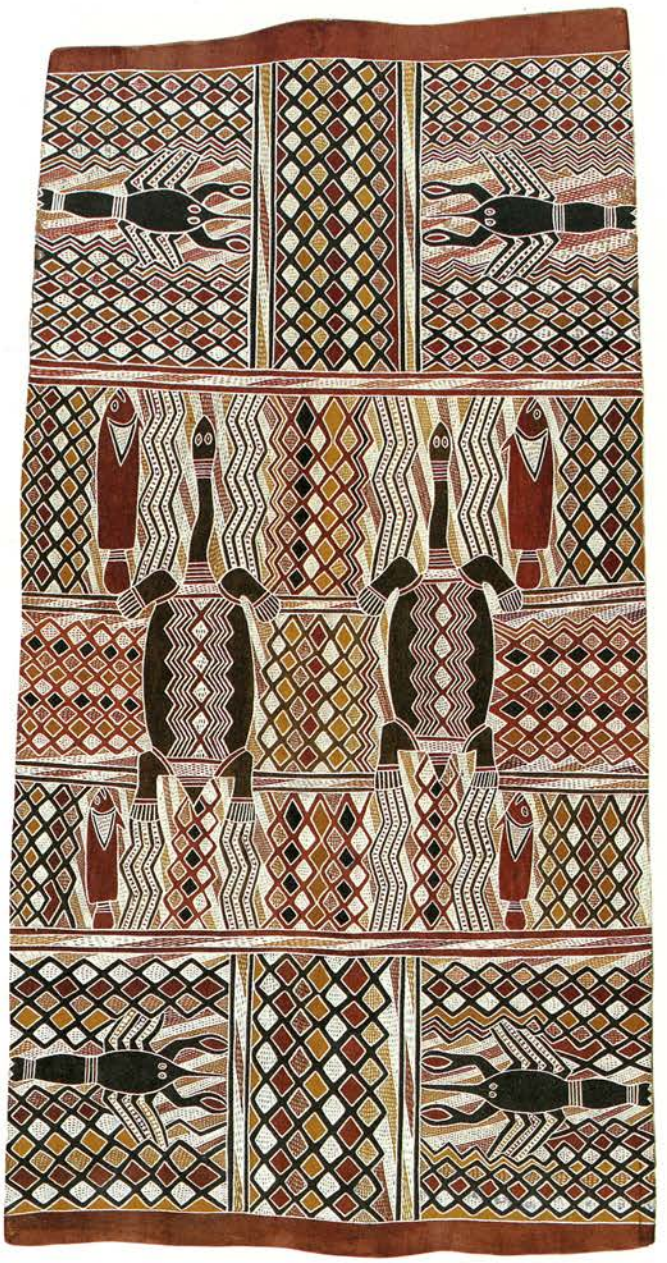


Wet season floodwaters at Gangan. Painted at Gurumuru, northeastern Arnhem Land, 1976. Artist: Yangarriny Gumana, Dhalwangu clan, Yirritja moiety.

B. DOWHY

CHAPTER 9

WAITING FOR THE DJIRRAPUYNGU

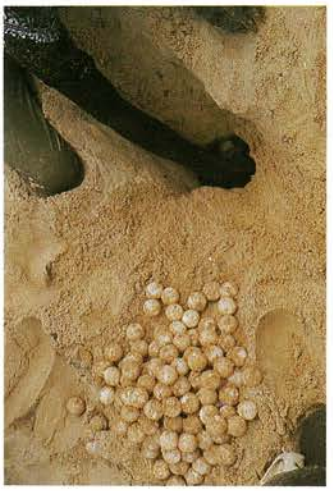
HOWARD MORPHY AND FRANCES MORPHY

THE DAWN LIGHT was beginning to filter through the thin mist that lay like a spider's web over the bay. It was well into the dry season and the nights were cool. A heavy dew had fallen, which seemed to be holding the heat into the fire. Garawuy, as always, was awake before his family. With a stick he stirred the fire and, blowing on the embers, released the flames. His two wives lay on either side of where he had slept. Bandawuy, a middle-aged woman a little younger than he, held her grandson Wuthu in her arms. He had arrived in the early evening the night before with his mother, Wapithi, and her group from the inland. Bepurru, Garawuy's second wife, slept with her baby. The infant began to stir and, seemingly without waking, Bepurru eased it towards her breast. Around the fire the other children lay in depressions scooped out of the sand, covered with pandanus mats to protect them from the cold.

Garawuy stretched his limbs and shook his legs. He then moved over to where his daughter and her husband lay sleeping among the whistling trees at the back of the dune. He rekindled their fire and placed another log on it to ensure they would be warm when they awoke. His duty done, he moved to the high point of the dune where he could watch the sun begin to light up the sweep of the bay.

Garawuy was always working, never lying still except when the heat was too oppressive during the day or when he slept at night. Even then, he sometimes had little sleep. If a fight broke out then, Garawuy was always found close by, trying to keep the peace. If people were frightened at night when ghosts were about or fearful of attack from hostile warriors, he remained on guard throughout the night to reassure others. He sometimes worried what would happen to his family after he had gone, hoping that he would live long enough for one of his sons to take his place. This night, however, he had been able to sleep peacefully as his family slumbered contented and unafraid.

Wapithi and her husband Djimbun had brought with them a kangaroo they had killed and cooked on the journey from Djimbun's country inland. At that time of



A sea turtle's nest. The eggs of various species of sea turtle are a prized food. The female turtle's tracks mark the way to the nest.
F. AND H. MORPHY

year, kangaroo and wallaby were scarce in the coastal country and the meat had made a change from the diet of fish, shellfish and dugong. They had come to Barrapuy Bay for a ceremony for the bones of Wapithi's grandfather. Over the next few days many more people would be arriving, for her grandfather had been an important man and his clan was a large one. They would have a good time. The people who came would bring food and they would come in peace.

