



Manggalili art and the Promised Land

The Manggalili clan has its homelands in eastern Arnhem Land on the Gulf of Carpentaria. Its members speak a dialect of a Yolngu language and belong to the Yirritja moiety. Their clan lands are centred on Djarrakpi (Cape Shield) a promontory that stretches out from the north east corner of Blue Mud Bay towards Groote Eylandt, and on Wayawpuy, a rich flood plain to the north. Like all eastern Arnhem Land clans, the Manggalili also have smaller areas of land elsewhere in the region. Manggalili is an average sized clan of some fifty individuals who are descended from three people—Nanyin and Narritjin Maymuru, who were full brothers, and their classificatory brother Bokarra.

In the 1970s when I first met Narritjin Maymuru, by then the leader of the Manggalili clan, he referred to Djarrakpi as his 'Promised Land'. His use of a biblical analogy says much about the recent history of eastern Arnhem Land; about the positive way in which Yolngu engaged with the Methodist missionaries and how they attempted to communicate understanding of their cultural values to others. The analogy with the Promised Land is particularly apt: it fits with Yolngu mythological understandings of the origins of people and place and it reflects the history of disruption that followed European colonisation.

Djarrakpi is a beautiful place. At its centre is a lagoon that is separated from the sea by mountainous sand dunes. A long gravel bank that stretches its full length marks the inland shore. Surrounding the lagoon are groves of trees including important food resources such as *ganyawu* (native cashew) and *munydjutj* (wild plum). The level of the lagoon varies seasonally and it is thought of as a mixture of salt and fresh water. For much of the year fresh water is obtained not from the lagoon itself but from the beach on the far side of the dunes where freshwater springs bubble up at low tide. In the early morning the lagoon is often shrouded in a mist which keeps the surrounding trees moist, allowing the sap to flow well into the dry season so that bark can be taken from the trees later than at most other places (see the films of Ian Dunlop, 1981a and b).

Djarrakpi (Cape Shield) from the air, looking north. To the right of the lagoon (in the centre of the photograph) the sand dunes created by the Nyapililngu ancestral women extend down to the sea. The leftward margin of the lagoon is marked by a gravel bank—the burrkun (possum fur string) laid down by the Guwak (koel cuckoo).

Photo: Howard Morphy

**PLATE 18****Baluka Maymuru**

Yolngu language area

Marrngu (possum), 1986

1985.45.44

12.5 x 72.5 x 13 cm

Carved and painted softwood

The possum is a key creator ancestor at Djarrakpi. It is shown with its characteristically curved tail. The designs on its body allude to the possum fur string from which the gravel bank of the lagoon at Djarrakpi was created. These are first painted on and then incised with crosshatching.

The mythic journey

The identity of Djarrakpi and the Manggalili people is inextricably interwoven with the life and journey of the ancestral Guwak (koel cuckoo). The Guwak provides a main theme of Manggalili art. He set off on his journey to Djarrakpi from the Ritharrngu country of Donydji far inland, travelling with the Marrngu (possum) (see **PLATE 18**) and emu ancestors. Each night on his journey the Guwak would rest on top of a *ganyawu* tree and feast on its fruits, while Marrngu feasted on *munydjutj*. The Guwak instructed Marrngu to spin his fur into lengths of string that could be used by the Yolngu who lived in the area to manufacture sacred objects. The emu who accompanied them provided water: where he scratched in the ground, the water flowed. In Manggalili paintings the Guwak is characteristically shown perched on the top of a tree, with the possum climbing up its trunk and the emu on the ground beneath. Sometimes the ancestors are drawn in pairs, and are said to have travelled together as brothers. The following day, refreshed and strengthened, the ancestors would move on to another place. The Guwak flew with lengths of possum fur string in his mouth and trailing out behind him. Eventually exhausted, he let them fall to the ground where they formed features of the landscape such as hills and valleys. Then at night the Guwak would again rest on a cashew tree and the cycle would repeat itself. Finally the Guwak arrived at Djarrakpi, the Promised Land, where he was to remain (see Morphy 1991 for a detailed discussion of paintings from Djarrakpi).

At Djarrakpi there already lived two women, the Nyapililngu (see **PLATE 20**). In some

stories the women had originally come over from Groote Eylandt. They were naked and hid from men. They did not know how to make string for bags, or for pubic aprons, or for binding artefacts together. They observed the possums and learnt from them how to make string. They made mountains of string that were eventually transformed into the sand dunes that separate the lagoon from the sea at Djarrakpi. The women, like the possums, collected wild plums. They are often portrayed walking up and down the dunes at Djarrakpi, with their digging sticks in either hand, and baskets filled with wild plums balanced on their heads. The Nyapililngu are said to be sisters to the Guwak.

