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in *American, African, and Old European
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THE MYTHOLOGY OF THE INUIT OF THE CENTRAL ARCTIC

In the mid-1970s, the population of the Inuit—spread over more than twelve thousand miles of coastline from eastern Siberia to the lands lying east of Greenland—was approximately one hundred thousand. Inuit, “the human beings” (or its variants Yuit and Suit), is the term by which they refer to themselves; but better known, since the end of the seventeenth century, is the term “Eskimo,” which the French borrowed from the Algonquians; it means “eater of raw meat.”¹ Those who live in Greenland, after two and a half centuries of Danish colonial presence, refer to themselves as Kālādlit.

The Inuit are distributed as follows: approximately two thousand in Siberia, thirty thousand in Alaska, twenty thousand in Canada, and fifty thousand in Greenland.

The ancestors of the Inuit (or the Proto-Eskimos) came from Asia some ten thousand years ago, crossing over the Bering Strait, which at that time connected Siberia with Alaska. Then, after they had lived in Alaska for five thousand years, their descendants (called Paleo-Eskimos) began to emigrate eastward, eventually reaching Greenland as well as the Quebec-Labrador peninsula, where the pre-Dorset and Dorset cultures would develop.

Four thousand years later (barely a thousand years ago), a new culture called the Thule developed in northern Alaska. This was characterized by its skin boats and its dogsleds. In less than four centuries, the Thule culture extended its influence to encompass all of the Arctic regions of North America, from Alaska to Greenland.

These ancestors of the Inuit were remarkably well equipped for hunting marine mammals (including the right whale), but they also hunted land mammals (especially the caribou).

This final great wave of migration which prehistory reveals to us may be viewed in connection with the great linguistic and cultural homogeneity observable from Greenland to north Alaska, though the southern Alaskan groups are different from the northern group both culturally and linguistically. Other differences appear in certain regions of the Inuit territory: the best known are those which have been

observed among certain island groups (such as the Sagdlirmiut of Southampton Island) or continental groups (such as the Caribou Inuit, west of Hudson Bay), as well as among the Ammassalimmiut of Greenland, on the western edge of the Inuit zone.

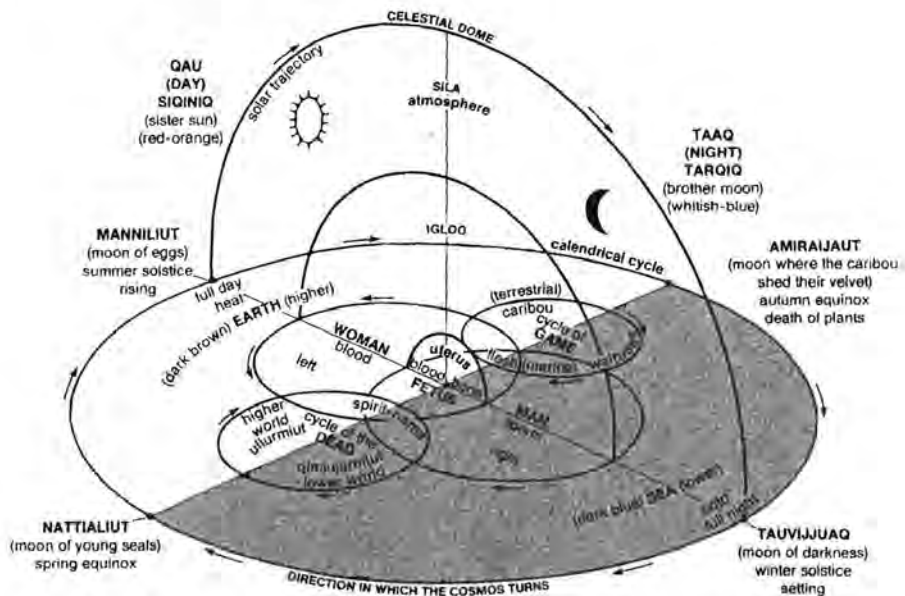
I. Inuit Mythology

Inuit mythology, in anthropomorphizing the natural environment and in establishing divisions between that environment and the social milieu, reflects and serves as the foundation for social order and customs. Most beliefs and individual and collective rites, in the everyday organization of life, refer everything to that mythology.

This mythology of hunters follows an unpredictable course in which connection counts for more than explanation. A mythology of small groups, it treats social relationships at their most basic level. As a vast system of relationships and symbols, the mythology is often compared by the Inuit themselves with oneiric productions, as dreams and myths are based on the same order for them. When we realize, moreover, that death and sleep are states of the same nature for the Inuit (which explains the appearance of the dead in dreams), a panorama of mental activities and productions opens up before us.

