

Main Points of Prof Anthony Cowles' NYU Lecture

ONE

A bat cult once existed among the Aborigines of Australia. It was known across the continent, and the god of the cult was always known as the Father of All Bats. Adherents believed that by making human sacrifices to their god they themselves would become worthy enough that the Father of All Bats would appear to them. Once he was enticed to appear, he would conquer all men. Sacrifices were run through a gauntlet of worshipers who struck the victims with clubs embedded with the sharp teeth of bats. The teeth were coated with a substance derived from rabid bats. The poison was quick-acting, but victims apparently went mad before they died. Leaders of the cult reputedly could take the forms of bat-winged snakes, enabling them to steal sacrifices from across the land.

Cowles believes that this cult became dormant or extinct hundreds of years ago. Its former existence is the reason that he became interested in Jackson Elias' books about present-day cults.

TWO

An Aboriginal song cycle mentions a place where enormous beings gathered, somewhere in the west of Australia. The songs say that these built great sleeping walls and dug great caves. But living winds blew down the gods and overthrew them, destroying their camp. When this happened, the way was open for the Father of All Bats,

who came into the land, and grew strong.

THREE

Cowles shows the investigators a set of four over-exposed glass slides. Each shows a few sweating men standing beside enormous blocks of stone, pitted and eroded but dearly dressed and formed for architectural purposes. Dim carvings seem to decorate some. Billows of sand are everywhere. Though he did not bring the book with him, Cowles says that the discoverer, one Arthur MacWhirr of Port Hedland, kept a diary in which he records several attacks on the party by Aborigines. MacWhirr reportedly records deaths to victims from hundreds of small punctures, reminiscent of the earlier bat-cult.

FOUR

Cowles tells finally of a tale he collected from near the Arafura Sea in northern Australia. In it Sand Bat, or Father of All Bats, has a battle of wits with Rainbow Snake, the Aboriginal deification of water and the patron of life. Rainbow Snake succeeds in tricking and trapping Sand

Bat and his clan into the depths of a watery place from which Sand Bat

can only complain, and is unable to

return to trouble the people.