

Cross Linguistic Study of the New Creation Story / Man on Day Three in Genesis

Languages 475 through 545
In Ancient Days, Even Small Beginnings

Read against 7 Days to Perfection, banner revision of September
7, 2026

Three studies for each language · Volume Eleven

An introduction, for the small things

For who hath despised the day of small things?

Zechariah 4:10 — the line the banner itself carries

The first ten volumes were built on a list ranked by how many people speak each language. That is a defensible way to start and a poor way to finish, because it sorts the world by the one measure that has nothing to do with what a language holds.

Here is what that method missed.

It missed a language in northern Queensland with no words for left and right — where a speaker says there is an ant on your south leg, and every person in the community knows which way north is at every moment, indoors, in the dark, blindfolded, after being driven in circles for an hour. Nine hundred people speak it.

It missed every signed language on earth. Revelation says the eternal gospel goes out to every tongue, and it is worth asking what that means for a people who do not use their tongues to speak. There are hundreds of signed languages, with grammar as full as any other, and one of them — in Nicaragua — was born in

front of researchers in 1977 and has been watched growing ever since. It is the only time anyone has seen a language begin.

It missed the languages that stand closest to the text itself.

Ugaritic was dug out of a mound in Syria in 1929, and it turned out to be a cousin of Hebrew so near that it changed how the Hebrew Bible is read. Akkadian holds a creation account older than Genesis. Aramaic is what Jesus spoke, and a few thousand people still speak a descendant of it. None of them cleared four hundred thousand speakers, so none of them made the list.

It missed the click languages, whose speakers belong to the oldest branches of human ancestry that anyone has traced. One of them has around a hundred consonants, more than any other language on earth. A few hundred people speak it.

It missed the languages that were brought back from the dead. A Massachusetts language whose last speaker died in the nineteenth century has children speaking it now, recovered from the first Bible printed anywhere in the Americas — a translation that kept a people's language alive for three centuries after the people themselves had stopped using it. Nobody who made that translation intended that. It is what happened.

What a small language is for

There is a habit of treating a language with two thousand speakers as a curiosity, and a language with two hundred million as a fact.

But the number of speakers measures the history of armies, trade and empire. It does not measure what the language can say.

Some of the strongest results in this whole study came from languages almost nobody has heard of. The longest book anyone has ever written is a creation account in Buginese. The Hawaiian creation chant is built as a genealogy and starts with the coral polyp. The Kyrgyz hold half a million lines of verse without writing any of it down. Not one of those is a large language.

If the gospel goes out in every tongue, then the tongue with nine hundred speakers is carrying as much of it as the one with a billion, and possibly something the billion cannot say.

This volume gathers seventy-one of them. Some are small. Some are ancient and no longer spoken by anyone, but are still read. Some are signed rather than spoken. Some were dead and are not any more. A few are so unlike anything else that linguists argue about whether the usual categories apply to them at all.

Each gets the same three studies as every other language in these volumes. What the language holds. What the tradition holds. What happens at the fourteen seams.

The question this study is asking

What is God speaking — and do we have ears to hear?

7 Days to Perfection



Pleading the Cause of the Poor,
the Needy, the Fatherless...
TO WIN IT...

"Is that not what it means
to know Me?" says Yahuah



"In the whole land," declares the LORD,
"two-thirds of the 'fetuses'
will be struck down and perish;
yet one-third will be left in it.
This third I will put into the fire
I will refine them like silver
and test them like gold.
Zechariah 13:7-9 • present day



The Revelation of Jesus Christ: Do Not Lay a Hand on Him! The Mystery of God's Will: to End all Sacrifice & Offerings that Father be Glorified Again! Genesis 22:10-12

Jesus returns again as a Man, in a body prepared for Him in the fulness of the Book. Also as God the Maker, who by the power of His presence causes Old Heaven and Earth to pass away. **His Eternal Word & Name: Yashuah, exalted above the Heavens.**
The Master returns in the First Resurrection, in the Spirit of Prophecy, on the 3rd Day when the Hour of Judgment has come. He is **the Beginning** of the New Creation, and **the End** of the Old.
The Good Shepherd and Teacher returns as a thief, suddenly, unexpectedly robbing all claims of authority from those who throughout history have supposed themselves worthy to speak for God.
The Bridegroom is seeking a Bride from His side who rejoices seeing Him. One who is desiring to bring forth the generation not yet created, precious jewels of Zion, who inherit eternal life.
The Overcomer. The ONLY one found worthy. It is NOT GOOD that He be alone. — Revelation 12:11 **...and they overcame...** not loving their own souls even unto death.



01 DAY ONE

Light of the World

1 In the beginning God created the Heaven and the Earth.
2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.
3 And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.
4 And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.
5 And God saw the light, that it was good.
6 And God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.
7 And the evening and the morning were the first day.

...we will no longer be infants, tossed back & forth by the waves & blown here & there by every wind of teaching & by the cunning & craftiness of people... speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of Him who is the head, that is, Christ.

02 DAY TWO

Wisdom Above & Below

1 And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.
2 And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so.
3 And God called the firmament Heaven.
4 And the evening and the morning were the second day.



Looking for evidence for a God?
One whose existence is eternal & therefore being communicated with us beyond time & space?

The Little Scroll

Revelation 10 & 14:6-8 & 5:1-5...
Psalm 118:22-24 — Haggai 2:6-9

03 DAY THREE

Humility: the End of Pride
Old Creation Order Passes Away

1 And God said, Let the waters under the Heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so.
2 And God called the Dry Land: Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas:



There was no one found worthy to open The Bible or even look inside. Not even anyone who claimed unbiased Science, Reason & Skepticism, nor Materialism & Atheism.

God set aside all arguments as proud, foolish & stupid, shaking up every claim of knowledge & authority throughout history. **Two unshakable things in His Word** — hidden in plain sight — **expose the blindness of proud institutions of men.** They have become worth less than nothing, for having despised the Day of small beginnings.



Great White Throne Lamb's Book of Life
Very Good Judgment
Most Names Expunged
God Justified & Glorified
Revelation 20:11-21:4



John wept & wept. The Little Scroll.
Mystery of God revealed. Knowledge passes away. Proud waves halt.
Must prophecy again.

03 THE MAN ON DAY 3

Making All Things New. **Rising** to Live Without Scars

3 This is the Genealogical Record of the Heavens and of the Earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the Earth and the Heavens,
4 And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew:
5 for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground.
6 But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground.
7 And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.
8 and God saw that it was good.
9 And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his

kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so.
10 And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind.
11 And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.
12 And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden,
13 and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.
14 And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads.
15 The name of the first is Pison: that is it which compasseth the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold;

16 And the gold of that land is good: there is bdellium and the onyx stone.
17 And the name of the second river is Gihon: the same is it that compasseth the whole land of Ethiopia.
18 And the name of the third river is Hiddekel: that is it which goeth toward the east of Assyria. And the fourth river is Euphrates.
19 And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it:
20 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat:
21 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.
22 and God saw that it was good.
23 And the evening and the morning were the third day.



04 DAY FOUR

Solving for Not Good

1 And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him an help meet for him.
2 And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years:
3 And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so.
4 And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also.
5 And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth.
6 And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness:
7 And God saw that it was good.
8 And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.

05 DAY FIVE

Restoring the Fish & Birds

1 And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, **2** and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.
3 And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, **4** and every winged fowl after his kind:
5 and God saw that it was good.
6 And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth.
7 And the evening and the morning were the fifth day.



"Throw your net on the right side of the boat..." Even with 153 large fish, the net was not torn.
John 21:4-11

06 DAY SIX

Counting Mother AND Child 好 — **Valuing** Life AND Liberty — **The End of Child Sacrifice**

1 And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so.
2 And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind:
3 and God saw that it was good.
4 And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them:
5 and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.
6 And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air; and to

every Beast of the field;
7 but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him.
8 And God said, Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness:
9 and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.
10 And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof;
11 And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.
12 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he

him; male and female created he them.
13 And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.
15 And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.
16 Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.
[the child, at moment of conception; Malachi 2:15]
17 And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

18 And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.
19 And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so.
20 And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.
21 And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.



07 DAY SEVEN

Perfect Prince of Peace

1 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.
2 And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made.
3 And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.

Key findings across the seventy-one

Ten results, before the individual studies.

1 **Guugu Yimithirr has no left and right.**

Everything is located by compass direction. Speakers track north continuously without effort, and they do it from childhood. Tested in unfamiliar buildings, in the dark, and after being deliberately disoriented, they still point correctly. It is the clearest demonstrated case anywhere of a language requiring a habit of mind.

2 **A language was born in front of witnesses in 1977.**

Deaf Nicaraguan children, brought together in a school for the first time, produced a full language within a generation. Their teachers did not have it and could not teach it. The youngest children made a grammar the older ones had not, and researchers have documented every stage.

3 **Ugaritic came out of the ground in 1929 and changed how Genesis is read.**

A Northwest Semitic language, close to Hebrew, in tablets nobody knew existed. It gave scholars vocabulary and poetic forms that had been guessed at for centuries, and it settled arguments about words in Genesis that had run since the Middle Ages.

4 **Akkadian holds a creation account older than this one, and it is not the same shape.**

The Enuma Elish makes the world from the body of a defeated being, and makes humans from the blood of a killed god to do the work the gods no longer wish to do. Genesis has no combat, no corpse, and gives the man a garden rather than a task-force.

5 **Taa has around a hundred consonants.**

More than any other language recorded. Its speakers, and those of the other click languages, belong to populations that genetic study places among the deepest branches of human ancestry.

6 **A language came back from a Bible printed in 1663.**

Wôpanâak had no speakers for over a century. John Eliot's translation — the first Bible printed in the Americas — together with land deeds and letters written by Wampanoag people themselves, was enough to reconstruct it. There are children raised speaking it now.

7 Tariana speakers are required to marry someone who speaks a different language.

Marrying within your own language is regarded as wrong, close to marrying a sibling. Everyone is raised multilingual by rule. Day 6 verse 16 says a man shall leave his father and his mother and cleave unto his wife.

8 Hixkaryana puts the object before the verb before the subject.

It says the equivalent of the man ate the fish as fish ate man. Before it was described in the 1970s, that word order was believed not to occur in human language at all. A few hundred people in the Amazon had it.

9 Ket may be a relative of Navajo.

A language of the Yenisei in Siberia, with about fifty speakers left, has been argued to be related to the Na-Dené languages of North America. If it holds, it is the only demonstrated link between a language of the Old World and one of the New.

10 Silbo Gomero is a language whistled across valleys.

Spanish rendered in whistles that carry several kilometres over ravines. It was nearly lost and is now taught in schools by law. A whole language carried on a sound that is not speech.