II. Mythic History and the Emergence of Culture

It was thought for a long time that Inuit mythology contained no coherent and detailed explanation of mythic history or the emergence of culture and was essentially composed of fables about animals, heroic epics, and accounts of accidental events of no general interest.² We shall attempt to show that this notion does not stand up to meticulous examination and, indeed, that it arises from the fact that our Western societies are used to treating their history in a very explicit and linear fashion, while the Inuit, on the other hand, are a hunting society with an oral tradition that speaks in its own nonlinear and often indirect fashion through a mass of myths, rites, and prescriptions. There is a history in which many developments are merely implied or simply defined by their absence in accounts which apparently say nothing about them.



Differentiation, complementarity, and analogical construction in Inuit thought. Three-dimensional representation.

I will attempt to reconstitute their mythic history from data collected principally by K. Rasmussen in the central Arctic in 1921-24, and completed by data that I collected in the same region between 1971 and 1978.³ A scientific analysis of this remains to be done, but the pioneering work accomplished by C. Lévi-Strauss for Native American mythologies reveals the benefits that may be derived from a systematic application of the structural method to the mythology of the Inuit.

1. The Conception of the Universe and of Its "Prehistory"

For the Inuit of the central Arctic, the universe in the primordial period included the earth which was, properly speaking, a sort of round disk washed by the sea. It was populated by animals and by humans who were not Inuit. It upheld, with the help of four pillars, the celestial vault which constituted another world populated with animals after the image of the earth. Just below the terrestrial disk was a cramped world in which it was impossible to stand up straight, below which was a final lower world which also replicated the earth and was populated with animals.

It then came to pass that the pillars that held up the celestial vault became dislocated and caused the earth to pitch, along with its inhabitants, which explains the presence of so many spirits beneath the terrestrial mound. A diluvian rain fell from the sky and drowned all other life.

2. The Life-Giving Earth in the Time of the Great Blackness

"In the time that followed there appeared two small mounds of earth from which were born two men, two adults, the first Inuit. They soon wished to reproduce, and one of them took the other to be his wife. The wife-man became pregnant and when his time came, his companion, anxious to bring the fetus out, composed a magic song:

Here is a man
Here is a penis
May he form a passage there
A great passage
Passage, passage, passage.

This song split the penis of his partner, who was transformed into a woman. All of the Inuit descend from them" (Rasmussen 1929, 252).

The first man was named Uumarnituaq and the first woman Aakuluujjusi. They brought forth animals either by creating them or by bringing them back from other worlds (Saladin d'Anglure 1974).

In these earliest times it was always dark on earth. All was somber, and neither places nor animals could be made out. There were no heavenly bodies in the sky, there was no ice on the sea, neither tempest nor storm nor lightning nor winds. At the bottom of the sea, trees grew, which would sometimes wash up on the shore.

At that time the Inuit were poor and ignorant, with few hunting instruments and no knowledge of game; the only animals they hunted were the lagopus and the Arctic hare. In order to see their prey, they wet their fingertip with saliva to make it luminous, and pointed it in the air. But they often had to be content with scratching the ground and eating the earth, which at that time was their primary food. For clothing, they had only the sparse and fragile skins of birds and white foxes.

Among the first animals of this age were the crow, the white fox, the wolf, and the bear. But there was confusion between the world of animals and the world of humans. Humans could easily transform themselves into animals and animals could metamorphose into humans—to whom they thus became very close, speaking the same language, living in similar habitations, and hunting in the same way in spite of the differences between their respective habits.

There were no marine mammals, no big game, and thus no taboos. Life was without great danger but also without the real joy that follows effort and exertion.

There were no shamans in that time: people were afraid of disease and were unaware of the rules of life and of ways of arming themselves against danger and wicked-

ness. They nevertheless discovered the protective power of amulets. First among these was the shell of the Itiq (anus) sea urchin, which one person would point toward the diseased area of the patient while farting, at the same time as another person was blowing on the diseased organ: these two acts combined all of the vital force emanating from the human body.

