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CAPTURING HISTORIES AT THANTYI-WANPARDA: COMPARING EARLY AND LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY ETHNOGRAPHIES IN ARABANA TERRITORY, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Jason Gibson¹ and Luise Hercus²

¹ Deakin University, Melbourne, VIC 3125, Australia

² Australian National University, Canberra, ACT 0200, Australia

Abstract

This paper deals with the original field diaries and notebooks of Walter Baldwin Spencer during his brief fieldwork endeavour amongst the Arabana of northern South Australia in 1903. The information recorded by Spencer reveals a relatively accurate, although abbreviated and fragmentary, assemblage of Arabana mythologies and language that can be compared with information recorded by Luise Hercus with Mick McLean and other Arabana and Wangkangurru people, over 60 years later. In this paper we describe and contextualise what is an overlooked episode in Spencer and Gillen's fieldwork career, provide an analysis of their work with Arabana informants, and compare their findings with more recent ethnographic information collected in the latter half of the 20th century. Interrogating this historical information and rereading it in light of far more recent and thorough research, we demonstrate the benefits of combining the sets of information from two radically different periods in Australian ethnography, linguistics and anthropology.

Introduction

The work of late 19th and early 20th century anthropologists still looms large in the consciousness of central Australians. Not only are the major ethnographies that were produced at this time still read and referenced, but also their contents are often critical to cultural and linguistic reinterpretations and revivals and are used in native title and land claim research. In this paper, we take a close look at the work of arguably Australia's most influential anthropologists, Francis James Gillen and Walter Baldwin Spencer, and assess the contemporary value of a small portion of their ethnography. Our analysis is made by comparing

the field notes made by Spencer during his time with Arabana people in 1903, with the vast amount of material collected by Luise Hercus many years later in the same region. We take a closer look at the information documented by Spencer and ask how the linguistic and anthropological information contained in his field notes compares with the far more extensive documentation created by Hercus with a number of Arabana people and the exceptionally knowledgeable Wangkangurru/Arrernte man, Mick Mclean (Gibson 2015; Hercus 1977; Walkington 2004). The audio, film and textual recordings McLean and others made with Hercus between 1966 and 1977 included many of the songs, stories and Histories (Dreamings) of the Wangkangurru and Arabana people. These recordings are now highly valued by members of these communities.¹

Spencer and Gillen's fieldwork amongst the Arabana was extremely brief and only Spencer's notebook and photographs from this time survive. They did not make any sound or film recordings (as they had previously with the Arrernte in 1901) and Gillen's notes from the Arabana fieldwork, if he did indeed take any, have yet to be found.² Collected over an intensive ten days of fieldwork, Spencer's notebook titled '1903 Urabunna Old Peake Station', does however contain over 90 pages of hurriedly scrawled notations. The content covers Arabana mythologies, placenames, incomplete song texts and snippets of information on the Arabana informants themselves.³ As such, this notebook provides us with a very concise record of a concentrated period of fieldwork and gives us an idea of Spencer and Gillen's methodological approach when working in

¹ Mclean also recorded important material with T.G.H. Strehlow in the late 1960s. There is also an important interview with McLean concerning the Spencer and Gillen collection that was produced by the then Curator of Anthropology at the Melbourne Museum, Alan West.

² Our archival research included Spencer and Gillen's distributed manuscript collections at the Barr Smith Library, the Mitchell Library, the Melbourne Museum, the South Australian Museum, the State Libraries of Victoria and also South Australia and the Pitt Rivers Museum.

³ Spencer's notebook, item XM5863, Museum Victoria. In addition to this central document are two supplementary pages of notes, which given the dated entries appear to have also have been created in the field, and a further ten pages of notes added to the end of Spencer's second journal from the 'Spencer and Gillen Expedition' journal of the previous year. See items XM5990 and XM5857 in the Spencer Collection at Museum Victoria.

situations where they lacked familiarity. Unlike the bulk of their work, which concentrated on the Arrernte people with whom Gillen had long and close relationships (Gibson 2013; Morphy 1997), amongst the Arabana Spencer and Gillen were largely unfamiliar with the local community, the language and the surrounding totemic geography. While the pair had had some practice studying cultural groups that were new to them from the previous year—when they crossed the continent from north to south gathering ethnographic data on various cultural groups (Gillen 1968; Spencer and Gillen 1904)—the Arabana fieldwork was not part of a longer expedition but a brief foray into a new region. Their time at Thantyi-wanparda (see Figure 1), Gillen's last fieldwork trip before falling ill and becoming increasingly sick before dying in 1912, has subsequently been largely overlooked in the telling and analysis of their careers.

In analysing Spencer and Gillen's time amongst the Arabana we are not looking to evaluate the comprehensiveness of their work, but rather consider its quality and limitations. Critiques of Spencer and Gillen's work have tended to focus upon their lack of linguistic skills (Moore 2016; Strehlow 1947:6–10; Wolfe 1991), while others have defended their pioneering achievements in ethnographic description (Batty et al. 2007; Gillen 2001; Jones 2005). In our analysis, we focus on both their capabilities as ethnographers in dealing with Aboriginal languages but also their abilities in identifying and noting important information on placenames, songs and mythology. We were also particularly interested in Spencer's hearing of Arabana (a language he was completely unfamiliar with).

We began our analysis by firstly producing an annotated transcription of Spencer's document, paying particular attention to the Arrernte and Arabana Histories/Dreamings and language material contained in the text.⁴ We were then able to correlate this material with Hercus' own considerable corpus of fieldwork data (gathered between 1965–1975), which, although focused on language documentation, also contains biographical data,

⁴ In this part of northern South Australia, Aboriginal people often use the English term 'History' when referring to the narratives/events that are more commonly known as 'Dreamings' (Luise Hercus pers. obs.).

social histories and collective ancestral mythologies. Building linkages between Spencer's notebook and this later material we were then able to assess the worth of Spencer's raw data in helping future generations gain a better appreciation of Arabana traditions.



Figure 1 The Thanyi-wanperta area, northern South Australia.

To Peake Station

Between 1894 and 1903, Walter Baldwin Spencer (1860–1929) and Francis James Gillen (1855–1912), collaborated on extensive studies of Aboriginal groups in central and northern Australia. When in the field they collected a vast array of artefacts, took hundreds of glass plate photographs, produced detailed field diaries and created some of the earliest ethnographic sound and film recordings (Gibson and Batty 2014). Their published works had a decisive influence on the early development of anthropology in Australia and Britain, and their legacy continues to be the subject of considerable debate and interest.

Spencer first met Gillen when he arrived in central Australia as part of the Horn Scientific Expedition in the winter of 1894. Spencer, then a professor of biology at Melbourne University, was immediately attracted to Gillen's charismatic persona but also his deep familiarity and knowledge of the Arrernte people. As Gillen had lived on Arrernte lands for close to 20 years, he had acquired a detailed understanding of local Aboriginal traditions and had already begun to document the languages, traditions and rituals of the Arrernte people. Following an initial two-year period of correspondence, Gillen shared much of his accumulated ethnographic observations with Spencer, and the two later collaborated on fieldwork during the summer of 1896. Descriptions of the ceremonies they witnessed at this time formed the substance of *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (1899). Spurred on by an overwhelmingly positive reception to this book, the two men again collaborated on the aforementioned 'expedition' through central Australia that saw them identify and study the Aboriginal peoples living between Oodnadatta in the far north of South Australia and Borroloola in the Gulf of Carpentaria in 1901–1902, which they published as *The Northern Tribes of Central Australia* (1904). Before finalising this book though, one more collaborative fieldwork journey was required into Arabana territory in 1903.