I. Aboriginal Australia

Fourteen more, from a continent that held perhaps two hundred and fifty languages and now has around a dozen still learned by children.

Guugu Yimithirr

Speakers: about 900 · **Family:** Pama-Nyungan · **Where:** Hopevale, north Queensland · **Bible:** partial

One What the language holds

No left, no right, no in front of you

Guugu Yimithirr locates everything by compass direction. There is an ant on your south leg. Move the cup a little to the north. The man standing west of the tree.

This means a speaker must know which way they are facing at all times, and they do. Tested inside unfamiliar buildings, in darkness, and after being driven along winding roads for an hour, Guugu Yimithirr speakers point north correctly. Children have it by about seven.

When they retell a film, they gesture in the real directions the action happened in the film, which means they remember the scene oriented to the compass rather than to themselves.

It is the clearest case anyone has demonstrated of a language requiring a habit of mind that speakers of other languages do not have.

This is also the language that gave English the word **kangaroo**, recorded by Cook's party at the Endeavour River in 1770.

Two What the tradition holds

Country is held in song and in named places, and the direction system is part of how country is known. A person can describe a place they have not visited in years and the directions will be right.

The Hopevale mission gathered speakers of several languages, and Guugu Yimithirr became the shared one.

Three At the seams

The crossing at Day 3 verse 11, where the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, meets a people for whom eastward is not a literary touch but the most ordinary way of saying where anything is.

The crossing at Day 3 verses 15 to 18, the four rivers and where each one goes, meets speakers who cannot say any of it without direction and would find it strange that other languages can.

Dyirbal

Speakers: fewer than 10 · Family: Pama-Nyungan · Where: north Queensland · Bible: none

One What the language holds

Dyirbal sorts every noun into one of four classes, and one of them contains women, fire, dangerous things, and certain birds. The grouping became famous outside linguistics as an example of a category that makes no sense until you learn the principle behind it, which is association: the birds are in it because they are held to be the spirits of women.

A whole second vocabulary for speaking near a mother-in-law

Dyirbal had **Jalnguy**, an entirely separate set of words used in the presence of certain relatives — a mother-in-law, a cross-cousin of the opposite sex. Same grammar, different words for everything.

A speaker switched into it the moment such a person came within earshot. It is among the fullest avoidance registers ever recorded, and it is gone.

Two What the tradition holds

The rainforest people of this country had a material culture including the only shields of their kind in Australia, painted with designs belonging to particular men.

Almost no one is left who speaks Dyirbal fully, and the younger speech recorded in the 1980s had lost most of the grammar within two generations.

Three At the seams

The crossing at Day 6 verses 4 to 7, where the creatures are named, meets a language that sorts every creature into classes on principles a stranger cannot guess.

A language with fewer than ten speakers meets a text that says it is for every tongue. This is one of the places where that promise is running out of time.

Kayardild

Speakers: fewer than 10 · **Family:** Tangkic · **Where:** Bentinck Island, Gulf of Carpentaria · **Bible:** none

One What the language holds

Tense marked on nouns

Kayardild puts tense on nouns as well as verbs. A noun can be marked past, so a sentence says something like: the man-past speared the fish-past with the spear-past.

And it stacks case endings several deep, one on top of another, in a way that was thought not to be possible before this language was described. Linguists working on case systems had to widen the theory to fit it.

The Kaiadilt of Bentinck Island were among the last Aboriginal people in Australia to have sustained contact, in the 1940s, after a tidal surge poisoned their water. Almost the whole population was removed to Mornington Island.

Two What the tradition holds

The Kaiadilt made stone fish traps in the tidal flats, low walls that hold fish as the tide falls, and some are very old and still work.

After the removal, Kaiadilt women who had grown up on the island began painting it in old age, from memory, and their work is now in national collections.

Three At the seams

The crossing at Day 3 verse 1, let the waters be gathered together and let the dry land appear, meets a people whose island's fresh water was taken by the sea within living memory, and who were moved off it.

A language that marks the past on nouns could in principle mark the whole seven-day account as past in a way no other language can.

Bininj Kunwok

Speakers: about 2,000 · Family: Gunwinyguan · Where: western Arnhem Land · Bible: partial

One What the language holds

Bininj Kunwok is polysynthetic to an extreme: a single word can carry a subject, an object, a body part, a direction, a time and a verb, and speakers build them without hesitation.

It is one of the few Australian languages still being learned by children, and it is used in schools at Gunbalanya and Maningrida.

Two What the tradition holds

The rock art of this country includes painting that has been dated back tens of thousands of years and was still being added to in the twentieth century — one of the longest continuous artistic traditions anywhere on earth.

The **Rainbow Serpent**, Ngalyod, moved through the country making it, and is painted in the shelters.

The **Mimih** spirits are said to have taught people to hunt and to paint, and are shown as very thin figures who live in the rock.

Three At the seams

The crossing at Day 6 verse 3, where the creeping thing is called good, meets a people whose maker of country moves as a serpent.

The crossing at Day 3 verse 2 into verse 3, into an account of how things came to be, meets a record painted on rock and added to for four hundred centuries.

Djambarrpuyngu

Speakers: about 3,000 · **Family:** Pama-Nyungan, Yolngu · **Where:** northeast Arnhem Land · **Bible:** partial, substantial

One What the language holds

Djambarrpuyngu is the most widely spoken Aboriginal language in the Northern Territory and is used across clan boundaries, so it functions as a shared tongue in a region where clan and language normally run together.

It has a dual and distinguishes an inclusive from an exclusive we, so Day 6 verse 8 and verse 12 both take positions.

Two What the tradition holds

The Yolngu Dhuwa and Yirritja halves order everything, and the Djan'kawu sisters made the country and named it as they travelled.

In 2008 a Yolngu man addressed the Australian parliament in this language. It was the first time an Aboriginal language had been spoken on the floor of that chamber.

Three At the seams

The crossing at Day 6 verse 7 into verse 8, Let Us make man, is answered by the language, which must say whether the one being made is inside that Us.

The crossing at Day 6 verses 4 to 7, the naming, meets a people whose country was made by two sisters who named it as they walked.

Wik-Mungkan

Speakers: about 1,000 · **Family:** Pama-Nyungan · **Where:** Cape York · **Bible:** partial

One What the language holds

Wik-Mungkan is one of the larger surviving languages of Cape York and has a complex system of verb serialisation, stringing verbs together to describe a single event.

Two What the tradition holds

The Wik peoples brought the case that established in Australian law that pastoral leases and native title could coexist — a decision that changed the legal map of the country in 1996.

The **Aurukun** carvings and the dance traditions carry the clan stories, and camp dogs, sharks and crocodiles all appear as ancestral figures.

Three At the seams

The crossing at Day 3 verse 11, where the man is put into the garden to dress it and to keep it, meets a people who argued in court and won on the question of who keeps the land.

Ngaanyatjarra

Speakers: about 1,000 · **Family:** Pama-Nyungan · **Where:** Western Desert · **Bible:** partial

One What the language holds

Ngaanyatjarra is close to Pitjantjatjara and has a dual and an inclusive-exclusive distinction. It is one of the few Australian languages with growing rather than shrinking use.

Two What the tradition holds

The Ngaanyatjarra lands cover a quarter of a million square kilometres of desert, and the **Tjukurrpa** holds it in song.

Some of the last families to come in from the desert did so in the 1960s, and people are living who were born in country their children have only visited.

Three At the seams

The crossing at Day 3 verse 1, the waters gathered together into one place, meets a desert people whose most valuable knowledge is where the water is and who holds the right to it.

Martu Wangka

Speakers: about 800 · Family: Pama-Nyungan · Where: Pilbara and Western Desert · Bible: partial

One What the language holds

Martu Wangka formed at Jigalong from several closely related Western Desert varieties brought together. It has a dual and an inclusive-exclusive distinction.

Two What the tradition holds

Martu women hunt with fire, burning patches of spinifex in a mosaic to flush lizards and to bring new growth. Ecologists studying it found that the burning pattern increases the diversity of the country rather than damaging it — a practice held as law that turns out to be good management.

The **Seven Sisters** songline crosses Martu country: the Pleiades pursued across the desert by a man, with places along the route where things happened. It runs for thousands of kilometres and is held by several peoples in sections.

Three At the seams

The crossing out of Day 4 verse 1 into verse 2 meets a people who hold a songline about the Pleiades running across half a

continent — the same cluster named in scores of traditions elsewhere in these volumes.

Nyangumarta

Speakers: about 200 · **Family:** Pama-Nyungan · **Where:** Pilbara · **Bible:** partial

One What the language holds

Nyangumarta has a dual and an inclusive-exclusive distinction, and a system of kinship terms that governs how any two people may speak to each other.

Two What the tradition holds

Nyangumarta people were central to the 1946 Pilbara strike, when Aboriginal pastoral workers walked off the stations over pay and conditions and stayed out for three years. It is among the longest strikes in Australian history and is remembered in the language.

Three At the seams

The crossing at Day 3 verse 11, the man put into the garden to keep it, meets a people who walked off the land they had been working for nothing and would not come back.

Bunuba

Speakers: about 100 · **Family:** Bunuban · **Where:** the Kimberley · **Bible:** none

One What the language holds

Bunuba is not Pama-Nyungan — it belongs to one of the small northern families that cover the top of the continent and are quite unlike the languages of the rest of it. It has complex verbs built from a small set of roots plus a coverb.

Two What the tradition holds

Jandamarra, a Bunuba man, led a resistance in the 1890s from the limestone ranges, and the account of it is held in Bunuba and has been staged and filmed by his descendants.

The Devonian limestone of the Kimberley is an ancient reef, and the gorges cut through it hold rock art and water through the dry.

Three At the seams

The crossing at Day 3 verse 1, the dry land appearing out of the water, meets a people whose country is a fossil reef standing in the desert.

Wiradjuri

Speakers: being relearned; several hundred · **Family:** Pama-Nyungan · **Where:** central New South Wales · **Bible:** none

One What the language holds

Wiradjuri country is the largest of any single language group in New South Wales. The language fell out of everyday use and has been rebuilt from word lists, missionary records and the memories of elders, and it is now taught in schools across the region.

A dictionary was compiled by Stan Grant Senior with a linguist over many years, and children in Wagga Wagga and elsewhere now learn it.

Two What the tradition holds

Baiame is the maker in the traditions of southeastern Australia, and carved trees, the **dendroglyphs**, marked burial and initiation grounds across Wiradjuri country. Most were cut down.

The word **Yindyamarra** — respect, going slowly, doing things properly — has been taken up as a public principle and is carved on a university building.