Among the first humans, it was not rare for women to be sterile; thus they would go out in search of "children of the earth," babies that were to be found in the ground. They had to go far away and to search for a long time to find boys, whereas there was an abundance of girls. Death did not exist, and the number of Inuit increased progressively. (After Rasmussen, 1929, 1931)

These narratives show us the essential place occupied by the earth (*nuna*) in Inuit mythological thought—not only as the generator of the human race, but also as regulator of Inuit social reproduction in the first times of humanity. On the demographic level it furnished babies to sterile women, and on the economic level it afforded essential food in a time when game was rare and difficult of access. These accounts also show us the importance of the new humanity's discovery of the magical effectiveness of breath and of the spoken word. Sexual difference is created by a song, and the first case of healing is by means of the vital breath (associated with the sea urchin).

Many natural constraints remain, however, to be overcome: the creation of woman indeed allows man to free himself in part from a dependence on mother earth for procreation, but feminine sterility is still great; the search for small game allows him to explore a new solution to the problem of provisionment, but the earth continues to be his principal food, and the endless darkness hinders any advance in hunting. A new danger threatens humanity, that of overpopulation, as death does not exist. Finally, the important role played by woman for the increase of human beings, either by procreating or by collecting the "babies of the earth" in the course of long journeys, creates a new depen-

dence for man, who remains ignorant, poor, and nearly sedentary because of his inability to hunt.

3. Light, Death, and the Beginnings of Culture

The magical power of words was progressively explored and put to work by humans or by the metamorphosed animals who resembled them, in an attempt to surmount the obstacles that threatened the survival of the new humanity.

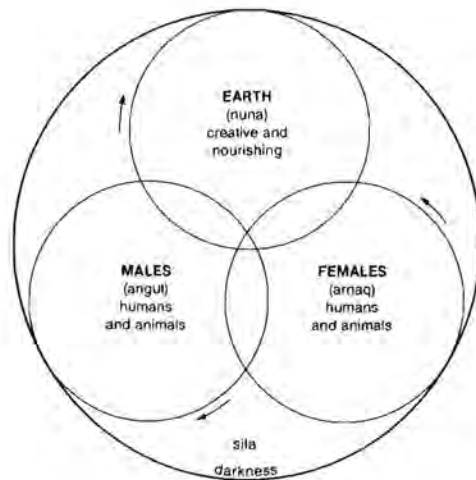
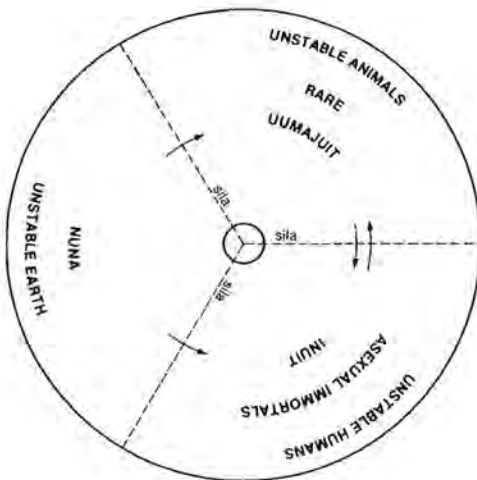
"One day the crow, meeting the white fox, said that he wanted light, the better to find his food. But the fox preferred the dark, the better to pillage the places where men hid their meat. The crow then cried 'qau qau qau' (light . . .), while the fox retorted 'taaq, taag, taaq' (darkness . . .). The crow won out, and since that time day has alternated with night" (Saladin d'Anglure 1974).

"According to several myths of the central Arctic, the first Inuit lived on the island of Millijuaq in the Hudson Strait. They became so numerous that the island began to rock slowly in the sea under their weight. The people panicked until an old woman cried, 'May humans die, because there is no more room for us on earth; may they make war and disperse'; and humans became mortals, made war between themselves, and dispersed in every direction" (Rasmussen 1929, 92; Boas 1907, 173; Saladin d'Anglure: field notes).

With the appearance of the "short life" and the alternation between day and night, humans disengaged themselves further from the tutelage of the earth, which was characterized by darkness and endless life. Woman is again implicated in this process of differentiation and discontinuity, which simultaneously affirms her status and marks the dawn of culture while ensuring human survival. A variant of these two myths, from Greenland, further attributes to the same person the origin of day and of the short life.

Now that they had light, the Inuits could truly acquire technical knowledge and develop hunting. Qau, the radical which means light, is also found in compounds in the words "forehead" and "knowledge."