The Guwak made his home at Djarrakpi and in the end Djarrakpi became his death place. Like other ancestral beings he was sometimes human in form. One day he went out fishing. A powerful tidal wave, pushed by ancestral turtles, rose up and overwhelmed the boat. A great cloud arose from the ocean and the Nyapililngu took this to be a portent of the death of the Guwak. They wept and, seizing their digging sticks, cut open their heads in mourning. Their blood flowed freely and mixed with the waters of the lagoon. Eventually the body of the Guwak was washed up on the shore at Djarrakpi. The Nyapililngu made a special sand sculpture called *yingapungapu* (see **PLATE 22**). They laid the body of the Guwak to rest in the *yingapungapu* and prepared it for burial. Part of the spirit of the Guwak remained in the landscape at Djarrakpi but another dimension went up to the Milky Way, which is the Yirritja moiety land of the dead (see **PLATE 23**).

PLATE 19

Narritjin Maymuru

Yolngu language area
*Creation stories of the
Manggalili clan, c 1965*

1985.242.1

224 x 77.5 cm

Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark

The top panel of this painting shows the creation of Djarrakpi by the Guwak (koel cuckoo), and possums. The central panel relates to Manggalili mortuary ceremonies and the creation by the Nyapillingu women of the *yingapungapu* sand sculpture. Below are the stars of the Milky Way, which are the transformed souls of deceased Yirritja moiety people. The painting as a whole depicts the ancestrally created Manggalili lands, and includes many references to the life cycle including birth, burial, bodily decay, and spiritual transformation. The individual components of the painting receive detailed discussion in this essay, and keys to the three major parts accompany PLATES 24, 28, and 29.

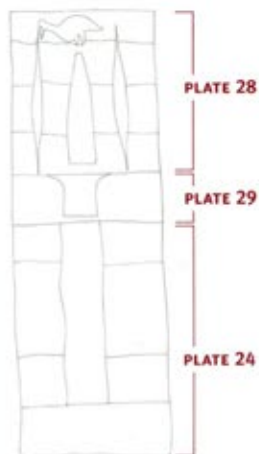




PLATE 20

Baluka Maymuru

Yolngu language area

Nyapililngu, 1986

1985.45.39

125 x 17 x 12.5 cm

Carved and painted softwood

This superb carving depicts one of the ancestral Nyapililngu women at Djarrakpi. The women used their digging sticks for many things: to dig for water lily bulbs, to peel bark from trees, and to gather wild plums. On the figure's head is the basket she used to carry the food that she collected. The crosses on her chest represent breast girdles made from possum fur string. They also represent the cumulus clouds that formed out at sea on the death of the Guwak. The anvil shaped figure on the base of the sculpture also represents cloud.



PLATE 21

Baluka Maymuru

Yolngu language area

Ngāw (freshwater crocodile), 1986

1985.45.42

13 x 139 x 14 cm

Carved and painted softwood

This ancestral crocodile lived in the Milnguya River that flows from Wayawpuy into Blue Mud Bay. This river is connected to the Milky Way, which is represented on the crocodile's back. The crocodile itself is manifested as one of the constellations in the Milky Way.

PLATE 22**Baluka Maymuru**

Yolngu language area

Yingapungapu, 1986

1985.45.1

69 x 29.5 cm

Natural pigments on
eucalyptus bark

This painting shows the sand sculpture that Manggalili people make in ceremonies for their dead. An ancestral *yingapungapu* is part of the landscape at Djarrakpi. In the centre of the painting the two Nyapililngu are shown mourning for their dead brother the Guwak. The lower panels show the footprints of people looking for turtle eggs along the beach. The panel on the right shows the tracks of the turtle itself, while the one on the left shows birds hunting for crabs in the sand.

