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Recensions / Book Reviews

ANDERSON, Wanní W.

2005 *The Dall Sheep Dinner Guest: Inupiaq Narratives of Northwest Alaska*, Fairbanks, University of Alaska Press, 293 pages.

The Dall Sheep Dinner Guest: Inupiaq Narratives of Northwest Alaska is a collection of Inupiaq Eskimo stories shared with Wanní Anderson by elders from Northwest Alaska. Beginning in the late 1960s and continuing on to the present, Anderson collected stories. Many of the narratives were told at Onion Portage, an ancient archeological site where W. Anderson's husband, Douglas Anderson, conducted excavations. Additional work was done in the surrounding villages in subsequent years. There are 88 stories that were told by 16 narrators. The collection is a tribute to elders who are no longer with us and is a good way to remember their storytelling.

The book begins with an extensive introduction describing previous recording efforts in the region and the ways the stories in this collection depict Inupiaq values. Each story begins with a short biography of the narrator and description of the setting where it was told.

The stories are noteworthy for several reasons. They represent a link to ancestors who have recently passed away, and when we read their stories and learn where and when they told them, this is a way to preserve a sense of the elders and how they shared their culture. Many of the stories mention place names that will be familiar to people today, and so the stories form a link to the history of the region and are a reminder of the antiquity of settlement in the region. The stories give a sense of how people think about the past. The accounts are *unipchaaq utuqqaq* ('old story'), *unipchaaq* ('not so old'), or *uqaqtuqaq* ('real incident') (p. 20). As Anderson points out, this sense of time depth is also presented in comments by the narrators identifying time markers such as the time before missionaries (p. 21). Also, some accounts describe a world quite different from what young people experience today, one where people and other animals undergo transformations and perform extraordinary feats. For instance, the Qayaq cycle stories describe how animals and places took on the forms and characteristics that we recognize today.

I found the most interesting group of stories those that dealt with raiding and revenge killings. Most of these chronicle Indian/Eskimo conflicts but they also document the intermarriage between the two groups and the presence of people of mixed ancestry. The narratives of conflicts are portrayed primarily as stories of retaliation for past raids, abductions, and killings. There are several versions of Aagruukaaluk's revenge, each differing in minor detail and all emphasising controlling

anger and waiting for the right moment to take revenge. A very interesting account was given by Nora Paniikaaluk Norton in 1977 about the fear of conflict that still existed in her father's time ("The False Alarm at Kobuk," p. 140). "The Last War with the Indians", a story told by Wesley Qaulugtailaq Woods (p. 147-150), hints at population pressure on the Kobuk River as the cause for one attack. The story tells how the Inupiat tricked the Athabascans telling them to leave because an epidemic was spreading and then how they went on to ambush the Athabascans at their camp. They tricked the strongman by telling him that his Inupiaq girlfriend wanted to prepare a feast for him before he left. The man who did the tricking was recognized as a *suunaaq*, a special friend to the strongman, so it was a double breach of trust. The mention of population pressure, the presence of some conjugal and peaceful relationships between Indian and Eskimo men and women, and the violent raids between the two groups have been documented in other research, but in this story, all of these forces are brought together in a very contested way. This makes me want to know more about the story, its origins, and how it was used. I wonder, for instance, if it wasn't sometimes used to demonstrate the complexity of the relationships between people in the upper Kobuk and Koyukuk.

Future generations of Inupiat will appreciate this collection as a touchstone back to their relatives and the stories that they told. The collection adds documentation to the growing record of oral literature from the region. Anderson's 52 page introduction will be referenced as a guide to Inupiaq storytelling. The volume would be more useful if the author had related relevant comments from the introduction before or after presenting each story, but perhaps she felt this would be culturally inappropriate and too interpretive of stories that would not have been interpreted in their oral telling. And perhaps this is a lesson about oral tradition: a story shared orally over many tellings with different audiences bears the marks of the tellers, the particular context and the reasons for telling, as much as the actual words spoken. In written form, we have the text, but it is hard to sense the narrator's presence and what prompts them to tell the story. But, for those who know the narrators in this book, this record may resonate with other tellings they have heard, and that would be a sure sign of its contribution to local cultural preservation.

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HOLST, Jan Henrik
2005 *Einführung in die eskimo-aleutischen Sprachen*, Hamburg, Buske, 280 pages.

This "Introduction to the Eskimo-Aleut Languages" has three major parts. Part one deals with Greenlandic, part two discusses the "Eskimo-Aleut language family," part three is an attempt at reconstructing a relationship to the Wakashan language family.