Eskimo Tales and Songs

by H. Rink and F. Boas (1858-1942)

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ESKIMO TALES AND SONGS.

DURING his explorations in Baffin Land, F. Boas collected a considerable number of songs, fables, and tales of the Eskimo inhabiting that region, a few of which are of recent origin, while by far the greater number have been handed down from generation to generation. As the proper translation of these texts requires a most thorough knowledge of the Eskimo language, H. Rink, the other writer of the present paper, undertook this task, F. Boas furnishing notes only on points of dialectic difference between the Greenlandic and the language of these songs. The following translations, the first excepted, and the linguistic notes are due to H. Rink, the explanations of the songs to F. Boas.

The translation of such texts offers peculiar difficulties. To be properly understood, the tales must be heard as told by the storyteller in the snow-house; the surroundings greatly enhancing their charm and facilitating comprehension. The contents of the tale have been often talked about. Now the lamps are made to burn low; the story-teller strips off his outer jacket and retires to the rear part of the hut, facing the wall. He pulls his hood over his head, puts on his mittens, and begins in a low chant, first singing slowly, then with increasing rapidity, in a monotonous recitative, until he comes to one of the songs, which are frequently interspersed between the tales. These are still more difficult to render, the words being often rather trifling, the sentences abrupt, and the author presuming the audience to be familiar with the whole subject of the song, and able to guess the greater part of it. According as euphony and cadence require, the words are sometimes abbreviated almost to interjections, sometimes lengthened by rare or obsolete affixes, the meaning of which is not understood by the present generation, while occasionally words of the peculiar Angakok speech and of magic spells are interspersed. If these difficulties have been met with in Greenland, they are much more conspicuous in texts written in little known dialects. To a literal translation of the following songs explanatory remarks on some of the most striking differences of the Greenlandic have been added, to illustrate the relation of the Baffin Land dialect to those of Greenland (Gr.) and Labrador (L.). Kleinschmidt's alphabet has been used, with the exception of q, which is used instead of his k, and χ, which is used for ch in Scottish loch.

The following tradition was obtained from an old Eskimo, Pakaq by name, in Cumberland Sound. The text, given below, is sung in a low recitative by the story teller. The song itself is undoubtedly of considerable antiquity, particularly the conclusion, which is told almost with the same words by the Eskimo of Greenland.
The following is a translation of this song:

Uinigumissuitoq married a dog. One night she was found outside the hut sleeping with the dog. She gave birth to ten children, one half of them dogs, the other Adlet. The children grew up. Every time their grandfather had got a seal, he loaded it upon his kayak and carried it to them. His grandchildren were very voracious. Therefore he selected an island for their place of abode and carried them over there, his daughter, the dog, and the children. Their father, the dog, swam every day to the old man’s hut to fetch meat in a pair of boots which he had hung around his neck. One day the grandfather filled them with stones instead of meat and thus drowned the
When he was drowned their grandfather continued to send them food. The mother, however, said to her children: "Watch your grandfather, when he goes out in his kayak, and attack him!" They killed him. Then she searched for her children, and after having cut a sole for herself, she transformed it quickly into a boat, in which she ordered them to travel across the ocean. She sang: "Angnaijaja. When you will have arrived on the other side, you will make many little things. Angnaijaja."

Here is a fuller account of the tradition:—

Saviqong (i.e., the knifeman), an old man, lived alone with his daughter. Her name was Niviarsiang (i.e., the girl), but as she did not want to take a husband she was also called Unigumissuitung (i.e., she who did not want to take a husband). She refused all her suitors, but at last a dog, spotted white and red, whose name was Ijiqang (i.e., the powerful eye), won her affection and she married him. They had ten children, five of whom were Adlet and five dogs. The legs of the Adlet were like those of dogs, and hairy all over, the soles excepted, while the upper part of their bodies was human. When the children grew up they became very voracious, and as the dog Ijiqang did not go hunting at all, but let his father-in-law provide for the whole family, Saviqong found great difficulty in feeding them. Moreover, the children were very clamorous and noisy; so at last their grandfather, being tired of their manifold demands and the trouble they gave him, put the whole family into his boat and carried them to a small island. He told Ijiqang to come every day and fetch meat.