Exactly why Spencer and Gillen decided to make their return to the field so soon after their cross-continental expedition has its roots in debates in anthropological theory and requires explanation. Spencer and Gillen's earlier work had cast them as advocates of the Scottish anthropologist J.G. Frazer's interpretation of religious origins and their work was widely referenced by other 'armchair social theorists' in the United Kingdom (see Kuklick 2006). These writers used Spencer and Gillen's work on the Arrernte in ways that either contested or provided nuance to Frazer's theories of human social and spiritual development (Mulvaney and Calaby 1985:214–215). But it was Andrew Lang's particular suggestion that the Arrernte were not a 'survival' of a 'primitive' society that particularly

annoyed Spencer.⁵ Lang argued that it was the Arabana, and not the Arrernte, that exhibited more 'primitive' traits, such as counting descent in the female line, rather than the paternal and having totem affiliations linked to rules of exogamy, indicating an understanding of reproduction (Lang 1903:70). What Frazer and Spencer had taken as proof of the Arrernte's truly primitive character—their belief that individuals' totemic identities were conferred by the spirits who impregnated their mothers—were in Lang's assessment a later development.

Frazer wrote to Spencer and alerted him to Lang's views. Almost immediately Spencer began planning an expedition to Arabana territory to counter the armchair hypothesis and defend the theories of Frazer (Mulvaney and Calaby 1985:214–215). The objective of the 1903 trip was to record as much information as they could from a 'tribe with a maternal descent' to see if they—like the Arrernte and other central and northern groups—also had similar social and religious ideas, such as increase ceremonies, and believed in reincarnation from totemic ancestors. If they did, then Lang's (1903:70) theory that such things were a relatively recent invention or 'sport' in more recent patrilineal societies could be squashed. Spencer believed that if he and Gillen could observe and document these practices they would be able to show that the Arrernte and Arabana were essentially at the same stage of development. Spencer wanted to show that if Arrernte totemism was the rule and not an exception, Lang's hierarchy was incorrect.

Spencer was, according to his biographer D.J. Mulvaney, 'using evidence obtained by a field sortie' to assault theoretical speculation (Mulvaney and Calaby 1985:215). It is important to point out here that as much as fieldworkers like Spencer and Gillen were positioned at the peripheries of colonial influence and power, they were not simply supplying information to the theorists 'back home' to interpret. As Morphy (1996, 1997) has argued, Spencer and Gillen defended their own fieldwork based observations and theoretical opinions and as more recent scholarship on early Australian anthropology has suggested those in the colonies openly questioned the perceived wisdoms

⁵ Spencer to Frazer Letter 49, 13 June and Letter 50, 6 July 1903. Pitt Rivers Museum Box 5.

of their intellectual mentors in the United States and the United Kingdom (Gardner and Kenny 2016; Gardner and McConvell 2015). The 'southern' anthropologists from Australia and the Pacific therefore often pressed those in the 'north' to question their assumptions, make changes to their theoretical models and rethink their methodologies. Spencer and Gillen's decision to embark on the Peake Station fieldwork was not just about defending their chosen theoretical alliances with Frazer but arguing for the value of ethnographic information over further speculation.

Spencer wrote to Gillen, urging him to use his local contacts in central Australia to arrange for the appropriate field site. Gillen had already spent some time travelling through Arabana country and his friend, Ernest Courtenay Kempe, at Old Peake Station was soon called upon to assist (Figure 2). Described by Gillen as a man that had 'always been good' to the Aboriginal people on both the Peake and Macumba Stations, Kempe's assistance was critical to setting up an impromptu fieldwork foray.⁶ Having worked on the construction of the Overland Telegraph Line as well as partnering with the pioneering cattle entrepreneur Sidney Kidman, Kempe had considerable experience in the region.⁷ Kempe's current residence at Peake Station was located in the heart of Arabana territory and Gillen had periodically called upon his friend to

⁶ E.C. Kempe was the father of Wangkangurru elder George Kempe, whom Luise Hercus worked with in the 1960s and 1970s. George Kempe's mother was a young Wangkangurru woman, daughter of Warrpili, the main elder for the 'grinding stone tradition'. He was born in the 1890s or possibly 1900 under a tree by the spring near the old Telegraph Station. He asked us to take a photo of that tree (Hercus L16, Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), Hercus Tape Collection). We tried, several times, but he was not satisfied that we had got the right tree.

⁷ Kempe died in Adelaide in 1905. He had a property in Somerton, an Adelaide suburb near the sea between Glenelg and Brighton and his brother, Gerald Stuart Kempe, a very well-known 'sheep man' at the time, and who introduced sheep dogs to Australia, also owned a large property at Kapinka which is 20 km due west of Tumby Bay on Eyre Peninsula (Northern Territory Library, *Peake Telegraph Station*. Retrieved 6 November 2003 from <http://www.territorystories.nt.gov.au/handle/10070/19939>).

provide clarification on Arabana matters.⁸ A month before their arrival Gillen wrote to Kempe asking him to 'get together a few of the old men and form a Camp somewhere in his run' to act as informants (Gillen 2001:459). On the 5th of August 1903 the anthropologists arrived at Peake Station ready to begin their work. They brought with them a few items intended to communicate their credentials to the Arabana, including a copy of their first publication *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (1899), and various Arrernte *tywerrenge* (sacred ceremonial objects of stone and wood) that they had previously collected from the Arrernte.

In anticipation of their arrival, Kempe prepared six chosen men to help with the enquiries, some of whom had previously been acquainted with Gillen. When they arrived Gillen claimed that the group had 'an inkling' of their intentions and knew of their interests in ritual and mythology (Gillen 2001:459). The anthropologists figured that the site could not be too close to the railway line as any Arabana contact with Europeans might taint the authenticity of their informants. They also required a site where the informants might be located far enough away from the Arrernte that they would not have been 'modified by contact' with them (Gillen 2001:455). Peake Station was ultimately chosen as a place where Arabana had less contact with outsiders. Further to this, a separate anthropological camp was set up a short distance away from the Station amongst the gidgee scrub and close by to a naturally occurring outlet of artesian water (a 'mound spring') nearby. Known as Thantyiwanparda to the Arabana this site was also at the centre of the primary 'rain history' in the region (Figure 3).

⁸ Edward Charles Stirling, A.W. Howitt and the explorer John Walter Gregory also called upon Kempe for ethnographic insights into the Arabana (Gillen 2001:140, 184–185, 192).



Figure 2 Some residents of Peake Station (February 1899). Mr Ernest Kempe beside 'Ranger' in back. 'Smart' sitting in front, Bobby (Robin) in front of Mr Kempe with strap over his shoulder and 'Telegraph' kneeling in front of Bobby (Gillen Collection, South Australian Museum AA 108/36/1/6).



