

'FRUIT OF THE EYES'

SEMANTIC DIFFUSION IN THE LAKES LANGUAGES OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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The genetic relationship between Australian Aboriginal languages is notoriously complex, and the north-east of South Australia is no exception. The languages of this area are often referred to as 'Lakes Languages' (Capell 1963). On the basis of similarity and differences in morphology and syntax these languages can be subdivided into the following main groups:

1. Arabana - Wangaṅuru, formerly spoken to the west and north of Lake Eyre
2. The Diyari - Yandruwaṅṅa group, spoken mainly to the east of Lake Eyre, and comprising the subgroups:
 - a) Diyari, Dirari, Namini, Yaluyandi
 - b) Yawarawarga, Yandruwaṅṅa and Biladaba
3. The Yuṛa - Miṛu-Yali group consisting of:
 - a) Guyani, Adnjamaḡaṅa to the south of Lake Eyre,
 - b) Baṅḡala, Nugunu, Nadjuri, Naraṅga and Kaurna,
 - c) Yaḡliyawara and Maljaṅaba.

This classification differs slightly from that given by Schmidt (1919), by O'Grady, Voegelin and Voegelin (1966) and Wurm (1972). The point of the present paper is not to justify this genetic classification, but to show how regional affiliations cut across genetic boundaries.

There are numerous mythological and ritual links between the tribes in this area. The Wiljaru cicatrisation ceremony was known over a large portion of the region, though it took different forms - among the Biladaba there was no actual cicatrisation and marks were simply painted

on. Numerous myths crossed tribal boundaries, usually though not always travelling in a north-south direction. The longest song cycle of all was probably the Urumbula or Native Cat cycle, which came from Aranda country to Pt Augusta and then returned crossing through Bangala, Guyani and Arabana country. The Grinding Stone Myths from Arabana, Wangajuru and Namini country are linked with Mt Termination (in Guyani territory). The Whirlwind travelled through Arabana and Guyani country to the Diyari, and there are well-known Dog myths that connect Arabana and Diyari sites with the south (Elkin 1934). The Yawarawarga, Yandruwanda, Diyari and Namini all took part in the Mindari corroboree - these are just a few examples of the vast network of mythological tracks that crossed the country and which were of the deepest significance. There were also important trade links: men travelled from as far as the Simpson desert to the red ochre mine near Parachilna in Adnjamadana country and the grinding stone quarries at Sunny Creek (Arabana) and Charley's Swamp (Guyani) supplied most of the Lake Eyre basin.

With such a complex system of links it is not surprising that

a) there should be some linguistic diffusion

and that

b) this diffusion should be varied in its extent and focus.

Two examples of this diffusion have been reported earlier: the pre-stopping of nasal and lateral consonants (Hercus 1973) and the use of special pronoun forms linked with the kinship system (Hercus and White 1974). Both these traits show the maximum elaboration in Adnjamadana and Guyani and this was probably their focus of diffusion. There are certain other very noticeable features that cross the linguistic boundaries in this region, such as the dissimilation of the second nasal (in a word) when there are two consecutive nasal + plosive clusters (ḡaṅga-ḡa from *ḡaṅga-ṅḡa). The traditional cognate counts in vocabulary cannot give a true picture of this linguistic situation as the diffusion affects more systematic features of language rather than mere vocabulary. Similar situations have been noted elsewhere in Australia, particularly by G. Heath (1975). The present paper gives just one series of examples which shows the hidden semantic links that cross linguistic boundaries.

The three authors noticed independently in the languages which they were studying (Hercus - Adnjamadana, Wangajuru and Guyani, Austin - Diyari and Dirari, Ellis - Adnjamadana) that there was a curious "suffix" at the end of words denoting certain body parts, such as 'eye'. It became clear that this "suffix" was in fact a word meaning 'fruit', gaḡi in Arabana-Wangajuru, ḡandḡa in Diyari and Dirari, gāga in Guyani; though āga in Adnjamadana did not have this meaning. Later it was found

that all these words, apart from meaning 'fruit' also meant 'clitoris', and this was the only meaning of the Adnjamadana word āga.

EXAMPLES

The following tables set out the data for the three language groups. Table 1 comprises entries referring to parts of the body, Table 2 objects in nature and Table 3 edible plants. This system emphasises the recurring entries between language groups even where the forms are not cognate: for example Table 2 contains 'rainwater', 'money' and 'bullets' in all languages.

Table 1: Diyari and Dirari

Compound	English	Notes
1. maṇa-ḡandřa	<i>head</i>	maṇa - unknown in Diyari, occurs as maṇu 'forehead' in Wanggaṇuru
2. milgi-ḡandřa	<i>eyeball</i>	milgi - eye
3. maṇa-ḡandřa	<i>tooth</i>	maṇa - mouth
4. ḡama-ḡandřa	<i>woman's breasts</i>	ḡama - breast
5. baṇḡa-ḡandřa	<i>kneecap, patella</i>	baṇḡa - knee
6. gaḷu-ḡandřa	<i>testicles</i>	gaḷu - male privates
7. giḷa-ḡandřa	<i>clitoris</i>	giḷa - vulva
8. gadi-ḡandřa	<i>Lake Eyre</i>	gadi - skin

NOTES:

- a) The name for Lake Eyre is associated with a legend concerning the origin of the lake. Elkin (1938, p.244) gives an account of this legend. The Diyari name Gadi-ḡandřa is used throughout the area, though the legend is Arabana.
- b) For 'eyeball' Yaḷuyandi has milgi-ḡanda and for 'tooth' maṇa-ḡanda.

