

ISSN 0067-1975

Published by the Australian Museum, Sydney
AN ABORIGINAL MAGICAL PLATE.

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(Figure 1.)

From Mrs. Daisy M. Bates, of Ooldea, South Australia, the Trustees have lately received an object, locally known as an inma or eenma, which is credited with magical properties. It was thought by the donor, who is persona grata amongst the aboriginals, to be a unique specimen, but this statement is open to modification. It consists of a thin pentagonal plaque of phyllite, a variety of slate, and is incised on both sides. For purposes of description, these faces will be referred to as the obverse and reverse.

![Fig. 1.]

On the obverse, as a centrepiece, is a human figure, the head encircled by a radiating dance ornament known in parts of Western Australia as wonnung-yi or tahlee, and in each hand a wandi is held. About the middle of the figure is what appears to be a loin fringe, while each thigh bears incised cinctures. In the field may be seen three boomerangs of the kylie type. The figure is contained within a scalloped margin, outside of which parallel, or radiating lines appear, cut right to the outer edge. The design on the reverse is considered phallic. It seems to represent the female pudenda, or possibly a combination of both the male and female organs of generation. The parallel transverse flutings are of a coarser type than those on the obverse. There are traces of ruddle in some of the incisions. The object when received was contained within a padded envelope composed of matted emu feathers loosely bound with fur string, the latter terminated with tufts of woman’s hair.
The following information has been supplied by Mrs. Bates:—

The specimen shows the figure of a man wearing the wonnung-gi or sacred head-dress—never seen by women—and on the other side is what I believe to be a phallic emblem. Maradhanu [a local native] brought it to me, and such was its ugly reputation, I think he was glad to give it to me, for I can keep evil magic from hurting them. It was brought to the camp as a powerful evil magic weapon, and Maradhanu—to whom it does not belong—took it from its hiding place, and brought it to me. A hole had been bored in it in order to hang it around the neck, but the hole had got broken. Looked at from the native standpoint it is rather gruesome, for if you run it upwards along a man's stomach he will die a very painful death; but if it is rubbed transversely by a friend it may heal a sick man.

It is a very important, and I think, unique object of magic. I have seen many inma, with their various carvings of group totems, but have never before seen the human figure plus the wonnung-gi, i.e., the webbed head ornaments held in the hands of the dancing figure. The inma has probably been made by a nor'-west area artist, and has come down along the zigzag native highway past the heads of the Ashburton and Gascoyne Rivers to the W.A.-S.A. border. It is very old and has the bent knee of true native drawings. Inma of Ooldea = Kalijuru of the north-west; these names are also applied to the wooden bull-roarers and other sacred and totemic marked boards.

The inma seems to be comparable, if not identical with the tjurunga of the Finke River natives as described by the Rev. L. Schulze, and similar to some of the corroboree stones of the Arunta tribe as depicted by Dr. E. Eylmann. The firstnamed author emphasizes both the sacredness of these objects and their esoteric significance, but does not attribute to them any magical properties. Eylmann, speaking of the Arunta, says that these plates can be divided into two groups, those having a beneficial influence and warding off evil, and others bringing death and trouble. These latter give the possessors the power to remove their enemies in a safe manner. He adds that both the material of which they are composed and their magical properties are inseparable, and if the owner of one dies it still retains its potency. Because of this feature, as an article of barter they are invaluable. This latter may explain the ancient appearance and great distance the inma under description has traversed.

The figures are of natural size.

1 = Churinga of Spencer and Gillen and Churina of Gillen. cf. Spencer and Gillen, Native Tribes of Central Australia, 1899, p. 128 et seq., and fig. 21; Horn Expedition iv, Anthropology, 1896, pp. 77 and 179.


3 Eylmann—Die Eingeborenen der Kolonie Südadustralien, 1908, pl. xxxi, figs. 2 and 3.