree of initiation of the individual into the tribal lore, which elucidated the links between tribal customs and natural phenomena. You could not set out to learn this knowledge from observation. It had to be given to you as a gift from the Elders. Without this knowledge, the individual was disoriented and powerless in an alien universe.

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The Morning Star

What do we see, *waridj*, as we look back?
Paddling, we see the shine of the Morning Star.
Yes, *waridj* Bralbal, paddling we see it close to us.

The Morning Star sends out its rays as it rises near us:
It skims the water, shining across the sea, the Bralgu Star,
its rays shining near us.
It skims the sea, from Bralgu, shining upon us, on the end
of its string, attached to a young sapling.
Another Star, *waridj*, a feathered ball held by the Spirits ...
Close is the Morning Star ...

It shines near, as we turn to see it. Oh, Morning Star, Oh
pole and strings ...

The Star and its rays rise gradually for us, *waridj* Miralaidj;
we rest our paddles, dragging them through the sea.
See the shine from the disc of the Star, close to us, *waridj*.
The Bralgu Spirits are dancing, sending the Star ...

The Morning Star shines, bringing the dawn ... putting an
end to the night ...
Close to us, ending the darkness, bringing the dawn.
It pierces the darkness, that Star, sent by the Spirits ...

From the Djanggawl Song Cycle, Yirrkalla People of Arnhem
Land, from *Djanggawul: An Aboriginal Religious Cult of North-
Eastern Arnhem Land*, by Ronald M Berndt, Routledge & Kegan
Paul, 1952.