It had taken a long time to arrange the ceremony. Messengers had been sent out to the surrounding clans throughout much of the Yolngu land; word had come back that the people were coming. For a ceremony in honour of such an important person, peace was essential. Old quarrels had to be forgotten, disputes resolved and scores settled before the ceremony could begin. Without the presence of the main relatives, the ceremony could not take place, but these kin would come only if they felt assured of peace. Otherwise it would be too dangerous. If disputes broke out at the ceremony when many people from different clans were present and emotions were charged with memories of the dead man and the conflicts of his lifetime, a fight could break out and someone might be killed.

Garawuy wanted the ceremony for his father; it had been six years since his death, and the time was right. He also wanted peace and that was another reason why he wished to bring the people together for a ceremony, as a sign that they were living in harmony. Preparations so far had gone well. Most people had by now arrived or sent messages that they would soon be present. But Garawuy was still a little concerned; he was worried about the Djirrapuyngu clan.

Garawuy still sat on the dune repairing the harpoon that his son would use that day for hunting turtle and dugong in the calm waters of the bay. All along the bay he could see the lights from the fires of the people who had gathered for the ceremony and the shadowy figures of the other early risers preparing for the day. As the sun rose behind him, the casuarinas were shaded purple.

He thought the Djirrapuyngu people would come. For most of his life, they had been close to his clan. His father's mother had first been promised to an old man of that clan who, having many wives already, had given her to Garawuy's paternal grandfather as a sign that their two groups were close. It was important that the Djirrapuyngu recognised this past generosity for what it was: their gift of a wife to Garawuy's father. There was a danger that over the years they might have reinterpreted it as a theft. Garawuy feared this because, since his father's death, relations between the two clans had cooled. His father had been entrusted with holding the secret knowledge of the Djirrapuyngu clan and some of the younger Djirrapuyngu men suspected that he had not passed it all on to them before he died. They thought he might have held some back from them and told only his eldest son, Garawuy. Garawuy hoped he had persuaded them that this was not so, but doubts lingered. The situation had not been helped by Garawuy's eldest son, who had run off with a woman already promised to a Djirrapuyngu man, using his great-grandfather's marriage as a precedent. This had angered Garawuy as much as it had the Djirrapuyngu, and the couple had sought sanctuary with an unrelated group many days' journey away. They could not be forgiven and permitted to return for some years. The Djirrapuyngu probably understood that Garawuy had played no part in encouraging his son's behaviour, but it could still become an excuse for hostilities if they needed one. He would have to resolve this problem with them that day.

The sun was up now and children had begun to play on the beach, spearing the slow-moving sea slugs that abounded in the shallows, picking them up and squirting jets of water from them at each other. People ate the remains of the previous night's kangaroo and prepared for the day ahead. Garawuy filled his

Coast of northeast Arnhem Land near Port Bradshaw, from the top of a high sand dune. The low-lying rocks at the base of the rocky promontory in the background are encrusted with oysters, which are an abundant source of food.

F. AND H. MORPHY

long-stemmed pipe or *lunginy* with some of the last of his small supply of tobacco obtained from working and trading with the Macassans during the previous wet season. His store would certainly run out before the next boats arrived at the end of the dry season and he would have to make do with some of the bush tobacco that grew among the dunes. He laughed to himself as he watched the children play with sea slugs, thinking how strange it was that the Macassans should journey so far in ships for something that the Yolngu used only as a plaything. But it was good that they came, for the things they brought more than compensated for the occasional trouble that broke out.

Garawuy had himself visited Macassar in south Sulawesi as a young man, and had stayed there for the whole dry season. He knew something of the Macassans' language, which made relations with them much easier. There had been bad trouble once when his father was a young man. A Macassan boat had anchored in the river not far from where Garawuy was camping. An important ceremony, a *djungguwan*, was being held and some members of the crew had walked uninvited into the ceremonial ground where preparations were being made. The preparations were secret, but the seamen had refused to leave when asked. The following night two of the Macassans, separated from the rest, had been speared to death in a surprise attack and their boat had been captured. The captain had sailed away and it was several years before any other boats ventured into Barrapuy Bay, introduced by Yolngu guides from elsewhere along the coast.

A group of people revisiting their previous year's wet season camp. During the wet season, huts of this type are built from stringybark. The raised floor of the hut enables storage of food and objects out of the reach of dogs and small children and at night smoky fires may be lit on the ground under the platform to discourage mosquitoes.

N. PETERSON

The dugong hunters. A dugout canoe sets out in the morning. The man standing in the bow holds his harpoon ready, its end lashed to a long coil of rope. Photograph by Tom Cole in the 1930s on the Adelaide River.

AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF ABORIGINAL STUDIES

Members of Garawuy's camp were setting about their day's activities. His wives and the younger children went to collect oysters. They took large dilly-bags and fire-hardened digging-sticks, Bepurru carrying her baby on her hip. Garawuy helped two of his young brothers, Gitjkuy and Warnambal, prepare for turtle hunting. The harpoon had been repaired and was placed at the front end of the dugout canoe, the *lipalipa*, with its point attached to a great length of turtle rope made of strong bark fibres. With the *lipalipa* in the water, Gitjkuy and Warnambal raised the mast with its square woven pandanus sail.

