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QUILP'S HORSE: ROCK ART AND ARTIST LIFE-BIOGRAPHY IN WESTERN ARNHEM LAND, AUSTRALIA

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that this article includes discussion of massacres that took place in northern Australia.

Abstract. Rock art created in the recent past has often been interpreted as a passive reflection of Indigenous curiosity at newly introduced phenomena. However, more recent analyses have tried to refigure such depictions as active and innovative artworks with social and cultural roles to play. Likewise, most contact rock art studies identify and interpret contact rock art within the clan or group context — as representations of a whole. In this paper, we broaden the conceptual framework around contact rock art to, where possible, embrace analyses of particular artists, their life biographies and legacies. By focusing on one known artist and his painting of a horse in western Arnhem Land, we draw together rock art studies, ethnography and Aboriginal life biographies to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Australian history.

From contact rock art to artist's biographies

During the new millennium, global processes of decolonisation have transformed the study of contact period rock art, i.e. artworks reflecting cross-cultural interaction in colonial contexts, to a distinct field of research within archaeology (e.g. Smith 2010; Berrojalbiz 2015; May and Goldhahn 2019). In Australia, this process has resulted in a reappraisal and reinterpretation of rock art depicting introduced subject matter related to Indigenous contact with 'outsiders'. Traditionally, this imagery was understood as passive reflections mirroring Indigenous people's wonder at newly introduced phenomena, such as new means of transport, new domesticates and newly introduced material culture.

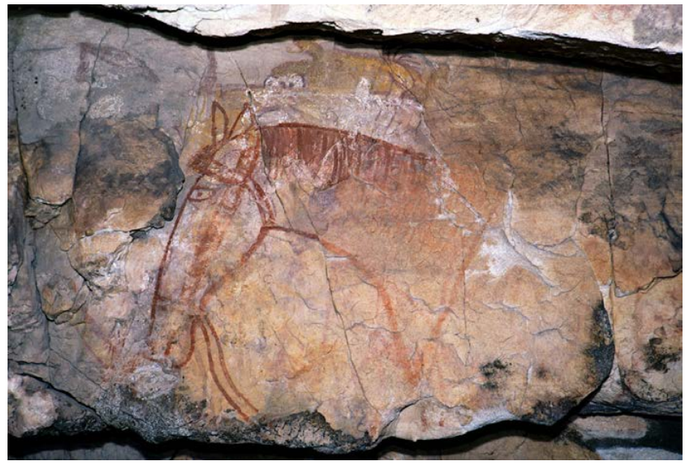
Recent analyses of contact rock art have tried to refigure such depictions as active and innovative artworks used for, among other things, education, enforcing and revitalising Aboriginal cultural identity, and contemplations of cross-cultural interactions in colonial contexts (e.g. Frederick 1999; Veth et al. 2008; Gunn et al. 2017; Taçon 2018; May and Goldhahn 2019; Frieman and May 2019; May et al. 2020a; among others).

This article argues that most Australian studies have perceived contact rock art as a general cultural response; that is, as expressions of Aboriginality, rather than as artworks unfolding specific individuals' personal experiences of cross-cultural or other interactions. Consequently, we wish to broaden the conceptual framework around contact rock art to, where possible, embrace analyses of particular artists, their life biographies, and legacies. In short, how can the life history of a rock art artist help us to understand contact rock art, and how can contact rock art help us to understand the life history of a rock art artist? To demonstrate the value of this approach, again when and where possible, we turn to an elusive painted horse figure from western Arnhem Land and the life of the artist who created it (Fig. 1). Combining archaeology, rock art studies, ethnography, history and Aboriginal life biographies allows us to present a more comprehensive understanding of an artist's life and rock art legacy.

Quilp's horse

'That Aborigines were good horsemen and very fond of their mounts can be seen in this sentimental portrayal of the artist's favourite horse' (Chaloupka 1993: 200, see Fig. 1).

While depictions of horses in Australian rock art are little studied and present rich opportunities for future research (e.g. Chaloupka 1979, 1993; Fijn 2017), this paper is not simply about horse imagery. Rather, we are interested in how a single rock painting can relate to and unfold the biography of an individual rock art artist. In this case, the artist was a man who experienced



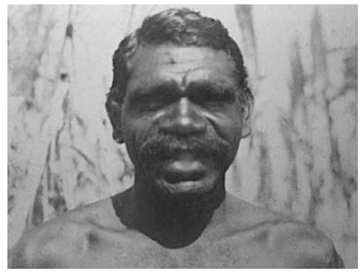


Figure 2. *Quilp (Yilari Balalaman) photographed about 1927 by Reverend Dyer at Oenpelli (Gunbalanya) (Northern Territory Archive Service, Keith Hart Collection).*

Figure 1. *Rock painting of a horse by Quilp (Yilari Balalaman) photographed by George Chaloupka, August 1985 (Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory TRN-5573.0053.0001).*

immense personal tragedy; a man dislocated from his birth family, kin and Country. A man who would become instrumental in the buffalo shooting industry of northern Australia. While Chaloupka was not aware of the actual artist (see quote above), his suggestion that the painting was a 'sentimental portrayal of the artist's favourite horse' is evocative. As we will see in the following, the artist in question — Quilp (Yilari Balalaman) — did indeed have a close relationship with horses, an animal instrumental in the cross-cultural encounters throughout his life (Fig. 2).