Niviarsiang hung a pair of boots on his neck and he swam across the narrow channel separating the island from the mainland. But Saviqong, instead of giving him meat, filled the boots with heavy stones which drowned Ijiqang when he attempted to return to the island.

Niviarsiang thought of revenging the death of her husband. She sent the young dogs to her father's hut and let them gnaw off his feet and hands. In return Saviqong, when his daughter happened to be in his boat, threw her overboard, and cut off her fingers when she clung to the gunwale. As they fell into the sea they were transformed into seals and whales. At last he allowed her to climb again into the boat.

As she feared that her father might think of killing or maiming her children, she ordered the Adlet to go inland, where they became the ancestors of a numerous people. She made a boat for the young dogs, setting up two sticks for masts in the sole of one of her boots, and sent the puppies across the ocean. She sang: "Angnaijaja. When you will have arrived on the other side, you will make many little things. Angnaijaja."
In Greenland and the northern portion of Baffin Land the children, which are called Adlet in our tale, are called Erqigdlit. It is of great interest to notice that the Labrador Eskimo call the Indians of the interior Adlet, while the tribes inhabiting the west coast of Hudson Bay call them Erqigdlit. In Baffin Land and Greenland the historical meaning of the term has totally disappeared, but it denotes a fabulous tribe with dog's legs and a human body. It is difficult to account for the application of these different terms to both Indians and the fabulous beings above referred to.

Rink gives an abstract of the legend, as he heard it in Greenland (Rink, "Tales and Traditions of the Eskimo," p. 471): "A woman who was mated with a dog got ten children. When they had grown larger she ordered them to devour her father, whereupon she divided them into two parties and sent them off from home to seek their subsistence henceforth by themselves. Five of them, who were sent up the country, grew erkileks; and the other five she gave the sole of an old boot, and put it into the sea, when it rapidly expanded and grew a ship, in which they went off, turning into Europeans."

J. Murdoch reports a fragment of the same legend from Point Barrow, Alaska. He says ("American Naturalist," 1886, p. 594): "Long ago, Aselu, a dog, was tied to a stick. He bit the stick (i.e., set himself free) and went into the house where he had intercourse with a woman who gave birth to men and dogs."

It is remarkable that, according to Petitot ("Monographie des Esquimaux Tchiglit," p. 24), the Mackenzie Eskimo should have an altogether different account on this subject. He gives the following tradition: Far west on a large island, the beaver created two men. They came to the bank of a river hunting ptarmigan. They quarreled about their ptarmigan and separated. One became the ancestor of the Eskimo, the other that of the sea animals, who were the ancestors of the Europeans. The Erqigdlit, according to his report, originated from eggs of lice. It seems to me very probable that this is only a very fragmentary and imperfect portion of the complete story as told by the Mackenzie tribes.

It is a very interesting fact that the Eskimo, from Greenland to the Mackenzie, apply the term qavdlunaq or qablunaq to the whites, with whom they became acquainted comparatively recently, and that they have a legend, evidently of great antiquity, referring to their origin. There are two explanations of this fact that suggest themselves: Either the tradition was not invented until the Eskimo came into contact with the whites, or an old tradition was applied to the whites when they became first known to the Eskimo. I believe the former explanation to be very improbable, as the Eskimo report events that happened about three hundred years ago, as Frobisher's
expedition to Frobisher Bay, without any additions. It is, on the other hand, entirely in accord with known facts, that the report of the advent of the whites coming from beyond the sea should be confounded with an old legend treating of a tribe of this kind, and it is easily understood how such a legend spread from one tribe to the other. It is worth remarking, that the song given above does not refer to the whites expressly, although it is understood that "the little things" the children make are the whites.