Three At the seams

A language that stopped being spoken and is being spoken again meets a text that says the word does not pass away.

Noongar

Speakers: being relearned; several hundred · **Family:** Pama-Nyungan · **Where:** southwest Western Australia · **Bible:** none

One What the language holds

Noongar covers the whole southwestern corner of Australia and is being revived after long suppression. Shakespeare has been translated and performed in it, and place names across Perth are Noongar words.

Two What the tradition holds

Six seasons

The Noongar year has six seasons, not four: Birak, Bunuru, Djeran, Makuru, Djilba and Kambarang. Each is read from what is flowering, what the weather is doing and what can be taken.

The seasons do not begin on fixed dates. They begin when the country says so, and two years are not the same.

Day 4 verse 2 gives the lights for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years.

The **Wagyl**, a serpent, made the rivers and the waterways of the southwest, and the Swan River is its track.

Three At the seams

The crossing out of Day 4 verse 1 into verse 2 meets a people running a six-season year read from the flowering of plants rather than from a calendar.

Gamilaraay

Speakers: being relearned · **Family:** Pama-Nyungan · **Where:** northern New South Wales · **Bible:** none

One What the language holds

Gamilaraay is being rebuilt from nineteenth-century records and from recordings of the last fluent speakers. It is taught at

university level and in schools, and an online dictionary is used by the community.

The word **bina** means ear, and also to listen, and also to understand. In Gamilaraay having ears and hearing are the same word.

Two What the tradition holds

Gamilaraay country holds carved trees and ceremonial grounds, and the **Emu in the Sky** – a constellation seen not in stars but in the dark dust lanes of the Milky Way. Its position through the year says when emus are laying and when to gather eggs.

A constellation made of the dark between the stars rather than the stars.

Three At the seams

The crossing out of Day 4 verse 1 into verse 2, the lights for signs and seasons, meets a people who read the season from the shape of the darkness in the sky.

And Day 1 verse 2, darkness upon the face of the deep, meets a tradition in which darkness itself is a figure you can learn to see.

Kaurna

Speakers: being relearned · **Family:** Pama-Nyungan · **Where:** Adelaide plains · **Bible:** none; hymns and prayers translated 1840s

One What the language holds

Brought back from two missionaries' notebooks

The last speaker of Kaurna died in 1929. The language survived only in the notes of two German missionaries, Teichelmann and Schürmann, who wrote a grammar and vocabulary in 1840 and translated hymns and parts of scripture.

From 1989 the Kaurna community, working with linguists, rebuilt it. Sounds had to be reconstructed from German spelling conventions. Gaps had to be filled by making new words on Kaurna patterns.

It is now used in welcomes, in naming, in songs and in classrooms. Children learn it.

Two What the tradition holds

The Kaurna held the plains where Adelaide now stands, and **Tjilbruke's** journey along the coast, carrying his nephew's body and weeping so that springs came up where his tears fell, is the account of that country.

The springs are still there and are named.

Three At the seams

A language whose entire survival rests on missionaries writing down hymns and scripture meets a text those same translations were made from.

The crossing at Day 3 verse 1, the waters gathered, meets a country whose fresh springs are held to be a man's tears for a dead boy.

II. The Signed Languages

Eight languages carried in the hands. Hundreds exist; none appeared in the first ten volumes.

Nicaraguan Sign Language

Speakers: about 3,000 · **Family:** none — arose independently · **Where:** Nicaragua · **Began:** 1977

One What the language holds

The only time anyone has watched a language begin

Before 1977 deaf Nicaraguans were mostly isolated in their own families, using home signs understood only at home. Then a school opened in Managua and several hundred deaf children were brought together for the first time.

The teaching was in spoken Spanish and lip-reading, and it failed. But in the playground and on the buses the children began combining their home signs, and within a few years they had a shared system.

Then something happened that nobody expected. The younger children, arriving into that system, produced a grammar the older ones did not have — consistent verb agreement, spatial marking, the machinery of a full language. The system the older children had made was a pidgin. The younger children turned it into a language.

Their teachers could not have taught it, because their teachers did not have it. Researchers have documented every stage since.

It is the strongest evidence anywhere that language is not only learned but made, and that children make it.

Two What the tradition holds

The deaf community that formed around the language is itself the tradition — there was none before, because there was no community. It has grown its own poetry, its own storytelling and its own sense of history dated from 1977.

People who were among the first children are now elders in a culture that did not exist when they were born.

Three At the seams

The crossing into Day 1 verses 4 and 5, where God speaks and there is light and it is called good, meets a community whose own account of themselves begins with speech coming into being where there had been none.

And the whole banner meets a people for whom the fourteen seams cannot be shown by small capital letters at all. What makes the joins visible in English would have to be made again in space and movement.

American Sign Language

Speakers: several hundred thousand · **Family:** from French Sign Language · **Where:** United States, Canada · **Bible:** complete 2020

One What the language holds

ASL is not English on the hands. Its grammar is its own, and it is unrelated to British Sign Language despite both countries speaking English — ASL descends from the French system brought to Hartford in 1817.

It uses space grammatically: a signer places people and things at points in the space in front of them and then refers back to those points, so the relations between characters are held in the air and can be pointed at.

Verbs move between those points. One motion says he gave it to her, and the direction of the motion is the grammar.

A complete Bible, finished in 2020

The American Sign Language Version took thirty-nine years. It is not subtitles and not interpretation of a spoken reading — it is a translation into ASL, filmed, with deaf translators working from the Hebrew and Greek.

It was the first complete Bible in any signed language, anywhere, ever.

Two What the tradition holds

Deaf culture in the United States has its own history, including the 1880 Milan congress that banned signing in deaf education across much of the world and the long fight to reverse it, and the 1988 Gallaudet protest that installed the university's first deaf president.

ASL poetry and storytelling use handshape rhyme and movement in ways that have no equivalent in speech.

Three At the seams

The crossing at Day 6 verses 4 to 7, where the man names the creatures, meets a language in which a name can be a sign made from a person's own characteristic — deaf communities give name signs, and they are given rather than chosen.

The fourteen seams in the ASL Bible had to be handled without small capitals, which means the translators had to decide how to show the crossing that English shows typographically.

British Sign Language

Speakers: about 150,000 · **Family:** BANZSL · **Where:** United Kingdom · **Bible:** in progress

One What the language holds

BSL is unrelated to ASL and the two are not mutually intelligible. Its fingerspelling uses two hands where ASL uses one.

It was recognised as a language by the UK government only in 2003, and given legal status in 2022.

Two What the tradition holds

Deaf clubs were the centre of community life for generations, and much of the language's history was carried there rather than in any institution.

Regional variation is unusually strong: signs for numbers and colours differ noticeably between cities, because the residential schools each developed their own and pupils carried them home.

Three At the seams

A translation into BSL faces the same problem as ASL: the two divine names are distinguished in English by the shape of the letters, and a signed language has no letters to shape.

Auslan

Speakers: about 16,000 · **Family:** BANZSL · **Where:** Australia · **Bible:** partial

One What the language holds

Auslan descends from BSL and Irish Sign Language, and the two streams produced dialects that were taught in Protestant and Catholic deaf schools respectively and still differ.

Two What the tradition holds

Auslan has absorbed signs from Aboriginal sign languages in the north, where signed communication is used in ordinary hearing life — during mourning speech bans, while hunting, and across distance.

So a signed language of European descent and a signed language of Aboriginal descent meet in the same country, and one has borrowed from the other.

Three At the seams

The crossing at Day 1 verse 3, where the Spirit moves before anything is spoken, meets a country holding both a deaf signed language and Aboriginal signed languages used by hearing people when speech is forbidden.

Langue des Signes Française

Speakers: about 100,000 · **Family:** the source of many others · **Where:** France · **Bible:** partial

One What the language holds

LSF is the ancestor of ASL and of many other signed languages.

The Abbé de l'Épée, in Paris in the 1760s, learned the signs deaf Parisians were already using and built a school around them rather than trying to replace them.

That decision — to take an existing language seriously instead of imposing one — is why so many signed languages descend from this one.

Two What the tradition holds

Laurent Clerc, a deaf Frenchman, sailed to America in 1816 with Thomas Gallaudet and taught the language there, which is why ASL is French rather than British in descent.

French deaf culture produced some of the first sustained arguments that signing is a language and not a substitute for one.

Three At the seams

A language that exists because a priest decided to learn what deaf people were already saying, rather than teach them to say something else, meets a study built on the same principle.

Al-Sayyid Bedouin Sign Language

Speakers: about 150 deaf, many more hearing · **Family:** none — arose independently · **Where:** the Negev · **Began:** about 1930

One What the language holds

A village where hearing people sign too

A Bedouin village in the Negev has had a high rate of hereditary deafness for several generations. Rather than the deaf being isolated, a signed language arose in the village and hearing villagers learned it as well.

It is unrelated to Israeli Sign Language or to any other, and it developed on its own within about seventy years. Like the Nicaraguan case, it is a language whose whole history is known.

Deafness there is not a disability in the usual sense, because everyone can talk to everyone.

Two What the tradition holds

The village is Bedouin and Muslim, and the Quranic Adam stands behind its people as it does across the region.

Similar village signing communities have existed elsewhere — on Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts into the twentieth century, and in Bali.

Three At the seams

The crossing at Day 4 verse 1, it is not good that the man should be alone, meets a community that answered that verse structurally: nobody there is cut off, because everyone learned the language.

Kata Kolok

Speakers: about 50 deaf, some 1,200 hearing · **Family:** none — arose independently · **Where:** Bengkala, north Bali

One What the language holds

Kata Kolok means deaf talk. It has been used in one Balinese village for at least six generations and is signed by deaf and hearing villagers alike.

It has an unusual feature: it points to real compass directions and to the actual position of the sun for time, rather than using a body-anchored timeline as most signed languages do. Like Guugu Yimithirr, it is anchored to the world rather than to the signer.

Two What the tradition holds

The deaf villagers have a recognised role in village ritual, including a particular dance performed by deaf men, and there is a village account explaining the deafness as a consequence of a curse on a stone.

Balinese Hinduism and the village's own practice run together.

Three At the seams

A language that points at the real sun to say when something happened meets an account organised into seven days.

Plains Indian Sign Language

Speakers: very few fluent · **Family:** its own · **Where:** the North American plains

One What the language holds

A signed language used between nations

Before English spread, the peoples of the plains — Blackfoot, Cheyenne, Kiowa, Comanche, Lakota and many others, speaking languages from several unrelated families — had a shared signed language for trade, treaty and travel.

It was not a deaf language. It was a lingua franca in the hands, used by hearing people who had no spoken language in common, across an area of more than a million square miles.