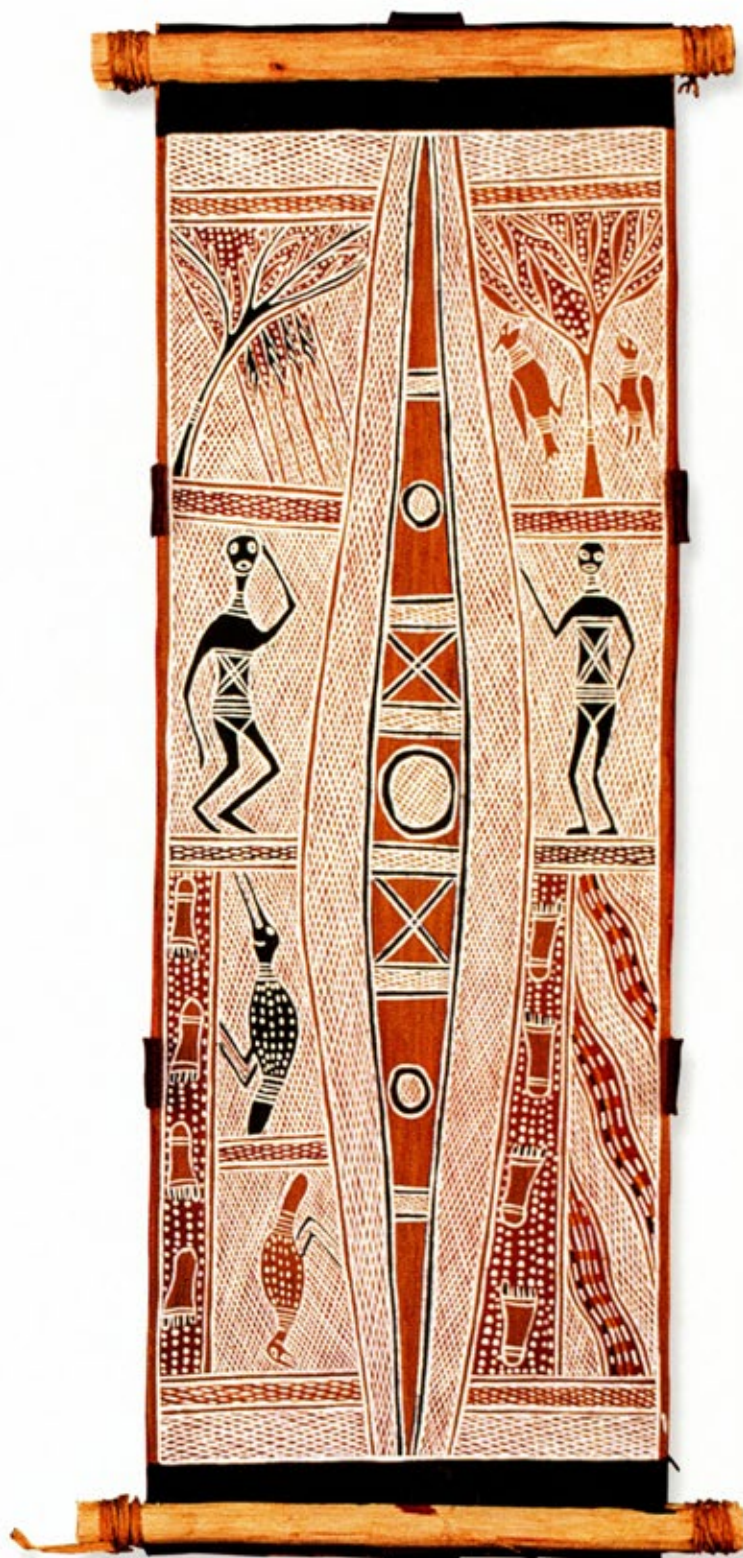


PLATE 23

Maymirrirr Gurruwiwi

Yolngu language area

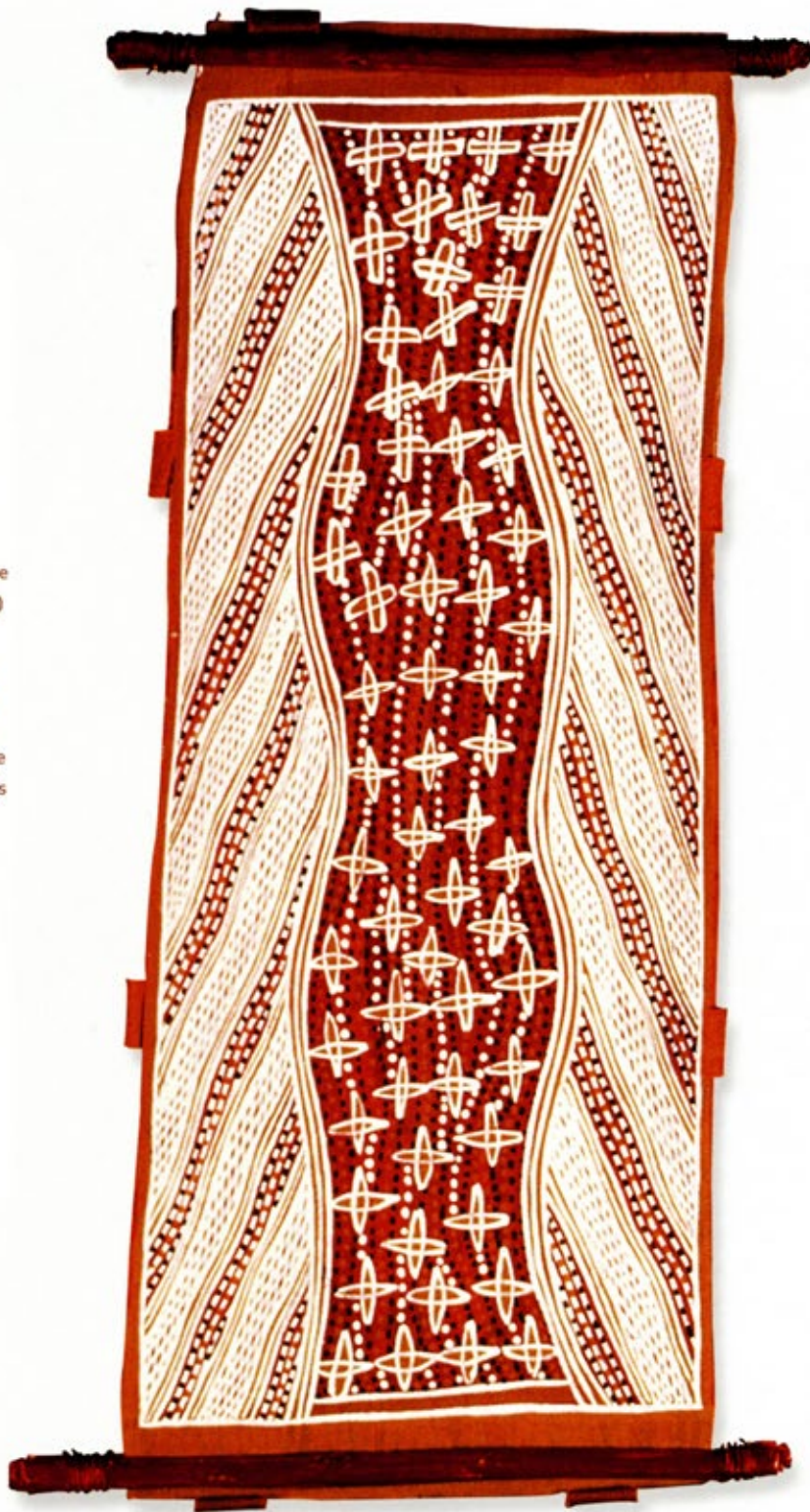
Milnguya (Milky Way), 1986

1985.45.30

68 x 27 cm

Natural pigments on
eucalyptus bark

Maymirrirr is the widow of
Narritjin's deceased son
Banapana. Her painting shows the
stars of *milnguya* (the Milky Way)
surrounded by the tidemark
patterns which are sacred to the
Manggalili clan. In this case the
shape of the pattern echoes the
track of the turtle. The stars of the
Milky Way are said to be the souls
of deceased members of the
Yirritja moiety.



The lower half of Narritjin's major painting, **PLATE 19** (repeated in detail in **PLATE 24** together with a key to its panels), represents the death of the Guwak (here depicted as two men) and the ascension of their souls to the Milky Way. The panels on the left show the Guwak paddling out to sea in their canoe (a) beneath an image of a sea monster (b) that represents one of the hazards that they had to face. The panel beneath, (c), represents the ancestral turtles out at sea rushing towards each other and causing a great wind to come up. The anvil shaped figure (d) between the turtles represents a great cloud rising out of the sea—a sign of the storm that caused the great wave which overturned the canoe. The panels above on the right show the empty canoe drifting about in