A young boy surviving a massacre

The massacre of Aboriginal people by invading groups across Australia has been well attested (e.g. Elder 1988; Rose 1991; Bednarik 2006; Lewis 2012). As recounted by Indigenous community members, these horrific stories often focus on the build-up to the event, the loss of life, and the resulting trauma experienced by communities. There are several examples of young Aboriginal children being spared the bullet and taken captive by those behind the guns (Moses 2004). However, what happened to the children kidnapped by the killers?

Yilari Balalaman (skin name: Jangala) was one such child. Born around 1886, he was given the nickname 'Quilp' by the Cahill family (Northern Territory Probate Index 1911–1994; Roney 1985: 36). Paddy Cahill, the famous Northern Territory buffalo shooter (Mulvaney 2004), had a passion for horses and horse racing, and we suspect the name Quilp came from the famous 1890s Australian racehorse of the same name (e.g. *Cootamundra Herald* 21 December 1889; *Border Watch* 9 May 1891). As the Gunbalanya (formerly, Oenpelli) community today remembers him as 'Quilp', we have chosen to use this name throughout this paper.

How Quilp ended up as Paddy Cahill's right-hand man at Oenpelli has been somewhat of a mystery (Mulvaney 2004). Despite rumours that Quilp was from the Borroloola area (Cole 1975: 15), it seems he was actually a Wardaman man (Northern Territory of Australia 1957). Paddy Cahill's niece Ruby Mudford (later Roney) spent many years living with her uncle and his family and had a close relationship with Quilp (Roney 1985). Roney placed him as being born in Wardaman Country and, specifically, Delamere. Recalling a return visit to Oenpelli about 1965, she wrote: 'And then there was poor old Quilp. He didn't belong to Arnhem Land, he came from Delamere. Uncle got him as a little boy and reared him and he was a good faithful native …' (Roney 1985: 51).

So how did a Wardaman man end up in Arnhem land? The buffalo shooter Carl Warburton recalled meeting Quilp in the early 1920s, discussing his background with Cahill:

> Early in the morning the household was astir. I walked outside and found Paddy getting ready an outfit for mustering. About half a dozen boys were engaged some little distance from Paddy, and I noticed that one of them seemed to be in command of proceedings. His manner was authoritative, and his methods business-like. I heard him say to them:
> 'Come on, boys; get a move on. Boss close up.'
> I asked Paddy who he was.
> 'Twenty-five years ago,' he replied, 'there was a shoot-up of blacks by the whites in revenge for the killing of a white man. This chap was then three or four, and I saved his life. He was the only one rescued from the massacre, and he's been with me ever since. That's the only way I know of doing anything with the blacks. Get 'em young (Warburton 1934: 143–144).

According to Warburton, Cahill claimed to have 'rescued' the young boy from the 'shoot-up.' The above account would date the massacre to about 1894; however, as Mulvaney (2004: 8) points out, Cahill himself indicated an earlier date for Quilp's birth: '… in 1901 Cahill had said that Quilp had been with him for eleven years, making Quilp's birth around 1886–87'. So was Quilp a massacre survivor, kidnapped by Cahill? It seems highly likely. Mulvaney (2004: 8) suggests that he may have been a survivor of the Muckederry 'punitive' posse or some unrecorded 'dispersal' in the Wave Hill area. In Warburton's account, Cahill is elusive about his role in the massacre. Others have been more explicit. In the early 1960s, Kulumput, a Senior Wardaman informant to Arndt (1962), recalled a nearby massacre. It started with the spearing of Sydney Scott and ended when Paddy Cahill 'yarded up in a cave' people of the Bulinara 'tribe', and 'shot the whole blooming lot' (Arndt 1965: 245). As Mulvaney (2004: 8) concluded, 'in either case, given that Cahill was able to 'rescue' the boy, presumably he was a member of the punitive squad'.

Figure 3. *Paddy Cahill and a man thought to be Quilp (Yilari Balalaman) on horseback with a rifle in his hand, and other Aboriginal members of the buffalo shooting team, early 1900s (State Library of South Australia B 53799).*

Darrell Lewis (e.g. 2012, 2018), Deborah Bird Rose (e.g. 1991) and Francesca Merlan (e.g. 1994a, 1994b) have written at length about the frontier violence evident in Wardaman Country in the Victoria River region. Lewis described the Wardaman people as earning 'a reputation for fierce resistance to the whites, aided, no doubt, by the rough range "getaway" country to the west' in the early decades of colonisation' (Lewis 2018: 163–164). First-hand accounts of murder and massacres of Aboriginal people appear throughout the historical sources from this region, though we cannot say conclusively which of these relate to Quilp's family. If we assume the massacre took place around 1890, there are multiple known contenders (and unimaginable numbers of presumably unreported events as well, see Lewis 2012, 2018). Importantly, there is additional evidence for Cahill's direct involvement in killing Aboriginal people around this time. For example, as he reported in the *Adelaide Observer* (20 October 1900):