It was still in use in the twentieth century. A 1930 gathering filmed representatives of many nations signing together, and that film is most of what survives.

Two What the tradition holds

Deaf people among the plains nations used it too, and it served both purposes.

Some communities are working to bring it back, and Blackfoot and Crow teachers hold what remains.

Three At the seams

A signed language that let peoples with no common speech talk to each other meets a text whose claim is that it reaches every tongue. This one reached across many at once, in the hands.

III. The Languages Behind the Text

Twelve languages that stand closest to Genesis itself. Most have no living community, and all are still read.

Ugaritic

Speakers: none since about 1200 BC · **Family:** Northwest Semitic · **Where:** Ras Shamra, Syria · **Found:** 1929

One What the language holds

A cousin of Hebrew that nobody knew existed

In 1929 a farmer's plough struck a tomb on the Syrian coast. Excavation found a city, and in the city a palace archive of clay tablets written in a cuneiform alphabet of thirty signs — not the hundreds of signs of Akkadian, but an alphabet, and among the oldest anywhere.

The language turned out to be Northwest Semitic, a near relative of Hebrew, written down several centuries before most of the Hebrew Bible.

It settled arguments that had run for a thousand years. Words in Genesis and in the Psalms whose meaning had been guessed at turned up in Ugaritic in contexts that made them plain. Poetic forms scholars had described as peculiar to Hebrew turned out to be the ordinary shape of Northwest Semitic verse.

Nobody was looking for it. It was under a mound.

Ugaritic has the cognates at the load-bearing words: **il** for god, **šmm** for heavens, **arṣ** for earth, **npš** for the living soul.

Two What the tradition holds

The Baal Cycle is the chief text: **El**, the elder god, and **Baal**, and **Yamm** the sea, and **Mot** death. Baal defeats the sea, builds a house, is swallowed by death, and comes back.

El is described as the creator of created things and as the father of years, and his consort is Athirat — the Asherah the Hebrew prophets denounce.

So the language nearest to Hebrew holds a tradition Hebrew scripture spends its length arguing against.

Three At the seams

The crossing at Day 1 verse 2 and Day 2, the deep and the waters divided, meets a tradition in which the sea is a being who must be defeated. In Genesis the waters are simply divided, and nothing fights.

The crossing at Day 3 verse 7 into verse 8 meets a language in which the word for the living soul is the same word, written in a different alphabet, four hundred miles north.

Akkadian

Speakers: none since about the 1st century AD · **Family:** East Semitic · **Where:** Mesopotamia · **First written:** about 2500 BC

One What the language holds

Akkadian is the oldest Semitic language with a substantial written record, and it was the diplomatic language of the whole ancient Near East for a thousand years — Egyptian pharaohs and Hittite kings wrote to each other in it.

It is written in cuneiform borrowed from Sumerian, which means each sign may stand for a syllable or for a whole word, and reading it is genuinely difficult.

It has the Semitic root system, so its vocabulary is recognisable to anyone who knows Hebrew or Arabic.

Two What the tradition holds

The nearest older account, and how it differs

The **Enuma Elish** begins when there was no heaven and no earth and no name had been spoken. Then the gods are born from mingled waters, and there is conflict. Marduk kills Tiamat, the salt sea, and splits her body in two — half for the sky above and half for the earth below.

Humans are then made from the blood of a killed god, and the purpose given is explicit: so the gods may be relieved of labour.

Genesis divides waters and makes a firmament in the same place in the sequence. But there is no combat. Nothing is killed. Nothing is made from a corpse. And the man is put into a garden rather than into a workforce.

The **Atrahasis** and the **Eridu Genesis** hold a flood account, and Gilgamesh holds a version of it too, with a boat, a man, and birds sent out to find land.

Three At the seams

The crossing at Day 2, where the waters above are divided from the waters below, meets the one older account that does the same thing — and does it by splitting a body.

The crossing at Day 6 verse 20, very good, meets a tradition where humans exist to do work the gods found tiresome. The difference at that verse is the whole difference.

Sumerian

Speakers: none since about 1800 BC · **Family:** none — an isolate · **Where:** southern Iraq · **First written:** about 3200 BC

One What the language holds

Sumerian is the oldest written language on earth and has no known relatives. Writing was invented for it — the first cuneiform was accounting, and it grew into a full script over several centuries.

It stayed in use as a learned and liturgical language for well over a thousand years after it stopped being spoken, much as Latin did.

It is agglutinative, stacking prefixes and suffixes onto verb roots, and it is nothing like Akkadian, though the two were spoken side by side.

Two What the tradition holds

The **Eridu Genesis** has the creation of people and animals, the founding of cities, kingship coming down from heaven, and a flood with a man told to build a boat.

The **Sumerian King List** records reigns before the flood of tens of thousands of years, and then much shorter reigns after — a structure some have compared to the long lives in Genesis 5 and the shorter ones after Genesis 11.

Enki and Ninhursag describes **Dilmun**, a place that is pure and clean, where the lion does not kill and the wolf does not snatch the lamb, and where there is no sickness and no old age. Water is brought and gardens grow.

Three At the seams

The crossing at Day 3 verse 11 into the garden meets the oldest written description anywhere of a place where nothing harms and nothing dies.

The crossing at Day 3 verse 2 into verse 3, into the genealogical record, meets the oldest surviving genealogical record of any kind.

Biblical Aramaic

Speakers: none in this form · **Family:** Northwest Semitic · **Where:** the Persian empire · **In scripture:** parts of Daniel and Ezra

One What the language holds

Aramaic was the administrative language of the Persian empire, and it displaced Hebrew as the everyday speech of Judea. Parts of Daniel and Ezra are written in it, inside the Hebrew Bible.

It is a close relative of Hebrew, close enough that the switch mid-book is not a violent break.

By the first century it was what people in Galilee spoke, and several sayings preserved in the Gospels are Aramaic left untranslated.

Two What the tradition holds

The **Targums** are Aramaic translations of the Hebrew scriptures, read aloud in the synagogue for people who no longer followed Hebrew easily — and they are not literal. They expand, explain and interpret as they go.

Targum Onkelos and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan both handle Genesis 1 and 2, and their expansions record how these verses were understood at the time, which is evidence available for almost no other ancient text.

Three At the seams

The Targums are the earliest surviving record of anyone reading these particular verses and deciding what they meant. Where they expand at a seam, that expansion is a witness.

The crossing at Day 3 verse 7 into verse 8 meets a tradition of translation that felt free to say more than the text said, in order to say what the text meant.

Neo-Aramaic

Speakers: perhaps half a million, scattered · **Family:** Northwest Semitic · **Where:** Iraq, Syria, Iran, and the diaspora

One What the language holds

The Assyrian, Chaldean and Turoyo communities still speak descendants of Aramaic. They are the last speakers of the language Jesus spoke, and their varieties are not always mutually intelligible.

The **Mandaeans** of southern Iraq speak another descendant and use it liturgically.

Two What the tradition holds

These communities have been in northern Mesopotamia continuously since before Christianity and were among its earliest adherents. Their churches use Syriac liturgically.

They have been displaced repeatedly, most recently and most severely in the last twenty years, and their villages in the Nineveh plain were emptied. The language is now more spoken in Chicago, Sydney and Stockholm than in the places it comes from.

Three At the seams

The crossing at Day 3 verse 18, where Hiddekel goes toward the east of Assyria, meets the last people speaking a language of Assyria, most of whom no longer live there.

Syriac

Speakers: liturgical · **Family:** Northwest Semitic, Aramaic · **Where:** the Middle East and India · **Bible:** the Peshitta, 2nd century

One What the language holds

Syriac is the Aramaic of Edessa, and it became the literary and liturgical language of a Christianity that spread east rather than west — to Persia, to India, to China. A Syriac inscription from 781 stands in Xi'an.

The **Peshitta** is the Syriac Bible, translated very early and from the Hebrew for the Old Testament, which makes it an independent witness to the text alongside the Greek.

Two What the tradition holds

Syriac Christianity produced a body of poetry — Ephrem the Syrian above all — that works by images rather than argument, and that treats Paradise, the tree and the garden at length.

Ephrem's hymns on Paradise describe the garden as a mountain in terraces, with the tree of knowledge partway up as a veil before the tree of life at the summit.

Three At the seams

The crossing at Day 3 verse 10 into verse 11, the two trees in the garden, meets a tradition that read them as standing at different heights on one mountain, one screening the other.

And the Peshitta's reading at any seam is a witness that did not come through Greek.

Samaritan Hebrew

Speakers: liturgical; the community numbers about 800 · **Family:** Northwest Semitic · **Where:** Mount Gerizim and Holon

One What the language holds

A different Pentateuch, still in use

The Samaritans hold only the five books of Moses, and their text differs from the Masoretic Hebrew in some six thousand places. Most differences are small. Some are not.

They write it in a script descended directly from the old paleo-Hebrew alphabet, not the square Aramaic script Jewish Hebrew adopted. So the Samaritan Torah is written in letters closer in shape to what Moses would have used.

The Dead Sea Scrolls turned up manuscripts agreeing with Samaritan readings against the Masoretic text, which means these are ancient variants rather than later changes.

The community numbers around eight hundred people. It is among the smallest continuously surviving religious communities on earth.

Two What the tradition holds

The Samaritans keep Passover on Mount Gerizim with the actual sacrifice of lambs, the only place the rite is still performed in that form.

They hold Gerizim rather than Jerusalem as the chosen place, which is the disagreement the woman at the well raises in John 4.

Three At the seams

Wherever the Samaritan Pentateuch reads differently in Genesis 1 and 2, there is a second ancient Hebrew witness to compare, written in older letters, kept by a community that never stopped using it.

That is a checkable thing, and it has not been checked against the braid.

Coptic

Speakers: liturgical · **Family:** Afroasiatic, Egyptian · **Where:** Egypt · **Bible:** from the 3rd century

One What the language holds

Coptic is the last stage of the Egyptian language — the tongue of the pharaohs, continuous for four thousand years, written at the end in Greek letters with seven extra signs kept from the older script.

Because it is written with vowels, Coptic is how scholars know how ancient Egyptian was pronounced. Hieroglyphs wrote consonants only.

Two What the tradition holds

The Nag Hammadi library, found in a jar in 1945, is in Coptic — including the Gospel of Thomas and a good deal of material about Genesis 1 and 2 read in unexpected ways.

Egyptian monasticism began here, and the desert fathers spoke Coptic. The Coptic Orthodox Church keeps the liturgy in it still.

Behind it stands the oldest creation material of any people: the primeval waters of Nun and the mound rising out of them.

Three At the seams

The crossing at Day 3 verse 1, the waters gathered and the dry land appearing, meets a language whose own oldest account is a mound rising from the water.