The fuller account of the tradition as given above shows a marked resemblance to the Sedna legend, which I have treated at another place (Petermann's "Mittheilungen," 1887, p. 303). Evidently the story of the transformation of her fingers into sea animals is the same in both. Petitot's tale also indicates a certain connection between the legend of the sea animals and of the whites.

It would be of the greatest interest to know the version in which this legend is told in Alaska, as it would probably give a clue to its history, more particularly to the question, how the legend came to be applied to the whites.

We give here the text of the Sedna legend:

SEDNAŁO \( ^{1} \) QAXODLULO.\( ^{1} \)

SEDOR AND THE FULMAR.

Nautaima Uinigumissuitoq? \( ^{2} \) Qajarmut \( ^{8} \) kangenut \( ^{4} \) audliirtoq.  
Where then She who never would marry? In a kayak to the mainland going off.

Sikoqa'ngenut \( ^{5} \) ikurika'. Takuvigit iijika,\( ^{7} \) takuvigit?  
Over the ice crossed. Doest thou see my eyes, Doest thou see them?

ia ha ha ha ha!  
ia ha ha ha ha!

Tupirmut itelingmut \( ^{8} \) aid niedliranuk \( ^{9} \) qietaronivik.\( ^{10} \) Angutá'  
To a tent of ragged skins as he had brought her crying. Her father

angninga umiarmut tikitoq. Paningminik aitirtoq.\( ^{11} \) Umiarmut  
her elder brother in a boat coming. His daughter going for. In the boat

paninga ikivoq. Uinga\( ^{12} \) qaxodluk qiesivoq. Qaxodluk  
his daughter embarked. Her husband the fulmar cried. The fulmar

oxapoq: agartsorutika \( ^{18} \) takuleka taimaitjut ijingit  
says: my means for transforming let me see them being thus the eyes

takudnejukpat. Tupirmut angiqatut \( ^{14} \) qaxodluk madlilirpoq.  
they see once more (?). To the tent going home the fulmar followed.

Anure agsualuk kanipoq; umiavat\( ^{15} \) kanipoq. Panine  
Wind very strong was near; they were wrecked nearly. His daughter

ingipa. Umiarmut igdliuktut\( ^{16} \) umiarmut ajeqpurpoq.\( ^{17} \)  
he pushed into the sea. To the boat on both sides to the boat she clings.

Savingmut anauva: aqbirit\( ^{18} \) puiva.\( ^{19} \) Atedlo anauva: ugjuk  
With a knife he struck her; whales emerged. Again he struck her: a thong seal

puiva. Atedlo anauva: netiq puiva. Tamarme\( ^{20} \) ajeqpurpa:  
emerged. Again he struck her: a hood seal emerged. Her whole body she leaned:
Savingmut jingemut touqpa. Toqova.\textsuperscript{21} Nunamut anguta niuva.

With a knife into the eyes he stabbed her. He killed her. On the shore her father lifted her.

Qipingnik tigussiva.\textsuperscript{22} Tinimermut idnatirpa. Qingmisumik.\textsuperscript{23}

A quilt he took. On the beach he laid her down. With a dog skin qipipoq. Udlutiva.

She was covered. The flood-tide took her.


RAVEN AND GULL.

The following dialogue refers to a tale well known in Greenland ("Tales and Traditions of the Eskimo," No. 108, p. 451, in abstract), where it is stated that an angakok and his son visited a house inhabited by ravens and gulls, who regaled them with excrements and twigs. The angakok is able to see the birds in human shape. We must imagine the birds sitting in their house, — the bird-cliff, — conversing and looking at the men, who are seen to approach on the ice, coming shoreward, and who finally reach the entrance of the house.