> We had just started from the luncheon camp, and had hardly gone 300 yards when I noticed some very fresh blacks' tracks. Knowing that the blacks were very bad in that part of the country, I took my rifle from under my saddleflap and filled it with cartridges. I rode on a few yards, when one of my boys cried out — 'Blackfellow! look out Paddy!' I knew the blacks must be behind me; so I dodged down alongside of my horse's shoulder, and only just in time. A spear struck my hat, going through it, and giving me hard knock on the head. Luckily I am Irish, and a bit thick-headed — so it did very little harm! Before I could say a word I had niggers all around. I could do nothing but shoot as quickly as I could, and I can shoot fairly quickly. I don't know how many niggers I shot — I didn't stop to count them.

Mulvaney (2004: 9) suggested that Cahill may have invented the story of the massacre and that Quilp was, in fact, Cahill's biological son from a liaison with an Aboriginal woman in the 1880s. Cahill had at least one other Aboriginal child, Paddy Cahill Junior Neyingkul, born around 1900 to a Wilirrgu mother. We cannot know for certain, but, unlike with Neyingkul, who was widely acknowledged as Cahill's son by local Aboriginal people, there appear to be no such memories for Quilp. We are inclined to believe then that Quilp was indeed a massacre survivor who spent much of his life living and working for one of those responsible for his family's murder.

Life in Arnhem Land

The first mention of Quilp in the documentary record is in an 1899 newspaper article that refers to him as 'Quiz' (*Northern Territory Times and Gazette* 10 November 1899). Quilp was accompanied by horses, enabling him to save a life:

> On Sunday night, about 11.30, a black fellow arrived in town from Cahill and Johnstone's buffalo shooting camp on the Adelaide River, bringing the very bad news that W. Johnstone had been horned by a wild bull and was lying in the camp unconscious when the boy left. Luckily the blackfellow ('Quiz') brought in three horses with him riding one and driving the others, and as soon as they had had a sufficient rest and been fed Mr. Cahill started out for the scene, riding St. Lawrence.

Cahill claimed to have been shooting in the Alligator Rivers area since 1892, so we can assume Quilp was with him during this time (Fig. 3). Indeed, this account of his desperate journey to save William Johnstone's life is quite remarkable given he was only about 12 of

13 years of age.

Just two years later, in 1901, Cahill wrote: 'My own boy, Quiz, whom I have had with me for eleven years, I have had to leave with this tribe he having developed unmistakeable symptoms of leprosy' (*Northern Territory Times and Gazette* 6 December 1901). Quilp was abandoned to an Aboriginal community living between the South and East Alligator Rivers. Yet he was quickly adopted by Nadambala (Rambler Cahill), as remembered by Bill Neidje and told to historian Robert Levitus: 'Twenty years ago Bill Nayidji (Neidjie) a senior Aboriginal lawman of the Bunitj clan estate of the Gagudju people told Robert Levitus, a historian of the Alligator Rivers region, that Quilp was a Wardaman. From Bill's perspective, Bill's father, Nadambala or Rambler Cahill, 'grew Quilp up' at Oenpelli, and Bill called Quilp brother' (Mulvaney 2004: 9).

Nadambala (Rambler Cahill, also Narda:mbala) was a senior member of the Bunidj clan. His skin name was Nangarridj and he was Yarriburrik moiety (Justice Toohey 1981: 112). Nadambala was brother to Kabirriki (Kopereik), a well-known Aboriginal leader in western Arnhem Land, made famous in the Warburton memoir *Buffaloes* (Warburton 1934). Being adopted by Nadambala placed Quilp within an important central kinship network that also included the Senior Traditional Owner for the Oenpelli area — Nipper Marakarra. Kabirriki's daughter Dolly Yarnmalu became one of Nipper Marakarra's wives, thereby linking two powerful families and clans (Justice Toohey 1981: 112).

Today in Gunbalanya (Oenpelli) it is widely assumed by those who knew Quilp that Nipper Marakarra adopted him. As Graham Badari (pers. comm. 2020) states, 'I saw his father's house was there in middle camp, Nipper, his house was there, in middle camp, that cement's still there I think …'. Likewise, Jill Nganjmirra (pers. comm. 2020) always believed Nipper had adopted him, stating that Quilp's skin name was Nakangila. Given the close kinship ties between Nadambala and Nipper Marakarra, both men likely played a key role in Quilp's life.

Having abandoned Quilp in western Arnhem Land, Cahill and his family continued their exploits. Although not the focus in this article, it is interesting to note that Cahill and family went on to live at Delamere Downs Station for three years from 1904 (*Observer* 10 June 1905; *Register* 8 June 1905; *The Register* 7 March 1907; Roney 1974: 2–3; Lewis 2018: 169). This is the place that Quilp referred to as his place of birth, and the massacre likely took place in the vicinity. Paddy Cahill's brother Tom Cahill, who was renowned for his eager participation in 'punitive expeditions' against Aboriginal people (Lewis 2012, 2018), was working at Wave Hill Station and managed to secure his brother a job at Delamere Downs Station (W. F. Buchanan owned both stations) (Roney 1985: 2). The fact Roney does not mention Quilp by name during this period further suggests he was not with the Cahill family but remained in western Arnhem Land.

