

STRAY NOTES ON THE ESKIMO OF ARCTIC ALASKA

DIAMOND JENNESS

The following notes were collected by the author between December 1913 and June 1914, in the course of linguistic and archaeological studies along the coast from Point Barrow to the Alaska-Canada Boundary.

1. STORIES ABOUT SHAMANS

(a) *From a Nome Eskimo.*

About the end of the 19th century a shaman living in Nome went through the ceremony of being burned alive. He sat quietly on the ground while the people built a small wooden hut around him and set it on fire. House and man alike seemed to be burned; nothing remained except a pile of ashes. The people went about their usual occupations during the next three days, as the shaman had instructed them, and on the evening of the fourth day assembled with their dogs in the village dance-house. Suddenly they heard a loud noise on the roof, and a few minutes afterward the shaman entered the room through the doorway, as though nothing had happened. Some years later, however, after he was dead, the people found a little house or den under the spot where he had seemingly been burned, and recalled that he had never been willing to repeat the performance except in this one place.

Some Colville River Eskimos credited their shamans with a similar feat.

(b) *From Wales.*

Many years ago when seals were very scarce and the people in danger of starvation someone said to the shaman Umialiksrq, "You are a shaman. Why don't you make the seals come? Soon we shall all be dead." Umialiksrq hung his head a moment, then quietly answered "Very well." Two or three evenings later the people gathered in the dance-house where Umialiksrq was beating his drum. At his command they dimmed the lamps, bound him securely with lashings of bearded-seal hide, and tied around his ankles an extra cord, the end of which they placed in the hands of a strong hunter. Behind the shaman, too, they arranged a number of stones, his tail, as he called them, to prevent anything from harming him as he traveled through the sea. As they sat, waiting in the semi-darkness, they heard a shrill whistle and saw Umialiksrq vanish like a flash of light along the cord that the hunter was holding. He reappeared in the same way after a short absence, told them that he had descended through a certain hole in the ice where the people had been trying to catch tom-cod, and prophesied that after three days the seals would come in large numbers. On the fourth day the hunters did actually capture a few seals, and thereafter they caught as many as they needed.

On another occasion the same shaman sat down in the middle of the dance-house, beat his drum and ordered the people to extinguish the lights and to tie him up. They lashed him with stout cords of bearded-seal hide, fastened a noose around his neck and drew him up towards a rafter until his feet were several inches above the floor and his head dropping on one side as though he were dead. After a few minutes they heard his drum beating again and his voice bidding them relight their lamps. When the lamps were relit he was sitting quietly on the floor beating his drum.

On another evening he balanced on his wrist the end of a stone that was as long as the distance between his elbow and his fingers; and the stone remained there without falling. Then he twisted it around his arm as though it were string, and, knotting the ends, told a hunter to pull the knot taut. When the man pulled, the stone seemed to cut right through the arm.

Another shaman could push a stick right through his head behind his ears without suffering any harm; and the same man could hold his drum in front of him, wave his arm, and cause the drum to disappear.

Still another shaman (the father of my informant) would drive a knife into his stomach and draw it out covered with blood, while blood issued also from his mouth. (A Point Hope native reported the same trick from his village also.)

A young woman who was a shaman sat on the floor gazing intently at the trap door while the people behind her watched and listened. Presently, in the passage-way leading to the house, they heard voices and laughter as though several people were about to enter. A man who was sitting on the sleeping-platform called out, "You people down there are making a noise as though you were coming in"; and a man's voice from below answered him, "Don't talk. You haven't big teeth."

(c) *From Point Hope.*

A shaman threaded a rawhide cord through a crevice between two large planks and apparently sawed with it right through one plank without marking either the wood or the cord.

Another shaman threw his knife on a caribou hide and, holding up the end of the hide with one hand, beckoned to the knife with the other. Slowly it crept up the hide towards him.

(d) *From Point Barrow.*

Occasionally a man, usually a shaman, killed someone and buried the body to use later for sorcery. In 1912 the Point Barrow Eskimos accidentally dug up a woman who had been killed for this purpose and buried, in a squatting position with all her clothes on, near the sorcerer's ice-house.