Table 1: Arabana and Wangaḡuru

Arabana Compound	Wangaḡuru Compound	English	
1.			
2. mildja-aḡi	milgi (gaḡi)	<i>eye</i>	milgi - <i>eye</i>
3.			
4. ḡama-gaḡi	ḡama-gaḡi	<i>deceased mother's brother</i>	ḡama - <i>breast</i>
5. baḡa-gadi			baḡa - <i>knee</i>
6. maḡa-aḡi	maḡa-gaḡi	<i>testicles</i>	maḡa - <i>testicles</i>
7. gaḡi	gaḡi	<i>clitoris</i>	
8.			
9. mambu-gaḡi	mambu-gaḡi	<i>elbow</i>	
10. gudna-gaḡi	gudna-gaḡi	<i>intestines</i>	gudna - <i>excrement</i>

NOTES:

ḡama-gaḡi is probably connected more directly with Wangaḡuru ama 'mother' (ḡama): loss of the initial velar nasal is prevalent in Arabana-Wangaḡuru. Such a connection is common in words meaning *mother's brother*, e.g. Adnjamadaḡa-Guyani ḡami 'mother', ḡamaḡa 'mother's brother'. The connection between ḡama-gaḡi and ama is particularly interesting as it indicates that the use of gaḡi to form compound nouns preceded the loss of the initial velar nasal.

Table 1: Guyani and Adnjamadaḡa

Compound		English	
Guyani	Adnjamadaḡa		
mina-āga	mina-āga	<i>eye</i>	
	yundjuru-āga	<i>nose</i>	yundjuru - <i>nose</i>
gāga	indi-āga	<i>clitoris</i>	indi - <i>vulva</i>
gaḡ!u-gāga	aḡ!u-āga	<i>testicles</i>	(g)aḡ!u - <i>testicles</i>
ḡulga-gāga	yulga-āga	<i>heart</i>	
-	yalda-āga	<i>sweet meat from the calf muscle</i>	
-	ḡama-āga	<i>hollow in tree where birds nest</i>	ḡama - <i>breast</i>

NOTES:

- Guyani mina-aga may be a loan word from Adnjamadaḡa since we would expect to find *mina-gaga as the Guyani form. It is interesting to note that Schürmann (1844, p.30) gives menakaka under the entry mena 'eye' but fails to translate it. We would suggest that the word is mina-gāga meaning 'eyeball'.
- There appear to be no cognates for these terms in Kurna (see Teichelmann and Schürmann (1840) or Maljaḡaba (Hercus fieldnotes)) containing (g)āga.

Table 2: Diyari and Dirari

Compound	English	
maḍa-ḡandřa	money	maḍa - stone
diřgi-ḡandřa	grain of sand	diřgi - rough sand
ḡuḷa-ḡandřa	piece of stone chisel	ḡuḷa - flint adze chisel
miḷḡi-ḡandřa	piece of unburnt ochre	miḷḡi - unburnt ochre
gařgu-ḡandřa	piece of red ochre	gařgu - red ochre
mařu-ḡandřa	piece of black ochre	mařu - black ochre
ḡaba-ḡandřa	rainwater	ḡaba - water
ḡalara-ḡandřa	raindrops	ḡalara - rain
maḍabuřu-ḡandřa	hailstones	maḍabuřu - hail
digi-ḡandřa	stars	digi - sun
magida-ḡandřa	bullets	magida - rifle (borrowed from English "musket")
miřga-ḡandřa	ants' eggs	miřga - ant

Table 2: Arabana and Wangaḡuru

Compound Arabana and Wangaḡuru	English	
ḡuḍa-ḡaḡi	rain water	ḡuḍa - water
ḡaḡna-ḡaḡi	money	ḡaḡna - stone
{ ḡuldji-ḡaḡi }	rifle bullets	ḡuldji } - round stone, bullets
{ magidi-ḡaḡi }		
ḡaḡi-bila	star (this word also means 'mushroom')	
ḡaḡi-margara	mythological serpent	margara - crawling

NOTES:

ḡaḡi-margara is an Arabana term, yet it was mainly used in Diyari and Dirari. The legend of the ḡaḡi-margara belonged to the whole area: a Guyani story tells of the 'stranger snake with the pretty markings' that was killed near Curdimurka in Guyani country, named after the event. As shown in Table 1 the Diyari term *Gadi-ḡandřa* 'Lake Eyre' is used throughout the area, particularly in Arabana, and the Arabana term ḡaḡi-margara 'mythological serpent' is used in Diyari (in Arabana and Wangaḡuru the common term for the same creature is ganmari): this emphasises the mythological unity of the area.

Table 2: Guyani and Adnjamaḡaṅa

Compound		English	
Guyani	Adnjamaḡaṅa		
gawi-gāga	awi-āga	<i>rain water, big drops of rain</i>	(g)awi - <i>water</i>
gadnja-gāga	adnja-āga ¹	<i>money</i>	(g)adnja - <i>stone</i>
	magidi-āga	<i>bullets</i>	magidi - <i>rifle</i>

NOTES:

1. In Adnjamaḡaṅa this refers to a site in the Northern Flinders Ranges (South Australia) - a rock formation known as Depot Springs.