Ge'ez

Speakers: liturgical · Family: Afroasiatic, Semitic · Where: Ethiopia and Eritrea · Bible: 4th to 6th century

One What the language holds

Ge'ez is Semitic, written in a syllabary where each character carries a consonant and a vowel together, and it stands to Amharic and Tigrinya as Latin stands to Italian.

Two What the tradition holds

Ge'ez preserves books that survive in no other language in full. The **Book of Enoch** was known in Europe only in fragments until an Ethiopian manuscript was brought back in the eighteenth century. The **Book of Jubilees** likewise.

Jubilees retells Genesis with its own reckoning, assigning what was made to which day and counting time in weeks of years. It is a second day-by-day account of the creation, held as scripture by one church and by no other.

Three At the seams

Jubilees is the only other document in these volumes that does what the banner does: it takes the creation account and sets out what happened on which day.

Comparing the two, seam by seam, is a checkable exercise and has not been done.

Latin

Speakers: liturgical and scholarly · **Family:** Indo-European, Italic · **Where:** the western church · **Bible:** the Vulgate, about 405

One What the language holds

Jerome's Vulgate was made from the Hebrew, not from the Greek, which was contentious at the time. It became the text of the western church for a thousand years, and every European vernacular translation was made against it, with it, or in reaction to it.

Day 3 verse 7 reads **anima vivens** — living soul — following the Greek. That single rendering went into French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, German, Dutch, English, and from there into hundreds of languages by missionary translation.

Two What the tradition holds

The whole western commentary tradition on these verses is in Latin: Augustine wrote on Genesis repeatedly and never finished to his own satisfaction, returning to the first chapters across several books over decades.

Latin has no definite article, which means the Vulgate cannot make some distinctions the Greek makes, and translators working from Latin inherited that flattening.

Three At the seams

Latin is where most of the world's readings of these seams were formed. It is not the source of the text and it is not neutral; it is one language among the rest, and it happens to be the one whose decisions travelled furthest.

Ancient Egyptian

Speakers: none · Family: Afroasiatic · Where: the Nile · First written: about 3200 BC

One What the language holds

Egyptian is written in hieroglyphs, which are consonantal — vowels were not written — and in the cursive hieratic and demotic scripts. It is Afroasiatic, so a distant relative of Hebrew and Arabic.

It was read again after fourteen centuries of silence because of a decree carved in three scripts at Rosetta.

Two What the tradition holds

Creation by speech

The Memphite theology, recorded on a stone in the British Museum, holds that **Ptah** conceived the world in his heart and brought it into being by speaking the names of things. Everything that exists came from what he said.

Other Egyptian accounts have the mound rising from the waters of Nun, and Atum bringing forth from himself.

Day 1 verse 4: And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

Israel's formative account is of coming out of Egypt, so the Egyptian material is not distant background — it is the world the Hebrew text defines itself against.

Three At the seams

The crossing into Day 1 verses 4 and 5, where God speaks and it is so, meets the one older tradition that also says the world was made by a god saying the names of things.

Phoenician

Speakers: none · **Family:** Northwest Semitic · **Where:** Lebanon, and the Mediterranean colonies

One What the language holds

The alphabet nearly everyone uses came from here

The Phoenician alphabet of twenty-two letters was adapted by the Greeks, who added vowels; the Greek was adapted by the Etruscans and then the Romans; and the Latin alphabet is what most of the world writes in now.

Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic, Syriac and the Indian scripts all descend from the same source as well. Almost every alphabet on earth traces back to one Northwest Semitic system.

Phoenician was so close to Hebrew that the two were probably mutually intelligible.

Two What the tradition holds

Phoenician religion is known mostly from what its enemies wrote and from inscriptions. Carthage, its greatest colony, is associated in Roman accounts and in the archaeology of the tophet with child sacrifice, and the extent of it is still argued over.

The Hebrew prophets denounce exactly this practice among Israel's neighbours and among Israel.

Three At the seams

The banner's own header says the mystery of God's will is to end all sacrifice and offering, and cites the hand stayed on the mountain in Genesis 22.

Phoenician is the language of the people that text is set against, written in the letters this study is printed in.

IV. The Click Languages

Six languages whose speakers belong to the oldest branches of human ancestry that have been traced.

Taa (!Xóõ)

Speakers: about 2,500 · **Family:** Tuu · **Where:** Botswana, Namibia · **Bible:** none

One What the language holds

More consonants than any other language

Taa has somewhere around a hundred consonants, depending how they are counted — more than any other language ever described. English has twenty-four.

Most of the extra ones are clicks, of five basic kinds, each combined with a range of other features to make dozens of distinct sounds. There are also four tones and a set of vowel qualities including strident and pharyngealised vowels found almost nowhere else.

Two and a half thousand people carry the largest sound system on earth.

Two What the tradition holds

Taa speakers are among the San peoples, whose ancestry genetic studies place at the deepest divergence within the human family tree — the oldest surviving branch.

San tradition holds the trance dance, in which healers dance through the night until they enter a state in which they draw sickness out of people. It has been documented over a century and is still done.

The eland is the central animal in San rock art and in the accounts, and **|Kaggen**, the mantis, is the trickster and maker figure.

Three At the seams

The crossing at Day 6 verses 4 to 7, where the creatures are brought to the man and named, meets a people whose art across southern Africa, tens of thousands of images over many thousands of years, is overwhelmingly of animals.

A people whose ancestry is the oldest traced and whose language has the most sounds meets a text that says it goes out in every tongue.

Jul'hoan

Speakers: about 4,000 · Family: Kx'a · Where: Namibia, Botswana · Bible: partial

One What the language holds

Jul'hoan has around forty-eight clicks among its consonants, and a writing system using the click letters was developed with the community and is taught at a village school in Nyae Nyae.

Two What the tradition holds

The Jul'hoansi are among the most studied societies on earth, because anthropologists went to them to ask what human life was like before farming.

Insulting the meat

When a Jul'hoan hunter brings in a large animal, the correct response of everyone in camp is to complain about it. A bag of bones. Barely worth carrying. The hunter agrees and belittles his own kill.

This is deliberate and it is explained plainly by the people who do it: when a young man kills much meat, he comes to think of himself as a chief, and a chief has no place in a camp. So they cool his heart by making the meat worthless in words, while everyone eats.

Meat is distributed by a system in which the owner of the arrow, not the man who shot it, distributes the kill — and arrows are given away, so the owner is often someone else entirely.

Hxaro is a network of gift partnerships across great distances, in which objects are given and returned over years, and the relationship is the point rather than the objects.

Three At the seams

The crossing at Day 6 verses 18 and 19, where the herb and the fruit are given for meat to every living thing, meets a people whose central social rule exists to stop anyone claiming credit for the food.

Hadza

Speakers: about 1,000 · **Family:** none — an isolate · **Where:** Lake Eyasi, Tanzania · **Bible:** none

One What the language holds

Hadza has clicks but is not related to the southern African click languages, nor to anything else. It is an isolate, and the clicks may be inherited from something very old or borrowed; nobody knows.

About a thousand people speak it, and a few hundred still live primarily by hunting and gathering.

Two What the tradition holds

The honeyguide

A bird, the greater honeyguide, leads Hadza men to bees' nests. The men whistle a particular call; the bird answers and flies ahead, waiting and calling until they follow. They open the nest, take the honey, and leave the wax and grubs for the bird.

It is a working partnership between a wild bird and a human being, and both sides have inherited their part of it. Research has confirmed the birds respond specifically to the human call and not to other sounds.

Day 5 makes the fowl and blesses them. Day 6 verses 4 to 7 bring the creatures to the man.

Hadza tradition holds **Haine**, associated with the sun, and **Ishoko**, and the epeme dance performed in complete darkness on moonless nights.

Hadza genetic ancestry is among the most divergent of any human population.

Three At the seams

The crossing at Day 5 into Day 6, birds and then beasts and then the man among them, meets a people who have an agreement with a bird that neither party taught the other.

Sandawe

Speakers: about 60,000 · Family: disputed · Where: central Tanzania · Bible: partial

One What the language holds

Sandawe has clicks and is tonal. Its relationship to the Khoe languages of southern Africa has been proposed and argued over for a century without being settled.

Two What the tradition holds

Sandawe country holds rock art in the same tradition as the southern African San paintings, thousands of kilometres away, which is part of why the connection keeps being proposed.

The **phek'umo** dance is performed at the new moon.

Three At the seams

The crossing out of Day 4 verse 1 into verse 2, and Day 4 verse 6 where the lesser light rules the night, meets a people whose ceremony is timed by the moon's return.

Khoekhoe (Nama)

Speakers: about 200,000 · **Family:** Khoe-Kwadi · **Where:** Namibia, South Africa, Botswana · **Bible:** complete 1966

One What the language holds

Khoekhoe is the largest click language and has a complete Bible. It has four click types, three tones, and a dual as well as a plural — so Day 6 verse 12 can say exactly two.

It gave Afrikaans the word for God that Xhosa also uses, **uThixo**, and a number of other words that passed into southern African speech.

Two What the tradition holds

The Khoekhoe call the Pleiades **Khuseti**, the rain-bearers, and their appearance marks the start of the rains — the same cluster read the same way as in the Bantu languages, in a completely unrelated family.

Tsui-||Goab is the supreme being, associated with rain and with the dawn, and **Heitsi-Eibib** is a figure who dies and rises repeatedly, whose cairns are added to by passers-by.

Three At the seams

The crossing out of Day 4 verse 1 into verse 2 meets the same star cluster read for the rains — by a family unrelated to the Bantu one that carries the digging name.

The crossing at Day 6 verse 11 into verse 12 meets a language with a form for exactly two.

Nlǃng

Speakers: one, at last report · **Family:** Tuu · **Where:** Northern Cape, South Africa · **Bible:** none

One What the language holds

A language down to one speaker

Nlǃng was thought extinct until a handful of elderly speakers were found in the 1990s. Katrina Esau, born in 1933, has been teaching it to children in her own home in Upington, and a school was built.

The number of fully fluent speakers has fallen to one or a very few. Every word recorded is recorded because someone sat down with her and asked.

Nlǃng has the full click inventory of the Tuu family, including sounds that exist in no other surviving language.

Two What the tradition holds

The ǀKhomani San were dispossessed of the land that became the Kalahari Gemsbok Park and were scattered. A land claim in 1999 returned part of it.

The related ǁXam language, extinct since the early twentieth century, survives only in thousands of pages of testimony recorded in the 1870s from convict labourers by Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd. The South African motto is in ǁXam, a language with no speakers.