Tulugaq: Irdni'ng,\textsuperscript{1} irdni'ng, takojartopa'gin,\textsuperscript{2} inuktua'ja

The raven (says): Son, son, doest thou go to see them, that man namui'dlirtoq \textsuperscript{3} pikalu'jang \textsuperscript{4} unguata'ne?

going somewhere the iceberg beyond?

Irdning, irdning, takojartopag, inuktuaja namuidlirtoq pikaluujang Son, son, doest thou go to see, that man going somewhere the iceberg miksiline? \textsuperscript{5}
on this side?

Irdning, irdning, takojartopagin inuktuaja namuidlirtoq ikerga'kulu \textsuperscript{6}
Son, son, doest thou see that man going somewhere the small rock seni'ne?
at the side of?

Irdning, irdning, takojartopagin inuktuaja sigjamiliirtung? \textsuperscript{7}
Son, son, doest thou go to see them that man reaching the shore?
Irning, irodning, tokojava\textsuperscript{a} togain inuk, taki\textsuperscript{a} pamilitung? \\
Son, a son, doest thou go to see the man yonder reaching the entrance? \\
Ite\textsuperscript{a}ro\textsuperscript{b}vin \textsuperscript{c} iserit! Unalipil\textsuperscript{a}roq! \\
If thou hast an anus come in! But take this! \\
Inung: Ah! piungmangitinga \textsuperscript{d} qileksinang sudnalgq. \\
The man (says): Ah! I do not like something bad (?) \\
Tulugaq: Unalipil\textsuperscript{a}roq! \\
The raven (says): But take this! \\
Inung: Taima, taima! pissuillenga! \\
The man: So it is, so it is! I will not have it! \\
Nauja: Quti\textsuperscript{a}uq! Quti\textsuperscript{a}uq! Quti\textsuperscript{a}uq! \\
The gull: Bring it! Bring it! Bring it! \\
Tulugaq: Issilarin nutuarualung! \textsuperscript{e} Unalipil\textsuperscript{a}roq! \\
The raven: Just step inside, big baby! But take this! \\
Inung: Taima, taima! pissuillenga! \\
The man: So it is, so it is! I will not have it! \\
Tulugaq: Maunga kangivermigin! \\
The raven: This way come here further inside! \\
Nauja: Quti\textsuperscript{a}uq! najatama, aititietaminga pitsiqaming! \\
The gull: Bring it! my sister, go and fetch dried fish pieces of salmon. \\

Explanations: 1. Gr. erneq. 2. Gr. takujartorpoq, he goes to see. 3. L. namurigarpok; or from Gr. nangmagpoq, carries something on his back. 4. L. pekkalujak; Gr. iluliaq. 5. L. miksiptinut. 6. L. ikkarok; -kuluk, small. 7. Gr. sigssamileroq, beginning to be on the beach. 8. Gr. takiga, yonder (in the south). 9. A very doubtful word: Gr. literally iteqaru\textsuperscript{a}vit, if thou hast an anus; perhaps iserqaru\textsuperscript{a}vit, when thou first enters. 10. Gr. piumangitunga. 11. Gr. piumangituna. 12. Gr. qaisuk. 13. L. nutarak, -aluk. 14. L. kangivurpa, he goes from the entrance further inside towards him. 15. L. pipse; Gr. niuse, or niuse, split and dried fish.

AVIGNAQULULO TERIENIARLLO. 

THE LEMMING AND THE FOX.

Avignaq: Pissuq\textsuperscript{a}ng, \textsuperscript{f} pissuqadla! sinirsartuarpin? \\
Leming: Fox! fox! doest thou always run along the beach? \\
niqegsarsiarpin? \\
Doest thou search for something to eat? \\

Terieniaq: Suva, niukitu, \textsuperscript{g} timikitung? Kinauna \textsuperscript{h} angmalortung, \\
The fox: What will with his short with his bit of a Who is that round thing, \\
iukit\textsuperscript{a}niukitu? \\
small leg — small legged one?