the now tranquil sea (e), while the bodies of the Guwak float lifeless above with their paddles to either side (f). In between the drifting bodies of the Guwak is a dead body contained within a Manggalili hollow log coffin. The central panel (g) represents the Milky Way with two of the constellations: *ngāw* (freshwater crocodile; see also **PLATE 21**) and the parrotfish. In between the constellations are two men with clap sticks singing to lead the soul on its journey to its spirit home.



A little history

Narritjin was born at Caledon Bay around the time of World War I. At that time Yolngu society had, so far, avoided the main impact of European colonisation. Although there had been occasional visits by European explorers and adventurers, the main contact with outsiders had been with Macassan traders from eastern Indonesia, who spent each wet season on the Arnhem

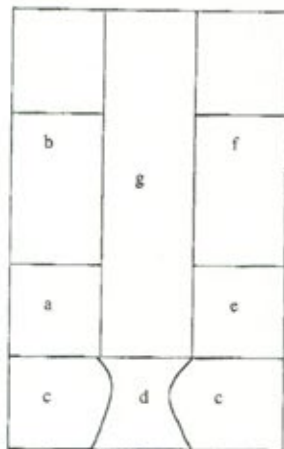


PLATE 24

The bottom half of the painting by Narritjin Maymuru that is illustrated in **PLATE 19**. The accompanying key to the panels is referred to in the text of the essay on this page.

**Narritjin Maymuru, 1976**

The artist is painting a bark on the verandah of his house at Yirrkala. He has just completed an outline of the sacred cashew tree at Djarrakpi and is beginning to mark out Manggalili clan designs in red ochre on a yellow background.