Figure 3 The camp at Thantyi-wanparda in August 1903. Gillen is pictured sitting at the rear of a wagon next to one of the Arabana informants. Two other Arabana men can be seen in the background (Spencer Collection, Museum Victoria, detail of XP9998).

Analysing the ethnographic writing and collecting that occurred at Peake Station at this time provides us with a unique vignette of Australian anthropological fieldwork practice at the beginning of the 20th century. In the ten days Spencer and Gillen spent camped at Thantyi-wanparda they produced over 30 glass plate photographs—fourteen of which capture sacred ceremonial performances—and collected Arabana throwing sticks, clubs, stone knives and ritual objects. Although these objects are important in their own right, it is Spencer's notes—taken down whilst carefully listening to the men that hosted him and Gillen at Thantyi-wanparda—that provide extremely important insights into Arabana traditions.

The Informants

Although Spencer and Gillen have been criticised for not recording the names of their informants (Bradley et al. 2014), closer analysis of their field diaries has revealed otherwise. While it is true that they rarely published these names in their publications, they did nonetheless record personal information about their informants in their notes (Gibson and Batty 2014). The Arabana men present at Thantyi-wanparda were recorded by Spencer as 'Wantjalli' (Wantyali) (also known as 'Ilimmeri' or 'Donkey'), Charley 'Purula' (Perrurle), an Arrernte rainmaker who had moved into Arabana territory where his wife came from, and two men from the Macumba area, 'Merkilli' (Marrkili) and 'Matjilli' (Matyili) (another man with Arrernte familial connections who was also known as 'Pakinki'). We know virtually nothing about the informant identified as 'Utapinji' (Utapintyi) or their sole Wangkangurru informant, 'Katipuka' (see Figure 4).

Additional information on each of these men is hard to glean from the archival material. Nonetheless, it appears that Marrkili, whom Spencer describes as 'the rainmaker' was the great-great-grandfather of members of the Gepps family,⁹ because, according to McLean, the site of Thantyi-wanparda was in fact 'Alf Gepp's grandfather's country'. The man identified as

⁹ Hercus met his grandson Alf Jepp, aka 'Alf Pudden' who was a friend of Mick McLean (pers. comm. Luise Hercus 13th September 2013—this information is contained in the genealogy of Alf Jepp that was collected by Hercus).

Wantyali or 'Donkey' (of the Kararru moiety) was also noted as being 'in charge of rain place', which was most probably Thantyiwanparda where they were camped. Arabana elder Maudie Lennie told Hercus in the 1960s that she was in fact the daughter of a man named Wantyali 'Donkey Jimmy' and when Hercus asked Mick McLean about Wantyali in 1970 he explained that his name referred to a *yarirda* (a powerful song/spell). According to McLean this song/spell was associated with rain and was used as a 'drying out song', to stop the rain. Spencer's notes also record the name 'Wantjili' alongside an associated annotation which refers to 'drying up water' but he does not make any reference to the *yarirda* (spell/song) associated with the name. The Wantyali *yarirda* was considered such a powerful rain-arresting song that it, if used unwisely, could result in a very serious, long-term drought.



Figure 4 Spencer's photograph of 'Katipuka', a Wangkangurru man (Spencer Collection, Museum Victoria, XP14495).

Language and Placenames

Spencer never obtained a sound grasp of the Arrernte language, although after a number of weeks amongst the Arrernte in 1894, a longer period of fieldwork in 1896, followed by a number of months in 1901, we can expect that he was relatively familiar with key terms and phrases. Nevertheless, Spencer most certainly relied upon Gillen to act as interpreter in the conversations had with Arrernte men and a number of Arrernte informants also used a combination of simple English and rudimentary Arrernte to communicate (Mulvaney and Calaby 1985:174). The fact that Gillen had lived among Arrernte people since 1875 (see Gillen 1995), published an early word list of the Lower Arrernte language spoken at Charlotte Waters (Gillen 1886) and had kept a detailed record of the Arrernte spoken in the MacDonnell Ranges district, suggests he had reasonable facility in spoken Arrernte. It is likely, though, that an interpreter would have been needed to capture rapid or esoteric language.

In Arabana territory, then, Spencer and Gillen had to rely upon the English abilities of their informants, but also their understanding of the neighbouring Arrernte language. Fortunately for them, their 'chief informant', Charley Perrurle, had originally come from the Lower Arrernte region, and Matjili, whose father was Arrernte, could also communicate using Arrernte (Mulvaney and Calaby 1985:216). Arrernte was thus apparently used as a kind of bridging vernacular, or 'inter-language' (Moore 2016), and Spencer's notes are peppered with Arrernte words and phrases which are then often compared with their Arabana equivalents (see Table 1). For example, key concepts pertaining to Arabana cultural and religious beliefs were translated into the familiar Arrernte terms, such as 'oknanikilla' [*aknganeke-arle*] and 'alcheringa' [*altyerreng*] (see Table 1). Spencer also regularly translated the Arabana moieties, Mathari and Kararru, into the Arrernte subsection classifications such as Bultahra [Peltharre], Kumara [Kemarre], Purula [Perrurle] and Pananga [Penangke]. He also made note of the Arabana terms for their ancestral stories, 'Ularra-aka' (Ularaka). This is probably the earliest record of this term, although Spencer was wrong to simply equate it with the Arrernte term *alcheringa* (*altyerreng*) with its connotations of 'Dreams' and 'Dreaming' (see Green 2012). Arabana people never made these

associations with ‘Dreams’ or ‘Dreamtimes’ although they certainly regard the Ularaka as referring to ancestral stories or ‘Histories’ (Arbon 2008). The Ularaka or ‘History-time’ was not time-less, it had its own internal chronology and described the happenings of Ancestors as they made the landscape.

Table 1 The Arrernte bridging vernacular.

Spencer's Arrernte	Contemporary Orthography	Gloss
<i>Quabara</i>	<i>Ngkwapere</i>	Ceremony
<i>Alchera / Alcheringa</i>	<i>Altyerre / Altyerrengge</i>	Dreaming, Eternal times
<i>Oknirabata</i>	<i>Akngerrepate</i>	Senior man
<i>Irritja</i>	<i>Irretye</i>	Eagle
<i>Obma</i>	<i>Apmwe</i>	Snake
<i>Qui-ia</i>	<i>Kweye</i>	Girl
<i>Wiya</i>	<i>Aweye</i>	Boy
<i>Unkulla</i>	<i>Ankele</i>	Male cross-cousin
<i>Unkurta</i>	<i>Ankerte</i>	Central Bearded Dragon
<i>Oknanikilla</i>	<i>Aknganeke-arle</i>	That which was manifested in the Dreaming
<i>Alcheringa</i>	<i>Altyerrengge</i>	Of the Dreaming, eternal creation times

In his ten days at Peake Station, Spencer nevertheless noted a remarkable number of Arabana words. He recorded over 75 placenames and often noted the optional proper noun marker in Arabana and Wangkangurru, the final *-nha*, written as ‘na’ or ‘nna’ (see Table 2). Most of these places would have been utterly unknown to Spencer and Gillen, who had spent little or no time in this area, and except for a few of the sites around Mt Kingston, Spencer’s notes do not contain any specific information on the geographical location of these places. Apart from a rudimentary pastoral map, there were also no maps for this part of Australia readily available at that time. Most of the site names recorded here by Spencer are only recognisable today due to the more recent documentation work carried out by Hercus with McLean and others in the 1970s (see for example Hercus 2009a, 2009b).