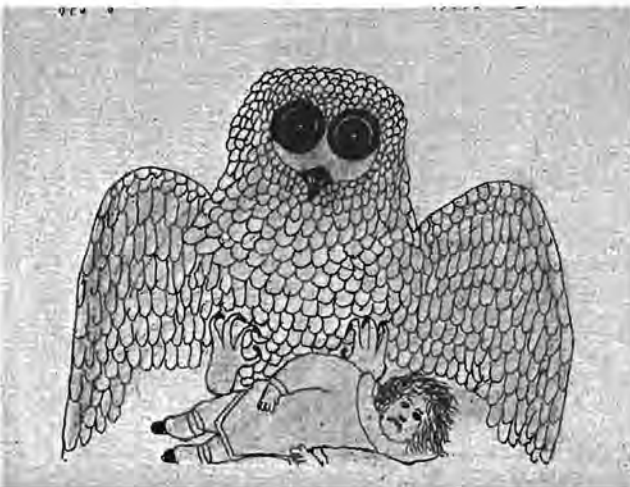
"At this time they had nothing to harness dogs with, and discovered that their houses (made of snow, stones, or peat),





Mask, "Spirit of the Mountain." Sitka, Alaska, Sheldon Jackson College. Courtesy Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas.

In mythic times, animals could easily turn themselves into human beings. Illustration of the myth of the woman who married an eagle and left him when she discovered his way of life. Drawing by Davidialuk Alasuaq. Povungnituk, Canada, B.S.A. collection.



which were animated by spirits and endowed with life, had the power to move about with their occupants inside by sliding over the ground when certain magic words were pronounced. They thus used them to go to places in which game was abundant. This continued until the day the Inuits complained that many children were being killed by the houses as they fell from their beds while the houses were moving—at which time the houses suddenly ceased their movement" (Rasmussen 1929; Saladin d'Anglure 1974).

Oil was not used to fuel lamps as it was possible to burn fine snow.

4. Contradictions, Human Disorders, and the Need for a Cosmic Order (Sila)

The destruction of humanity had now been averted by the appearance of death, and thus of a certain demographic equilibrium. The exploitation of game had also been rendered possible by the light of day. But no sooner were men slightly more liberated from their primary dependence on the earth than they commenced to use their new powers of antagonism and war: they brought on death and transgressed the rules they had sought to establish in order to organize their social relationships and their relationships with nature.

The sun, moon, stars, thunder, lightning, the cold wind from the north, and the warm wind from the south were all living beings, either human or animal. Their own misbehavior or the mistreatment they had suffered made them climb up into the sky, where they came to participate in the new world order, the cosmic order of Sila. Sila is at once air, ordered movement, cosmic periodicity, the rationality of the mind, and the understanding of and respect for this order.

"The sun and the moon were brother and sister. One day the brother was deceived by his mother: while he was suffering from sore eyes, she made off with his first white bear, which she ate in secret instead of sharing it in common as is the rule for the first game brought in. When his eye was healed by a dive which gave him great visual power, he caused the death of his mother by harpooning a great beluga while she was attached to the thong of his harpoon to help him in his hunt" (Rasmussen 1929).

Symbolically cutting the umbilical cord that attached him to his mother, he attached her to the beluga with the cord that was the thong of his harpoon, thus sacrificing her to his game (a social product), following the rule of the social distribution of products.

"Having become orphans, the brother and sister had many adventures until the day when, under the cover of darkness, he took advantage of her sexually. When she discovered his identity after blackening his face with soot, she reacted violently, cut off one of her breasts, and threw it at him, saying, 'If you love me so much, eat this.' Then she picked up the breast he had refused, made a torch of it, and fled into the sky, where she became the sun, Siqiniq. He pursued her with another torch—which went out—and he became the moon, Taqqiq" (Saladin d'Anglure 1974).

By her voluntary mutilation and the sacrifice of her fertility, Siqiniq established the foundation for another rule of distribution: that of exogamy or matrimonial exchange. Involuntarily incestuous, taken advantage of in a darkness which recalls the blackness—and thus the confusion and continuity—of the earliest times of the earth, Siqiniq (the sun) is now placed in a celestial position of luminosity and mobility, with an ordered trajectory and a productive seasonal periodicity.

Her severed and bloody breast, which her blood brother did not dare to consume, was never to give milk; this breast, having become a flaming torch and shining sun, would now warm humanity. Furthermore, through its symbolic representation, the oil lamp, it would illumine the microcosm constituted by the domestic family and its new rule of exogamy. By means of the cooking that it makes possible, it finally establishes a definitive separation between the bleeding woman (by virtue of her reproductive properties) and bloody meat (the game produced by the hunter). Henceforth, this separation is marked on the face of the woman in the form of a radiating facial tattoo, a sort of symbolic cooking which is effected by inserting soot from an oil lamp under a girl's skin after her first menstruation.