Photo: Howard Morphy

Land coast collecting and preparing trepang, until they were banned from the shores and coastal waters by the Australian authorities in 1903. Yolngu had established largely friendly relations with the Macassans and were quite open to trading with other voyagers as long as they respected Yolngu rights and values. In the 1930s relations with outsiders became tenser, culminating in the death of a policeman, M C McColl, on Woodah Island in 1932 and then of the crew of a Japanese fishing boat at Caledon Bay the following year. The Australian Government at first planned to send a punitive expedition to Arnhem Land but the outcry in the southern press was such that instead they sent an anthropologist, Donald Thomson, to explore the situation, and encouraged Methodist and Anglican missionary societies to extend their activities into the region.

From a Euro-Australian viewpoint the effective colonisation of eastern Arnhem Land dates from the establishment of the

Methodist mission station of Yirrkala in 1935. The Yolngu perspective was (and is) very different. Under the leadership of Wonggu, the head of the Djapu clan from Caledon Bay, they had decided to be proactive in establishing friendly relations. Indeed during all the difficulties of the early 1930s an Englishman, Fred Grey, had made his base at Caledon Bay where he collected and traded in pearls and trepang, enjoying perfectly good rapport with the Yolngu. From the Yolngu point of view they made peace with the incoming Euro-Australians as they had done with the Macassans before them, and in no sense did they believe that they had given up any rights to their land or to their way of life.

Narritjin played an important role in the development of closer contacts with Euro-Australians. While Yolngu continued their traditional hunter-gatherer way of life, relationships with the incomers created a new focus of activity, drew people to the mission stations for part of the year and created a new political and economic environment. Narritjin and Nanyin worked for Fred Grey and later for the missionary Wilbur Chaseling at Yirrkala mission. Narritjin was a witness at the court hearings in Darwin over the killings of the Japanese and afterwards accompanied Fred Grey when he moved to Groote Eylandt to form the settlement of Umbakumba. World War II intervened and brought further disruption to Yolngu life with the establishment of a flying boat base near Yirrkala on the Gove Peninsula. Many Yolngu were also called up to join the Special Reconnaissance Unit set up to monitor Japanese activities along the northern coast.

PLATE 25

Narritjin or Nanyin Maymuru

Yolngu language area

Manggalili clan painting, 1948

1985.67.91

100 x 46 cm

Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark

This is one of the earliest Manggalili paintings in any collection. It was collected by C P Mountford during the American–Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land. The central image shows the Guwak (koel cuckoo) sitting on top of the *munydjutj* (wild plum tree) at Djarrakpi. Cicadas are flying around the top of the tree. The ancestral possums are shown spinning their fur string by running up and down the tree. The dashed background design represents the footmarks of possums as they scramble in and out of holes in the trunk of the tree.





The sand dunes and the lagoon at Djarrakpi, viewed from the burrkun (the gravel bank which is a transformation of the possum fur string).

Photo: Howard Morphy

One of the main activities encouraged in these new circumstances was the production of art for sale (see **PLATE 25**). Donald Thomson and Wilbur Chaseling, for different reasons, provided a catalyst for the production of bark paintings. Thomson collected paintings and artefacts as part of his research and Chaseling, following the practice of the Methodists elsewhere in northern Australia, used artefacts as a means of earning income for the Church. But in some other respects their motivations overlapped. Thomson's collections were part of his mission to understand Yolngu society and its values; Chaseling saw paintings as a means of engaging the sympathy of congregations in the south for Aboriginal people. The Methodist Overseas Mission was on the whole sympathetic to Aboriginal culture and created an environment in which ideas were exchanged between Euro-Australians and Yolngu, with an emphasis on increasing mutual understanding. In many ways the aspirations of the Church and the Yolngu were quite compatible, since Yolngu appreciated the economic opportunities provided by the sale of bark paintings and also saw art as a means of persuading Euro-Australians of the value of their society and way of life. This positive environment provides an important background to understanding the way art developed in eastern Arnhem Land after the mission had been established (for a more detailed discussion see Morphy

1991). The idea that Yolngu have a Promised Land in the same way as do Christians and Jews was just one of the ideas exchanged between the two parties.

Paintings as memories of land

Aboriginal society has always combined mobility with long term attachment to particular places. Mobility is a prerequisite of a hunting and gathering life, and people would always have spent as much time away from their country as living on it. But it is a characteristic of art in Arnhem Land that it keeps alive the attachment to a place even when people are far away from it. Art is a means of *transporting* place and knowledge of place. Manggalili designs are an ancestral inheritance. The paintings contain innumerable elements that can be connected to myth and land. Some designs were literally created by ancestral events and the ancestors also gave paintings and sacred objects to the human groups who succeeded them in the land, just as the Guwak handed out lengths of possum fur string to the clans he encountered on his journey. When the body of the Guwak was washed up on the beach the movement of the tide up and down his body impressed on it a pattern of wavy lines that has become the background pattern of Manggalili saltwater paintings. The dotted and dashed infill characteristic of Manggalili art represents the footmarks of the possum as it scrambled up and down the tree (see **PLATE 26**).