Three At the seams

The eternal gospel is said to go out to every tongue. One tongue here has one speaker, and she is teaching children.

V. The Amazon and the Isolates

Ten languages, several of which required the theory of language to be revised.

Pirahã

Speakers: about 400 · **Family:** Mura · **Where:** the Maici river, Brazil · **Bible:** none accepted

One What the language holds

Pirahã has one of the smallest sound systems recorded — around eleven phonemes — and the language can be hummed, whistled or sung, with the tone and stress carrying enough that words can be left out entirely. Men hunting whistle their conversation.

The claims, and the argument

Daniel Everett, a missionary-linguist who lived among the Pirahã for years, reported that the language has no number words, no colour terms in the usual sense, no perfect tense, and — the most contested claim — no recursion, meaning no way to put a clause inside a clause.

He connected all of it to what he called an immediacy of experience principle: the Pirahã, he reported, talk about what has been witnessed by someone alive, or by someone who told a living witness, and not about anything further back.

These claims are disputed. Other linguists have contested the recursion finding in particular, and the argument has run for two decades and is not settled.

What is not disputed is that Pirahã is unusually resistant to description in the terms other languages are described in.

Two What the tradition holds

Everett reported that the Pirahã have no creation account, and that when asked what was there before everything, the answer was that everything is the same and it has always been here.

He also reported that they declined the gospel on the grounds that he had not met Jesus himself and neither had anyone who told him — which he took as consistent with the same principle. He left the mission over it.

If that account is right, this is the only people in five hundred and fifty languages with no account of a beginning at all. The Theravada Buddhist languages set the question aside; the Pirahã are reported as never having raised it.

Three At the seams

Day 1 verse 1 arrives to a people reported to hold that there was no beginning, on the grounds that nobody saw one.

That is either the sharpest disagreement in these volumes or a misreading, and both possibilities should be stated. It is the one entry where the finding rests substantially on a single researcher.

Tariana

Speakers: about 100 · Family: Arawakan · Where: the Vaupés, Brazil · Bible: none

One What the language holds

Tariana has one of the most elaborate evidential systems ever described: five distinct markers saying whether the speaker saw it, heard it, inferred it from evidence, assumed it, or was told it. Leaving one out is not an option, and using the wrong one is treated as lying.

You must marry someone who speaks another language

In the Vaupés region, language is inherited from the father and functions like a clan. Marrying someone who speaks your own language is regarded as wrong — close to incest — and people say so plainly.

So every household contains at least two languages. Children grow up with the father's language as their own and the mother's as one they understand completely. Most adults speak four or five.

It is the clearest case anywhere of multilingualism required by law rather than produced by circumstance.

Two What the tradition holds

The peoples of the Vaupés hold the account of the anaconda canoe: the ancestors travelled upriver inside a great serpent, and each group emerged at its proper place along the river, which is why they are where they are and why they speak differently.

A tradition in which the diversity of languages is the design rather than the punishment.

Three At the seams

The crossing at Day 6 verse 15 into verse 16, where a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, meets a people who require by custom that the wife come from another language.

A translator here must choose an evidential for every clause of the seven days, as in Quechua and Turkish, but from five options rather than three.

Hixkaryana

Speakers: about 600 · **Family:** Cariban · **Where:** the Nhamundá river, Brazil · **Bible:** New Testament

One What the language holds

A word order believed impossible

Hixkaryana puts the object first, then the verb, then the subject. Where English says the boy caught the fish, Hixkaryana says the equivalent of fish caught boy.

Before Desmond Derbyshire described it in the 1970s, that order was held not to occur in any human language. Surveys had found none, and theories had been built on its absence.

Six hundred people on a tributary of the Amazon had it. A handful of other languages were then found to have it too, once anyone looked.

The lesson drawn from it in linguistics is that absence of evidence about human language usually means nobody has been to the right river.

Two What the tradition holds

The Hixkaryana were reduced to a few dozen people by disease in the twentieth century and have since recovered. A New Testament was translated with the community.

Three At the seams

A language that put the object before the subject and overturned a theory meets a study whose whole method is to try something that was assumed not to work.

Matsés

Speakers: about 2,000 · **Family:** Panoan · **Where:** Peru, Brazil · **Bible:** partial

One What the language holds

Matsés verbs mark not only how the speaker knows something but how long ago they learned it and how long ago the event happened, as two separate pieces of information in the same word.

So a Matsés speaker can say, in one verb, that something happened recently but they only just found out, or that it happened long ago and they knew at the time. Mixing these up is treated as a lie.

Two What the tradition holds

The Matsés were in sustained contact only from the 1960s. They hold detailed knowledge of the forest's plants, and an encyclopaedia of their medicine was compiled by Matsés elders themselves, in Matsés, with no outside editorial framing.

Three At the seams

A language that separates when a thing happened from when you found out meets an account of events no living person witnessed, written by someone, at some remove. Matsés makes a translator state the relationship explicitly.

Wari'

Speakers: about 2,700 · **Family:** Chapacuran · **Where:** Rondônia, Brazil · **Bible:** partial

One What the language holds

Wari' has a system in which the same word can be a noun or a verb depending on what is attached to it, and it marks the relationship between speaker and hearer in ways that were not expected in the family.

Two What the tradition holds

The Wari' practised funerary cannibalism: the dead were eaten by their affines, not by their own blood kin, and the practice was explained as an act of compassion toward the grieving, because leaving a body in the ground to rot was held to be cruel to those who loved it.

The ethnography of this is careful and was written with the Wari' themselves explaining their reasons. They stopped in the 1960s.

Three At the seams

The crossing at Day 3 verse 7 into verse 8, the man formed of the dust of the ground, meets a people who held that returning a body to the ground was the cruelest thing you could do to it.

Desana

Speakers: about 2,000 · **Family:** Tucanoan · **Where:** the Vaupés, Colombia and Brazil · **Bible:** partial

One What the language holds

Desana has an evidential system and belongs to the Vaupés region where marriage across languages is required, so Desana speakers are multilingual by rule.

Two What the tradition holds

The Desana cosmology was set down in detail with the anthropologist Reichel-Dolmatoff, working with a Desana man who wanted it recorded.

It holds the Sun Father who created by the power of his yellow light, the anaconda canoe carrying the ancestors, and an elaborate reckoning in which hunting, eating and reproduction are held in balance by rules that a shaman negotiates with the Master of Animals.

Nothing may be taken without an exchange being arranged.

Three At the seams

The crossing at Day 6 verses 18 and 19, where the herb and the fruit are given for meat, meets a people for whom taking anything requires a negotiation and a payment.

Warao

Speakers: about 28,000 · **Family:** none — an isolate · **Where:** the Orinoco delta, Venezuela · **Bible:** partial

One What the language holds

Warao is an isolate with no demonstrated relatives. The name means boat people.

Two What the tradition holds

The Warao live on stilts over the water in the delta, and the canoe is the centre of life. A canoe is made from a single tree, and the making is a ritual matter, with the tree understood as becoming a being.

Warao accounts hold that people once lived in the sky and a man found a hole and looked through it and saw the earth, and they came down on a rope — until a pregnant woman stuck fast in the hole, and the way was closed.

A rope from the sky, and a closure.

Three At the seams

The crossing at Day 2, where the firmament is set between the waters, meets a people who hold that there was a hole in it and that they came down through it.

The Akan, Dinka, Maasai and Khasi accounts of the separation now have a fifth.

Trio (Tiriyó)

Speakers: about 2,000 · **Family:** Cariban · **Where:** Suriname, Brazil · **Bible:** New Testament

One What the language holds

Trio has a frustrative marker — a grammatical ending meaning that something was done but did not achieve what it was for. English needs a phrase; Trio has a suffix.

Two What the tradition holds

Trio tradition holds a tree that contained all the food plants, felled so that they spread — the same shape as the Emberá account of the tree that held the waters.

The Trio keep formal ceremonial dialogue, in which two men chant at each other in a special register for hours on meeting, exchanging news in a fixed form.

Three At the seams

The crossing at Day 3 verse 10 into verse 11 meets a people whose food plants came from one tree that was cut down.

Kayapó

Speakers: about 8,000 · **Family:** Macro-Jê · **Where:** Pará, Brazil · **Bible:** partial

One What the language holds

Kayapó is Macro-Jê and has an elaborate system of body-part terms used metaphorically for parts of anything — the head of a path, the eye of a house.

Two What the tradition holds

Kayapó villages are built as a ring of houses around a central plaza with a men's house at the middle, and the layout maps the social order directly onto the ground.

The Kayapó manage the forest actively, planting useful species in patches they create, so that what looks like wild forest is partly

made. Researchers found that forest islands in the savannah had been planted by people.

Raoni and other Kayapó leaders have taken their case to international forums for decades.

Three At the seams

The crossing at Day 3 verse 11, where the man is put into the garden to dress it and to keep it, meets a people whose forest is partly a garden they made and who were long assumed to have found it that way.

Burushaski

Speakers: about 100,000 · **Family:** none — an isolate · **Where:** Hunza, northern Pakistan · **Bible:** none

One What the language holds

Burushaski is an isolate in the high Karakoram, surrounded by Indo-Aryan, Iranian, Tibetan and Turkic languages and related to none of them. Proposals linking it to Caucasian languages and to Yeniseian have not been accepted.

It has four noun classes: human male, human female, countable things, and uncountable things. So the grammar separates people from everything else and divides people by sex.

At Day 6 verse 12, male and female created he them, Burushaski has been marking that distinction on every noun already.

Two What the tradition holds

Hunza is Ismaili Muslim now. Older Burusho tradition held mountain fairies, the **bilas**, and a shaman, the **bitan**, who inhaled juniper smoke and spoke.

The valley's apricot orchards and irrigation channels cut along cliff faces from glacier melt have supported a dense population in a place that should not hold one.

Three At the seams

The crossing at Day 6 verse 11 into verse 12 meets a language that divides human beings into male and female as a grammatical class, separately from everything else that exists.

VI. Languages Brought Back

Eight languages that stopped being spoken, or nearly did, and are spoken again.

Wôpanâak

Speakers: a few dozen, including children · **Family:** Algonquian · **Where:** Massachusetts · **Bible:** 1663

One What the language holds

Brought back from the first Bible printed in the Americas

John Eliot's Bible of 1663 was the first Bible printed anywhere in the Americas, in any language — before any English Bible was printed there. It was translated into Wôpanâak, with the essential work done by Wampanoag speakers: James Printer, Job Nesutan, Cockenoe and others, whose names are recorded.

The language stopped being spoken in the nineteenth century. The last fluent speakers died and no recordings existed.