The Point Barrow Eskimos used charms extensively. Some they attached to their coats; others they set over the doors of their houses. Often charms were built into the boat-head of the *umiak* to give success in whaling.

(e) *From Endicott Mountain Eskimos.*

A shaman could fly through the air and reach distant places in a very short time. About 1904 two men who had the reputation of being

shamans went outside their tents for the avowed purpose of flying to a distant place and killing someone there. They returned in about half an hour, but their victim did not die.

Three or four men once attacked a shaman, cut his body into small pieces and threw them into a lake. The next morning the shaman reappeared at his home unharmed. His murderers fled.

Two men who were traveling together came to a narrow crack in the ground. One said to the other, "Let us stop here. I shall go down this crack and come out on the other side." The second man said, "I'll try to do it first." He squeezed himself down a little way, and when he could proceed no farther drew himself out again. Then the first man entered the crack and a moment later reappeared on the opposite bank. His companion said, "I'll try again"; and when the crack became very narrow he bored a tunnel and so emerged on the opposite bank. But the first man was a shaman.

In cases of sickness a shaman often predicted the issue by fastening a cord around the head or leg of a patient. According to the heaviness or lightness of the head or leg the patient would die or recover. Kanaura, an Eskimo living on Flaxman Island in 1914, was reported to make similar diagnoses by using a mitten instead of the patient's head or leg.

A shaman could use his powers to steal meat. At times, while the people inside a house were sleeping, a hand would come up through the floor, abstract the meat and return in the same way as it came. That is why meat seems to disappear very rapidly and mysteriously in times of scarcity.

Certain shamans would light their pipes, gaze into the smoke and see things that were far beyond the range of normal vision. Thus if a man had been lost on the ice the shaman might declare, "I see tracks leading zigzag over the hummocks, then they disappear"; and his audience, listening in profound silence, would know that the man was dead. Or he might say, "I see many tracks, all in one place," and would proceed to describe the place. The people then knew that the man was alive and would search for him.

Certain shamans knew one or more songs that helped them in caribou hunting. Caribou often ran away with the nooses and the sticks to which they were fastened, but these shamans by merely singing their songs could make the lines tangle around the animals' legs and bodies.

(f) *From the Mackenzie River delta.*

Apakkoq, a medicine man in the Mackenzie River delta, allowed his countrymen to lash his hands behind his back and to draw his head down between his knees with a stout thong. He then ordered the lamps to be extinguished and in the darkness flew through the air over their heads. When he ordered the lamps relit he was sitting on the floor, bound as before.

Another of his tricks was to permit himself to be trussed up and to consign one of the cords into the hands of three strong men. After the lamps were extinguished the cord would snap in the men's hands and Apakkoq would fly through the air. Several minutes later he would return and order the lamps to be relit. He would then appear bound as before, but the cord held by the men would be broken.

At other times he would go down through the earth after being trussed up and return through the wall of the dwelling; or he would remove his skin coat, his trousers and his boots. Even his wife could remove her coat after the people had bound her with strong cords.

At Kittigazuit, in the Mackenzie delta, a man swallowed a large bead and extracted it from the top of his head. Then he flung it outwards, followed its invisible course around the room by pointing with a drum, and suddenly caused it to drop on the membrane of the drum with a loud thud. On another occasion he made a weasel skin so hard that when he tried to cut it with a sharp knife, the knife was dulled and made not the slightest impression.

II. MISCELLANEOUS SUPERSTITIONS

At Wales, when her little child is crying, a mother will sometimes say: *u u qaqasuaruk pilyiaratin qakma* "Hush, hush, The loon outside there will carry you away."

Point Hope natives say that if the dogs howl during the night something important is going to happen. Thus if you are whaling at the time you will capture a big whale.

Mackenzie delta natives believe that if you scorch a bear skin a strong wind will arise from the south-west.

The Eskimos from Point Barrow eastward claim that they can tell the state of the weather when a ptarmigan was born by examining its breastbone. If it is almost transparent, but flecked by a few dark spots, the sky was nearly cloudless, but a little rain was falling.