The following table lists the place names noted by Spencer, their location (where known) and their later identification by Hercus.

Table 2 Place names recorded in Spencer's notebook.

Place Names Recorded by Spencer	Place Names Recorded on Maps or Otherwise Known	Place Names Recorded by Hercus
Bunga wallinna	Location unknown	<i>Punga-warli</i> = 'shade-humpy'
Katapithirallina (another rain-man's rocks were there)	Location unknown	
Kulkararula 'Bald Hill'	Location unknown	
Tantana willinna 'Shag Camp'	Location unknown	<i>Thantani</i> = 'shag', <i>wila-wila</i> = 'many'
Therapininna	Location unknown	
Inkilarinna Irkilarinna (alternative reading)	Location unknown, but the alternative reading could refer to Sandhill Waterhole north of Loudon Springs.	<i>Irkilanha</i> , Sandhill waterhole, an Urumbula 'Native Cat' site and a vast camp site
Waranthunna	Location unknown, probably on lower Macumba	<i>Warantha</i> = 'pelican' in Arabana
Big Creek (mentioned re Mosquito tradition, misheard for 'Boy Creek')	Boy Creek	<i>Utaka Karla</i> <i>Yuwinya Karla</i> , <i>yuwinya</i> = 'mosquito'
Turaturanna	Brinkley Spring	<i>Thurru-thurrunha</i> = 'the hard one'
Cadni intjalkirra, Kadni untjalkera	Coppertop Hill	<i>Kadni Tyarkarnda</i> = 'lizard standing up'
'karingala is the name of bush which the cloud men found at Karingalinga', other spellings are Korungalla, Karingadlinga Kurangulla	Curanulla Spring, adjacent to Peake Creek	<i>Karingala</i> Spring, a major site in the Rain History
Kurlatjatjurari	Diamantina River	<i>Karla-tyuwari</i> = 'the long creek' usually just called <i>Karla</i> 'The Creek'
Wurntalrugu	Fountain Spring	<i>Wantalanha</i> <i>Wantala-ruku</i> = 'to fountain spring'
Wurpunga	Keckwick Springs	<i>Ngurpanha</i> = 'tail'
Kilara	Lake Callara	
Kurityina	Lake Coorichina	<i>Kurityinha</i>
Wobmadingalina 'warmed themselves in grass'	Claypan adjacent to this lake	<i>Wabma-thingkilinha</i> = 'snakes sun-bathing'
Katitunda	Lake Eyre	<i>Katithanda</i>

Place Names Recorded by Spencer	Place Names Recorded on Maps or Otherwise Known	Place Names Recorded by Hercus
Mudla mudla karinga	Lesbridge Springs	<i>Madla-madla-karinha</i> = 'little dogs'
Akundana	Levi Spring	<i>Akanta</i> = 'head-gear', word borrowed from Arrernte into Arabana
Kini katjarnia	Little Depot Springs	<i>Kidni Katyirinha</i> = 'twisting its tail'
Kadni kumamia	Lizard site on lower Diamantina	<i>Kadni-kubmari</i> = 'lizard blood'
Marakatthinna	Marakata, Simpson Desert site listed by Reuther	<i>Marakata</i> = 'rainstone', Eastern Simpson Desert site, no exact location
Karkuramana?	Mt Denison	There is an adjacent <i>kalku</i> 'Acacia seed' site, <i>Kalku-kardi</i>
Kadnoui	Mt Dutton, name preserved in Cadna-Owie Trig, and big and little Cadna-Owie Springs on Mt Dutton	<i>Kadnyawi</i> = 'rock-water', Kuyani name
Mt Charlotte	Mt Charles (This is close by to Levi Springs, there is no Mt Charlotte in the far north of South Australia)	<i>Wadna-kanhakanha</i>
Kurara murkaru Kurara merkuna 'Cloud rising'	Mt Kingston	<i>Kurawarra-markarnda</i> = 'cloud creeping up'
Wirintjina	<i>Wirintyinha</i> sandhill on the side of Mt Kingston	<i>Wirintyinha</i>
Tjiripinunna	<i>Tyiripanha</i> camping site, close to Wilparooona Springs at Mt Kingston	<i>Tyiripanha</i>
Kadna warru	Mt Margaret 'White Rock'	<i>Kadnha warru</i>
Karilinna	Mt Margaret, the double peak	<i>Karilyanha</i>
Mundwana	Mundoorina spring 'the Two (Springs)'	<i>Manduranha</i> = 'two'

Place Names Recorded by Spencer	Place Names Recorded on Maps or Otherwise Known	Place Names Recorded by Hercus
Muramurana	Murra-Murrana spring	<i>Marra-marranha</i> = 'getting singed'
Anunta	North of Tieyon, site	<i>Ananta</i> ¹⁰ where the Two Snakes history starts
'...sat down outside springs' (Spencer didn't realise it was a placename)	Outside Springs	<i>Yakarra irlilantha</i> = 'loose teeth'
Pantina	<i>Pantinha</i> waterhole above Kurlachidna on northern branch of Macumba	<i>Pantinha</i> = 'fighting'
Jadianna	Peake Springs	<i>Yardiyanha</i> = 'spindle'
Putjellana	<i>Pulyarla</i> , hill unmarked on maps, south of Petirina Yard, on the Macumba	<i>Pulyarla</i> = 'gibber-bird'
Murdlabuntakani	Small creek near railway line, immediately north of the Peake Crossing	<i>Mudlu-puntaka</i> = 'it broke through the sand-dune'
Wuntuwardina	Spring on this small creek,	<i>Unthu-wardu</i> = 'little tail'
Tjantjiwanperta	The main site in the Arabana Rain History, marked by a collection of rocks	<i>Thantyi-wanparda</i> = 'Lifting up his grandson'
Minkariri-wankuna	Spring near Thantyi-wanparda	<i>Minkariri wankanha</i> = 'he rises from the grave'

¹⁰ Arrernte women have suggested that this place may be what Spencer and Gillen cite when they recorded an 'Unintha' corroboree (song and dance) in 1901 (see Gibson 2015:173–74).

Place Names Recorded by Spencer	Place Names Recorded on Maps or Otherwise Known	Place Names Recorded by Hercus
Kudna Tjuraka	Rockwater Hill, Spring	<i>Kudna Tyuraka</i> = 'they (emus) had diarrhoea'
Mulatana	Smithfield, Cliff Waterhole on Neales	<i>Mudlarda</i>
Bungawarina	Strangways Springs	<i>Pangki-warrunha</i> = 'white ribs'
Tipungapunga	Teepacnuppa Creek	<i>Thipa-ngapa</i> = 'beetle-water'
Kaltikaltuija	Thirty Mile Spring	
Umbunga	Umbum Creek	<i>Ngapa-Murirla</i> = 'water dried out'
Kurintiltjina	Waterhole on Macumba opposite Alcuchina waterhole	<i>Kuriniltyi</i>
Wiarinna	Wirriarrina waterhole on the Neales	<i>Wiraranha</i>
Wuntnurua	Wuntanoorinna Waterhole	<i>Unthu-nyurinha</i> = 'foreskin'

Ularaka/Histories

The amount of cultural and mythological information that Spencer was able to collect in such a short period of time is quite significant. While many of the traditional stories and ceremonies that he and Gillen noted capture only fragments of information, these fragments nevertheless provide important insights and fill gaps in the ethnographic record. For example, the traditions of the eastern side of Lake Eyre can be found in the almost contemporaneous (and far more detailed) work of the Lutheran Reverend Johann Reuther (1981 [1904]) but his work contains very little information pertaining to the west of the Lake. In contrast Spencer's notes shed light on traditions from the western side of Lake Eyre.