Table 3: Diyari and Dirari

Compound	English	
buga-ḡandřa	<i>edible fruits</i>	buga - <i>vegetable food</i>
wiřa-ḡandřa	<i>seed of camel bush</i>	wiřa - <i>Acacia ligulata</i>
malga-ḡandřa	<i>seed of mulga tree</i>	malga - <i>Acacia aneura</i>

NOTES:

buga ḡandřa refers to such seeds and fruit as ṛaḡu (*Marsilia Drummondii*), ḡaṅgaldři (*sweet millet (sp.?)*), mařuḡuṅga (?), yawa (*grass onion*) and muga (*native cotton bush*).

Table 3: Arabana and Wangaṅuru

Arabana	Wangaṅuru	English	
biḍi-gaḍi manjuru-gaḍi	biḍi-gaḍi	<i>edible seed of Portulaca oleracea</i>	biḍi - <i>Portulaca oleracea</i> manjuru - <i>Portulaca oleracea</i>
galgu-gaḍi	galgu-gaḍi	<i>seed of Acacia Victoriae (Gundabluey)</i>	galgu - <i>Acacia Victoriae</i>
gaḍi-bila	gaḍi-bila	<i>mushroom, broom-rape (Orobanche australiana)</i>	bila - ?

NOTES:

gaḍi is most commonly used for the two kinds of seed listed, but it can refer to other seeds and fruit not only of Acacias (e.g. maṅḍara gaḍi, *seed of Acacia ligulata*) but also of quite different plants such as gudnambira gaḍi, *seed of Enchylaena tomentosa*. It is however always distinguished from bawa 'flour', i.e. *grass seeds and the seeds of Cruciferae*. The term gaḍi was also naturally not used for some other important fruits and seeds which had their own specific name, such as waḷiya *box-tree seed* and uljuguljuga, *the seed of wanjira (Nitraria schoberi)*. It shows something of the insight into plant life that *mushroom* and *broom-rape*, both plants without chlorophyll should have the same name. The same word also means 'star' (Table 2). None of the Arabana or Wangaṅuru speakers could assign any meaning to -bila.

Table 3: Guyani and Adnjamadaṅa

Compound Guyani	Adnjamadaṅa	English	
-	mayi-āga	<i>the native pear</i>	mayi - <i>vegetable food</i>
-	minga āga	<i>edible seed of Acacia</i>	minga - <i>Acacia species</i>

CONCLUSIONS

The information contained in the above tables points, we feel, to the following:

- 1) the expression of certain concepts in the languages of the Lakes area is identical even across genetic boundaries
- 2) there are at least two possible explanations for these similarities:
 - a) the expressions were independently created in each of the language groups

b) there has been linguistic borrowing at some time in the past, not of lexical items but of a semantic concept

The many important links, linguistic and other mentioned above suggest that the latter explanation is the more likely.

- 3) if semantic diffusion has taken place the existence of comparatively more examples in Diyari and Dirari points to their being the probable source from which the other languages borrowed. The directions of borrowing then, appear to be different to those suggested for lateral and nasal pre-stopping and special pronoun forms (source probably Adnjamaḡana)
- 4) we may speculate that the semantic concept which has diffused is the link between the shape of the clitoris and the shape of the other body parts, natural objects and fruits given compound names. The possibility that this is a reflection of a "folk taxonomy" has not yet been fully investigated
- 5) genetic classification of languages and language groups cannot give an adequate picture of the intricate and complex relationships which existed between the people speaking the Lakes languages before the time of white contact.

NOTES

We employ the following symbols:

CONSONANTS

	Bilabial	Lamino-Dental	Apico-Alveolar	Lamino-Palatal		Apico-Domal	Velar
stops	b	ḡ	d, t	ḡ	<i>voiced</i>	ḡ	g
					<i>voiceless</i>	ḡ	
nasals	m	ṅ	n	ɲ		ŋ	ŋ
laterals		l	l	ɻ		l	
flap			r				
trill			ř				
continuants	w			ɻ		r	