Warnambal took up his position at the front of the canoe, where he could launch himself and thrust the harpoon point into the neck or leg of a turtle or into a dugong feeding on the weeds in the shallows. The secret of spearing sea animals, or *miyapunu*, was to drift silently through the water and come on them unawares. Once they were speared the battle began; several hours could elapse before an exhausted dugong or turtle was pulled alongside the boat and killed with the edge of a paddle. Often the turtle hunters returned exhausted after a day spent on the waters of the bay, empty-handed apart from a few fish speared in passing. Sometimes a boat never returned. Each clan had its story of a relative lost at sea, the boat overwhelmed by a sudden squall, dragged beneath the waves by a diving dugong or tipped over by a huge wave. But a successful hunt was very rewarding. A single dugong could feed a camp of about fifty people and leave them feeling full for several days, its layers of rich fat satisfying the cravings of people who had subsisted on a diet of fish and fruit for several weeks.

When the others had gone, Garawuy and his son-in-law Djimbun set off together towards the stringybark forest inland from the bay. They were headed for a clearing in the scrubby margins of the forest where the men preparing for the ceremony camped during the day. They took a path that led them through the more permanent settlement of stringybark huts where they lived during part of the wet season. During the dry season it was preferable to camp in the open on the beach, where the sand was clean and the ground soft. Beyond the settlement a newly worn path led into dense coastal scrub at the margins of the stringybark forest, where men could work and talk hidden from view. Others had arrived before them and work had begun.

Young men's camp in central Arnhem Land. The inside of the bark roof has been decorated with pipeclay paintings.
F. AND H. MORPHY

Men from a number of clans sat in the shade of bushes around the small clearing. Garawuy's clan, the Mundul, was one of the largest, numbering some sixty men, women and children. It belonged to the Yirritja moiety. Barrapuy Bay largely belonged to the Mundul, though the entrance to the bay lay in the country of the Yiningbal, a clan of the Dhuwa moiety. Garawuy's wives both came from the Yiningbal clan. About a day's journey inland lay another stretch of the Mundul territory, a country of forested uplands on both sides of a paperbark swamp. In the wet season the swamplands were flooded and the paperbarks were half drowned in a huge lake. It was a difficult time to live there. Some people spent the wet season on the surrounding high ground where plenty of wallabies could be hunted, but Garawuy preferred to move to the coast, returning inland only at the beginning of the dry when the waters subsided. The land then abounded with game, fish filled the streams and swelling yams made good eating. It was a time of year when Garawuy's family often joined his relatives of the Bunumal clan whose country adjoined Mundul land on the upper Djurupitjpi River. Today, however, the Bunumal clan was visiting him in his saltwater country, and some of them were seated in the shade at the men's camp when Garawuy and Djimbun arrived.

The Bunumal would be important actors in the forthcoming ceremony. Garawuy's mother's mother had been a member of that clan; so too, had his father's mother's mother. Spiritually his father was thought to be closer to the Bunumal

than to any clan, apart from his own. In Yolngu ceremonies concerned with death, the mother's mother's clan, the Maaris, had a most important role to play. The clan had to perform some of the ritual dances and songs and prepare some of the paintings to help the spirit of its grandchild. In some ways the Bunumal elders were the real leaders of the ceremony. They also had the final word about the form the ceremony should take, and had to make sure that the other clans agreed. Certainly they would not act without asking Garawuy and they would always try to meet his requests. But they made the final decision.

Garawuy sat down beside Djirrpum, the leader of the Bunumal clan, an old man, still strong, but with the white tufted beard that showed him to be a man of wisdom. Djimbun joined a group of younger men sitting on the other side of the small clearing. A long hollow log lay in the middle of the clearing, covered with sheets of paperbark. Rarlandi, Djimbun's 'brother', had just finished moulding a wax ring around the mouthpiece of a drone pipe—a *yirdaki*—and was testing it gently by pressing his mouth against it. He scooped up a handful of water from the stringybark container beside him and wet the inside of the *yirdaki*. Lifting it up with one hand, he hit it with the other, knocking out the excess water and making a satisfyingly resonant sound. It was now ready. Rarlandi blew into it, making low rhythmical notes first, then concluding with two sharp notes in the upper register. Pleased, he handed it over to Djimbun to try. A recognised virtuoso, Djimbun might, if he was pleased with it, use Rarlandi's *yirdaki* to accompany the singing later in the day.

Djirrpum, the old Bunumal man, looked towards the younger men and spoke in a high-pitched tone that carried with it more than a hint of sarcasm. 'If you young men have finished your playing, there is work to do. But perhaps you have exhausted yourselves showing off with your new instrument and expect us old men to labour for you. This clearing is a mess, filled with all the rubbish from our work over the last few days, covered with the strips of bark and shavings of wood from the hollow log that we have prepared for painting. Perhaps you are leaving it around for the women to see the work we do. Perhaps you want the women to see so that they can do it while you go out and dig for yams and clamber over the sharp rocks for oysters. Maybe the breast girdles we are making for the young initiates at their circumcision should be made for you young married men instead. Come, let us see if you can move, or the other clans will think we have just been sleeping while they have been away.'

Spurred on by this speech, the young men began to clean up the evidence of the previous day's work, burning the wood shavings on the fire and removing the sheets of paperbark from the hollow log. By the time they had finished, more men had arrived until there were thirty in the clearing. One of the new arrivals was Galana of the Bamana clan, Djimbun's elder brother. His mother, like Djimbun's, had belonged to Garawuy's clan, the Mundul. He was some twenty years older than Djimbun and was the senior *waku* (woman's son) of the clan. His mother had been the oldest woman of her generation, the first born, and in her time one of the most important clan members. Through her Galana acquired his status as the leading custodian of the Mundul clan's law. He had to set the designs of the clan's painting and guide the young men's work. He had been taught the Mundul clan's law by Garawuy's father. There was no jealousy between Galana and Garawuy. They worked together to ensure that the law of the Mundul clan's ancestors would be passed on and that the spiritual integrity of the land would be maintained. If Garawuy died before passing his knowledge on to the younger members of his clan, that task would fall to Galana.