PLATE 26

Bumiti Maymuru

Yolngu language area

Marrngu (possums), 1986

1985.45.10

113.5 x 53.5 cm

Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark

Bumiti was Narritjin's second daughter. The hollow log in the centre of her painting is called *larrakitj*. The possums collected *munydjutj* (wild plums) and carried them back to put in the hollow log.





PLATE 27

Narritjin Maymuru

Yolngu language area

*Guwak, possum, and emus at**Djarrakpi, 1974*

1985.246.19

158 x 71.5 cm

Natural pigments on
eucalyptus bark

The painting shows two Guwak feeding on cashew nuts. The Guwak are represented in the form of messenger sticks that are used to announce a death, and their bodies simultaneously represent the trunks of the cashew tree. The possum ancestors climb the tree spinning their fur into string. The emus are searching for fresh water in the bed of the lagoon. The spear in the centre represents the leg of the emu. The arrangement of figures reflects the topography of the lagoon and sandhills at Djarrakpi.



Looking south over the lagoon from the present-day settlement at Djarrakpi. The coastal dunes created by the Nyapiliingu are visible on the horizon.

Photo: Howard Morphy

In ritual people can be transported to a distant place by painting the ancestral designs or making a sand sculpture associated with it. The design painted on a boy's chest prior to circumcision, or after a sacred object has been revealed to him, connects him directly with the spiritual power of the ancestor and links him to the place the design represents.

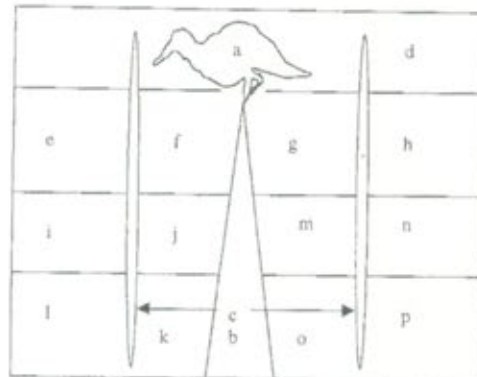
Many Manggalili paintings are coded maps of the landscape at Djarrakpi (see **PLATE 27**). They represent in schematic form the relationship between different features of the landscape and indicate the mythologically significant events that occurred at each place. They are able to do this precisely because the form of the landscape is itself the product of mythic action. When the Guwak first came to Djarrakpi neither the lagoon nor the sand dunes existed. He landed at a grove of cashews to the north of the site of the present-day lagoon. He spent a while there with his companions and the possum made great quantities of string. The Guwak then flew to a grove of wild plum trees where the possum could feast. He laid down a length of string between the cashews and the wild plums. Next he flew to an ancient cashew tree that would later mark the other end of the lagoon and again laid down a length of string. The two lengths of string were transformed into the gravel bank that separates the lagoon from the inland. The Nyapiliingu women, who were hidden on the far side of the lagoon, then spun the mountains of possum fur string that created the dunes. The emu, meanwhile, was scratching around in the lake bed looking for water with limited success. In frustration it seized one of its legs as if it were a spear

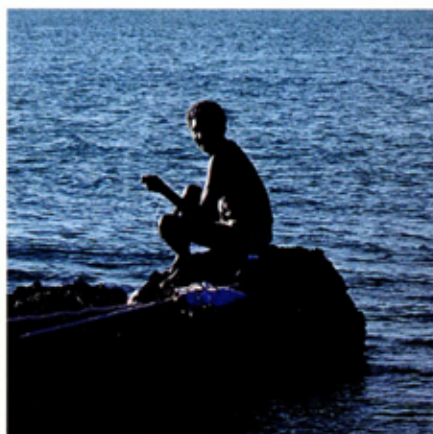
and hurled it high over the dunes. Where it pierced the beach, freshwater springs began to bubble up.

These events provide the basic structure that allows many paintings of Djarrakpi to be interpreted as maps of the land. The upper section of Narritjin's painting *Creation stories of the Manggalili clan*, **PLATE 28**, represents the area around the lagoon. The painting can be interpreted from one perspective as a series of illustrations drawn from myth. The central figure (a) represents the Guwak perched on top of the trunk of the ancient cashew tree (b). To the right and left of the tree are two gigantic digging sticks (c) representing those used by the Nyapiliingu for walking up and down the sand dunes they created and with which they cut their heads in mourning. The panel is divided up into a number of segments each separated from the next by the wavy clan design that represents the tide mark. The segments illustrate different characters of the myth. In the top right hand corner (d) the possum, with his tail extended in an extravagant curve, is spinning his fur into string. At the next level one of the Nyapiliingu is shown in the panel to the left collecting shellfish (e). Her body is modestly covered with a sheet of bark. Next to her are two cicadas (f) that lived in the bark of the cashew tree and cried out with the Nyapiliingu in mourning at the death of the Guwak. The next panel to the right (g) shows the possums climbing up and down the trunk of the tree spinning their string. In between them is a spider stretched out between the branches spinning its web, which forms the dense mist that shrouds the lagoon in the morning. In the right hand panel (h) is a representation of one of the

PLATE 28

The top section of the painting by Narritjin Maymuru that is illustrated in PLATE 19. The accompanying key to the panels is referred to in the text of the essay on pp 68 and 70.