VOWELS

	Front	Back
High	i	u
Low		a ā

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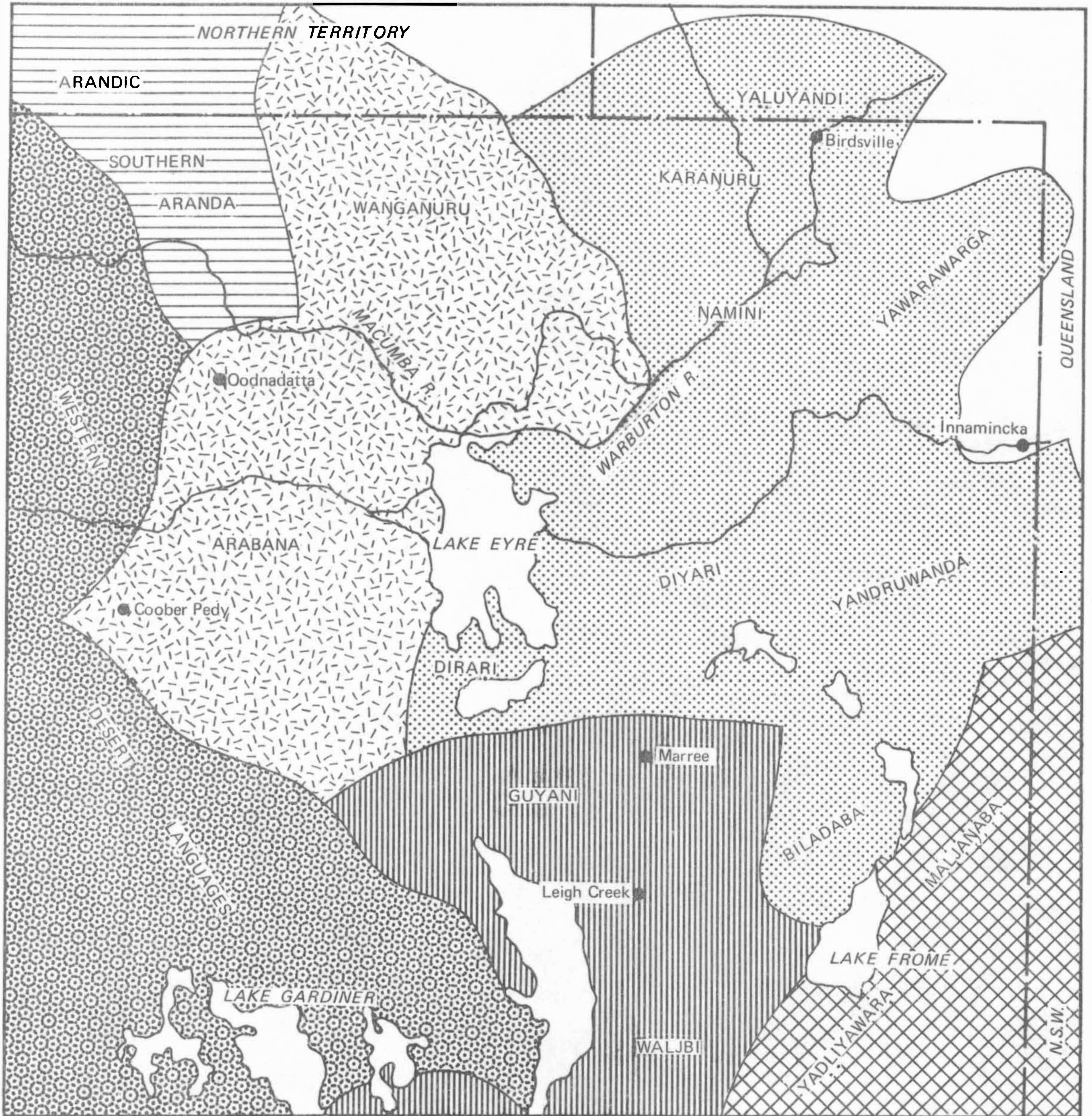
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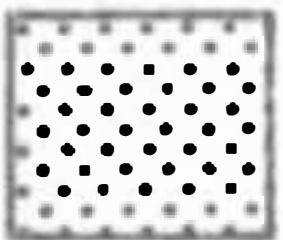
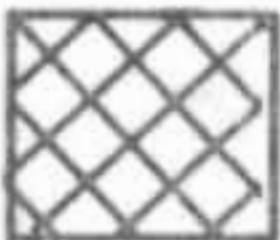

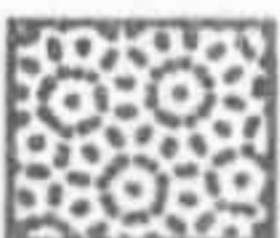

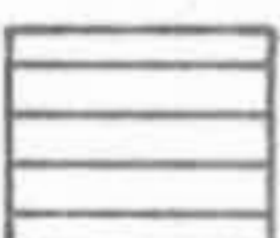
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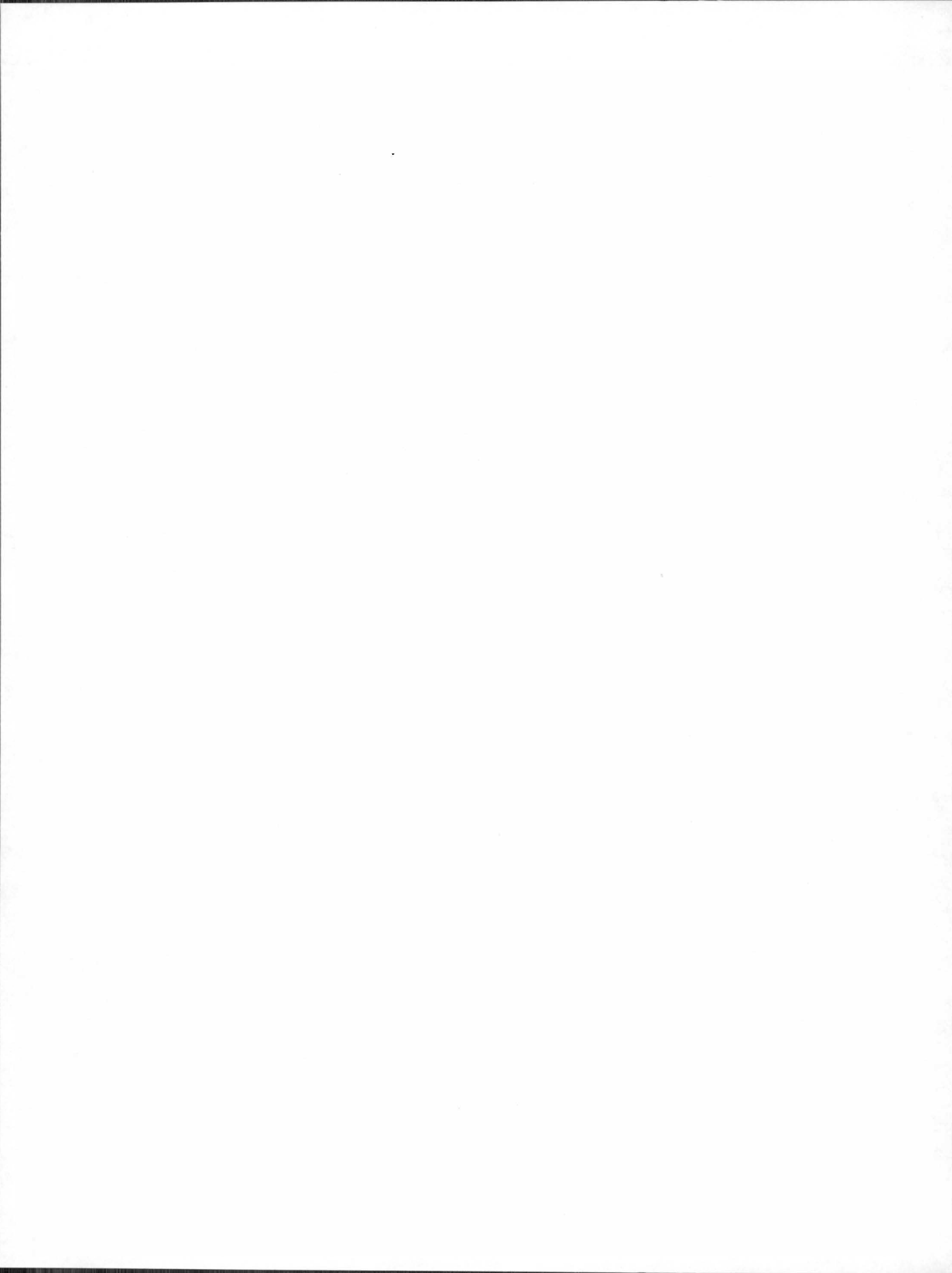
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ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES IN THE NORTH OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA



