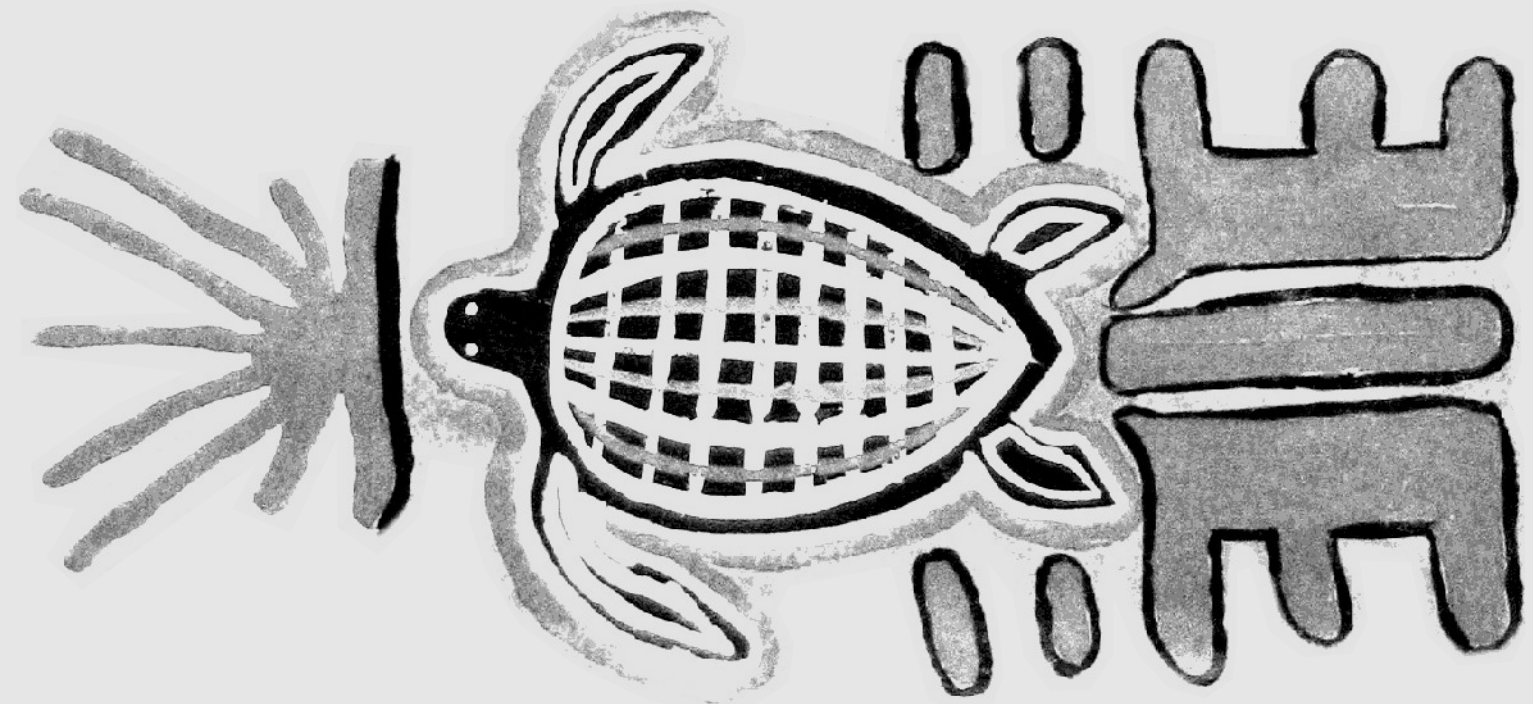