Galana sat down with Djirrpum and Garawuy and they talked quietly about the

Opposite top.
Seasonally flooded swampland, with paperbark trees in the distance. Lilies of various species are an important source of vegetable food in the wet season.
F. AND H. MORPHY

Opposite bottom.
Two Yolngu men perform a kangaroo dance during a mortuary ritual.
AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM

Singers perform in the shadow of a bough shelter, accompanied by a yirdaki *(drone-pipe) and* birlma *(clapsticks).*
AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM

progress of the ceremony. Every so often Djirrpum would tap his heavy ironwood clapsticks or *birlma* together, one of them resting on his knee. He hardly seemed conscious of his action; he could as easily have been whittling away at a stick or drawing idly with a finger in the sandy soil, but the *birlma* signified a change of mood as the real work of the day was about to begin. Soon his occasional tap was echoed by others as men picked up their own *birlma* and responded to his call. Then Djirrpum looked up. Holding the *birlma* in each hand, he began tapping out the rhythm of a song. Others joined him and he began to sing. Djimbun picked up the *yirdaki* and in seconds order was created out of apparent informality. The men began singing a song about Ngerrk, the white cockatoo.

Listen to the sound of the white cockatoo,
To his call as he flies through the trees.
The cockatoo looks for a place to land.
We hear his cries but cannot see him.
Hear the white cockatoo looking for a place to land.
And now you see him and he sees you!
Sitting in a tree he cries in alarm.
White cockatoo flies away.
Where are you now white cockatoo?
This way and that we hear your sound.
And now you see him and he sees you.
White cockatoo, white cockatoo.

The singing was to go on all day and into the night, each song repeated three or four times. Sometimes there were long intervals between songs, at other times scarcely any pause as one singer took over from others. The songs followed the

journeys of the Ancestral Beings as they wandered over the land in the Dreaming, creating the landscape and leaving behind them people and ceremonies. Such singing enabled people to remain in contact with the spiritual forces of the Dreaming, and summoned up the power of the Ancestral Beings during the ceremony. Ngerrk, the white cockatoo, represented the spirits of the dead as they travelled over the land, returning to their clan country to rejoin the ancestral powers that exist in the rock formations, rivers and waterholes. The flight of the white cockatoo ghosting through the trees of the forest looking for a place to land reminds people of the lonely journey a dead relative's spirit must undertake. While Djirrpum sang, Garawuy's thoughts turned to his father, and as the song concluded he added a line of his own. 'Oh my father,' he sang, 'your son still thinks of you.'

Garawuy's father had died at Nangali in the country of the Bunumal clan, towards the end of the dry season. At the time, Garawuy and his family had been thinking of moving back to the coast, as it was becoming almost unbearably humid inland and wet season rains would soon have made the country impassable. Garawuy had been worried that the journey might have been difficult for his father, and yet he had been reluctant to leave him behind, afraid that he might not see him alive again. His father had grown weaker during that year and had seemed to lose his enthusiasm for life. He had spent his days sitting in the shade with his grandchildren around him, entertaining them with stories of his youth, of battles fought with enemy clans, of a journey to the western lands where dangerous spirits lived in the rocks and the people spoke a language no Yolngu understood, and of the time he had become drunk on arrack (arak) brought by the Macassan voyagers and woken to find himself in a *prau* on a journey to foreign lands. He still retained the powerful voice that belied his frail body and was a reminder of the great strength he possessed well into his final years.

A year earlier he had called people from all the surrounding clans to a *ngaarra* ceremony, where he had passed his accumulated knowledge and power to the new generation of clan elders. It was a sign that he was ready to die and to rejoin the clan's Ancestors in the land. The ceremony had been almost too much for him, as he participated in it with the energy of a young man. Others held him in awe and the ceremony, in which he handed over his knowledge and power to those who were to follow, had been his ultimate gift to his people. He had declared afterwards that he was ready to die. At times, half-jokingly, he had talked as if he was already dead—as if part of him had already joined the Ancestors. He had accepted that his death was near and that had reassured people.

His face painted with Dhuwa moiety designs, a man of the Riratjingu clan stands holding his child in front of a stringybark shelter. The paintings have been made in mourning for the death of a relative whose body lies within the shelter.
J.C. REID

It seemed that his father had known Garawuy's concern. One night, while Garawuy was deciding whether to stay or to move, his father had drifted into a coma. Relatives gathered around him, and through the night and during the next day they sang the songs of his clan and related clans. At first the songs had sounded slightly strange. People wondered why until they realised what was missing: the deep, booming voice of Garawuy's father. No one alive could remember a time when he had not led the singing. He lay unconscious in the midst of the singers, occasionally responding to a song by moving his arm and once by opening his eyes. Finally he had lain still, and silence had fallen while everybody reflected on what had happened. The silence had become tense, finally broken by a display of grief so overwhelming that it had seemed for a while like the end of the world. Women had thrown themselves on the ground in front of his body, hit their heads with digging-sticks and slashed at their bodies with stone knives. Relatives had moved forward to comfort them and protect them from themselves, and gradually the noise had subsided, to be replaced by low sobbing and the humming of clan songs that had echoed mournfully through the forest.

Cleansing ceremony. Following a death in camp, the close relatives hold a sequence of ceremonies to help drive away the spirit of the dead and safeguard the living. This includes cleansing all the hunting spears in camp. The rites begin in the late afternoon with the adult males sitting about a small depression scooped in the sand. This represents the clan's gateway to the subterranean spirit world. While the men sing, the women dance to one side. After dark a fire is lit and green leaves are heated and brushed over people and items in need of cleansing because of their connection with the deceased. Here a senior Ritatjingu elder from central northeast Arnhem Land leads the singing before the cleansing of people and of hunting spears standing vertically about the sculpted well.
N. PETERSON

Garawuy's father had been buried at Nangali, but before he died he had requested that his bones should be finally laid to rest at Barrapuy near the place of the Old Woman's Blood, the origin of the spirit that had entered his mother so many years before and given him life.