Her brother Taqqiq (the moon), of powerful vision and overflowing sexuality, emerges from his earthly adventure both darkened and frustrated. He nevertheless becomes a celestial instrument of this order and of its reproduction. The principal agent of the division of the calendar, he is also charged with making sterile women fertile, bringing game to unfortunate hunters, and defending orphans who have been mistreated and disfavored on earth.

"It was also a brother and a sister who were the source of thunder and lightning. They wished to avenge themselves upon the adults who had reprimanded them because of their overly noisy games. They began to produce thunder and lightning with firestones and a dried skin; when they urinate, it rains on humans" (Saladin d'Anglure 1974).

As for the winds, they are controlled by a male and a female spirit, whose attributes are described in many accounts:

The parents of the baby giant Naarsuk were assassinated; when he was found, the people were astonished by his size and strength—he could hold up three women seated on his erect penis. He was abandoned with nothing but laced skin for clothing. He rose into the air and became the spirit-lord of the wind (the cold north wind) which rushes out when his laced swaddling clothes come unlaced. Another wind spirit, this one female, lives in a snow igloo: when the heat of her lamp makes holes in the walls, the warm southern wind blows on earth. (Rasmussen 1929, 1931; Saladin d'Anglure 1974)

All of these sidereal or atmospheric spirits, through their position and the order of their movements, constitute Sila: to move in the direction of the sun is to "act according to Sila" (Petersen 1967). Mankind progressed and began to gain control over its reproduction.

5. *The Ecological Order or the Failure of Female Autonomy*

The primordial couple, the ancestors of the Inuit, caused a number of animals to appear on earth.

"One day Aakuluujjusi took her trousers and transformed them into a caribou whose fur resembles, by its coloration, the trousers of a woman. She gave the animal sharp teeth and long tusks. Then, taking off her jacket, she made a walrus with horns on its head. But the Inuit took fright before these animals that attacked them on land and in the water: she therefore decided to interchange their horns and tusks, and kicking the forehead of the caribou she broke some of its teeth to render it inoffensive, and caused its eye sockets to bulge out to weaken its vision. She then said, 'Stay far away, like true game.' But the caribou were now too quick for the hunters, so she reversed the direction of the hair on their bellies to slow them down" (Rasmussen 1929; Saladin d'Anglure 1974).

These were the first big game animals of the Inuit, terrestrial and marine game around which they would organize their new socioeconomic life. New relationships began to be established among humans and between animals and humans, replacing the primordial confusion. It still remained to circumscribe the limits of humanity and of animality and to establish the nature of their connections. The myth of Unigumasuittuq contributes to the resolution of these problems:

Unigumasuittuq ("she who did not wish to marry") lived with her parents and their dog Siarnaq. She refused all suitors. Nevertheless, one day she accorded her favors to a handsome visitor. It was their dog, metamorphosed, whom no one had recognized; he returned often and she became pregnant. The father then discovered the identity of their guest and in fury he placed the couple on an island. The girl made the dog swim back and bring food from her father's house. The father supplied them many times, but then one day he loaded the dog with rocks, causing him to drown. The girl soon gave birth to beings who were half human and half dog. On the advice of their mother, they tore their grandfather's kayak apart when he came to bring them meat; then, overwhelmed, Unigumasuittuq sent her children away so that they might survive. The first puppies were set adrift in a southerly direction in the sole and upper leather of a boot; they disappeared in the fog amid a metallic din and became the ancestors of the white man. She sent others toward the continent to the south, and these became the ancestors of the Indians. Another group became the ancestors of the Tunit, a prehistoric people; and the final pup, sent toward the north, became the ancestor of the Ijirait, invisible beings who live on caribou.

After the dispersal of those who were the originators of the human races, she returned to her father's home. But twice more she refused her suitors (a metamorphosed caribou and wolf) before she finally agreed to follow a third, a petrel who had taken a human form. He took her in his kayak, but too late she discovered his ugliness and his sarcastic laugh, which disgusted her. She then succeeded in escaping, with the complicity of her father, in a boat made of skins. But the petrel discovered her flight and stirred up a terrible storm; in panic the father threw his daughter into the water, and when she tried to hold on to the boat's sides he cut off the fingers of both of her hands and poked out her eyes. She sank into the sea, but bearded seals and ringed seals were born from her severed hands. In despair, the father let himself be covered by the tide and joined his daughter and his dog at the bottom of the sea, where they have lived ever since. They control the movements of marine game animals and punish after death all persons guilty of sexual infractions—of bestiality in particular. (Saladin d'Anglure 1974)

Several observations may be made about this new episode in the slow emergence of culture as it is conceived by the Inuit.