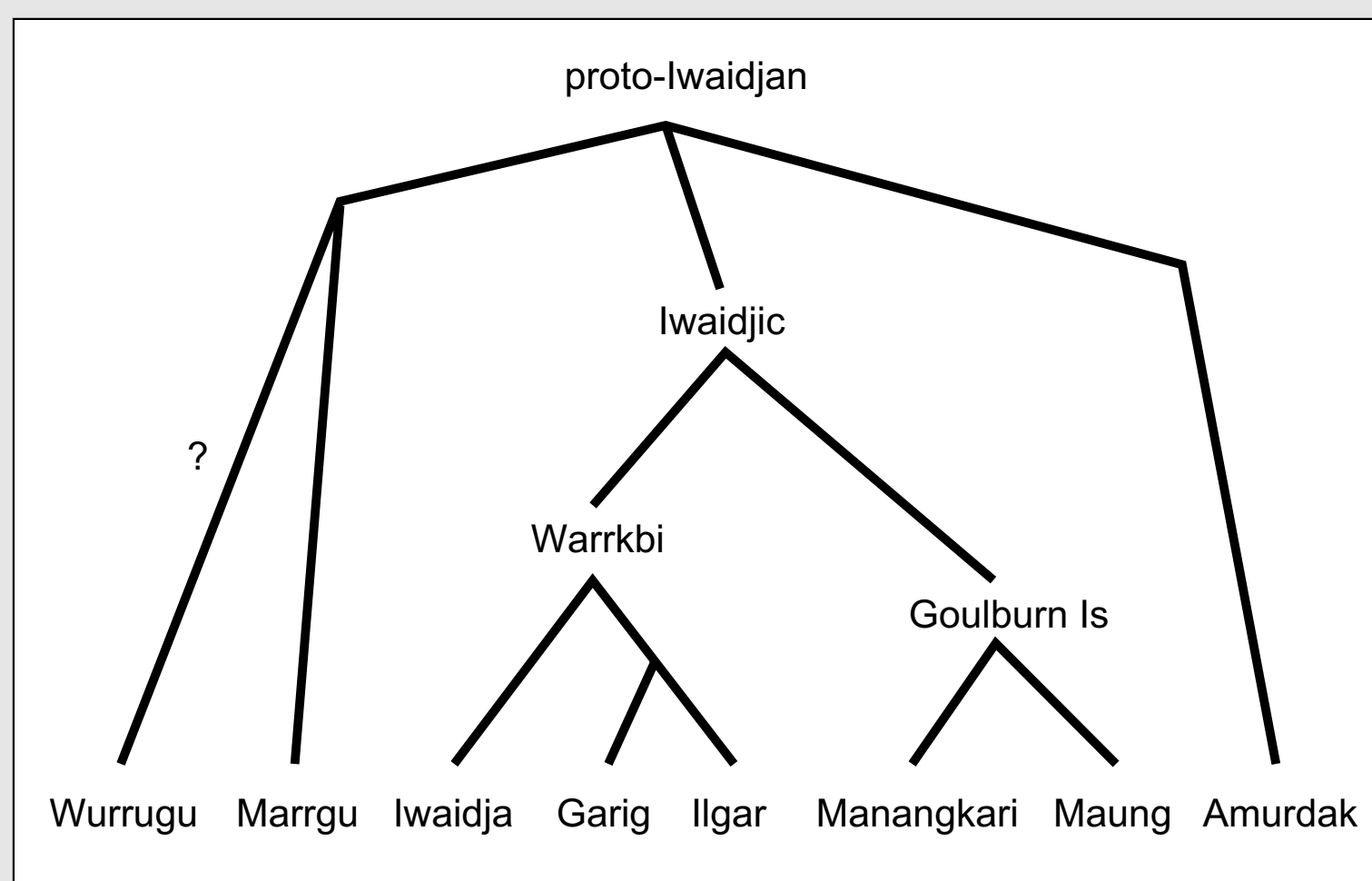