Near Baillie Island (just east of the Mackenzie River delta) there is a small stone resting on a larger one. The latter was formerly a woman who ran away from her home to escape ill-treatment; and the smaller stone is the baby she was carrying on her back. The larger stone is now cracked, but formerly, when it was unbroken, part of it, the woman's teeth, became red when caribou were numerous in the district and white when they were scarce.

Mountain sheep often wander down to the sea and change into beluga. Hence when there are plenty of beluga off the Arctic coast mountain sheep are scarce; and when sheep are plentiful in the Brooks Range beluga are absent in the adjacent sea. A man once followed the tracks of a sheep far out on the sea ice until they suddenly disappeared, when he knew that the animal had changed to a beluga.

Behind Martin Point, on the Arctic coast of Alaska, is a small hill which the Eskimos generally avoid. Any man who does ascend it avoids sleeping there, knowing that his limbs would become like those of an old man and that he would never rise again. Sometimes a caribou falls asleep on its summit and never wakes.

In travelling overland from the Arctic coast to Kotzebue Sound the Eskimo ascend the Colville River to a point beyond the head of the Noatak River before they cross over to the latter stream. The crossing takes them three days, and the trail leads them past a high mountain whose summit is covered with perpetual ice. Any one who sleeps on the side of this mountain will die. A Point Barrow youth who slept there died within a few days of reaching his house. Soon afterwards two Colville River natives slept on it also and one of them failed

to waken; but his companion, who was a shaman, returned to the village they had left, recovered the dead man's soul and restored him to life. The Eskimo therefore make a forced march that will carry them past the mountain in one day.

From Wales to beyond Point Barrow the Eskimo have many tales of two monsters, a ten-legged white bear, *qoqogaq* or *qoqogiaq*, and a walrus dog. A Wales native living near Point Barrow, who claimed to have seen the bear, said that the distance between its ears is the full stretch of a man's two arms. It is so big and heavy that it can break through ice as thick as a man is tall. Sometimes it lies on its back and waves its ten legs in the air so that from a distance they appear like men in motion; hence hunters are warned to be careful if they see anything that looks like a man on the ice. In the spring and summer it lies in wait to drag the hunter's kayak under the water. Whether there is only one of these animals, or more than one, the Eskimo cannot agree. A party travelling eastward from Point Barrow in the autumn of 1913 heard one swimming beneath their sleds, and when they coughed loudly and moved away from the trail, the monster poked its head through the ice, which was too thin to endure its weight. Afraid lest it should follow their footsteps and devour them, they hurried home by a long and circuitous route.

The monstrous dog that watches over some of the walrus herds is said to be larger than the largest bull walrus. When the animals are alone on the ice-floes they raise their heads every few minutes to guard against danger; but when their watchdog is near they sleep unconcernedly. It has a three-edged tail bristling with spikes with which it lashes the water if enemies are near, emitting at the same time a peculiar whistling noise. It never strikes a walrus unless one is refractory and will not obey its warning; for it feeds on seals and fish. In its ear dwells a tiny animal like a fox, which darts into the water when it sees a hunter in a kayak, springs at him from behind and kills him. A Point Barrow native who was hunting once saw this dog lash up the water and cause a herd of walrus to disappear in the foam. Another native who was going out on the ice to hunt seals heard it whistle, and, knowing it was dangerous, turned back home.

A few years ago a Point Barrow native who was sitting behind his wind-break on the ice, watching for seals, saw a mysterious monster raise its head out of the water in front of him. Its hair was black and closely cropped like a man's, and all that was visible of its face, from the nose upward, resembled a human being. The Eskimo ran away; but afterwards some old hunters in the village told him that if he had shot the creature he would have been able to kill any animal he wished.

When the Arctic Coast Eskimo throw away old clothes they cut them to shreds, and if they are leaving them behind in a cache they cut off tiny fragments. They believe that unless they do this some sorcerer may take a fragment to bury in a grave, which would cause the death of the owner. Caribou and reindeer hides they treat in the same way.