Explanations: 1. From the angakok language. 2. L. senortarpok, runs along the edge; Gr. -(\textsuperscript{c})urop, continually. 3. Gr. neqigssarsiarp\textsuperscript{c}p. 4. Gr. -kitsoq, having a small or scarce. 5. Or kina una, that face.
The last two tales or fables are told in a very artistic manner. The first lines of the raven tale are spoken in a marked rhythm, as indicated in the first line, the arsis being about half a tone higher than the thesis. The style of delivery may be indicated thus:

\[
\text{Ir} \text{d-ni-ng, ir} \text{d-ni-ng, takojarto-pa} \text{g} \text{n, i} \text{nuk}
\]

\[
\text{tau} \text{j} \text{a} \text{na} \text{-mu} \text{i-dlir-toq pi-xa-luang ungua-ta-na.}
\]

The words takojarto'pa'gin, and particularly later on unalipil'droq, are pronounced from the depth of the throat, imitating the croaking of the raven. The gull's voice is imitated in the rapidly pronounced screaming: Quiti'uq, quiti'uq, quiti'uq.

While the foregoing tales are undoubtedly ancient, the following songs are modern. The first is said to have been composed about a hundred years ago. The Eskimo of Cumberland Sound are in the habit of visiting every summer a large lake, called Netiling, i. e., with seals. There they find an abundance of deer and salmon, and, as the name suggests, even seals frequent the waters of this lake. The journey is very arduous, occupying many days, and leading up a narrow fiord, in which high tides form dangerous rapids. Farther on a number of difficult portages must be made. The feelings of the Eskimo, when starting on this journey, are described in the following song:

\[
\text{Adagio non troppo.}
\]

\[
\text{A} \text{j} \text{a. A} \text{x} \text{a} \text{-go-dlo pa} \text{lir-tu-gun; uang-nangmun}
\]

\[
\text{ti-pau-vun-ga, i-ja ji-ja a-ja-a. A} \text{ja.}
\]

Axagodlo palirtugun¹ uangnangmun² tipauvunga³
ija ji ja a a.
Atutelirpara mana⁴ pingatirtuангamanga
ija ji ja a a.
Sapernaruorqipiva⁴ marqaidlo sarbaidlo
ija ji ja a a.
Plitisariomena ajurnarianigmen⁴
ija ji ja a a.
Ijersenlartudlika pujeksenik⁷ tamainik.
ija ji ja a a.
Takulisagipara pinissuagapiga⁸
Explanations: 1. Gr. paarpoq, pulls the kajak; -lerpoq, begins to; -lugut, we who. 2. L. warrngnak, west wind. 3. Gr. tagpavunga. 4. Gr. artulitdlarpamata. 5. Gr. sapernarpoq, it is difficult; -lugpoq, is badly. 6. Gr. ajornarpoq, is difficult; -ningmat, as it was not. 7. Gr. puissinik. 8. L. pinasuarpoq, tries to gain something (Gr. piniarpoo).

TRANSLATION.
To-morrow we begin pulling towards the northwest, up the country, ija jija aja a. I began finding it very troublesome, when I tried it the first time, ija jija aja a. Awkwardly difficult the overland passages and the rapids, ija jija aja a. But I got plenty, as it could be done, ija jija aja a. ? ? seals of all kinds, ija jija aja a. I shall see something I can try to obtain.

THE RETURNING HUNTERS.
Sung by the women who stand looking out for their arrival.

Explanations: 1. Gr. angut, male; -tiut, plur. our. 2. Gr. awvarpoq, he is hunting reindeer; -simangmata, as they have been. 3. awvarpoq, he hunts regularly. 4. nerivoq, he eats; -palugpoq, he has the appearance of; -tunga, I who.

TRANSLATION.— Our husbands thus down there, as they have been hunting reindeer, as they have been regularly engaged in hunting, I shall have plenty of meat now.

H. Rink,  
F. Boas.