Fourteen mythological traditions are mentioned in Spencer's notes and they all belong to a network of stories that explain this much-favoured area. During her extensive fieldwork in the area Hercus came to understand that the area surrounding the Peake Telegraph Station was noted for its excellent, permanent waterholes dotted along the Peake Creek.¹¹ Standing not far from Spencer and Gillen's camp Mick McLean explained the cultural significance of these waterholes to Hercus in 1967:

There's two waterholes down there, *Inthunintyunha*¹² one this (south) side, and the one other side is *Palku-kudnanha*, 'Mass of Cloud descending' and right outside (to the East) is *Kata-katatharranha* 'Budgerigar waterhole'...*kutha idnhili, malyka malyka kathara wityili pitarunga*. Water stays there, it never ever dries out in drought time'.¹³

All around, but mainly to the east and south, was the spring country where water could be more readily sourced. In this region, there was a tremendous density of cultural sites. The 16 different traditions mentioned by Spencer are recognisable from Hercus' later work in the region. These include the origin of the Wilyaru Ceremony, Rain History, Eaglehawk Ceremony, a Rainmaking ceremony, the Carpet Snakes at Panti-nha (Lower

¹¹ See Hercus Collection at AIATSIS, Tape L11, Archive no.001265A.

¹² Both Mick McLean in 1967 and Laurie Stuart (1991) named this site while we were at the location (Hercus Collection, AIATSIS, Tape 124). It is called Warrarawoona Waterhole on modern maps.

¹³ Luise Hercus Collection at AIATSIS, Tape L16-002124A (September 4th 1967).

Macumba), Crow and Kestrel, Kadni the Bearded Dragon, the Two Snakes, the Ancestor Thudnungkurla, Kanmarri the Rainbow Snake, the Rain from Karingala, the Two Men of Initiation at Oontanoorina, Swan and Fire, Maka thakapa the Fire-striker, The Fish and Crane, as well as the Mosquitoes and other noxious insects.¹⁴ The following discusses only four of these traditions in order to demonstrate how these traditions can be better understood after having analysed Spencer's notebook.

The Ancestral Birds and the Origin of Wilyaru

The story of the Man-eating Black-breasted Buzzard and his mate, the Eaglehawk, is well documented in Spencer's Notebook and was later published in *Across Australia* (Spencer and Gillen 1912:24–28).¹⁵ The version presented in the notebook is significant because not only does it present a more lively version of the narrative but it also confirms a link between the Wilyaru myth (linked to the practice making cicatrices on a man's back) and the Rain myth that was only hinted at in information provided by Mick McLean.¹⁶

In Aboriginal story-telling the main participants are very often not named and it can be hard to know who is doing what. Thus, in the notes that Spencer made for this story, he cleverly achieved a way of circumventing this issue by labelling each of the characters with numbers. The main participants are: 1) Wantu Wantu, the Man-eating Black-breasted Buzzard (*Hamirostra melanosternon*); 2) Irritye or *Irretye* (Wedge-tailed Eagle, *Aquila audax*) the friendly 'Eaglehawk'; and 3) 'Kutta Kutta' or *Akwete Akwete* who is described as a small 'hawk' but is in fact the Spotted Nightjar (*Eurostopodus argus*).

¹⁴ These mythologies are recorded in Hercus' field recordings held at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. See Tapes L11 and L16. Hercus has also self-published booklets on a number of these traditions which have been lodged with the National Library of Australia.

¹⁵ Spencer's Notebook (XM5863) pp.49–55.

¹⁶ Hercus, L. and M. Irinyili 2017 Unpublished MS. 2017 The Rain History. National Library of Australia, pp.47, 51–52.

As an example of how the notebook compares to the printed version we have chosen a dramatic moment in the story. Little Kutta Kutta had refused to run away from Wantu Wantu, but he has just changed his mind. The notebook continues the story as Irritja helps Kutta Kutta hide in plain sight in a manner that matches the behaviour of the Spotted Nightjar, by camouflaging itself amongst fallen bark and leaf litter.

No too late now you can't run away now. Oh well all right me lie down & change himself into bark or rather Irritja chucked dust over him to make him look like bark. Wantu came up. Hallo where you been put 3. Irritja said I don't know which way him go. Wantu run about all over to look out track. Can't get him.¹⁷

The story in the notebook is told mainly in dialogue form, presumably as recounted by the informant in English. The published version has maintained most of this but has also added some explanations and elaborations:

"No, it is too late now, you must stay where you are". "Oh well" said Kutta Kutta, who was terribly frightened, "I will lie down on the ground and look like bark." Irritja, to try and help him, threw some soil over him, though he knew Wantu Wantu had caught sight of him. Wantu Wantu came and said: "Where is Kutta Kutta?" though all the time he knew quite well where he was. Kutta Kutta lay low and said nothing. Irritja said "I do not know which way he has gone". Wantu Wantu pretended to search for his tracks...

The situation, as described in the notebook, is of the kind that usually causes much laughter, when someone runs all over the place looking for something that is under his nose. It reads like an exact transcription of what the informants are likely to have said. But, by removing the vernacular, the published version is more complex and formal and a new element is introduced, that of Wantu pretending to look, so the story loses some of its impact.

There was a parallel Wangkangurru story centred on a site in the Simpson Desert. In his work on placenames Reuther (1981, Volume 7) lists numerous places named by 'Godagodana', his spelling for Kuta-kutanha i.e., Kutta Kutta the Spotted

¹⁷ Spencer's Notebook (XM5863) p.51. This probably is written for the pidgin 'can't get'm', meaning 'he can't find the track'.

Nightjar, but they do not refer to this story. There are a number of references also to the eagles. Some deal with the orphaned children of Wantu Wantu, an aspect that is different from the account given to Spencer in 1903. As an example, a site in the Simpson Desert, numbered 1471 in Reuther's listing (1981, Volume 7) of places included the site of Ngamungamuru, deriving from 'ngamuru', an orphan (the reduplication denoting the plural number).¹⁸ This site is recorded as being the place where Karawora adopted Wonduwondu's four orphaned children. The place therefore acquired this name. Karrawara is the Arabana-Wangkangurru name of the Eaglehawk, called Irritja/Irretye (the Arrernte name) by the elders speaking to Spencer and Gillen. In their version Wantu's children are killed too.