Ruby Roney (1985: 46) first mentions Quilp in association with a buffalo shooting camp near Lake Finnis: 'We did not camp near Lake Finnis, we camped on the edge of the jungle when we went over to Lake Finnis to shoot buffalo, on the edge of the jungle under a lovely big shady tree. It was called Mick Conners camp. He was a previous buffalo shooter who we all knew had camped there'. She and the Cahill family left Delamere in 1907 and worked at buffalo camps such as these until arriving at Oenpelli in 1910. She described their work at the buffalo camp with the Aboriginal women and the skinners following the shooters on foot, skinning the dead buffaloes and bringing the hides back to their camp. The women and boys then spread them out and the women removed extra bits of flesh and rubbed salt into the hides. Again, we see Quilp working in the presence of horses:

> On the way down from where we camped to where the lugger was, two or three miles, there was an old buffalo bull that started to menace the lubras as they led the pack horses down, frightening them, so my uncle sent Quilp one day with a rifle to get rid of this old buffalo to save the lubras because he was an absolute nuisance. The lubras were all — they were very happy when it was shot and they could go down — lead the horses down safely (Roney 1985: 46).

We can assume then that, sometime in this period, Quilp re-joined the Cahill family working at buffalo camps.

Quilp at Oenpelli station

After years of constant movement and attempts at a variety of employment (see Mulvaney 2004), the Cahill family settled down at Oenpelli in 1910. Quilp was with Cahill and his family from the beginning, helping to establish the settlement:

> After trying his hand at the butchering business for about a year in Darwin, Mr. Cahill started buffalo shooting on East Alligator River, selling the hides in London. It was Mr. Cahill who introduced the method of shooting buffaloes from horseback, accompanied by his faithful Quilp, his plan was to employ 15 or 20 natives, who would lead the packhorses, skin the buffaloes as they were shot, and when a load was obtained returned to the camp, where the hides were cured, and sent to Darwin for shipment (*Register* 6 February 1923).

The *Register* attributes the new method of shooting buffalo from horseback to Cahill, but we note that Quilp was also there as the 'faithful' offsider. It is almost certain that Quilp was involved in developing these new buffalo shooting techniques alongside Cahill.

Beyond the references above, mentions of 'Quilp' by name are rare. In October 1917, Cahill wrote to Baldwin Spencer that 'Quilp is saving up his money and very eager for a trip with me, as soon as I can get away for a spell'. We know little about Quilp's travels, but he did visit Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide in 1918/1919, as evidenced in the Cahill letters to Spencer (10 October 1917; 29 August 1919) and passing mention


THE BLACKBOY QUILP,
who visited Adelaide with Mr. Cahill in 1919.

Figure 4. *Quilp photographed during his visit to Adelaide in 1919 (*Register, *6 February 1923).*

Figure 5. *Oenpelli Station in 1912 showing a group of people standing outside the main family home. Paddy Cahill is on the far right; the women on the left are most likely Elsie Masson and Maria Cahill. Quilp is almost certainly one of the Aboriginal men in the photograph (Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, 1998.306.64).*

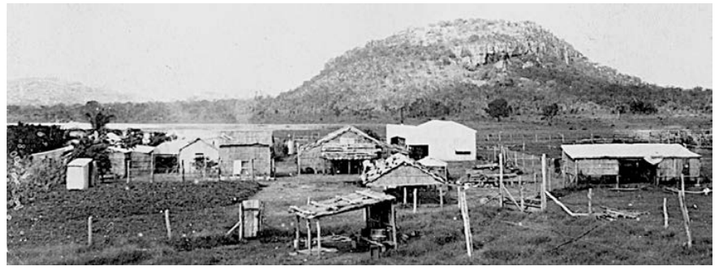


Figure 6. *The Oenpelli station nearing the end of the Paddy Cahill era (State Library of South Australia, PRG 280/1/39/346).*

in local newspapers (e.g. *Observer* 8 February 1919). This trip is also mentioned in a 1923 obituary for Cahill (*Register* 6 February 1923), stating that Paddy visited Adelaide in 1919 and describing Quilp as a 'servant': 'When he made the journey, accompanied by his wife … and their aborigine servant Quilp'. A photograph of Quilp taken in 1919 accompanied the obituary (Fig. 4). His status as a 'servant' is somewhat dubious, given he was able to take leisurely swims each afternoon during their visit and participate in aquatic competitions (*Journal* 1 March 1919). From eyewitness accounts, it seems Quilp's status, at least in Adelaide, was somewhere between son and circus performer — with Cahill enjoying showing off his 'Black Boy's' athletic abilities. As a spectator at a major 1919 swimming event in Adelaide noted:

> Mr. Cahill, at one point of the proceedings, said something to his 'boy' in the native tongue, and Quilp replied in English, and the people roared with laughter in appreciation of the happening. Quilp and his employer, too, enjoyed the situation (*Journal* 1 March 1919).