Yiwarruj, inyman, radbihi lda mali: Iwaidja and other endangered languages of the Cobourg Peninsula



The words *yiwarruj*, *inyman*, *radbihi* and *mali* refer to four key concepts of knowledge in Iwaidja culture. *Yiwarruj* is 'teachings' - all the stories and songs which keep a culture going. *Inyman* is 'language' - here, the indigenous languages of the region. *Radbihi* are 'customs', traditions and ways, including ceremonies and song-cycles, which act as templates for social behaviour, so helping to hold society together. And *mali* represents 'thought and ideas' - your capacity to think, consider, and understand. People of the Cobourg region see all four ingredients as vital in maintaining their language and culture. Our project recorded these through rich multi-media documentation as well as through the creation of dictionaries and written text collections. It had the dual aim of presenting them to the outside world of scholarship, and of helping the younger generations of the Cobourg region to hold onto their linguistic and cultural heritage in the face of the encroachment of *balanda* (European, or more generally 'foreign') culture.



Family tree of the Iwaidjan languages

The Cobourg Peninsula region of Northern Australia is one of the most linguistically diverse regions on earth. It contains a third of Australia's twenty-five language families, and nineteen distinct languages in an area the size of Belgium with a population of only a couple of thousand. The Iwaidjan family (see family tree), which formed the focus of this project, originally contained five distinct languages (counting Ilgar and Garig, and Maung and Manangkari, as pairs of sister dialects). Of these, only Maung and Iwaidja still have significant numbers of speakers (100-200 in each case). Within the small community of Minjilang, on Croker Island (population around 300), where the project had its field headquarters, live speakers of around ten indigenous languages. Many languages of the region, however, have recently become extinct, or, as with Ilgar and Amurdak, are down to the last one or two speakers. In some cases, such as Marrgu, there are no remaining 'speakers', but thanks to the generation who can still 'hear' the language our project was able to transcribe and translate some earlier recorded materials that would otherwise have been uninterpretable. One arm of the project recorded as much of these severely endangered languages - Marrgu, Ilgar, Garig and Amurdak - as was possible with the last remaining speakers and hearers.



Recording Yanakanak songs feeds into the revival of traditional song and dance

Iwaidja, the main language of the project, is still the vehicle of a living culture, and here we concentrated on documenting the full gamut of traditional contexts within which the language is used, including hunting, fishing, butchering, plant use, the gathering, preparation and cooking of 'bush tucker' such as wild yams, geographical and ecological knowledge, terms for kinship and social categories such as clans, and language associated with the manufacture of traditional stone and wooden implements. Traditional place names and myths associated with the 'dreaming tracks' laid down by founding ancestral figures such as Wamba the shark were also recorded in detail. Often renditions of these stories involve several different languages according to which character is speaking and which country they are passing through.



Telling the story of Wamba the shark

Another focus of the project was on recording and transcribing traditional songs. Every language group has its own distinctive song style, such as the Jurtbirrk style sung in the Iwaidja language (see score), or the Yanakanak style associated with the Amurdak people of the inland 'stone country'.

Jurtbirrk 3 "Yangmanara"

Composer: David Mlaymanak
Musical setting of Jurtbirrk song Jurtbirrk 3, "Yangmanara" as sung by Reggie Cooper (song leader) and David Mlaymanak with Archie Cooper playing adawir (didjodibe), recorded by Linda Barwick at Minjilang, NT, Australia, on 22 July 2003, on behalf of the Iwaidja project team. First verse of song Jurtbirrk 14 on recording I973030221002, timecode start = 1:14,047 - finish = 1:16:5,000. Musical transcription by Linda Barwick, February 2006.

MM117

yang-ma-ta-ra jurt-birrk-ma-ma-lai-jo-may yang-ma-ta-ra [jurt-birrk-ma-ta-ra]

Anchil: first verse of Jurtbirrk 14 on recording I973030221002, timecode start = 1:14,047 - finish = 1:16:5,000.
Anchil: second verse of Jurtbirrk 14 on recording I973030221002, timecode start = 1:16,500 - finish = 1:18,000.
Anchil: third verse of Jurtbirrk 14 on recording I973030221002, timecode start = 1:18,000 - finish = 1:19,500.

Note: Text elements enclosed in square brackets are not meaningful in spoken languages, and are included only in the sung version of the text; they are enclosed in round brackets in the musical notation for reference to the song version of the text.

Transcript of a Jurtbirrk love song

In addition to linguists Nick Evans (Canberra), Hans-Jürgen Sasse (Köln), and Bruce Birch (Canberra), our team included musicologist Linda Barwick (Sydney), anthropologist Murray Garde (Canberra) and material culture specialist and museum curator Kim Akerman (Hobart).



Going for Idungun 'long yam'

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Language map of the study region

