WARNDARANG STORY

MASSACRE AT HODGSON DOWNS

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Recorded at Ngukurr settlement, Northern Territory, 1973

This story was recorded at Ngukurr settlement, formerly Roper River mission, near the southern boundary of the Arnhem Land reserve, in late 1973. The narrator was Isaac Joshua, the last proficient speaker of the language. He was born around 1904 and died in 1974.

Isaac did not witness the events described, which occurred before he was born. He was told the story by his father who did witness the episode or at least was in the area when it occurred.

Except for the few weeks I studied with him in 1973–74, Isaac had not used Warndarang much during the last twenty or so years of his life; instead, he spoke Mara, Roper Pidgin, and other languages such as Alawa. Partly as a result, this and other stories obtained from him were characterised by short phrases punctuated by brief pauses (indicated by commas). One or two grammatical errors were corrected at Isaac’s request. However, the number of emendations has been kept to a minimum.
2. The road to Nukus, by 500, the same as the road to Shymkent, is only 100 km. A shorter route proves to be much more difficult. 

4. The city of Nukus is at the confluence of the rivers Ust-Urt and Kyzylkum. The city itself is divided into two parts: the old town and the new town. The old town is mostly residential, while the new town is more commercial and industrial.
Translation

1. My (classificatory) nephew (sister’s son), Long Peter, went to Queensland. They gave him many horses, the White man gave them to him. He took the horses from there to Hodgson Downs.
2. There (Long Peter and others) are some of the horses. Then they left for Roper Valley.
3. There were many Aboriginals there—Ngalakgan and Rengarrnga. There they ate the horses. They finished them off, they killed all of them. They danced a corroboree. After that Long Peter went back to Hodgson Downs.
4. The White man in Queensland then went looking for him. He asked, ‘Where is he?’ They told him, ‘He went to Roper Valley and is staying there’.
5. The White men assembled and followed him to Hodgson Downs. They found him there.
6. They asked Long Peter whether he had killed the horses. ‘No, they just died.’ They asked some other Aboriginals there, ‘What did this man do to the horses?’ ‘He and the others ate them until they finished them off.’
7. The next day they tied Long Peter up. A ghost gum still stands at that place, where they tied him up. The other Aboriginals were told to go cut firewood. They went and began cutting it.
8. ‘Why are we cutting this? Maybe they are going to shoot us.’ One old man said this, ‘Hey! Something terrible is stabbing at me, something awful is cutting into me!’
9. The White men then came on horseback. They formed a circle around the Aboriginals, like this. The same old man said, ‘Something terrible is cutting into me. Look at them there! Just as I told you, there come the white men! Oh dear!’
10. The White men surrounded them. The horses were in a circle, like this. There were many old (Aboriginal) men there.
11. Another of the old men picked up a long stick, and poked a horse in the eye with it. It bucked and ran.
12. Then that old man went through the wall of horses. Some of the White men chased after him, others began shooting right there. Some other Aboriginals began running in various directions, this way and that.
13. Then some White men rode toward a stone hill chasing and shooting Aboriginals.

LINGUISTIC NOTES

In reading interstellar glosses the reader should know that the label 3Sg especially in pronouns in the verb complex, can refer to a seconded number category as well as the specifically singular category. Non-human nouns form a dual (i.e. that dual prefix, you and correspond to dual pro-nouns in the verb complex) but their plural is identical in all respects to their singular. Thus re-pentjaru, even when corresponding to a 3Sg verb had a pluralized, may really refer to ‘horses’ rather than to ‘just horse’. Similarly, although human nouns have plural as well as dual and singular prefixes, any of them can be optionally replaced by re (this a non-human NC prefix), a numerically neutralized prefix used morphologically as a singular and therefore cross-referenced by 3Sg pronouns in the verb. Not all intransitive categories expressed by verb (or AUN) suffixes are labeled; in fact, three suffices are not even segmented by hyphens. Time (past, present, future) and mood (normal, potential) can be glossed from the translation and morphological context. Aspect (continuous, punctual) which is not always easily glossed, is indicated. It should be noted that the gloss given to the main verb in a man-verb plus AUN combination is really the gloss for the combination of a particular main verb with a particular AUX. Articles consist of a nominal prefix plus pronoun. They provide the elements they modify. The most neutral non-human class prefix is wa, so the form the article takes when modifying locative and temporal adverbs is wa-ya. This wa-ya also has syntactic use. To focus on a constituent X you put it at the beginning of the clause, with the rest of the clause provided by wa-ya, hence X wa-ya 5 (where 5 is the rest of the clause). The entire clause can be subordinated to another clause (as a relative, general, etc.) by putting wa-ya at the beginning of the subordinated clause.

NOTES

(1) / indicate, for example, a 3Sg subject or a 3Sg object.
(2) + indicates the boundary between main verb and AUX complex.
(3) CEN represents conceptual motion.
(4) A Nunggulanya word.