On their return to Darwin, Quilp was robbed, with the thieves taking his new portmanteau. Cahill wrote to Spencer (29 August 1919), 'Just fancy, stealing a Portmanteau from a native'.

Cahill listed Quilp as a permanent employee and horsebreaker at Oenpelli in a 1918 report (but with information relating to the period 1915-1917): 'Balalammon (Quilp), single, stockman, horsebreaker, and generally useful. Does most of the buffalo shooting for beef, and always to the fore with stock movements, droving, &c' (Report of the Administrator 1918: 47). Here Quilp was again noted for this affinity to horses. He was also mentioned as being treated for fever sometime between 30 June 1916 and 30 June 1917 (Report of the Administrator 1918: 48) and wanting to enlist to fight in the war in 1918 (Cahill to Spencer 30 June 1918; Figs 5 and 6).

Mulvaney (2004: 57) claims that the Aboriginal workers were probably guided by Quilp with his skills as a stockman and 'all-round man' widely praised for his work (e.g. Justice Ewing 1920: 131; Harris 1931). This is supported by Warburton's (1934: 144) account of meeting Quilp at Oenpelli about 1920: 'His manner was authoritative, and his methods business-like'. Stockmen were paid 25/- per week with 20/- retained for their keep (Cahill to Spencer 24 November 1921; Mulvaney 2004: 57).

Ruby Roney described how she and Quilp were often out riding. She recounted an incident where, once again, horses and their relationships with humans and animals shaped Quilp's experience:

> The hide was a valuable thing. There was a great sale for hides then, so it was a paying day, that. That was the only time I went after- a buffalo. But later on there was buffaloes come around and one of the boys there, a very faithful black boy we had named Quilp, everytime I went out riding, he'd say to me, 'Did you see any buffalo to day?' and I'd say, 'No, I

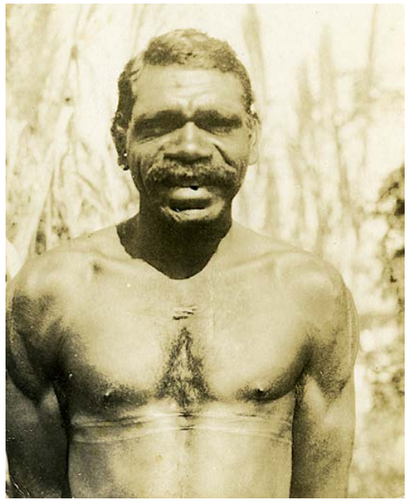


Figure 7. *Quilp (Yilari Balalaman) during the mission era in Oenpelli c. 1925–1930 (Northern Territory Archive Service, NTRS 694 P1 Box 4a Item 170).*

Figure 8. *'Butter Factory, boys on Xmas day 1925'. The old Paddy Cahill–era butter factory is in the background. In the foreground, the children are playing with their Christmas presents (Northern Territory Archive Service, NTRS694 P1 Box 4a Item 151).*

didn't'. (Roney 1985: 36).
So we went home and the black boy as usual, Quilp said, 'Did you see any buffalo tracks today?' I said, 'No, I didn't see a track at all', but I described the place, the creek, and I said, 'When we got in, that Mona' (that was my horse), 'got such a fright, the buffalo jumped. There was two buffaloes in the waterhole and Mona got such a fright that she fell over.' And I said, 'The buffaloes ran up the other side of the bank.' And the boy laughed. He thought I was having him on. And I said, 'No true, you go tomorrow and look, you'll see the tracks.' … Quilp went out the next day and didn't find the buffalo, but he saw where they'd been. So that was the end of those two buffaloes (Roney 1985: 37).

We do not know much about Quilp's relationship with local ceremonial activities, however, given his adoption by Rambler Cahill and the traditional scars obvious on his body in photographs, it is clear he was engaged in local ceremonial life (Fig. 7). As Cahill (to Spencer 24 November 1921) writes, 'Nearly all the station boys are away at a sacred corroboree'.

Mission era

With the departure of the Cahill family and following a brief change-over period, Oenpelli was taken over by the Anglican Church Missionary Society in 1925 (Cole 1975; May et al. 2020b). Dramatic changes in work and lifestyle conditions took place. The first was the immediate cessation of wage payments to all Aboriginal staff at the mission, including Quilp. According to Cole, Aboriginal workers were given the choice of whether to leave or stay, but with limited alternatives and keeping in mind kin and connection to Country, Quilp and others remained (Cole 1975: 24).

As 'head-boy', Quilp moved from 30/- per week to working for rations. Superintendent Alf Dyer, quoted by Cole (1975: 33), spoke of Quilp's work, noting, in particular, his ability working with horses: 'I could not do what he could do when breaking in horses. He could track where I could not see a mark. He could build a good cattle yard and do all classes of cattle work'.