Spencer's notes on this story help us make the links between the Wilyaru mythology and the History of the Rain. The Wilyaru ceremony was not as widely practiced among Wangkangurru people as it was among the Arabana, and Arrernte people did not practice it at all (Spencer and Gillen 1904:451–54). In what is a final ceremony marking male initiation, the Wilyaru features the making of a series of cicatrices on a man's back and neck (Howitt 1904:658–661). Mick McLean was not a Wilyaru man and therefore did not tell the detail of the story to Hercus or others, and he only knew the songs from the moment they entered into the Rain History where the blood from the wing of the wounded Eaglehawk brought Rain to the Peake Station area. He sang the Eagle's lamenting song for example, 'the vein in my arm is broken'.¹⁹

Significantly, Spencer's notebook confirms this link between the Wilyaru myth and the Rain myth simply by noting the 'Rain Karara Ceremony of Tjantjiwanperta'.²⁰ 'Karara' is Spencer's variant spelling for Karrawara (Eaglehawk) and he is

¹⁸ Reduplication in a noun in all the languages of this area does not imply number, on the contrary it is a diminutive, and so the name means '(poor) little orphans'.

¹⁹ Hercus, L. and M. Irinyili 2017 Unpublished MS. 2017 The Rain History. National Library of Australia. p.47.

²⁰ Spencer's 1903 Notebook XM5863 p.17 in the Museum Victoria collection.

clearly grouping together the Rain and Eaglehawk Histories in the way he has titled this material. There is a connection. Speaking of the Wilyaru myth in general Mick McLean explained:

That *Pakupaku* 'Bellbird' comes from my country too, this way from *Midlarku* (Midlarginna Creek, now called 'Baker's Creek', a southern tributary of the Macumba), and from *Ngamungamuru*, 'Little Orphans' way out in the Simpson Desert. [...] It is always the same story, *Wilyaru* and that *Pakupaku* in it. The *Pakupaku* belonging to *Wilyaru* in them places I tell you the name, this one *Thipa-ngapanha*²¹ and that same story up in my people's country that is *Midlarku*, that bellbird is in that too...way out in the Simpson Desert, he is in there too, *Ngamungamuru*, all same song they tell me.²²

The Rain History

The next-best documented History in the Spencer notebook concerns the Rain. This is perhaps unsurprising as Spencer and Gillen were camped near Thantyi-wanparda, the main Rain site, and some of their informants were custodians of local Rain mythologies. It is one of only three stories from Peake Station for which there is a published version in Spencer and Gillen's (1912) *Across Australia*. The information about the Rain tradition in the notebook is, however, more fragmented than the Wilyaru story. Mick McLean knew the songline but was reluctant to sing it, because he had his own Rain songs from Wangkangurru country around Parra-Parra Well in the Central Simpson Desert. Nonetheless, as McLean had taken part in Arabana Rain ceremonies and as knowledge of this material have attenuated amongst the Arabana, he ultimately did record these traditions with Hercus.²³ Included in his rendition are aspects of the story that are absent from Spencer's notebook as well as close to 30 song verses.

²¹ Teepacnuppana Creek, near Nilpinna Springs to the southwest of Peake.

²² Luise Hercus Collection. AIATSIS Tape 125, September 1967.

²³ Hercus, L. and M. Inrinyili 2017 Unpublished MS. 2017 The Rain History. National Library of Australia.

The notebook contains some data that are missing from Mick McLean's aforementioned, much more detailed version, and vice versa. The notebook tells of a *tywerrenge* (ritual object) stolen by an Arrernte ancestor and McLean certainly sung of the stolen rain-stone and how the Arrernte rainmaker returned to his home at Ilpwere on the Finke, causing havoc with floods along the way.²⁴ Spencer records a brief summary of a Rain History connected with a site called Marakatthina (Rainstone) that is also mentioned by Reuther (1981, Volume 7 No. 1175) as Marakata, but is otherwise unknown in the literature.²⁵ The notebook adds the depth of history and the authority of the most senior elders to what we can learn of the Rain History and the Rain ceremonies: their voices are much more audible here than in the published version of this Rain History (Spencer and Gillen 1912:21). The Rain verse recorded by Spencer is also reminiscent of verse 18 of the Rain verses taped by Luise Hercus and is recognisably similar to the main verse of the Thantyi-wanparda song.²⁶

The Carpet Snakes from Pantinha

Additional material is also revealed about the main ritual centres for Ancestral Carpet Snakes in Arabana-Wangkangurru territory at Pantinha. This site lies approximately 100 km northeast of Peake Station, close upstream on the northern branch of the Macumba from Kurlachidna (Karla-tyidli = 'Creek-branching') waterhole and is unmarked on modern maps. During fieldwork to this region in 1970, Mick Mclean explained that the word *panti* means 'to fight', and the place name refers to a fight between two pairs of Ancestral Carpet Snakes which resulted in the flattening of the ground here. Regarded as an important ritual centre, Pantinha is said to have once hosted a great

²⁴ Hercus, L. and M. Inrinyili 2017 Unpublished MS. 2017 The Rain History. National Library of Australia. pp.97-105.

²⁵ Spencer's notebook p. 5.

²⁶ See Spencer's 1903 Journal p.7 and Luise Hercus Tapes 75 and 125 in the Hercus collection at AIATSIS.

ceremonial string cross known as a *pirritya*.²⁷ Part of the ritual at Pantinha consisted of an increase ceremony involving the use of a pointed wooden stick or bone used for ritual bloodletting referred to as *pa(d)nyi* (Spencer's *paiidni*). The ceremony also featured men reciting song verses that referred to the activities of the Carpet Snakes at Pantinha. As Mick McLean pointed out: 'They have to sing all that when they *thakarnda*, *panyira thakarnda* (when they do the piercing with the *panyi*) they use that (song) in that place there, Pantinha.'

While Spencer and Gillen photographed this ceremony and collected the bloodletting instrument used, the site name of Pantinha is not mentioned in their publication (Spencer and Gillen 1904:286–288). Instead, in their later book, the reader is simply told prior to the description of the ceremony that '...the old headman of a snake group called Wadnungadni (i.e., *Wadnangkani* 'Carpet Snake') showed it (Spencer and Gillen 1912:23). In Spencer's original notes, however, this ceremony is introduced with the term 'Palpara' without explanation. Although we have since learnt from Arabana-Wangkangurru speakers that this word means 'open ground, good for ceremonies or fights', it appears that Spencer simply recorded the word without understanding its relevance. Had this word been cited in the published version it would have alerted us to the fact that here was the ceremony from Pantinha, as the flat ground on the north side of the Macumba at Pantinha is referred to as Palparra. Moreover, Spencer's additional notebook comment, 'Wadnangadni of Pantina [in blue pencil,] ^obma big carpet snake', confirms these associations.²⁸ This emphasis leaves no doubt whatsoever that Spencer had documented what Reuther (1981 volume 10:70) and others have noted as one of the main Histories of the Arabana-Wangkangurru people.

Whilst recording the song of Pantinha, however, Spencer appears to have lacked an ear for the complexity of verse. His rushed transcription of the verse, '*lirri wat thai umpai, lara nalari tjinta*', is not really able to be analysed, except that *umpa* might be interpreted as *unpa* (you), and *tjinta*, might be

²⁷ It is not clear whether Spencer's *pariltja* (p.34 of the notebook) represents this word.