The first of these concerns what may be called Unigumasuittuq's attempt at female autonomy. Since the incest taboo gave woman her trade value, it was tempting for her to take advantage of this new power, which is what she attempted to do in striving to keep control of her sexual life—first by refusing her suitors, and then by offering herself to the dog or the petrel. These two unhappy experiences culminate in a double mutilation, the first a moral one, with the loss of her

children, who could survive only through dispersal and cultural division, and the second a physical one, with the loss of her hands and eyes, which separated her from culture and from her productive-reproductive functions.

Her banishment to nature brought on by her blindness, her inability to produce, and her immobilization at the bottom of the sea cannot help but recall the primordial time. Her human origin nevertheless gives her a very important role as an intermediary between humans and the new extension of nature constituted by marine animals, her creatures, as well as an intermediary between the Inuit and the new extension of humanity constituted by the new human races, her children.

The resources she brings to men give her a status which balances that of the earth: they establish her as regulator of the ecological order, but only with a heavy counterpart—the final submission of women to social rules of matrimonial exchange as established by men. Men would henceforth have free access to the women of the group, within the limits of the incest prohibition.

The differentiation between hunters and game animals leads to the exclusion of animals who have become game, both from matrimonial alliances and from sexual relationships (bestiality), and this differentiation founds the new order.

But parallel to this differentiation and to the woman's banishment to nature, there is a symmetrical and inverse rapprochement of nature toward man through the promotion of the dog. The dog is promoted to the rank of a means of production in hunting and transportation, is promoted to a personal name in addition to a species designation (a privilege which it alone shares with humans), and is finally promoted to domesticity and even a certain commensality, which confers almost magical powers upon it. When a man is seriously ill, his life may be saved by sacrificing the life of his dog, who thus carries away the ailment with him.

The acquisition of the dog as a means of production corresponds in mythic history to the acquisition of the kayak. Both are very explicit symbols of productive virility, of the social expansion of masculine sexuality. In several regions of the central Arctic, a man's right to marry depends upon the acquisition of a kayak whose prow is metaphorically designated by the name of *usuujaq* ("that which resembles a penis").

Man's access to productive mobility coincides exactly with the loss of mobility on the part of houses (and thus of women, which they symbolize), which now must fulfill their destinies as containers.

It is interesting to note further that, in a rebellious leap against her father after he had killed her dog/lover, *Unigumasuittuq* attempts to destroy this male supremacy by sending her canine children out to attack the paternal kayak.

6. The End of Metamorphoses and the Recovery of Continuity

The appearance of the great distinctions—of man/woman, life/death, darkness/light, humans/game animals, and terrestrial game/marine game—beyond resolving certain crucial problems faced by the first Inuit, allows mythic thought to become conscious of the realities of the universe and to elaborate new principles which could simultaneously consolidate the cultural order and guarantee its reproduction.

With death, the short life (*inuusiq*) became the rule. It was thus believed that every living being was allotted at birth a determined time of life on earth. By means of light, shadows (*tarraq*)—doubles or reflections of living beings, without



Shaman's drum. Sitka, Alaska, Sheldon Jackson Museum collection. Photo Ernest Manewal.

An Inuit (Inuk) is seized with fear on discovering a tattooed "flying head" in an old igloo. Such flying heads, half-bird and half-human, taught the Inuit the panting songs that are their language. Drawing by Davidialuk Alasuaq. Povungnituk, Canada, B.S.A. collection.



weight or materiality—were discovered, and it was supposed that these survived the body in the afterlife, in the form of souls (*tarniq*).

Finally, the differentiation between game animals and humans and between living and dead humans made possible and necessitated the classification of living beings and of their living spaces. This was done by naming: at the level of species for game animals and at the personal level for humans.

With specific names for game animals, each species was thought of as a multiple and renewable ensemble of potential resources for man.

The personal names given to humans made it possible to think of each individual as the sum of all the productive capacities and qualities of his deceased homonyms; these names also, by their absence of gender, made it possible to obliterate sexual differentiation, thus helping women to surmount the contradictions of their dependence.