In the dry season following his death, his bones had been dug up from his shallow grave. The remains of his flesh had been cleaned from his bones and each bone had been carefully wrapped in paperbark and placed in a cylindrical stringybark container. For the next few years, relatives carried his bones with them as they moved from wet-season to dry-season camps. The bone container was always placed on a platform in the centre of the camp to protect its contents from dogs and goannas. His bones thus moved after death through the familiar places where he had lived, the rhythm of his life entering the rhythm of his spirit as it journeyed back to its final resting-place at Barrapuy. His bones were sacred during this period—a reminder of the 'bones' of his clan—the wooden cores of his clan's most sacred objects kept hidden beneath the mud of the Barrapuy billabong.

The bones of Garawuy's father were now near the end of their journey. As Garawuy joined in singing about Ngerrk the white cockatoo he looked in the direction of the shade of branches where the stringybark coffin lay. It was wrapped in cloth from the island of Sunda, brought over by a Macassan captain who had been a close friend of his father. The designs on the coffin were no longer visible and the bark had turned black with age. Garawuy felt a momentary sadness at the loss of his father, but knew that his spirit had long since joined the Ancestors and was again part of the Old Woman of Barrapuy. His thoughts turned to the future. He hoped that the present ceremony would be a success, not only as a memorial to his father, but in bringing together the clans of the area in peace.

Mortuary ritual. Unwrapping the bones before they are placed in the hollow log coffin. This phase of the ceremony follows the painting of the coffin, and takes place in the public ceremonial ground.
AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM

There was still no sign that the Djirrapuyngu had arrived. If they failed to come, the ceremony, rather than being a confirmation of peace, could signal the beginning of a time of tension and possibly a period of war. If Maripurru, the leader of the Djirrapuyngu, did come, his son would be given one of Garawuy's father's names to cement the relationship between the two 'sister' clans. It would show that the generosity of the old Djirrapuyngu man all those years ago, in passing over his claim to Garawuy's father's mother, had not been forgotten. But a gift could be given only to recipients willing to receive it. Were the Djirrapuyngu clan willing?

The singing stopped for a while and Galana, the senior *waku*, got up from where he had been sitting with Garawuy and Djirrpum and walked over to the hollow log coffin. He surveyed its length, looking at the designs that had been marked out in yellow ochre on the red base. He had done most of the detailed painting himself, as it was this initial marking of the designs that determined the final form of the painting. The ancestral designs had to be handed on through the generations in their correct form, and it was one of his responsibilities to his mother's clan to ensure that they were. Once he had set the design, others could help in finishing the painting, though they would always work under his eye. As the entire painting had to be infilled with fine cross-hatched lines, without help the job would take a month to complete.

The hollow log had been divided into two sections by three bands of yellow ochre. The top section was a painting belonging to the Bunumal clan, mother's mother's clan to the Mundul. On one side of the coffin two snakes ran from top to bottom, the head of one and the tail of the other disappearing into circles. On the other side was a painting of a hollow log with possums, tails curved above their backs, represented on either side of it. The background to the figures was marked

A Djuwany post, erected at a ceremony held some time after a log coffin burial. The paintings belong to the ancestral being with whom the person has become reunited. The designs represent the country created by that ancestor.
F. AND H. MORPHY

in a diamond pattern. The painting on the lower half of the pole belonged to Garawuy's own clan, the Mundul. It consisted of a hammerhead shark with a diamond stingray beside it, the stingray's barbed tail fixed firmly in the side of the shark. The design on the reverse side was entirely geometric, an elliptical figure surrounded by a pattern of linked triangles.

The snakes represented the Ancestral Snakes on the plain near Nangali where Garawuy's father had died. The hollow log represented a hollow tree on the edge of the plain where the Possum Ancestor made its nest. One day a fire raced across the plain into the forest, roasting the Possum alive in the tree. The tree became a memorial to the Ancestral Possum and thereafter when people died the practice established by the Possum was followed and their bones were placed inside hollow logs. The paintings from Nangali reminded people of the place of Garawuy's father's death and the beginning of his spirit's journey, but even if he had died elsewhere it is likely that a Bunumal painting would have appeared on the coffin. To the Yolngu, the relationship with their mother's mother's clan was very important. Men married daughters of women from their mother's mother's clan, as well as being related to it themselves by descent. The clans were assumed to be close spiritually and socially. So when the hollow log coffin was finally erected in the public ceremonial ground, Garawuy showed it to his youngest son, saying, 'Look at that painting, that is your grandmother. That is where you came from and that is where you will marry.'

The other paintings on the coffin belonged to Garawuy's own clan and represented places in Barrapuy Bay and the sacred rocks whence his father's spirit had come. The shark and the stingray represented the two Ancestral Beings locked

Men wait for the start of a makarata. *In this ceremony the offender is obliged to stand alone while those whom he has offended hurl spears at him. If, when everyone has thrown, he has managed to deflect or dodge all the spears, the ceremony is concluded by the miscreant having a spear thrust through his thigh. Ideally, this act signals the end of the dispute and the pardoning of the offender.*
H. SHEPERDSON

in mortal combat as they fought over their respective territories in the waters outside the mouth of the bay. Killing each other in the fight, they had been transformed into two islands in the sea beyond Bathangu Point. At low tide a promontory of sharp rocks joined the islands just above the surface of the water—the stingray's tail still piercing the shark's body. In the peacemaking ceremony (*makarata*) of the Mundul clan, members of the clan acted as stingrays, throwing spears armed with stingray barbs at the person accused of breaking the clan's law or seeking forgiveness for a hostile act. The miscreant, his fighting dilly-bag clenched tight between his teeth, acted like the hammerhead shark, dodging and weaving spears just as the shark had tried to avoid the stingray's barbed tail. The painting on the coffin reminded people of the hostility and passion generated by death, and of the need to resolve the tension between clans that death sometimes caused. Bearing in mind the relationship between the Mundul and Djirrapuyngu, the design was well chosen.