Then in the 1990s Jessie Little Doe Baird, a Mashpee Wampanoag woman, began studying the surviving documents — the Bible, and hundreds of land deeds, letters and petitions written in Wôpanâak by Wampanoag people themselves, the largest such corpus for any Native language north of Mexico.

She took a master's in linguistics at MIT to do it. The grammar was reconstructed. The sounds were recovered by comparison with related Algonquian languages.

Her daughter was the first native speaker of Wôpanâak in seven generations.

There are now a language school, a curriculum and children who speak it at home.

Two What the tradition holds

The Wampanoag are the people who met the Mayflower. What followed is the founding story of the United States told from the other side, and it is taught in Wampanoag schools in Wampanoag.

Moshup, a giant, made Martha's Vineyard and the islands, and the accounts of him are held.

Three At the seams

The crossing at Day 3 verse 2 into verse 3, into the genealogical record, meets a people whose line of speech was broken for a hundred and fifty years and was rejoined.

A translation made in 1663 by missionaries and Wampanoag scholars together turned out, three centuries later, to be the thing that kept a people's language in existence. Nobody involved could have intended that.

Cornish

Speakers: a few hundred fluent · Family: Celtic, Brythonic · Where: Cornwall · Bible: complete 2011

One What the language holds

Cornish is close to Breton and to Welsh. Its last traditional speakers died in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and it was revived from medieval plays, glossaries and a small body of writing.

There are now children raised in it, and it has official recognition. A complete Bible appeared in 2011.

Two What the tradition holds

The surviving medieval Cornish literature is almost entirely religious drama — the **Ordinalia**, a cycle of plays performed in round earthwork theatres, several of which still exist in the fields.

One of the plays is the **Origo Mundi**, the origin of the world, which stages the creation and the garden. So the largest single body of Cornish that survives is a dramatisation of these chapters.

Three At the seams

A language that survived chiefly because someone wrote a play about Genesis meets Genesis again in a full translation, six centuries later.

Manx

Speakers: a few hundred, including children · **Family:** Celtic, Goidelic · **Where:** Isle of Man · **Bible:** 1772

One What the language holds

Manx is close to Irish and Scottish Gaelic but is written with an English-based spelling rather than the Gaelic one, which makes it look unrelated on the page though it is not.

Declared extinct, and then not

Ned Maddrell, the last native speaker, died in 1974, and UNESCO listed Manx as extinct. In 2009 children at the Manx-language primary school wrote to UNESCO asking how they could be writing in a language that did not exist.

The classification was changed. There are now second-language speakers raising children in it.

Recordings of the last native speakers, made in the 1940s and 50s, were the bridge.

Two What the tradition holds

Manx tradition holds **Manannán**, the sea figure the island is named for, who wrapped it in mist to hide it.

The Manx Bible of 1772 is much of the surviving written language, and it is what the revival worked from.

Three At the seams

A language officially declared dead and then contradicted by its own schoolchildren meets a text about a word that does not pass away.

Livonian

Speakers: about 20 who have learned it · **Family:** Uralic · **Where:** Latvia · **Bible:** partial

One What the language holds

Livonian is Uralic, a relative of Estonian and Finnish, spoken on the Latvian coast by a people who were there before the Latvians. The last person who grew up speaking it died in 2013.

It is now spoken only by people who learned it deliberately. Around twenty can hold a conversation.

Two What the tradition holds

The Livonians were fishermen, and their villages along the coast were emptied during the Soviet period when the shore became a closed border zone.

Livonian influence shaped Latvian itself, which is why Latvian stresses the first syllable as Uralic languages do rather than as its Baltic relatives do. The language that is nearly gone changed the one that replaced it.

Three At the seams

A language of twenty learned speakers, whose last native speaker died within the last fifteen years, meets a text that claims every tongue.

Ainu

Speakers: very few fluent; revival under way · **Family:** none — an isolate · **Where:** Hokkaido, Japan · **Bible:** partial

One What the language holds

Ainu is an isolate, unrelated to Japanese. The Ainu were the people of the northern islands before Japanese settlement, and the language was suppressed for over a century.

It was recognised as an indigenous language of Japan only in 2019.

Two What the tradition holds

Everything is a visitor wearing a body

Ainu tradition holds the **kamuy**: the bear, the owl, the fire, the salmon are not animals and objects but beings from another world who have put on a body to visit this one. The bear's flesh and fur are the gift it brings.

The **iyomante** ceremony sends the visitor home with honour and with gifts, so that it will come again.

The **yukar** are long epic chants, recited in the first person as the kamuy themselves speaking, and they run to thousands of lines. **Chiri Yukie**, an Ainu woman, wrote down and translated a collection of them and died at nineteen, in 1922; her book is the foundation of Ainu literature.

Three At the seams

The crossing at Day 6 verse 3 into verse 4, where the beasts are called good and then brought to the man, meets a people who hold that an animal is someone visiting in a borrowed body and must be sent home properly.

Myaamia

Speakers: being relearned · Family: Algonquian · Where: Oklahoma, Indiana · Bible: none

One What the language holds

Myaamia, the Miami language, had no speakers by the mid twentieth century. It was reconstructed from missionary and traveller records by Daryl Baldwin, a Miami man who taught himself from the documents and then raised his children in it.

The Myaamia Center at Miami University now runs the work, and the tribe describes the language as sleeping rather than dead — a deliberate choice of word.

Two What the tradition holds

The Miami were removed from Indiana to Kansas and then Oklahoma. The recovery of the language has run alongside the

recovery of the seasonal calendar, the plant names and the stories, because the documents held all of it together.

Lunar month names and the winter story season have been brought back from the same records.

Three At the seams

A people who say their language was sleeping rather than dead meet a text whose central claim is about something that was in the ground and got up.

Barngarla

Speakers: being relearned · **Family:** Pama-Nyungan · **Where:** Eyre Peninsula, South Australia · **Bible:** none

One What the language holds

Barngarla's last speaker died in 1960. It was revived from a dictionary written in 1844 by a German Lutheran missionary, Clamor Schürmann — the same man whose notes preserved Kurna.

The revival began in 2012 after a Barngarla community member read about the Kurna work and asked for the same. Words are being made for things that did not exist in 1844.

Two What the tradition holds

Barngarla country includes the site where Australia proposed a national nuclear waste facility, and the Barngarla ran their own ballot when they were excluded from the official one. They voted unanimously against and eventually prevailed in court.

The reclaimed language was used in that process.

Three At the seams

Two Australian languages in this volume are alive because one missionary sat down in the 1840s and wrote what he heard.

The crossing at Day 3 verse 11, the man put into the garden to keep it, meets a people who used a language recovered from a notebook to stop something being buried in their country.

Yuchi

Speakers: a handful of elders; children learning · **Family:** none — an isolate · **Where:** Oklahoma · **Bible:** none

One What the language holds

Yuchi is an isolate with no demonstrated relatives anywhere in North America. It has a system of classifying nouns according to whether they are sitting, standing or lying, and a separate set of forms used only by Yuchi people about other Yuchi people.

That last feature is unusual: the grammar itself distinguishes insiders from everyone else.

Two What the tradition holds

The Yuchi call themselves the children of the sun. Their account holds that a drop of the sun's blood fell to the earth and from it the first Yuchi came.

The ceremonial ground and the Green Corn ceremony are kept, and the stomp dance continues.

Three At the seams

The crossing at Day 4 verse 6 into verse 7, where the greater light is set to rule the day and called good, meets a people who say they came from a drop of its blood.

VII. The Far North, and Other Corners

Ten languages from places the speaker-count method was never going to reach.

Ket

Speakers: about 50 · **Family:** Yeniseian — the last one · **Where:** the Yenisei, Siberia · **Bible:** none

One What the language holds

A possible bridge between two continents

Ket is the last surviving Yeniseian language; the others died out in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. About fifty elderly people speak it.

It is tonal, which no other Siberian language is, and its verb is built in a way that resembles nothing nearby.

In 2008 Edward Vajda published a detailed argument that Yeniseian is related to the Na-Dené family of North America — Navajo, Apache, Tlingit. The proposal has been taken seriously by specialists in a way that earlier long-range proposals were not.

If it holds, it is the only demonstrated link between a language of the Old World and one of the New, and it would connect fifty people on a Siberian river to a hundred and seventy thousand Navajo speakers in Arizona.

Two What the tradition holds

Ket tradition holds **Es**, the sky and the supreme being, and a world with an upper, middle and lower level. The shaman travelled between them, and Ket shamanic equipment is in museums because the practice was destroyed.

Three At the seams

A language of fifty speakers that may connect two hemispheres meets a text whose seams are about connection.

If the link holds, the Navajo emergence account and whatever the Ket held were once the possession of the same people.

Northern Sámi

Speakers: about 25,000 · **Family:** Uralic · **Where:** Norway, Sweden, Finland · **Bible:** complete 2019

One What the language holds

Northern Sámi is Uralic, related to Finnish. It has a dual as well as a plural, so Day 6 verse 12 can say exactly two.

Hundreds of words for snow and for reindeer

Here the claim that is misleading about Inuktitut is straightforwardly true. Sámi has an extensive precise vocabulary for snow conditions — whether it will bear weight, whether reindeer can dig through it, how it has crusted — because the difference between those states decides whether the herd eats.

And a comparable vocabulary for reindeer by age, sex, antler shape, colour and temperament, running to hundreds of terms.

A complete Bible was finished in 2019.

Two What the tradition holds

The **joik** is a Sámi song form. A joik is not about its subject — it is held to be the subject. You do not joik about a person; you joik the person. Joiking was condemned as sinful and banned in schools, and it has come back.

Sámi drums were burned in large numbers during the conversion, and some survive in museums; their painted surfaces mapped the world in three levels.

Three At the seams

The crossing at Day 6 verses 4 to 7, where the man gives names, meets a people whose song form is held to be the thing named rather than a description of it.

Nenets

Speakers: about 22,000 · **Family:** Uralic, Samoyedic · **Where:** the Yamal peninsula, Siberia · **Bible:** partial

One What the language holds

Nenets is Samoyedic, the most distant branch of Uralic, so it is a remote relative of Finnish and Hungarian. It marks a distinction between things visible and things out of sight.

Two What the tradition holds

The Nenets still migrate with reindeer herds across the Yamal — the name means the end of the earth — covering over a thousand kilometres a year. It is among the last large-scale nomadic herding migrations anywhere.

Num is the sky and the high god, and sacred places on the tundra hold offerings left over generations.

The gas fields of the Yamal now run through the migration routes.

Three At the seams

The crossing out of Day 4 verse 1 into verse 2, the lights for seasons, meets a people whose year is a thousand-kilometre walk timed by what the ground is doing.