- | | | | |
|---|----------------------|---|--------------------------|
|  | DIYARI - YANDRUWANDA |  | YALI SUBGROUP |
|  | ARABANA - WANGANURU |  | WESTERN DESERT LANGUAGES |
|  | ADNJAMADANA - GUYANI |  | ARANDIC LANGUAGE GROUP |

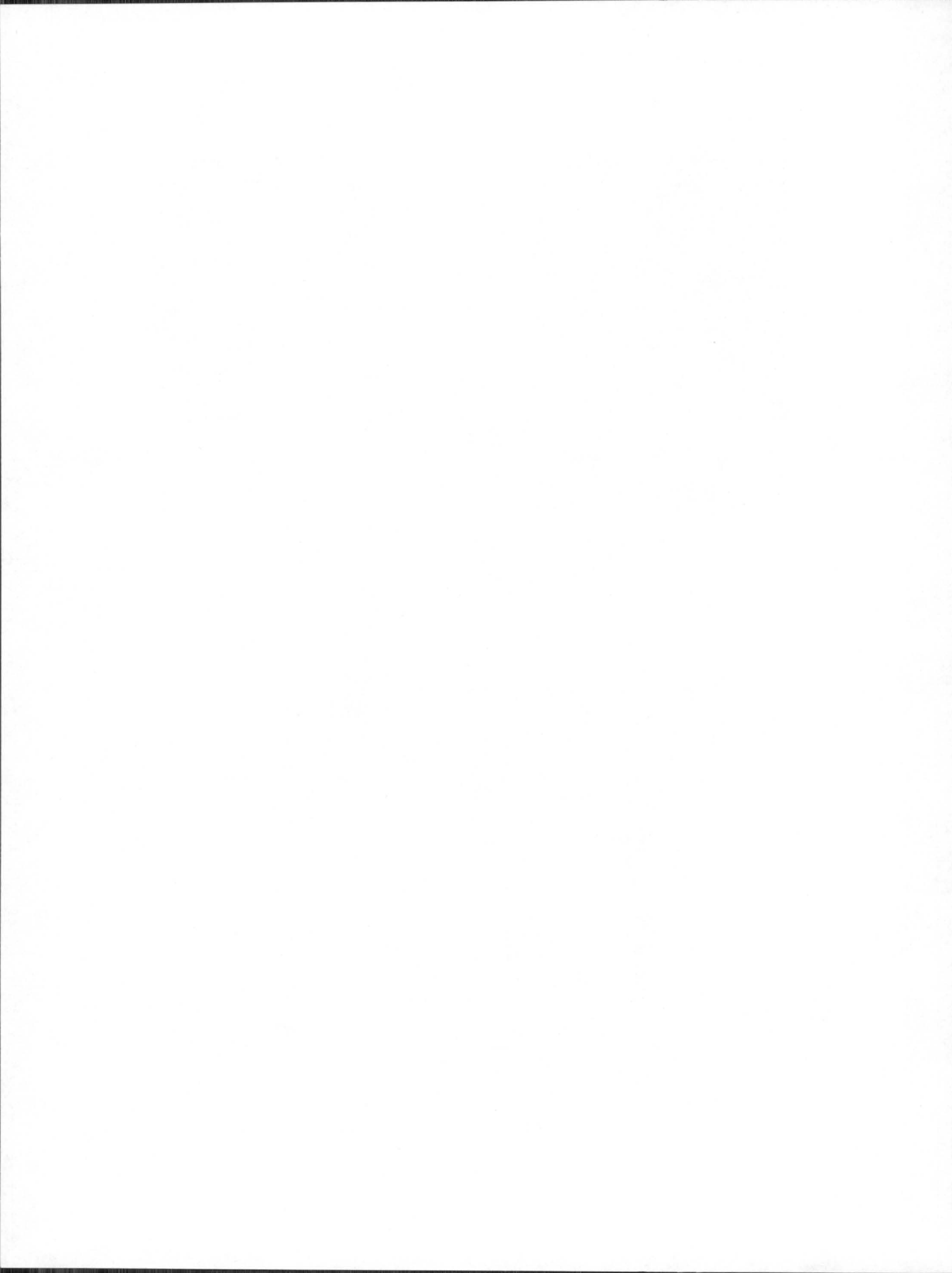




The last speakers of their languages:
Murtee Johnny (dec.) (Strzelecki Yandruwanda)
Tom Bagot (S. Aranda)
Mick McLean (dec.) (Desert Wanganuru)