The final design on the coffin, the ellipse, represented the place of the Old Woman's Blood: an oval depression in the rocks behind which people were camped for the ceremony. The depression remained damp in all seasons, its surface covered with a dense layer of reddish lichen. The rocks were a dangerous place, charged with spiritual power and avoided by most people. Women and children were supposed never to go there, and before Garawuy visited the place he prepared himself spiritually and was careful to announce his presence by singing to the Old Woman well before he ventured near. Even then he would only enter the place if he felt strong. It was to this place that the spirit of his father returned to rejoin the spiritual forces in the land.

A Yolngu elder stands waiting to take part in a makarata, *his fighting dilly-bag over his right shoulder and spears held at the ready. Photograph at Milingimbi in the 1930s.*
H. SHEPERDSON

*A completed earth oven against the background of the typical inland forest of northeast Arnhem Land. The predominant species of large tree is the Darwin stringybark (*E. tetradonta*), the bark of which is used for building and for such objects as canoes and containers for food and water. In the background is a tree that has just had its bark removed. The forest has recently been fired. The people of Arnhem Land burn off the area every two years or so, to maintain ease of access and to promote the growth of new shoots that attract game.*
F. AND H. MORPHY

*Large animals such as kangaroo or dugong are frequently cooked in an earth oven. A termite mound is broken up into small chunks and heated on a fire. When they are hot they are covered with a layer of green leaves and the prepared carcase is laid on top. The meat is then covered with sheets of paperbark (*Melaleuca *sp), and the whole is covered with a mound of earth and left for about an hour.*

With the designs set, it was time to begin detailed work on the coffin. Djimbun and other young men sat down on both sides of the hollow log and began to paint the fine parallel lines that filled in the designs. They used brushes of human hair bound onto thin sticks. For white pigment they used powdered white clay and for red, black and yellow they used ochres and manganese. The ochres were ground on stone palettes, mixed with a little water and then combined with the juices of pounded tree orchids that fixed the colours. The paint was applied with intense concentration. The hair of the brush, coated in pigment, was laid on top of the hollow log and the brush was pulled across the surface. For the white lines only the tiniest amount of pigment coated the brush, and the line drawn on the coffin was at first invisible. As the paint dried it took on a brilliant whiteness. Any more pigment and the line would have been too thick and the paint would have soon flaked off.

The men's camp took on an air of tranquillity as people concentrated on their work. For seconds at a time, individuals appeared frozen over the hollow log as they positioned their brushes precisely before gently moving them on. Even the grinding of the ochres had a soothing rhythm as the smooth stones were rubbed around the hollows in the palette. Guidance was sought and given without words as Galana and other old men used gestures to show the sequence of colours for a particular area or the position of a line. Soon the younger men were able to work unsupervised and the old men sat down again in the shade to smoke their pipes and talk until it was time to sing again.

As the day drew on, the rhythmical pattern of activity continued, making people feel at ease with life and at peace with each other. As dusk approached they began drifting away and it was time to cover the hollow log again with sheets of bark, to hide it from prying eyes and scavenging dogs. Garawuy and his son-in-law Djimbun walked back to the beach, both beginning to feel hungry and wondering how their families had fared in the quest for food. Most of all they wondered if Garawuy's harpoon had been used to good effect. Then, as they walked past the camps of other Yolngu on the way to their own, they saw smoke rising from earth ovens—a sure sign that something large had been caught. As there was no turtle shell on the beach, it had to be dugong. Garawuy anticipated the succulence of the meat and the crisp crackling of the dugong cooked slowly in an earth oven.

At the Mundul clan's camp beneath the whistling trees, people were talking quietly about the events of the day. Garawuy sat down in silence beside his wives. He looked at the soaking coil of turtle rope at the side of the fire and smiled, for beside it lay the harpoon, broken again. He looked from the broken harpoon to where Gitjkuy and Warnambal lay proudly in the early evening sun. 'So you young men have taken over from this old brother as great hunters,' he teased. 'You had better be good, because when I pass on you will no doubt have to hunt dugong with your bare hands.' Gitjkuy laughed, and replied, 'We learned our hunting from you and we will learn to make harpoons from you. But we have to learn from watching you work.'

'And did you learn to eat watching me eat?'

'You ate too quickly for us to see what you were doing—we would have starved watching.'

'And I could have starved teaching you to eat, you were such quick learners. But well done, my brothers! I like the smell of your dugong.'

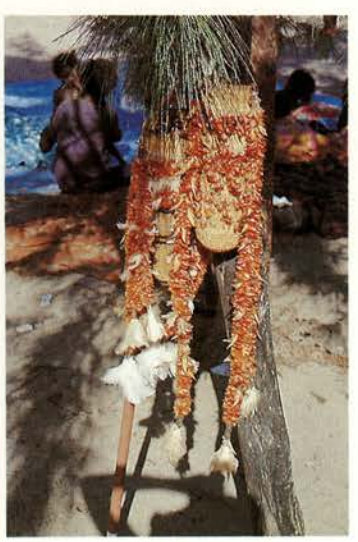
Garawuy turned back towards the fire and began eating some oysters that Bandawuy had passed over to him. She had saved them from her children until he got home, and he was grateful. As a saltwater man he always felt that oysters gave him strength, and for the days of singing ahead he would need it. Garawuy asked

one of his sons to fetch the spearthrower he had been working on. He had put it in a fork of a whistling tree for safety. It was time to prepare its surface finally before painting it with red ochre. He searched inside his dilly-bag and got out a piece of dried sharkskin and rubbed down the surface with it while he waited for the dugong to cook.