So it was that the double-soul (*tarniq*) and the name-soul (*atiq*) gave a new continuity to life, beyond the limits of the present moment. Since life on earth had become short in order to make possible the continuity of human society, it once again became continuous on the level of Sila, the universal order. Culture could now reproduce itself through the reproduction of the factors and relationships of production. All that remained was to begin the appropriation of terrestrial and marine regions, the sole portions of the present that were to remain continuous and permanent. A double naming process was applied to this end, the first in order to situate the resources and activities of production and the second to preserve the memory of past people and events.

Another myth, that of Arnakpaktuq, illustrates the search for the continuity of life; it shows us how a female soul that was unsatisfied in its conjugal life decided—after a fruitless search for a better life in the womb of animals of diverse species—to live again as the son of her brother:

A woman suffered constant ill treatment at the hands of her husband. She wanted to die, and one day while he was beating her she slipped under the blankets of her bed; the whining of a dog was heard . . . she had transformed herself into a dog. He harnessed her to his sled, but she was completely ignorant of canine hauling and was thus beaten again until she learned from the other dogs how to behave.

All went well until she made a mistake; and when she was thrashed, she let out a human cry. He killed her and threw out her corpse to be devoured by wolves: she became a wolf, and, completely ignorant of the life of the wolf, she had to learn from them how to hunt. Then, as a wolf, she died, and when a caribou stepped on her corpse, she penetrated his body and became a caribou. A new and long apprenticeship thus began for her.

She was harpooned by a hunter while she was crossing a lake. She was butchered and hidden in a cache for the winter, after which she was eaten and her bones thrown onto the shore next to the bones of a walrus. When the tide covered them up she passed into a walrus bone that came back to life and became a walrus. She learned to dive and to eat like a walrus, but she did not like the way they rubbed their muzzles.

She died yet another time, passed into a crow that had come to rest on the corpse of the walrus, was killed by a polar bear, and fell onto the remains of a ringed seal

which she entered to become a seal. She learned how to breathe through breathing holes cut into the ice in the winter, and it was at such a hole that she felt the point of a harpoon run through her head. She had been harpooned by a hunter who was none other than her brother.

When her brother's wife butchered her, she entered her body and became a fetus, although up to that time her future mother (her sister-in-law) had had only miscarriages. The fetus found itself in a little house which quickly became too narrow. The time came to come out. When she was almost out, she perceived a woman's knife (*ulu*) and the point of a man's harpoon (*savik*); she first wanted to take the woman's knife, but she changed her mind, seized the point of the harpoon, and came out in the form of a baby boy. The choice she had just made changed her sex. Later the boy became a great hunter and told his story. (Saladin d'Anglure 1974)

Arnakpaktuq's tale in a sense constitutes the myth of the origins of hunting. By explaining the acquisition of the knowledge of hunting by the Inuit, it justifies the new hunter-game relationship, which excludes metamorphoses between humans and animals. It also serves as a basis for beliefs concerning the connection of identity with name, and the reincarnation or transmigration of souls. Finally, it alienates woman into a status subordinate to man, by leading her to believe either that she might have access to masculinity in a future life or that she has been a man in a past life—which allows her to see herself as transsexual, to live as a transvestite, as a boy, in her youth, and to bear the identity of a male eponym during her life (Saladin d'Anglure 1977a).

Order and continuity were thus restored in the universe, but the fragility of their balance soon necessitated the elaboration of a complex system of prescriptions and prohibitions that applied principally to the junctures in the great productive-reproductive cycles: the cycle of human life (pregnancy, childbirth, childhood, and adolescence), of souls (entering and leaving the body), and of game animals (production and consumption).

This new order was now governed by the great master-spirits of Sila (time), Taqqiq (the moon), Siqiniq (the sun), and Kannaaluk (the girl at the bottom of the sea), the dominant figures of Inuit myth and religious beliefs.

In everyday life, however, respect for this order had become too complex for the laity and too important to the socioeconomic survival of the Inuit, in which women still occupied a dominant role in the reproduction of life. It was necessary to transpose into practical life the male domination that had been established at the mythic level; it was necessary to entrust to specialists the interpretation of myths and of empirical reality; it was necessary to establish intermediaries between the visible and the invisible, between the dead and the living, between game and hunter, between men and women. This would be the function of the Angakkuq (shaman), a mainly masculine function (Meyer 1932: 422) to which women could gain access only with difficulty, except in old age. The great shamans were always men.