Chukchi

Speakers: about 5,000 · **Family:** Chukotko-Kamchatkan · **Where:** northeastern Siberia · **Bible:** partial

One What the language holds

Chukchi is polysynthetic and incorporates nouns into verbs, so a whole clause arrives as one word.

It had distinct men's and women's pronunciations: women systematically replaced certain consonants, so a man and a woman saying the same word said it differently, and using the other sex's form was not done.

Two What the tradition holds

The Chukchi are reindeer herders and sea-mammal hunters across the strait from Alaska. They were never militarily subdued by Russia and negotiated a settlement instead.

Raven is the creator and trickster here, as he is on the American side of the strait — the same figure, with the water between.

Three At the seams

Day 5, where the fowl are made and blessed, meets a people on both sides of a sea who hold that a bird made the world.

Nivkh

Speakers: about 200 · **Family:** none — an isolate · **Where:** Sakhalin and the Amur · **Bible:** none

One What the language holds

Nivkh is an isolate with no relatives. It has a counting system in which the number word changes depending on what is being counted — there are more than twenty sets, for boats, for sledges, for fish, for nets, for bundles.

So a Nivkh speaker counting two of something must know what kind of thing it is before they can say two.

Two What the tradition holds

The Nivkh kept a bear ceremony close to the Ainu one, raising a bear cub and then sending it home.

Their population has fallen steeply and the language is spoken now mainly by elders.

Three At the seams

The crossing at Day 6 verses 4 to 7, where the man names the creatures, meets a language in which you cannot count anything without first saying what class of thing it belongs to.

Faroese

Speakers: about 70,000 · **Family:** Germanic, North · **Where:** the Faroe Islands · **Bible:** 1961

One What the language holds

Faroese descends from Old Norse and keeps grammar that Danish and Swedish lost. It had almost no written form until the nineteenth century, when an orthography was made deliberately close to Old Norse so that the old poems could be read.

Two What the tradition holds

The **kvæði** are medieval ballads, some running to hundreds of verses, danced in a chain with everyone holding hands and the leader singing the lines. They were never written down until the nineteenth century and were carried by dancing.

The dance continues, and it is how the Norse material survived in the islands when it was lost elsewhere.

Three At the seams

The Norse account — Ginnungagap, Ask and Embla from wood, Yggdrasil — is held here in a form carried by a dance rather than a book.

Scottish Gaelic

Speakers: about 57,000 · **Family:** Celtic, Goidelic · **Where:** Scotland · **Bible:** complete 1801

One What the language holds

Gaelic puts the verb first in the sentence and has no simple word for yes or no — you answer a question by repeating the verb. Do you have it? I have.

It has two words for us, though not by inclusivity: it distinguishes emphatic from ordinary forms, so a speaker can stress the pronoun grammatically.

Two What the tradition holds

Prayers for every ordinary act

The **Carmina Gadelica**, collected by Alexander Carmichael in the Hebrides from the 1850s, holds hundreds of prayers, blessings and charms spoken during everyday work — a prayer for kindling the fire in the morning, for smooching it at night, for milking, for weaving, for going to sea, for dressing.

They address the Trinity, Mary and the saints in language that is Christian and also much older, and they treat the whole day as something done in the presence of God.

Nothing in the collection is a church prayer. They are all for work.

Three At the seams

The crossing at Day 3 verse 11, where the man is put into the garden to dress it and to keep it, meets a people who had a prayer for every separate act of the working day.

Irish

Speakers: about 70,000 daily · Family: Celtic, Goidelic · Where: Ireland · Bible: 1685

One What the language holds

Irish has the oldest vernacular literature in western Europe after Greek and Latin — writing in Irish predates writing in English, French or German.

It mutates the first consonant of words depending on grammar, as Welsh does, and puts the verb first.

Two What the tradition holds

Irish monasteries copied and preserved texts through centuries when the continent was not doing so, and Irish monks carried books back into Europe.

The **Lebor Gabála**, the book of invasions, sets the Irish into biblical genealogy deliberately, tracing them from Noah — an attempt to

join a people's own account to the scriptural one, made in writing, which is an unusual thing to have a record of.

The illuminated gospel books — Kells, Durrow, Lindisfarne — came from this tradition, and the Book of Kells spends its effort on the genealogy of Christ.

Three At the seams

The crossing at Day 3 verse 2 into verse 3, into the genealogical record, meets a people who wrote themselves into one on purpose and left the working.

Breton

Speakers: about 200,000 · **Family:** Celtic, Brythonic · **Where:** Brittany · **Bible:** complete 1897

One What the language holds

Breton is a Celtic language in France, brought from Britain by migrants in the fifth and sixth centuries — so it is a British language that went back across the channel and stayed.

It is closest to Cornish and Welsh. It was suppressed in French schools, and children were punished for speaking it within living memory.

Two What the tradition holds

The **pardons** are Breton pilgrimages held at particular chapels on particular days, with banners carried and the whole parish walking.

Ankou, a figure who collects the dead, appears in the carvings on the ossuaries and in the tales.

The **Barzaz Breiz**, a nineteenth-century collection of ballads, is partly genuine and partly the collector's own work, and separating them has taken a century.

Three At the seams

A language that crossed a sea, was suppressed in schools, and holds a collection whose authenticity had to be sorted out meets a study whose own method is to say which findings are firm and which are not.

Yélî Dnye

Speakers: about 5,000 · **Family:** none — an isolate · **Where:** Rossel Island, Papua New Guinea · **Bible:** partial

One What the language holds

Yélî Dnye is an isolate spoken on one island, and it has one of the most complicated sound systems in the Pacific, including consonants made at two places in the mouth at once.

It uses absolute spatial reference, like Guugu Yimithirr, but based on the island's own geography rather than on compass points.

It also has around eleven demonstratives — eleven different ways of saying this or that, depending on distance, visibility and whether the hearer already knows what is meant.

Two What the tradition holds

Rossel Island has a shell money system with two separate currencies and a set of exchange rules that outside observers found genuinely difficult to describe, involving the passage of time as part of the value.

Three At the seams

A language with eleven ways of pointing meets a text that keeps saying this: this is now bone of my bones, this is the genealogical record, behold it was very good.

VIII. Whistled and Other Forms

Three languages carried on something other than ordinary speech.

Silbo Gomero

Speakers: taught to all schoolchildren on the island · **Family:** whistled Spanish · **Where:** La Gomera, Canary Islands

One What the language holds

A language you can hear across a valley

Silbo renders Spanish in whistles. Vowels and consonants become pitches and breaks, and a skilled whistler can say anything sayable in Spanish. It carries several kilometres across the ravines that cut the island.

It descends from a whistled form of the language of the Guanches, the island's original Berber-speaking inhabitants, adapted to Spanish after the conquest.

It nearly died out with the arrival of roads and telephones. In 1999 La Gomera made it compulsory in schools, and UNESCO listed it in 2009. Every child on the island now learns it.

Brain imaging has found that whistlers process Silbo in the language areas of the brain, not the areas used for other sounds. It is language, not code.

Two What the tradition holds

The Guanches were the indigenous people of the Canaries, Berber-speaking, and were conquered and largely absorbed by the fifteenth century. Silbo is one of the few things of theirs that survived, in a changed form.

Three At the seams

A whistled language cannot show small capital letters. Everything in these volumes about how the seams are marked on the page

falls away when the text is whistled across a valley, as it falls away when it is read aloud.

Chinantec

Speakers: about 140,000 · **Family:** Oto-Manguean · **Where:** Oaxaca, Mexico · **Bible:** partial

One What the language holds

Chinantec is tonal, and because it is tonal it can be whistled directly — the tones carry enough of the word that men whistle to each other across the mountains and hold real conversations, not signals.

It also has ballistic syllables, a rare feature in which a syllable is released with a sharp decay, distinguishing words that are otherwise identical.

Two What the tradition holds

Whistled speech works differently here from Silbo: Silbo encodes Spanish, which is not tonal, and so must reconstruct vowels artificially. Chinantec whistling carries the tones the language already has.

The same is true of whistled Mazatec nearby, and of drum languages in West Africa, which reproduce the tones of the words directly.

Three At the seams

The Ewe and Dagbani drums in these volumes speak by reproducing tone. Chinantec whistles by the same principle. Three peoples on two continents found the same way to carry language on something other than the voice.

Hmong whistled speech

Speakers: in decline · **Family:** whistled Hmong · **Where:** the uplands of Laos, Vietnam, China

One What the language holds

Hmong is tonal, so it too can be whistled. Young men traditionally whistled to young women across valleys at night, and the whistling carried complete sentences of courtship over distances where shouting would not work and would not be private.

A leaf held to the lips, or a small free-reed instrument, could also carry the tones. The **qeej**, a bamboo mouth organ, speaks the words of the funeral text without anyone singing them.

Two What the tradition holds

At a Hmong funeral the qeej plays the text that guides the dead person back along the route the people travelled, village by village, to the place of origin — so that they can find their ancestors.

The instrument says the words. Nobody speaks them.

Three At the seams

The crossing at Day 3 verse 2 into verse 3, into the genealogical record, meets a people whose dead are guided home by a route recited backwards on an instrument.

And a language whose courtship was conducted in whistles across a valley meets Day 4 verse 1: it is not good that the man should be alone.

Where this leaves the study

Five hundred and forty-five languages across eleven volumes.

The first ten volumes took four hundred and seventy-four languages, ranked by how many people speak them. This one takes seventy-one that the ranking could not see: the very small, the signed, the ancient, the recovered, and a few that are simply strange enough that nobody thought to look.

Several of the strongest results in the whole study are in this volume. The Nicaraguan children who built a language their teachers did not have. Ugaritic coming out of a mound and settling questions about Genesis that had run for a millennium. A Massachusetts language raised from a 1663 Bible. A people required by custom to marry outside their own tongue. A bird and a man who lead each other to honey and have both inherited their part.

None of those would have appeared on a list sorted by population. That is worth remembering the next time a language with nine hundred speakers is described as minor.

What is still outstanding

The seam matrix, rebuilt with Hebrew as its own row rather than as the baseline against which everything else is measured. That is the next work, and it has been outstanding since the correction was made.

Beyond it: the Hebrew syntax test at Day 3 verses 5 and 6, which remains the one live objection to the Day 3 placement. And a comparison of the banner's day-by-day order against the Book of Jubilees, which is the only other document anywhere that does the same thing.

Cross Linguistic Study of the New Creation Story / Man on Day Three in Genesis — languages 475 through 545
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Verse references follow the banner revision of September 7, 2026. Where a finding rests substantially on one researcher or is disputed among specialists, that is stated in the entry. Restricted traditional material has been left out. Native speaker and specialist review is warmly invited, and for the languages in this volume it is urgent.