Bandawuy took a bundle of bark fibres from her bag and laid them out on her knee, a task not made any easier by Wuthu, her grandson, who was climbing all over her. She rubbed the fibres together on her thigh to make lengths of fine string. Her eldest daughter, Gulapa, was stripping pandanus palm leaves for drying in the sun. She had walked inland several kilometre to get them from the freshwater pandanus growing on the margins of a large billabong. The saltwater pandanus that flourished behind the coastal dunes were not suitable for baskets and mats. Not that Gulapa minded the journey. It gave her a chance to see if the *raakay* in the billabong had ripened. It had, and the following day women would go in force to gather the crunchy rush corms for the ceremony.

Bandawuy and Garawuy had discussed the best time for the ceremony. They thought of Garawuy's father and judged that it should be held this year. People's memories of him were still strong, yet his spirit had been given time to return to the ancestral world. Similarly, the Djirrapuyngu clan had had just enough time to brood over the wrong done to them by Garawuy's son, but not enough to forget the years of friendship between the two clans. They had considered, too, the ripening of the *raakay* and the wanderings of the dugong, for a ceremony could last only as long as the food. Bandawuy was sure it would be a good season for *raakay*, but nobody could be sure about the dugong. There had been few dugong in Barrapuy Bay for several years, but in the past they had been plentiful. The previous year Bukingu Bay, to the north, had been full of them. They had probably eaten out Bukingu Bay, so perhaps they would move south. As Garawuy had said, 'We *think* that the dugong will visit our ceremony, but we don't know.'

It was time to take the dugong out of the oven. Bandawuy moved the earth aside, exposing the covering sheets of paperbark. Underneath were sizzling pieces of dugong meat wrapped in fragrant leaves. The meat was taken out, placed on segments of paperbark and distributed among members of the family. Bandawuy passed some dugong to Garawuy with a smile, saying, 'So your grandmother the dugong did decide to pay us a visit; let's hope your sister the Djirrapuyngu follows her example.'



*Dilly-bags (*bathi*) are made by women from the split and dried leaves of the pandanus tree. The bags are used both in everyday activities and for ceremonial purposes. They are usually undecorated, but may be painted. Men's 'fighting' bags, which are held clenched in the teeth, are small and are generally decorated with string made by twisting the feathers of the rainbow lorikeet (*lindirritj*) into bark fibre string. Ceremonial bags, which are the property of individuals, are also decorated with feather string. These bags belong to the Riratjingu clan.*
H. MORPHY/ J.C. REID

Fire lit by relatives of a dead man on their first visit to his country since his death. The purpose is to drive his spirit from there to the spirit world.
F. AND H. MORPHY

'They may be coming,' replied Garawuy.

Indeed, since late afternoon reports had been coming in of smoke from fires seen in the direction of Djirrapuyngu country. This was a good sign that people were on the move and that they wanted others to know. People with hostile intent seldom advertised their presence.

Garawuy looked over to the west and against the setting sun saw distant columns of smoke. One column was higher than the others, and as the smoke drifted upwards it merged with a billowing cloud so that the cloud appeared to be growing out of the smoke. Garawuy thought of the clouds made by the Ancestral Snakes as they spat into the sky just before the onset of the wet season. It was their way of communicating with each other over long distances. The Snakes of the inland signalled to the Snakes of the salt water to show that they were friends. The Mundul clan and the Djirrapuyngu shared the sacred law of the Yellow Snake, and owned similar songs and paintings. In each case the songs referred to places within the territory of the clan concerned.

Garawuy picked up his pipe and tapped out the rhythm of a song, gently hitting his pipe stem on a piece of firewood. He said, 'Let us sing to our sisters, to the snakes from the inland, to our sisters the Djirrapuyngu born from those snakes. They shall know they are welcome. They are talking to us through their billowing clouds, let our voices reach them with the cooling sea breeze.'

The sun was now beneath the trees, but its rays still caught the edges of the clouds, turning them a vivid crimson. The sea breeze freshened and the flames of the fire leapt in response, illuminating the faces of the people who were gathering around it. Djimbun took up his *yirdaki* and accompanied Garawuy. He sang the songs of the Mundul Snakes as they emerged from their holes in the salt flats behind the mangroves, of the Snakes as they hunted for mice or *nyiknyik*, through the sharply pointed grass. He sang of the Snakes as they spat into the sky, shooting

lightning from their flickering tongues. He sang until his voice grew hoarse and his brother Gitjkuy had to take over. Pausing between songs, they heard singing from other camps like echoes around the bay. That night the clans were singing separately. Next evening they would come together at the ceremonial ground and be joined in memory of Garawuy's father.

The morning found Garawuy seated on a rock further along the bay, out of sight from the main camp, his fishspear and spearthrower lying beside him on the sand. He had slept well, but he was still up before the others. He had walked along the beach to wash in the little creek that flowed from the paperbark swamp and disappeared into the base of the dunes. He had rested a while in the shadow of the dune, pressing his fingers firmly over his brow, pushing the skin together before squeezing his fingers down towards the end of his nose. He had repeated the action several times before feeling fully relaxed. Having worked out the tension of the preceding days, he had walked over the dunes to the rock from where he now scanned the waters of the bay. It was the time of year when the kingfish came and each year Garawuy prided himself on being the first person to bring kingfish into the camp. Although the main responsibility for feeding his family had now passed to younger men and women, Garawuy still liked to show that he had lost none of his skill. His delight in exercising the full range of his talents at an age when many others were content with the rewards of their status was carried by him almost to the point of eccentricity. Indeed, he had become famous for it.

