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# THE FEATHERED SERPENT

The Mythological Genesis  
and recreative ritual of the aboriginal tribes  
of the Northern Territory of Australia;  
the Kuppapoingo, Jumbapoingo, Birrikilli, Miarr-Miarr  
and Leagulawulmirree tribes at Milingimbi;  
the Murinbata and Djamunjun tribes of Port Keats;  
the Djauan and Ngalarkan tribes at the Roper River;  
and the Arranda, Luritja and Pitjantjara tribes of the Centre;  
chanted and translated

by the old-men of these tribes

to **ROLAND ROBINSON**

with a foreword by T. G. H. Strehlow, M.A.

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# The Old-woman Marmoonah of Kunapipi

*related by Goodoonoo of the Ngalarkan tribe*

An account and explanation of the myth and ritual of the *Kunapipi* (old-woman) cult.

AN OLD WOMAN called Marmoonah was the head of all the ritual of Kunapipi. In this ritual Marmoonah swallowed all the boys of the tribe. She went away into the bush for a period. Then she returned to the tribe. But when she spewed the boys she had swallowed, they did not come out alive, they came out as only bones. All the old-men talked to one another: "It might be this Marmoonah will finish up all the boys. It is better that we kill her." "We will kill her all right."

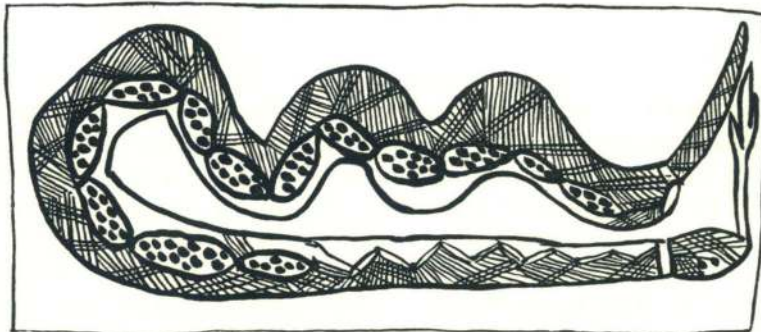
With a stone axe Bunnah cut off the head of the old woman Marmoonah. "Keep all the women away," he said. "I will go and make Maralpurndi." From a tree he cut and made Maralpurndi. He tied his hair-belt Urewa to it and whirled the Maralpurndi round his head. It made the sound that Marmoonah the old woman made when she spewed out the bones of the young men. "Ooh, ooh, ooh!" it sounded. "Ah," said Bunnah, "this is the Marmoonah again."

Now one old-man asked, "What are we going to do for the blood that came out of Marmoonah?" "Well," said the bandicoot-man, "I have blood here." The bandicoot-man cut open the vein in his forearm near the elbow and let the blood spurt into a coolamon. "Ah," said the old-men, "this is the blood of the old woman Marmoonah who should have brought out the young men alive."

Then the old-men said, "What shall we do for white paint for the ritual of Kunapipi?" They found the white paint along the river. The ant blackfellows were all there waiting for the blood. The old-men told the ant blackfellows that they all had to turn into ants.

Then the old-men took the Kunapipi song, the Kudjeeka from the women and they did not give it back. "Now," said the old-men, "we will make the ritual of Kunapipi. And we will bring back the young men alive. They will be born again. We are the old-men who have the sacred knowledge of death and rebirth. We are the old-men. It is only the old-men who can make this ritual of Kunapipi."

'Outside' or exoteric painting of the black rock-snake Kurritjal-pongo, the Rainbow-Serpent. Spotted oval shapes are eggs, some of which, when released, were turned into stone, which today are 'dreamings' of the Rainbow-Serpent.



From a painting by Jeemborala, Djauan tribe.