III. Shamanism, New Light, and Political Power

With the development of shamanism and of its practices, knowledge and power became essentially masculine privileges. An Iglulik myth tells how the first shaman, a man, came into being: A period of famine and trouble befell the Iglulik region one day. Many Inuit died of hunger and all were anxious and confused because they did not know how

to face the situation. At this time a man, taking advantage of a meeting in one of their houses, asked to go behind the curtain of skins, at the front of the platform, and announced his intention to descend to the place of the mother of marine animals. No one was to watch. He dived down under the earth with the help of auxiliary spirits that had become associated with him at the time of a solitary retreat he had taken. He visited Kannaaluk and brought abundance back to men, along with game. This is how the first shaman appeared. He was later followed in this by others who gradually extended their knowledge of hidden things and elaborated a sacred language to communicate with the spirits, thus helping humanity in many ways (Rasmussen 1929).

The principal attribute of the shaman was *qaumaniq*, light, vision, the profound knowledge of things and beings; his agent was *tuurngaq*, an auxiliary spirit which could be acquired through a solitary experience of communication with the earth mother, through a visit to a cave or a stay in a deserted place. A progressive diminution of knowledge and power followed among the uninitiated, a sort of return to the chthonic origins of humanity, to the primal night of the maternal womb—to the benefit of the shaman who, substituting himself for the woman as she substituted herself for the earth, succeeded in taking control of social reproduction, thanks to his imaginary operations, and thus in ensuring male domination even as he metaphorically took over the principal female processes and characteristics of the reproduction of life.

Shamanic seances, especially those that are designed to renew communication with game, seem always to stem from scenes of pregnancy and childbirth, borrowed either from myths, like the primordial darkness relived through the extinguishing of lamps, or from reality, like the untying of the belts and laces of spectators at childbirths, the crouching posture taken on the platform of a house (a posture close to that of a woman in childbirth), or the staccato and panting cries that the shaman emits before his soul succeeds in passing through the narrow way that leads to the beyond.

In a primary phase, the shaman attempts to bring his auxiliary spirit into himself. Then, when he has succeeded, he applies himself to making his soul leave his body and to guiding it through a narrow tunnel to the light, the knowledge that allows him to repair cosmic, ecological, social, or psychological disorders provoked by humans. All shamanic rites are carried out with the left hand, the inverse of reality, in which the right hand takes priority. When laterality is used in Inuit culture to differentiate between the sexes, right is male and left is female.

As the ally and protector of men, the shaman became a

public confessor, particularly of women, to whom the majority of ills were attributed and who were therefore subjected to strict prohibitions. He also had the privilege of treating the sterility of couples by intervening as sexual partner in reproduction.

The cosmic order was now controllable through the shaman, whose knowledge and power assured its effectiveness on the level of social reality.

B.S.A./d.w.

NOTES

1. Recent research by ethnolinguists suggests another meaning for the term "Eskimo": "one who speaks the language of a foreign land" (see J. Mailhot 1978).

2. After the works of Franz Boas, in particular.

3. Our research, begun on the staff of the C.N.R.S. under the direction of Professor C. Lévi-Strauss, has been continued at Laval University, Quebec, Canada. One part of the material presented here has been published in B. Saladin d'Anglure 1977a, 1977b, and 1978.

4. The works of R. Savard are a first tentative effort on this road; we cite here only his principal work (Savard 1966). Several other works on Inuit mythology have been published, some on other regions, some on themes treated in a comparative fashion, but a great deal of work remains to be done on this subject.

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NATIVE AMERICAN MYTHS AND RITUALS OF NORTH AMERICA

The eminent mythographer Stith Thompson was right to emphasize the fact that "outside of Western civilization, few ethnic groups have been studied as much as the Indians of North America" (1946, 297). Thus, at the outset the researcher is confronted with a mass of documents, some of which date back to the conquest and even earlier if one does not contest the authenticity of the *walam olum*, for example,

which recounts the origin of the Delaware people (Rafinesque 1832; Brinton, vol. 5, 1882-85).

The study of North American mythology constitutes a project all the more ambitious in that the themes that compose it are abundant and prodigiously diverse. In addition, it should be noted that no anthropologist before Claude Lévi-Strauss achieved a grand synthesis of the ethnic myths of the two Americas; the difficulties involved in such an attempt seemed insurmountable. Until then some researchers were content to record tales without attaching to them any specific analysis, unless it were classical, while others, like Franz Boas, Elsie Clews Parsons, and Paul Radin, to