Baluka Maymuru, 1998

Baluka is the eldest son of Nanyin, who was Narritjin's older brother. He is now the senior artist of the Manggalili clan, renowned as both painter and sculptor. Here he is seen fishing from rocks off the beach at Djarrakpi. Photo: Howard Morphy

followers of the Guwak. The left-hand panels continue the themes of Nyapililngu and the death of the Guwak. The middle panels show the carrying baskets that the Nyapililngu filled with wild plums (i) and the Nyapililngu standing on the dunes looking out to sea (j). The panel beneath (k) shows the snail on the beach whose shell provided a model for the Nyapililngus' shelter. The panel to its left (l) shows a vignette of the whole: to the left is the digging stick, in the centre Nyapililngu is carrying her basket filled with plums and on the right is a boat on its side which, viewed from above, turns into the form of the *yingapungapu* sand sculpture. The vignette represents in condensed form the death of the Guwak at sea, the placing of his body in the *yingapungapu*, and the Nyapililngu cutting their heads in mourning. The panels on the right hand side all illustrate the Guwak and emu in human form (m, n, o, and p). The emu (o, p) holds a spear thrower and a set of fish spears: in other representations of emu his neck and beak are a spear-thrower and his legs are a set of spears.

The iconography of the panels already suggests a geographical logic. The left-hand side of the painting represents Nyapililngu, the sand dunes, and the beach; and the right hand panels represent the possum, emu, and Guwak. The central panels relate to both. Indeed, the underlying template is the landscape of

Djarrakpi. The representation of the Guwak marks the position of the tree at the head of the lagoon that was his journey's end. The right hand digging stick represents the trunk of the tree that the possums climbed, but it also represents the length of possum fur string that was laid along the ground to form the inland margins of the lagoon. The central feature represents the lagoon itself with the figure of Nyapililngu reflected in its waters. The left hand digging stick represents the ones that the Nyapililngu used to climb the sand dunes and to cut their heads, but it also represents the sand dunes that separate the lagoon from the sea. This geographical positioning of the panels in relation to each other allows for ever more specific interpretations of the individual representations as indications of events that took place in particular parts of the dunes or along the lagoon shore.

Paintings are a medium for learning about the mythology of landscape while being physically separated from it. Narritjin himself learnt many of the paintings of Djarrakpi from his mother's mother's brother Birrikijji at Yirrkala and Caledon Bay and was able to maintain his relationship to Djarrakpi during long periods of separation while he worked at the mission or on Groote Eylandt and in Darwin. For many years paintings kept the image of Djarrakpi alive in his mind, preparing him for a time when he would be

able to return to his Promised Land. But, before he could, the Yolngu had to overcome a more serious threat to their land.

A little more history

In the 1950s huge reserves of bauxite were discovered in the area of the Gove Peninsula. The first Yolngu knew of the discovery was when they encountered prospecting parties on their land. It was then that they realised that the negotiated relationship they thought they had achieved with the newcomers was capable of several interpretations. Under Euro-Australian law it was assumed that Yolngu had no title to their land and that no one need ask their permission to exploit its resources. In 1963 Narritjin joined other Yolngu elders in drawing up a petition to the Commonwealth Government. Two copies of the petition were pasted onto strong sheets of bark bordered with clan designs—the Yolngu equivalent of Luther's petition on the door of Wittenberg Cathedral—and sent to the House of Representatives in Canberra. The petition failed to stop the development of the mine and the Yolngu took the Commonwealth to court in 1971 in the now famous 'Gove Land Rights' case. The Yolngu lost the case but the judgement seemed so out of step with the times, allowing as it did the continued invasion of Aboriginal lands, that it led within a few years to the passing of the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* and the first secure titles

for Aboriginal land in Euro-Australian law. As a result Yolngu gained ownership, under Australian law, over most of their land. But the area around Yirrkala had already been lost to the mine.