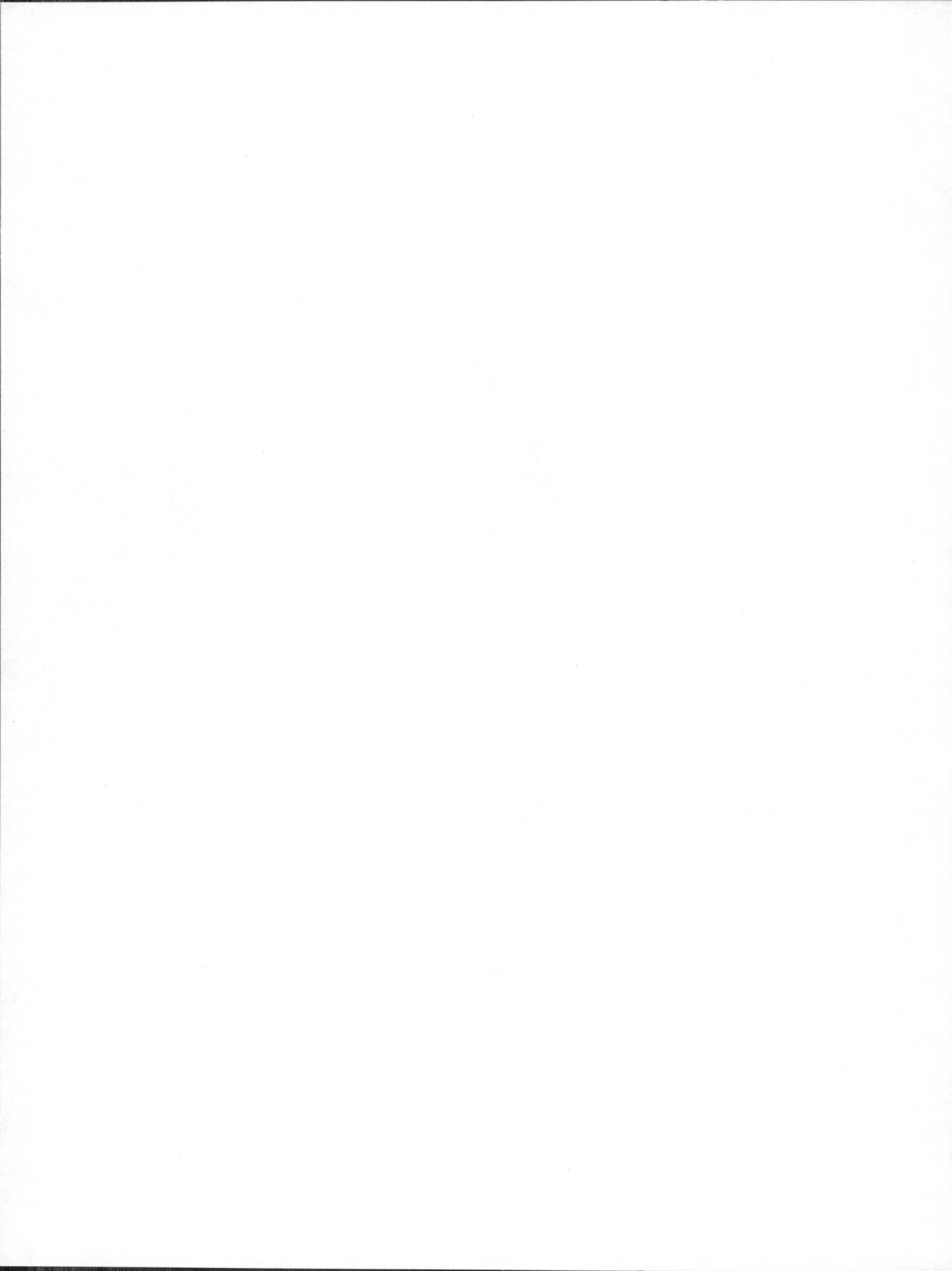


Mrs May Wilton (Adnjamadana)