Graveyards they consider dangerous places, because they are haunted by the malignant spirits of the dead, *alioqtun*. Once when a

man was passing a graveyard near Wales an old woman sprang out of the earth and attacked him. She told him that if she threw him to the ground he would die; but after he had pulled out most of her hair, and lost most of his own, she disappeared, and he returned in safety to his house. Afterwards, when his kinsmen questioned the truth of his story, he said, "Go and look at all the hair that is scattered about."

In the same neighborhood two men had gone out with a sled while their youngest brother remained at home. After a time a pup ran into the house, whining and refusing all food that the youth offered it. Finally he became alarmed lest something had befallen his brothers and went to meet their sled. As he drew near the brother who was walking in front of the dogs stumbled and fell; and by the time the youth reached them both his brothers lay dead, one on the ground and the other on the sled. They had offended their grandfather by glancing at his grave, and he had killed them. The terror-stricken survivor tried to return to his house, but despite all his efforts his feet would not move, for his grandfather was bewitching him also. At last he managed to tear open the front of his skin shirt and release his soul. Immediately his feet became free again and he was able to reach his home in safety.

III. CHILDREN'S GAMES

1. *Hide and Seek, irigaqtoq (Point Barrow)*

Three or four children stand with their heads together and eyes fixed on the ground, singing the following song while one runs away and hides:

himo himo himo himo (repeated)
himotayuni haiyuni (repeated)
qoloqolognasi qoloqolognasi
kugaurum iguanun taimaktoq taima
qingayayayanga qingayayayanga
kugaurum igluanun taimakoq taima
"Heads together, heads together,
Stand with your heads together.
Don't look, don't look,
On the other side of the creek he is lost.
I am looking for him, I am looking for him.
On the other side of the creek he is lost."

2. *Blind Man's Bluff (Point Barrow)*

A number of children stand inside a circle which they must not overstep. Two of them are taken out, blindfolded, and told to catch one of the children within the circle; whoever is caught takes the "blind man's" place. There is much chaffing whenever a boy catches a girl, or a girl a boy.

3. *Break the Ring (Point Barrow)*

A number of children join hands to form a ring, enclosing one child in the center. They circle round and round, chanting:

naukun naukun aningiaqpa	Where will he get out?
qangiralukun aningiaqpa	Through the corner he will get out.
auqohoi	Ho

At the shout *auqohoi* the ring stops circling while the child in the

center tries to break through. If he succeeds the others pursue him, and his captor pretends to scratch out and devour his eyes. The captor must then stand in the center of the circle.

4. *Kaputaq (Point Barrow, Point Hope)*

Four children arrange themselves as in tennis, but with the partners opposite each other. They have eight small sticks made of bone or ivory, four to use as counters and the others for throwing. Between each pair of adversaries a short peg is set up in the ground. The first child throws a stick as close as he can to the peg. His adversary then throws, trying to get nearer. Each in turn then throws his second stick. He whose stick lies closest to the peg wins a counter; if both sticks are closer than either of his adversary's he wins two counters. The pair on the other side then throw against each other. The game ends when one pair of partners has won the four counters twice in succession.

5. *Aqaraq (Point Barrow, Point Hope)*

There are three stick games which go under this name. (a) Four children arrange themselves as in the preceding game, but instead of throwing towards a peg they throw to each other, striving to catch the sticks in their hands. The game is varied in many ways. Two sticks may be thrown at once, or the stick must be caught on the back of the hand instead of with the palm. Occasionally the players withdraw their arms from the sleeves of their coats and thrust them in again in time to catch the sticks with their hands. Failure to catch cleanly means the loss of a counter. (b) The child balances a number of small sticks on the nose, makes them fall off, one by one, and as they fall, protrudes the tongue and catches them in the mouth. (c) The player holds a number of small sticks upright on the ground and lets them fall in a heap. Taking a thin stick, or a knife, he moves to one side each stick in the heap without disturbing any of the remainder and counts how many he succeeds in moving.