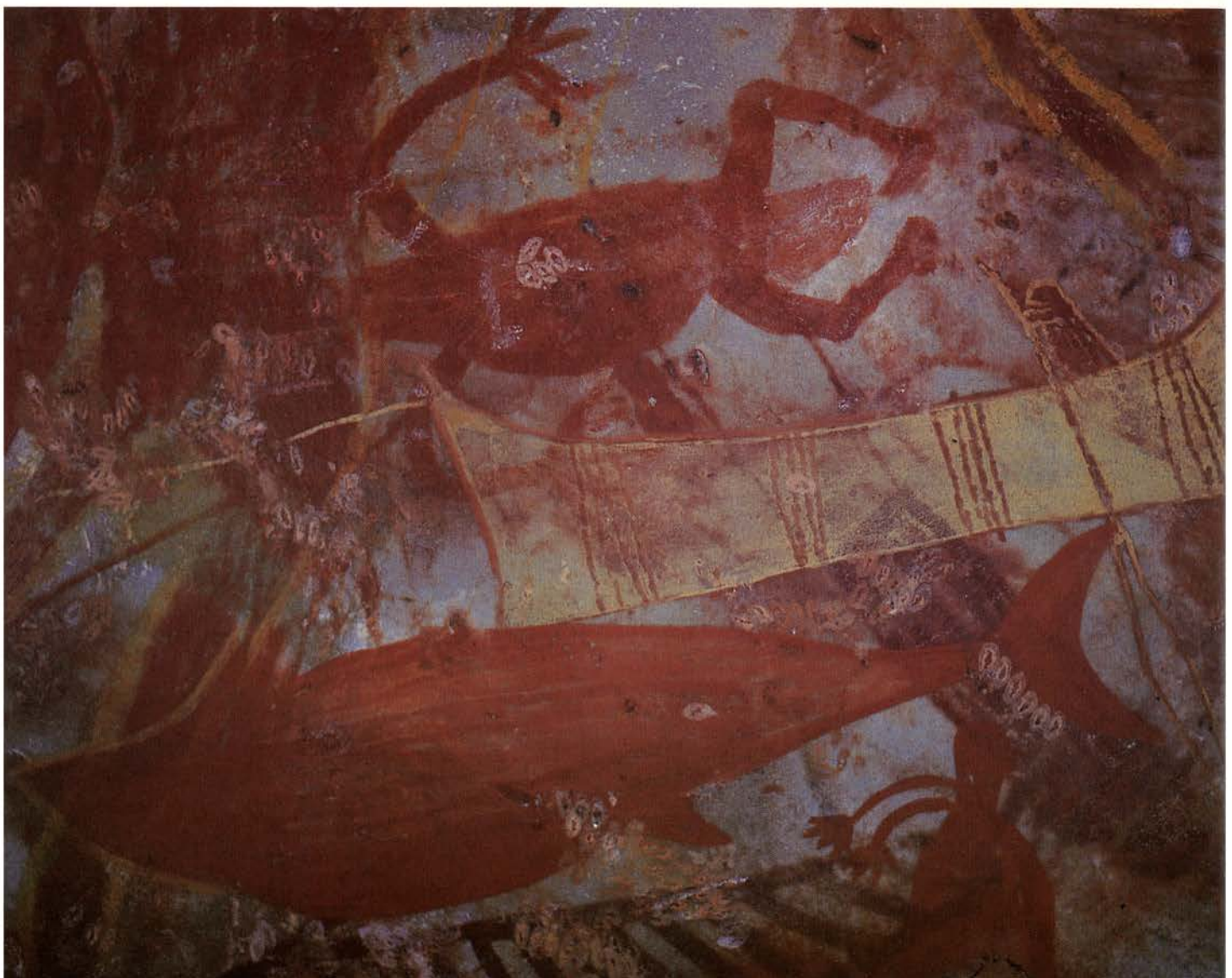
Today, however, he had no luck with the kingfish. After a while he wandered back to his camp, walking low down on the beach just where the tide was turning. He felt his feet pressing down into the sand and paused to look back at the sharp

Abandoned wet season camp in northeast Arnhem Land. N. PETERSON

impressions they had left behind. The row of footprints stretched out. Already those lower down were being washed out by the tide, and higher up the footprints, each cut so firmly in the sand, were being softened. Soon there would be no evidence left of his walk.

Once more, Garawuy's thoughts turned to his father, for soon, too, the last evidence of his existence on earth would be gone. The bones that had now been carried for six wet seasons would shortly be broken up and cast into the hollow log coffin. After a few years of wind and rain and fire, of goanna, white ant and dingo, nothing would remain. But just as other footprints would soon follow Garawuy's along the sand, so were other generations of people following on from his father, keeping his spirit alive by keeping alive the spirit of the clan.

Garawuy was in no hurry. By the time he got back to camp, most people were ready to get on with the business of the day. But that morning, like Garawuy, they still kept finding something else to do—a bag to repair, a digging-stick to resharpen in the fire, food to be wrapped in paperbark and placed out of reach of the dogs. Even the children playing in the water were in no hurry to go. People were waiting for something, their restlessness disguised as work. Then there was a shout from the distance, and the sound of women crying in mourning and throwing their bodies on the sand. No one had died, no tragedy had befallen anyone. It was the beginning of a ritual of greeting for a new group arriving for the ceremony: a demonstration of respect for past sadness. Out from the trees came the Djirrapuyngu clan, and they came in peace.



Groote Eylandt rock art. Cultural ties are close between this island and northeastern Arnhem Land people. These paintings depict themes common to the region, including a dugout canoe and a porpoise, the important food source, dugong, and spear fighting (possibly a ritual enactment).
D. LEWIS