Family life

Quilp married Maggie Mugurula (also Magarorda, Margurulu, Muk-errula) (skin name: 'Nalangil', probably, Ngalkangila) in Oenpelli about 1927. Mugurula was born around 1900 (Northern Territory Probate Index 1911–1994) and listed as one of the 'wives and mothers fed at the station, wives of the working men' in a report for the years 1915–1917 (Report of Administrator 1918: 48). This likely referred to her earlier marriage to another Aboriginal stockman at Oenpelli, Paddy Ingardbarry. Ingardbarry was the brother of Senior Traditional Owner Nipper Marakarra. Indeed, Goldie Blyth (pers. comm. 2020) recalled her own mother (Rebecca Garijala) saying she worked with Quilp's wife at the butter factory during Paddy Cahill's time at Oenpelli (Fig. 8). Missionary Mrs Thorne states that 'Margurulu' has been 'a great comfort to us in the house during some of our busy times caused by sickness and food shortage' (Mrs Thorne quoted in Cole 1975: 31).

Goldie Blyth (pers. comm. 2020) recalled some stories she was told about Quilp and his wife during an interview in September 2020:

> He was there as a stockman and buffalo shooter and all that but they got to know him — he spoke Wardaman language but I think he spoke Kunwinjku too but I'm not sure. They welcomed him to be there with shooting buffalos and hide for the overseers and that.
> ***Interviewer:*** *So did your father Dick Walumbi work with Quilp?*
> Yes and he was one of [the] buffalo shooters … with him but my grandfather, Nipper [Marakarra], as far as I know he took him under his wings and taught him about all that Gunbalanya area and that when he first got there … He was one that made sure he was alright … because coming from different area but language barrier sometimes but you get to know them and you teach them your language and they pick it up really quick so in those old days they just welcome anyone that came into the mission to help.
> ***Interviewer****: It's interesting because Oenpelli does seem to have had a lot of people from all across Arnhem Land coming to live there during Nipper's time.*
> Because at the time my grandfather, Nipper, he welcomed everyone from different countries or areas … in those days it wasn't a community but just a place where all the people [lived] and he told them they were welcome to come and stay there. He said 'you all speak different languages but I welcome you to come to my country and stay there' and that words that he told me when I was growing up. He told me about him [Quilp], he said 'I adopted him from that way and he come here to work, him and his wife', yes because she was in the kitchen, I think …
> She [Maggie] helped Mrs Dyer in the kitchen and helping her treat the sick people and that. Yeah, that old lady, Mrs Dyer, she cared for a lot of people … I remember other people was telling me that she worked in that kitchen making bread, helping Mrs Dyer, healing people, you know, like that. They said she was a good worker and things. Lot of those people that come from other stations, they want to help others, other countrymen.

Missionary Nell Harris (et al. 1998: 21) recalled an amusing story relating to Quilp, told to her by Mrs Dyer:

> He was married to a native woman called Magarorda. She used to help Mrs Dyer on Saturdays. She was helping clean up the dispensary one Saturday and Quilp came up and told Magarorda to go back to the camp. Mrs Dyer tried to shoo him off. Mrs Dyer used to tell this joke, but she didn't know it was on herself. Everyone thought she was the boss of Oenpelli — she was ten years older than Mr Dyer, but she worshipped him; thought the sun shone out of him, and would do anything for him. So on this occasion, Quilp said, 'Do you want to wear my trousers, too'.

Sometime between September 1930 and September 1931 Quilp left the Oenpelli Mission. The missionaries had been trying hard to convert him to Christianity, and perhaps he was almost convinced. Dyer stated in 1930 that 'Quilp has tried hard to help us, he is not far from the Kingdom' (Dyer 1930). Perhaps the departure of Dyer for furlough down south and the superintendency of Richard ('Dick') Harris in 1931 prompted the move. By September 1931, Harris was lamenting the loss of Quilp, particularly for his stock work: 'I miss Quilp very much, Nipper is not his equal in stock work, although perhaps a better leader of men' (Harris 1931).

The artist

As a rock art artist, we only know of one painting made by Quilp, the painted horse (Fig. 1). The painting was attributed to him in a report by anthropologist Frank McKeown relating to the development of the Nabarlek mine (McKeown 1989: 26). It is situated in a well-known grazing area for cattle not far from the Oenpelli Station. The report states: 'Karabalinya … Outlier with large shelter. Place name. Rock shelter with rock paintings, including striking example of contact art, a horse's head complete with reins, painted by Paddy Cahill's head stockman, Quilp'. During his site survey, McKeown consulted extensively with local Aboriginal people, including many elders. This includes Jacob Nayinggul snr, Moses Mangiru, Billynarra Nabegeyo, Billyeyka Nabegeyo, Harry Maralngurra, Hannah Mangiru, Joseph Girrabul, Carol Garnaradj, Isiah Burranali, Mindarbal Manakgu, Balarrda Manakgu, Priscilla Girrabul, Mick Maralngurra, Timothy Nadjowh, Jonathan Maralngurra, Johnny Ralkal (Djogiba) and Thompson Yulidjirri. He cited and used earlier reports, which we were unable to access for this research, to guide his survey. In short, McKeown's identification of Quilp as the artist was underpinned by extensive Aboriginal consultation. Chaloupka (1993: 200) also included a photograph of the painting but does not identify the artist. Carmel Schrire (White) (pers. comm. 2020) likewise photographed the painting in the early 1960s calling the site 'Jirit'.