6. *Juggling, igalukitaq (Point Barrow)*

Two stones, fox-paws, or other suitable objects are juggled in the air until the following song has been chanted:

vala vala a hi e
vala vala ha anga
yange i yahi nausagi
sumata napaqtulu
qingaluralu ayaniqaxluima
kavisingaxluima
utkusikluima
qorviqruluxi
nanuli nanuli iksuqakkin
oyaqakkin oyaga
kina yuli napaqtoqmiucat
nuluqtogayuarukkin taqtukkin

This chant is a rigmarole with only some of the words intelligible. The Eskimo of the Mackenzie delta play the same game but accompany it with a slightly different chant.

7. (*Endicott Mountain Eskimo*)

Clap the hands, chanting:

sama sama sama sama

"down there"

With the right forefinger bore the palm of the left hand and chant:

tarunago putullago

"make a hole through here."

With the left forefinger bore the palm of the right hand and chant:

taranugo putullago

"make a hole through here."

Wipe down the cheeks with both hands and chant:

qauqpapurakin

"your big forehead"

iqsraqpalurakin

"your big cheeks"

Press the stomach with the hands and chant:

narraqpapurakin

"your big stomach"

tahemma

"finished"

8. (*Point Hope*)

Two children, A and B, squat on the ground opposite each other. A holds out his right fist, B places his on top. A places his left fist on top of B's right, and B adds his left fist. Both children now close their eyes. B removes his upper fist, flips his lip with the forefinger and lays the closed fist against his left cheek. Then, with the same hand, his eyes still closed, he raises B's left fist and lays it as nearly as he can on B's left cheek. He repeats the same movements with his right hand, ending up with both his fists against his cheeks. The two children now open their eyes and laugh at their ludicrous positions (There is clearly some error in this description).

9. (*Wales*)

A number of children pile their hands one on top of the other, palms downward, and press hard. The lowest hand is withdrawn with difficulty, on the assumption that it is cold and stiff. The second hand is withdrawn with greater difficulty—it is nearly frozen. The third hand is withdrawn after a long effort and pressed against the body as though it pained—it is frozen and the skin has been torn off.

10. (*Wales*)

Two little girls face each other, join hands, and move them in time with the following chant:

yu ka (each child pushes back her partner's arm, like a piston)

yu ka (each pushes back the other arm)

qapsugusugusu (the paired arms are crossed)

qapsugusugusu (the paired arms are crossed again, but the ones that previously passed over now pass under)

11. When a man drags home a bearded seal the children at *Point Barrow* chant:

uniaqtoaq samanga atektoaq kiluvaqtoaq

"He is dragging something from the sea, the sealer who is coming back."

Point Hope children have a different chant:

uniaqtoaq tamanga atektunga-a

puvakamik aize aiza

tingukamik

"He is dragging something from the sea, the sealer, a thing with old lungs and an old liver."

12. When the aurora is glowing *Point Barrow* children sometimes throw a piece of liver into the air to show they are not afraid of it and chant:

kogowiya ki kigowiya ki	Oh aurora, Oh aurora
angi yangi yangi ya	
tulimaq pigna	Oh rib up there
angi yangi yangi ya	
qallutaq pigna	Oh ladle up there
angi yangi yangi ya	

13. The following chant, which also comes from *Point Barrow*, was said to be used to drive an evil spirit, aliqoq "jaw", into a corner and out of the house:

agliwaruaqrukkin	Your old jaws
agliqukkin n'vingarluik	Drop your jaws
kupkataallugit	Chatter your teeth
um um um	Um um um.

14. After setting a noose over a sparrow's nest a child will retire to one side and chant a song to make the bird enter the noose. The *Point Barrow*, *Point Hope* and *Nome* versions differ considerably, but the *Point Barrow* version is as follows:

uglure siqumilluit	Her little nest break it up
qitungaure siqumilluit	Her little children rend them
ugluiyaglugo	Take the nest away
qitunreyaglugo	Take the children away
ivalangi pillagit	Her nestlings snatch them
naaqtoaqtoaqtugluge-e	Break them up.

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