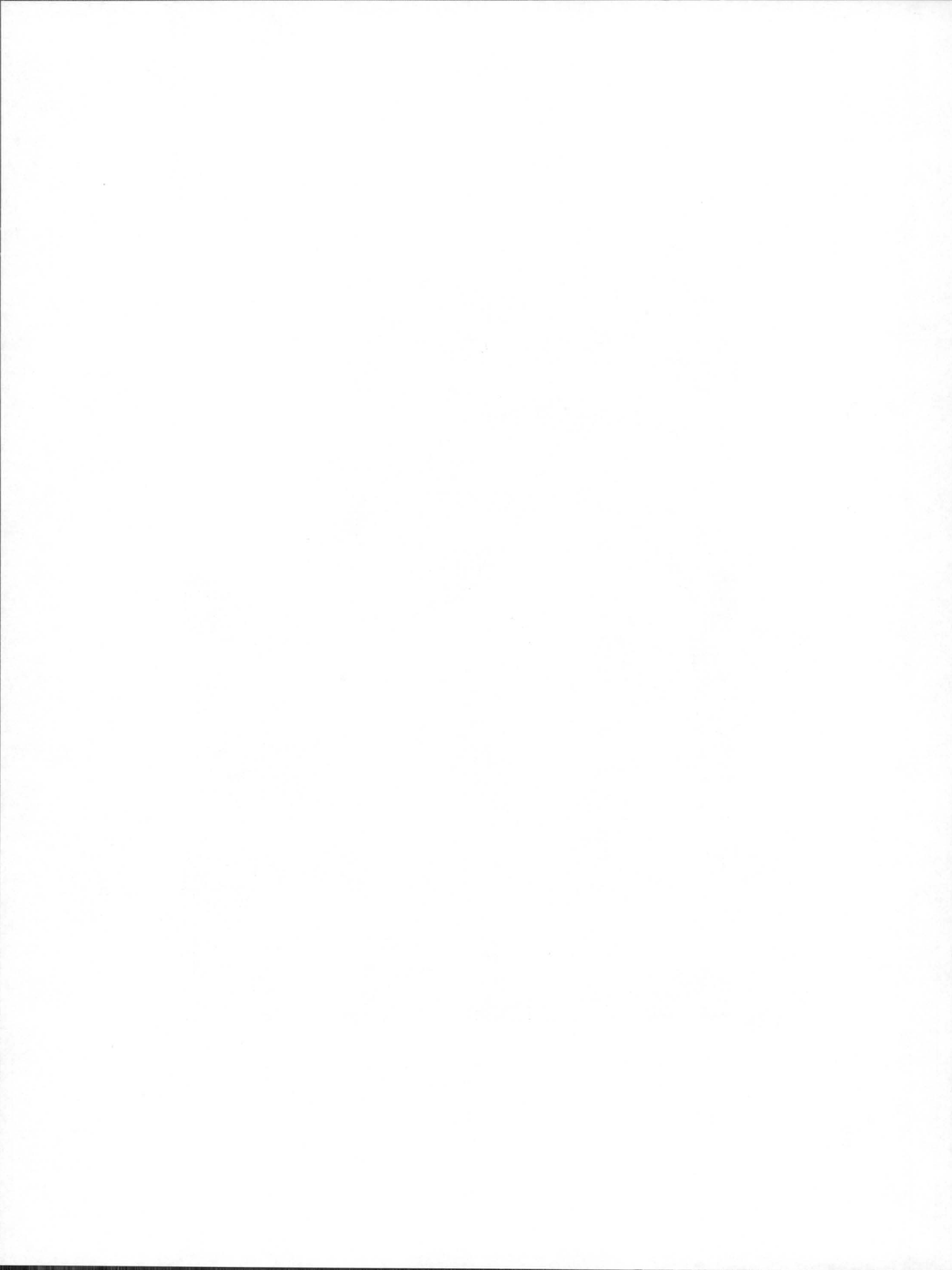


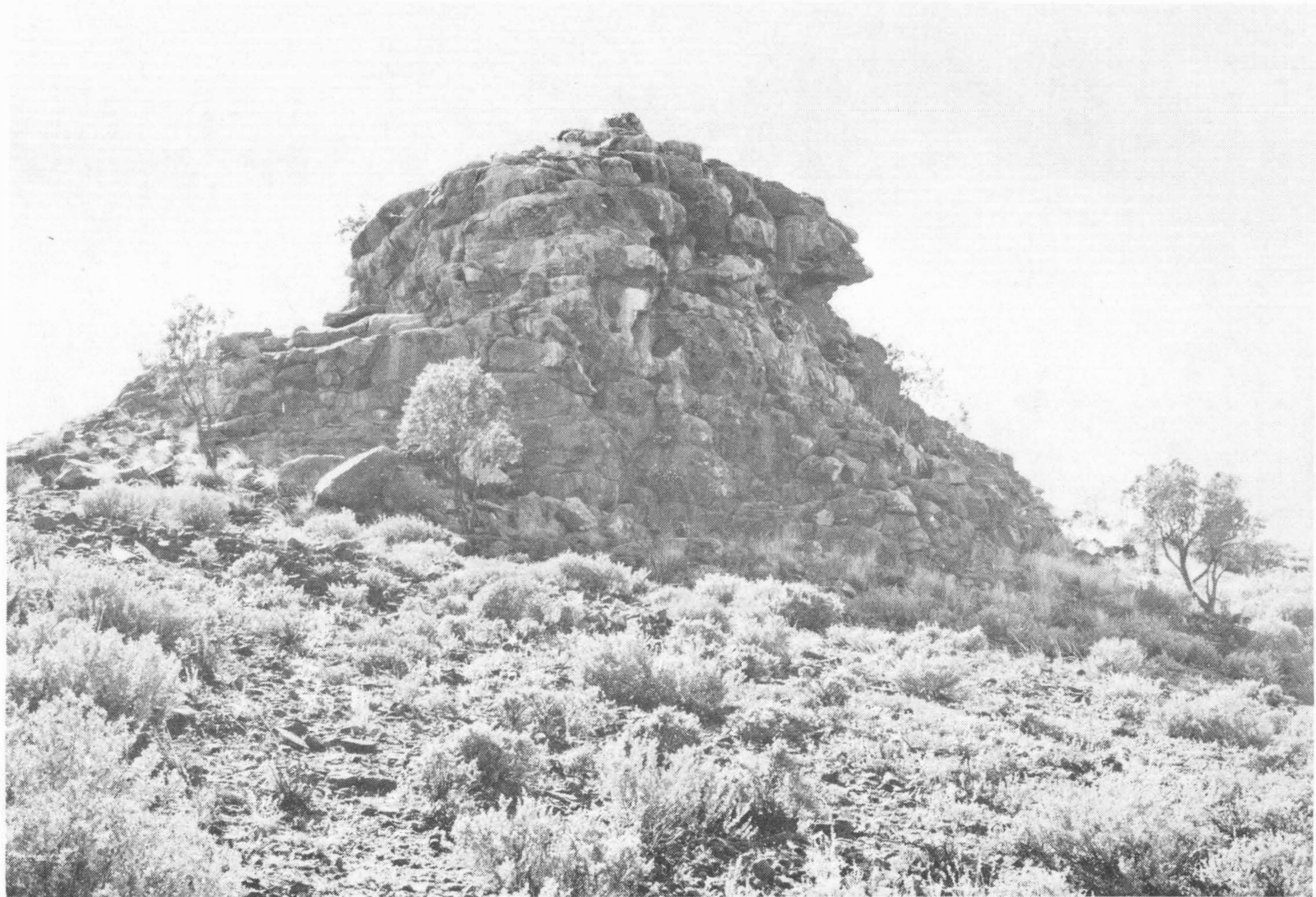
In happier days — Alice, the Last Guyani, with her late husband,
the last Namini rainmaker. Taken near Marree in 1960 by John
Weightman of the Welfare Department.