²⁸ This is one of only few places in the notebook where Spencer uses a blue pencil: he had realised that this was important information.

tyintha (cut). The sequence ‘*wat thai*’ is, however, reminiscent of verse 5 of the Pantinha section of the Carpet Snake line, the main verse for the major snake ritual centre at Pantinha, as sung by Mick McLean. It was the best-known verse of the whole cycle. This lively section of the Snake History starts from a sandhill named Pula-yalthi-yalthi (two coming down [from the sandhill]).²⁹ Mick Mclean recited this song in May 1971 whilst in the vicinity of the Snake History country, at Tuppana Waterhole.³⁰

Páantinhá yurkú watái
Páantinhá yurkú watáya
La pretáya Páantina prita
Yáya Páantina yurku watáya

Yurku is the neck of a snake, raised when they are fighting and thus refers to the snake at Pantinha (the Snakes) with their necks held high. As noted above, *palparra* ‘the Cleared Ground’ is the dancing ground belonging to the Pantinha ritual centre: the ground has been cleared and flattened in the History Time by the two female Snake-ancestors fighting ‘rolling around like centipedes’, as it says in the following verse, and in Mick McLean’s words were ‘smoothing the ground like two big steam-rollers’.

Marpámarpánti thimpá marpánti thimpá
Marílye wá marilyé marilyé yepá
Marpánti thimpánti thimpa marpánti má
 (Like giant) centipedes, centipedes coming together
 Over there, over there indeed
 (Like giant) centipedes coming together (they roll round
 fighting) (like giant) centipedes

²⁹ It includes the story of the main female Snake Ancestor swallowing a whole camp full of people, as well as their grinding stones. She falls ill as a result but is cured by the male Ancestor who finds the magic healing plant called *wakimpa*. The detail of Reuther’s version is different, but equally dramatic. See Luise Hercus Collection, Tape 400B at AIATSIS for McLean’s recitation of the song as Tuppana Waterhole.

³⁰ Luise Hercus Collection, AIATSIS, Tape 400B.

This verse and a following were also known to Reuther (1981 volume 10:70), who writes 'Marpantimarantimarilimarililinka'. Here it is clear that the main words *marpanti* (centipede) and *marilyi* (yonder) are exactly the same: it is only the padding that is slightly different between the version heard by Reuther and Mick McLean's version. Another much loved verse is given by Reuther (1981 vol. X:70) as follows, this and the preceding verse have been discussed by Hercus and Koch (1997:89):

...on reaching the top they slid down again on the other side of the sandhill. Again, they sang:
'Kantiyataakakantirulanilantanpurkauiwilla'

In January 1972 Mick McLean sang as follows:³¹

Kantiyiyatá káyá puruká
Yáriwé wélána
Ayá kantí wiyatá káyá puruká
Yáriwé welá
Ayá kantí wiyatáka puruká yariwé

This was explained (in Wangkangurru):

Just like *kanti*, heavy throwing sticks, they slide down the sandhill as they crossed over. *puruka* is just for *purka*, crossing over. They went straight down instead of wriggling down.

So, far from being a lone description of a snake ceremony, the additional information it contains puts Spencer's notebook right into the centre of Arabana-Wangkangurru traditions. The example of this particular ceremony described in the notebook shows us that the published version contains an item of additional information (about the performer) from Spencer and Gillen's memory of events. However, this version omits vital matters, names and site information. Before exploring the contents of this notebook, Mick McLean's recitals of the songs and Reuther's information appeared to have no links to Spencer's published data. With this additional material our understanding of the Snake ritual is greatly improved: in fact, we now have an actual description of the ceremony, associated

³¹ Hercus Tape 447, archive number 002560A, in the AIATSIS Hercus Collection.
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photographs and objects collected relevant to the ceremony as well as the details of its myth and songs.

Kadni the Bearded Dragon

Spencer's notes also shed new light on the History of Kadni, the Bearded Dragon from Coppertop Hill (Figure 5). As it was the first entry in Spencer's notebook we might assume that the Coppertop History was a topic that the informants felt comfortable beginning with. Coppertop Hill, known in Arabana as Kadni tyarkarnda or Kadni-tyarka-arkarnda (Lizard standing up), is a spectacular copper-coloured rocky hill that stands out at the eastern edge of the Denison Range, only about 20 km from Spencer and Gillen's camp. At the foot of the hill, a small rocky outcrop represents the female Kadni Ancestor (Figure 6).

The story told in the notebook differs in some points from Mick McLean's longer and more detailed version.³² The Kadni stands on top of the hill making boomerangs and throwing them further and further afield. Mick McLean showed us the female Kadni at the foot of the hill, but only Spencer's notes make it absolutely clear that he is in trouble because his wife has changed from a different type of lizard into a *kadni*, thus transgressing marriage rules. Moreover, only the notebook includes the, otherwise unknown, Lizard Increase song and gives us more valuable incidental information. It mentions a site that the Kadni once travelled to called Kudna-tjuraka, i.e., Kudna-tyurraka (they had diarrhoea), and also Kudna-tyurra-apukanha, where 'they had diarrhoea long ago', telling us that it is a small mound spring. In the Emu History it is a main site with green rocks on Rockwater Hill. With this additional information we should be able to locate it. On the other hand, only Mick McLean was able to locate and explain the site called Kadni-Kubmari (Lizard Blood) on the Lower Diamantina, a long way to the east of Peake Station, where the Bearded Dragon Lizards killed each other in battle and hit each other so much with heavy clubs that they all now have flat triangular heads.

³² Spencer's notebook pp.11-13.



Figure 5 Coppertop Hill, Kadni-tyarkanha (the Bearded Dragon standing up).
Photo: Pamela MacDonald.



Figure 6 The female Kadni, at the foot of Coppertop Hill, which is further to the left. Photo: Pamela MacDonald.

Notable Omissions

There are, however, two significant Arabana traditions that are surprisingly absent from Spencer's work. The first is the Kangaroo tradition, one of the most important ceremonial song lines and well known for its association with Lake Eyre. In this History it is a kangaroo skin that ultimately forms the large salt lake of Lake Eyre (see for instance Howitt and Siebert 1904:109; Elkin 1964:245). The verses of this Kangaroo tradition, which were mainly sung in the Antakirinya language, had also become the main song-line sung at initiation ceremonies in the Arabana region. Antakirinya people were regarded as owning these very important verses, most of which were secret. Mick McLean, who had played a senior part in some of these ceremonies, complained that they had to sing and perform the 'Kangaroo line', because nobody else now knew 'his' main 'initiation line' from the Arabana-Wangkangurru territory, the Fire History. Mick certainly knew the Kangaroo verses but felt that he was not properly permitted to sing them. His 'cousin' George Kempe was, however, anxious to see the tradition preserved and so he joined with Mick McLean to record a section of them. The late Arabana elder Laurie Stuart (b. 1911) also recorded some verses and told parts of the story.³³

In Spencer's notebook, though, there is no mention of this Kangaroo story, or of the songs and ceremonies connected with it. Even though he and Gillen were camped very close to some major sites associated with the Kangaroo tradition, such as Intunintyunha Waterhole and Pigeon Rocks, it appears his informants failed to disclose this important story. As McLean, Kempe and Stuart later revealed, rocks very close by to Thantyiwanparda represented the ancestor Wilkuta who thought he had spotted the ancestral Kangaroo but upon realising that it was only a possum said *thangkanharra*, 'let it be'.³⁴ According to this tradition, the Kangaroo had in fact been hiding behind another rock and hopped away. From the evidence of these more

³³ See Luise Hercus Tape no. 170, restricted.