We also know that Quilp created bark paintings that today form part of the Baldwin Spencer/Paddy Cahill Collection at Museums Victoria. Cahill mentioned Quilp in correspondence relating to the collection's formation, stating that there was no need to send further compensation to Aboriginal artists as they already had enough money.

> Professor, you ought not to send any more money to me for the natives. Do you know that I have over £20 in the bank for Mitcher-lackie, Romula has about £15 — , Quilp about £20 — , Mura-garna £10, Nulwoyo £10 and a boy named Im-merher £4, so you see that they are all solvent. … All the other natives said that I was to take the money to Sydney with me and give it to Quilp and Mitcherlackie and they could buy some thing for the others; in Sydney. So you see that they have plenty of money (Cahill to Spencer 26 March 1916).

Unfortunately, the bark paintings acquired between 1912 and 1920 by Spencer and Cahill do not have individual artists' names recorded. However, with his £20 in payments Quilp, was evidently a major contributor. Mulvaney (2004: 60) suggested that: 'Spencer … commissioned those whom he judged as superior artists, leaving the subject entirely to the artist's choice'. We can assume then that Quilp was considered an accomplished artist at this stage of his life. Mulvaney (2004: 60) suggests that Quilp's inclusion in the collection indicates that the bark paintings were not produced for or associated with ceremonies because Quilp was not from that Country. However, this is a misunderstanding of Quilp's adopted place in the local Aboriginal community. Quilp's adoption by Rambler Cahill and his body scarification indicate the contrary, that he was deeply engaged in local ceremonial activities. His art, therefore, may well have reflected these experiences and cultural knowledge.

Autumn years in Oenpelli

Quilp's whereabouts after 1931 are somewhat of a mystery. He and his wife disappear from the written historical records for a period but reappear in 1957 in the Northern Territory Register of Wards which listed them as living at Mt Bundy Station. Quilp returned to Oenpelli soon after. Several people remember him living as an old man in and near the Oenpelli Mission in the 1960s. Linguist Peter Carroll (pers comm. 2020) recalls that he was a 'kind and gentle old man' when he knew him. Likewise, despite only being a young child, Graham Badari remembers Quilp as an old man. His grandparents Dorcas and Joshua cared for Quilp in his old age. Badari (pers. comm. 2020) remembered both Quilp's art and his ability with horses:

> Quilp … every day I seen him sitting in that shed, I thought he was from somewhere [else] but the old people they were telling me his name Quilp — old man, old man … He was staying there, staying there. Going down here.
>
> … My grandmother Dorcas and my grandfather Joshua ... He was staying with them. They looked after him. Because he was an old man, really old, when I seen him when I was little he was a really old man, he got a walking stick and everything … I seen him in the [19]60s maybe [19]62 or something.
>
> … he paint that rock art somewhere, he used to be stockman, horse rider.

Ruby Roney captured a moment she shared with Quilp just a few years before he died. On returning to Oenpelli for her first visit in 50 years she sought out her old friend. 'And then there was poor old Quilp. He didn't belong to Arnhem Land, he came from Delamere. Uncle got him as a little boy and reared him and he was a good faithful native and he was away down the river. He always wanted to go back to Delamere but nobody seemed to take him because, as I know, the natives like to die in their own country. However, we went and paid a visit to poor old Quilp before we left the river' (Roney 1985: 51). Further, Bill Neidji recalled that Quilp worked at Mt Bundy but returned to Oenpelli to die and be buried alongside Nadambala, his adoptive father (Mulvaney 2004: 9). It seems Quilp may have eventually adopted some elements of Christianity into his life, as missionaries predicted. Badari (pers. comm. 2020) recalled that Quilp would attend church with Dorcas during the later years of his life, and this may be one reason he was buried in the Oenpelli cemetery.

Quilp died and was buried in the Oenpelli cemetery on 14 June 1970. While his official age at death was given as 70, he was likely closer to 84. His official place of birth is listed as Delamere, and his wife Maggie Mugurula was said to have passed less than a year earlier, on 17 July 1969 (National Archives of Australia, E887).

Discussion and conclusion

From a global perspective, western Arnhem Land provides us with a unique opportunity to explore contact rock art from a biographical perspective of known rock art artists. So, how and why is Quilp's life story important for understanding the painted horse, and how and why is the painted horse important in understanding Quilp's life story? First, unfolding the artists and their life stories behind contact rock art is important because it helps us frame the social and historical contexts of the cross-cultural encounters that resulted in the artworks. It is also crucial for dating the rock art in question. In this case, Quilp's horse was probably created between 1910 and when he left Oenpelli in the early 1930s.

Focusing on artists' life stories helps us move from a general discussion about cultural responses to cross-cultural interactions in colonial contexts to view contact rock art as a reflection of specific persons' lived experiences. In short, contact rock art is biographical. In western Arnhem Land, we have the opportunity to explore several rock art artists' biographies; sometimes, we are even able to gain insights into why such artworks were created (e.g. May et al. in press a). Sometimes their art may depict particular events rather than general experiences. For instance, Bardayal 'Lofty' Nadjamerrek recorded his encounter with a white man on a horse at Mainoru Station by painting it back in his Country (Munro 2010: 91 see also Garde 2004). Admittedly, such information is as rare as it is important, not least from a global perspective and understanding of contact rock art (cf. Smith 2010; Berrojalbiz 2015; May and Goldhahn 2019).