In the previous forty years, following the establishment of the mission at Yirrkala, Yolngu life had become centred on the mission station. Although people spent much of the year visiting other parts of their land, the mission provided the hospital and school and a source of income through trade. And it was thirty kilometres from Yirrkala that the mining town of Nhulunbuy was built. The development of the mining town had a devastating impact on the Yolngu of the region, exposing them to stress, alcohol, and disease. The response of the community was immediate. People began to move away from Yirrkala to establish permanent settlements in homeland centres far from the mission station and mining town. By 1972 Narritjin was planning to move with his family back to Djarrakpi, to escape from the problems of the mining town and return to his Promised Land. In 1974 he moved there with his family.

Narritjin was the head of a large family and was by this time responsible for the children of his brother Nanyin who had died a few years before. Over the years he had taught his children, and his brother's children, to paint. The Manggalili had become a clan of artists with his eldest

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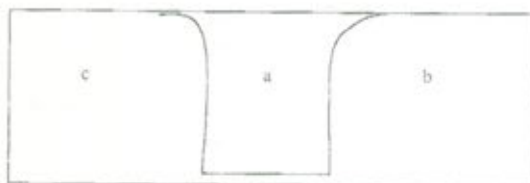
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**PLATE 29**

The middle section of the painting by Narritjin Maymuru that is illustrated in PLATE 19.

The accompanying key to the panels is referred to in the text of the essay on pp 73-4.



sons Manydjilnga and Banapana and his brother's son Baluka becoming leading artists. By the 1960s women had begun to play an increasingly important role in painting and his sons were joined by two of his daughters, Bumiti and Galuma, by Banapana's wife Maymirirr Gurruwiwi, and later by Nanyin's daughter Naminapu, and Narritjin's daughter's daughter Boliny Wanambi. Painting had become a mainstay of the economy at homeland centres across Arnhem Land.

Despite Narritjin's efforts, misfortune and the mining town were to take a terrible toll of the Manggalili. By the end of 1974 his two eldest children had died and he had to leave Djarrakpi temporarily to return to Yirrkala. In 1976 Narritjin and Banapana were awarded Creative Arts Fellowships at the Australian National University and spent three months in Canberra. The visit culminated in a major exhibition of their works and the gift of a painting of the Djarrakpi landscape to the university. Narritjin used the money earned during his fellowship to buy a vehicle to return to Djarrakpi. But re-establishing the homeland centre proved difficult and he died suddenly in Yirrkala in 1981 before his dream was fulfilled. During the next decade five more of his children died through accident or disease, attributable in part to the stress of living in close proximity to the mining town. The remaining members of the clan continued

to struggle against adversity and by 1995 had established a new settlement at Djarrakpi close to the northern end of the lagoon. Thus they continue to affirm their identity with their ancestral lands and to pass on their knowledge of the land, through art and ceremony, to the burgeoning younger generation of Manggalili clan members.

Conclusion

Manggalili paintings reflect on death and, at the same time, they provide hope for the living. They reflect an acceptance of death as a natural part of life and a belief that human beings are part of the spiritual continuity of the universe. Taken as a whole, Narritjin's *Creation stories of the Manggalili clan*, **PLATE 19**, represents a journey through life to death, and beyond. The upper panel, **PLATE 28**, represents the quest of the ancestral beings for the Promised Land and the creation of Djarrakpi. It represents the spiritual inheritance of the Manggalili clan and the land that they belong to. The lower panel, **PLATE 24**, represents death and life after death, the process of reincorporating the soul within the spiritual dimension. The central section of the painting (shown in **PLATE 29** opposite) represents images of transformation from life to death and of the removal of the dead from the world of the living. The central feature (a) is the anvil shaped cloud that arose at Djarrakpi from the fires lit by the Nyapililngu. It signifies

Sand crab tracks (opposite left)

These delicate and distinctive tracks reveal the activities of sand crabs on the beach at Djarrakpi at low tide. In Manggalili paintings of the beach at Djarrakpi the crosshatching represents the pattern made by these tracks.

Photo: Howard Morphy

Turtle tracks (opposite right)

These are the tracks of a female turtle, which has come ashore to lay her eggs on the beach. Note the resemblance between the tracks and the designs that represent them in Manggalili paintings.

Photo: Howard Morphy

the chaotic emotions felt during mourning—the response from the land to the cloud that arose from the sea at the place where the canoe was overwhelmed by the waves. To the right (b) are the footprints of people as they walk in life up and down the beach looking for turtle eggs. The underlying design on the sand represents the tracks of the female turtle as she drags her body up the beach to bury her eggs in the sand. The egg contains the embryonic body of a human. On the left (c) is another beach

scene. It shows a sand crab scavenging on the beach, taking decaying matter into its hole, and thus cleaning the beach. Beside it are reef herons—they too are hunting on the beach for, among other things, sand crabs. The right and left-hand panels together are metaphors for death, for the transformation of the body, and the fading of memory. The sand crab picks the beach clean and soon the footprints of the dead will be washed away by the movement of the tide. Then the process of life and death begins again.