³⁴ The Rain from Peake, section 2, MS in preparation by Luise Hercus.

recently deceased elders, it seems highly likely that the Arabana elders of 1903 who worked with Spencer and Gillen observed even tighter restrictions than these men of the 1960s in their handling of restricted men's business. It appears that they simply did not tell Spencer and Gillen anything about the Kangaroo History nor its related sites. It is also possible that these 'Histories' were held back because they were more precious or revered by Arabana people. As Spencer and Gillen lacked familiarity or any bonds of trust with this community, the informants may therefore have been reluctant to share.

Even more surprising is the absence of the Urumbula story in Spencer's notes. The story of the Urumbula (the Western Quoll ancestor and his followers) northward journey, from Port Augusta and to the northern coast, was/is a very popular mythology known to all in the southern Lake Eyre Basin, probably more so than any other tradition (Ellis 1964; Gibson 2017; Hercus 1991:13–16; Strehlow 1947:154; Strehlow 1971:561). Fifty years ago the older men and some women could still sing many verses, which were all composed in Arrernte. The nearest site for this songline is about 50 km from Peake Station, but there are several traditions cited in Spencer's notes that derive from sites of a similar distance from Thantyi-wanparda. We simply do not know why there is no mention of the Urumbula story.³⁵ Another songline with sites in the vicinity of Peake is about the ancestral Emus. The reasons for the absence of these and some other traditions may be quite simple, the opportunity for talking about them may not have arisen, or the leading elder for them may not have been among those chosen to work with Spencer and Gillen.

³⁵ The more northerly path of the Urempele Atyelp (Achilpa/Tjilpa) from Akarre (Okira) on Anadado Station, is mapped by Spencer in *The Arunta* (Spencer and Gillen 1927:390). The term is also discussed in Gibson's (2017:149–50) PhD thesis.

Of the remaining myths and songlines that are mentioned in the notebook, most have modern audio-data and geographical information, particularly 'The Two Men of Initiation at Oontanoorina', and the 'Maka-thakapa and the Fire History at Storm Creek'.³⁶ There are only brief mentions of these stories in the notebook. Nevertheless, in every single case the modern version has something to gain from the notebook, for example a more detailed description of the fight to grab the Fire in the story of the Swan from Mt Anna, or a suggestion of remedies against mosquitoes and march-flies, slightly different interpretations of stories or references to additional placenames.

Conclusions

Untangling what actually occurred between Spencer and Gillen and their informants is perhaps an impossible task. With careful analysis of Spencer's notebooks, however, we hope to have shed some light on these questions as well as revealing something about Spencer's methods of ethnography. The notebook reveals just how carefully Spencer listened to men like Wantyali aka 'Donkey', Charlie and their cohort, even though he was limited by his linguistic abilities and local knowledge. His notebook stands as a testament to his efforts and a record of an interaction in time. What the Arabana informants made of these exchanges is far more difficult to ascertain. Writing to Spencer one month after the Thantyi-wanparda investigation, Gillen (2001:469) reported some news from Kempe that gives us only the slightest clue:

He says Donkeys fame has extended far and wide...The poor Old Chap misses us dreadfully and says our visit will ever remain a red letter time...It's gratifying to Know that he enjoyed himself for we certainly did. I am thinking of writing an Ode to Tjanji wanpirta! and dedicating it to Donkey.

³⁶ There is also information on the Crow and the Kestrel. The story of Workala and Kerikki is told briefly in the notebook. As neither Reuther nor Mick McLean documented this narrative, this is our only record of this story. Mick McLean did, however, record a long, but different, myth about the Kestrel and the Rainbow serpents, pertaining to the Charlotte Waters area (Hercus 1993).

While Gillen's prose is typically light-hearted and humorous, the consequences of participating in this fieldwork may have been far more problematic for 'Donkey' and his associates than suggested. In 1967 Mick McLean took Luise Hercus to the site where he recalled that Spencer and Gillen had camped 64 years earlier. McLean was about 14 years of age when Spencer and Gillen arrived at Peake Station but he remembered stories of the two men using Arrernte to communicate with the Arabana men, and he also recalled the misgivings of some of the elders when they had left. The revelation of deeply held cultural material, Mclean stated, had apparently led to bone-pointing and 'a lot of deaths' (Mulvaney and Calaby 1985:217).

As a record of fieldwork Spencer's notebook is extremely useful. It is not a frantic scrawl as one might expect with so much new information but reveals an ability to listen closely and operate comfortably in an unfamiliar environment. The notes also do not start hesitatingly and gradually improve but maintain a high quality throughout. This does not make it easy to follow, as many items are written down as single words, mainly nouns, and it requires knowledge of both the Arabana and Arrernte languages, as well as the ethno-historical material associated with both groups to interpret them.

Although Spencer and Gillen did excellent work at the Peake Station, their linguistic work does not measure up to current standards or even the work of some of their contemporaries working in the region. Because they did not know Arabana there is practically no sentence material. Their spelling is based on English and it is not much different from the methods of spelling of Gillen's first wordlists almost 30 years earlier (Gillen 1886:416-417; Gillen 1995:81-91)—a far cry from the work of their linguistically talented, German contemporaries Carl Strehlow and to a lesser extent J.G. Reuther (Ferguson 1987; Gillen 1995:81-93). It is clear, however, that Spencer was hearing the Arabana language well at the time of his fieldwork and there are a number of errors in the glossary

entries for Arabana words (Spender and Gillen 1899, 1904), which are not present in Spencer's original notebook.³⁷

During their expedition in 1901, Spencer and Gillen made some of the earliest recordings of Aboriginal speech using wax cylinder technology. We can only presume that this technology was omitted from the Peake Station expedition because their interests there were primarily theoretical. Their intention was to record as much as they could about the Arabana in this short space of time so that Lang's theories about human development could be confronted by ethnographic detail. While these antiquated debates about degrees of primitiveness have long since receded from anthropological concern, the material collected by ethnographers like Spencer and Gillen now assumes a new role in making sense of cultural traditions. Spencer's Arabana material provides an informative record of placenames and mythologies that helps us better understand the person-land-myth nexus that we now know characterises Aboriginal ontologies (Rumsey 2001). Moreover, the significance of what is in this notebook is greatly enhanced, and in some cases only made relevant and comprehensible, by the information more recently gathered with far more active Aboriginal participation and involvement.

³⁷ For example, in their earlier publication, Spencer and Gillen (1899:654) had *thunthunnie* as the equivalent of the word totem in the Urabunna tribe. *Thanthani* is the word for cormorant in Arabana-Wangkangurru and is the name of merely one of the totems. The notebook reflects this information and has '*tantanni*' (presumably '*thanthani*') as one of the totems (p.9). Moreover, although Spencer and Gillen record '*kurdaitcha*' as being used amongst the Urabunna tribe to refer to the ritual assassin (Spencer and Gillen 1899:654), Spencer's notebook features the actual Arabana word, '*kutyu*' (p.64).

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