While understanding artists' biographies can shed light on their art, how might their art help us understand individuals' life stories? A clue can be found in the close bond that Aboriginal stockmen seem to have developed with their fellow workers (see Fijn 2017; McGrath 1987). A recurrent theme in the accounts of Quilp's life is his great knowledge and skill as a stockman, particularly his ability to work with horses. He acted as a so-called middle man, trusted and praised by Cahill and missionaries alike at the Oenpelli settlement. Horses were crucial to most tasks. Photographs from this time reveal that Quilp was entrusted with items not often available to many Aboriginal people in this region at the time: trousers, a shirt or coat, a hat, a firearm and a horse, setting him apart from most other Aboriginal men (Fig. 3). These material possessions signal his special status at the Oenpelli settlement, both to white colonisers and other Aboriginal people. This status was built on Quilp's skill as a stockman and his social capital through his long-term association with the Cahill family.

In 1918, Cahill stated that Quilp did 'most of the buffalo shooting for beef' and that he was 'always to the fore with stock movements, droving, &c' (Report of the Administrator 1918: 47), so we can assume that he mastered these tasks with success. Mustering cattle was a tedious task, demanding long hours and sometimes weeks of camping away from the main settlement. Horses and stockmen grew together, forming close emotional ties (McGrath 1987; Fijn 2017). Quilp was a fearless and skilled buffalo shooter. In the task of hunting buffalo, this bond between horse and rider was put to a test. It was a dangerous task (Levitus 1982, 2011; Feakins 2019). Both white shooters and Aboriginal workers were, at times, seriously injured or even killed in the course of the work. The interplay and trust between rider and horse were crucial; a mistake could lead to the death of either or both (see Cole 2013: 207). Indeed, some of Cahill and Quilp's close calls are recounted in the Adelaide *Register* (3 February 1919).

Historical and biographical accounts from the buffalo shooting era in western Arnhem Land reflect the great care given to a well-trained horse (e.g. Warburton 1934; Cole 1988, 1992). Often it seems non-Indigenous shooters paid more care about the life and well-being of their favourite horse than their Aboriginal workforce. For instance, they often commemorated the name of their horses, but not necessarily their Aboriginal workers. The few Aboriginal workers mentioned in the records were middle-men (Warburton 1934; Cole 1988, 1992), the cultural meditators and 'go-betweeners', such as Quilp.

Turning to the painting itself (Fig. 1), it looks as if Quilp has depicted a delicate light riding horse rather than a heavy working horse. This is noticeable by the convex bridge of the horse's nose and the long head. The carefully outlined mule, eyes and ears, gives an intimate feeling, suggesting that it is not a generic horse but a particular known horse. The horse looks calm and content. The position of the ears may indicate that it is listening backwards, maybe paying attention to his buddy on his back. This is in line with Chaloupka's (1993: 200) interpretation that this is 'a sentimental portrayal of the artist's favourite horse'. Quilp's painting seems to celebrate and commemorate a close bond to his horse, a horse that without a doubt would have had a name, associated stories of adventure and mishap, and a legacy that evidently lasted long after both the artist and his beloved horse had passed away (cf. McKeown 1989: 26).

We have arrived at a richer and fuller understanding of the artist's relationships with horses from our biographical analysis. Yes, the painting may be 'sentimental', but we can see that this affective expression was forged through decades of working with horses in a fraught colonial context in which there were few options for Aboriginal people. For Quilp, his particular affinity and skill with horses enabled him to adopt a vital mediating role between Aboriginal people and outsiders. At key moments in his life, horses were there.

Like all living beings in western Arnhem Land, horses were integrated into the kinship system and linked to specific moieties and sub-moieties (e.g. Taylor 1996; May et al. in press a). Based on their Oenpelli fieldwork, Berndt and Berndt (1970: 65) found that all these animals belonged to the same *ngaraidgu* matrimoiety and the '*jariburig*' (*yariburig*) semi-moiety whose symbol is *gunag* (i.e. fire). The horse, and Quilp's relationship with it, gave Quilp power to engage productively with non-Indigenous society and find ways of asserting the interests of his people as well as his personal interests as a highly-skilled expert stockman. Perhaps the painting depicts one of the many horses mentioned in the episodes and historical records associated with Quilp described throughout this article.

Our conclusion about how an artist's biography can help us unfold new information and knowledge about contact rock art and how contact rock art created by known artists can help frame the artists' biography is that they are entangled. Both relate to and constitute each other. Contact rock art is biographical and applying interdisciplinary methodologies (including archaeology, rock art research, ethnography, history and more) are key to unfolding individual stories and contact histories. The more we can reveal about these relationships, the more we can learn about how rock art was made meaningful through cross-cultural interaction in colonial times.

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