Maudie Naylor (Yaluyandi)

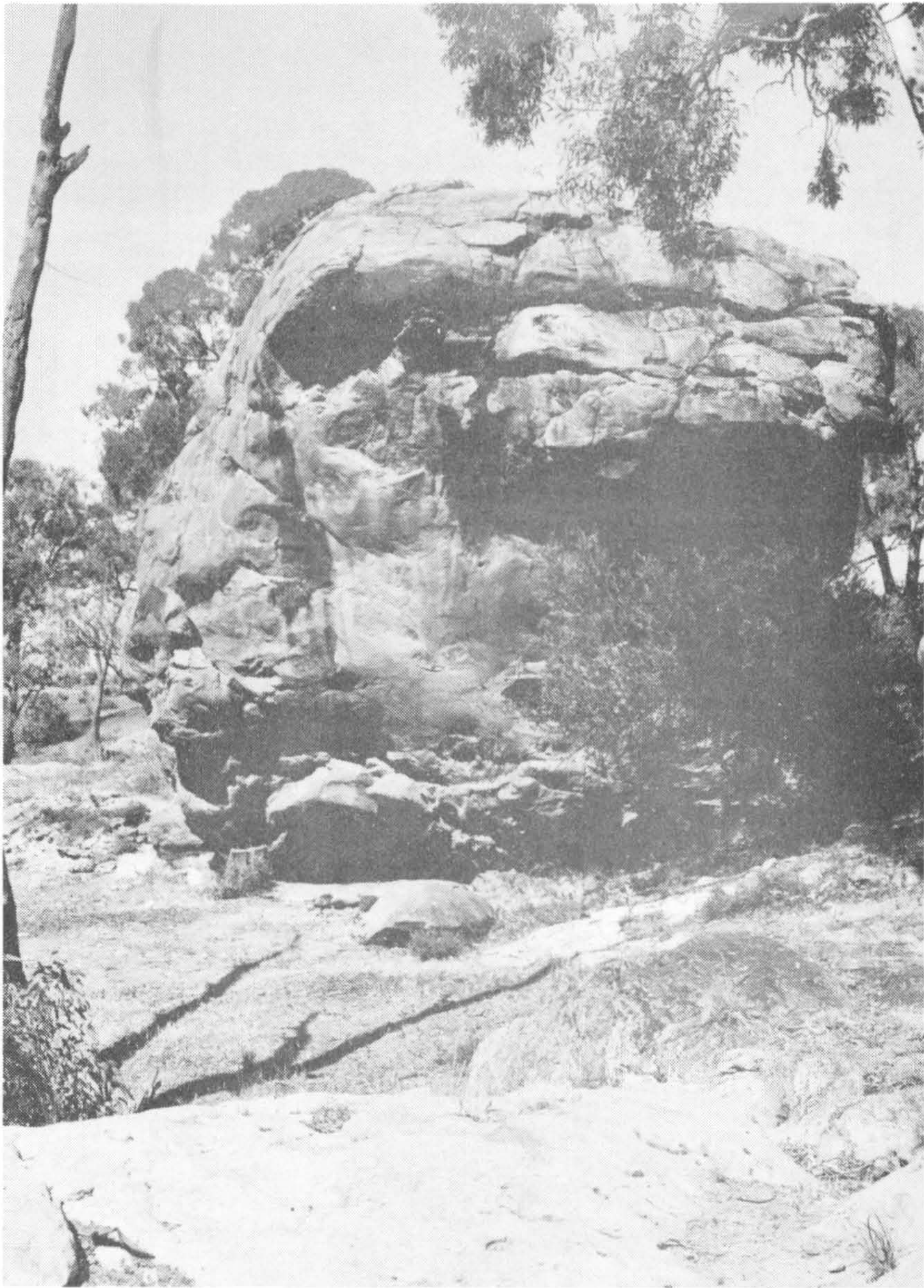




'FRUIT OF THE EYES'

Rock near Pigeon Box Hole in the Mundi Gorge area of the Flinders Ranges. This rock represents the āga of the wife of the Wiljaru ancestor who travelled along the Frome (Vidni-miruna).





"Death Rock", Kanyaka Station. October, 1972.
Kanyaka: Gadnya-āga
'rock'-āga

