

How Raven Marked the Land When the Earth Was New

Comment Corbeau a marqué le territoire alors que la Terre était nouvelle

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Article abstract

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Ann Fienup-Riordanⁱ

ABSTRACT

In Alaska, Raven is paradoxically both a lazy scavenger, relying on others to hunt for it and not adverse to eating human flesh, and the creator of light and life. Raven in southwest Alaska is also known as the creator of many landforms seen to this day, including mountains, rivers, and islands. Although Raven stories are told throughout the eastern Arctic as well as interior Alaska, specific places are rarely named in these tales. In contrast, Yup'ik narrators continue to refer to particular places, all across southwest Alaska, where Raven and his daughter left marks on the landscape, while recalling their activities in the distant past.

KEYWORDS

Raven, creation narratives, place names, southwest Alaska, Yup'ik oral tradition

RÉSUMÉ

Comment Corbeau a marqué le territoire alors que la Terre était nouvelle

En Alaska, Corbeau est paradoxalement à la fois : un charognard paresseux, comptant sur les autres pour chasser à sa place, n'étant pas contre la consommation de chair humaine ; et un créateur de la lumière et de la vie. Dans le sud-ouest de l'Alaska, Corbeau est également connu pour avoir créé de nombreuses formes de reliefs, tels que les montagnes, les rivières et les îles. Bien que des histoires de Corbeau soient racontées dans tout l'Arctique oriental et à l'intérieur de l'Alaska, les lieux spécifiques sont rarement indiqués dans ces récits. Or, les narrateurs yupiit continuent de faire référence à des endroits particuliers, partout dans le sud-ouest de l'Alaska, où Corbeau et sa fille ont laissé des marques sur le paysage, tout en rappelant leurs activités dans un passé lointain.

MOTS-CLÉS

Corbeau, récits de la création, noms de lieux, sud-ouest de l'Alaska, tradition orale yup'ik

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Among all the animals of southwest Alaska, Raven is perhaps the most complex and contradictory—simultaneously the gluttonous ne'er-do-well and the creator of our world. This large, black bird—in fact, the largest of all songbirds—is known by a variety of names. The common name is *tulukaruk* (raven, *Corvus corax*), which is onomatopoeic—that is, deriving from the sound it makes. Other names include Ciuliaqatuk (lit., “Person of Long Ago,” from *ciuliaq*, “ancestor”), Ungalek (One with a Beard), Qer’qaalleraq (Shabby Old Croaker), Neqaiq (Food Stealer), and, indirectly, *akmaliarall’er* (the one across there). Wassilie Berlin (September 1997) of Kasigluk explained this last term: “It’s the other name for raven.... ‘Hey you across there, old woman *akmaliarall’er*, where are you going?’ ‘I’m looking for some fat,’ replied the one across there. ‘Aa-a. Then when you return home, pass me.’ ‘Urru,’ he replied”¹ (Figure 1).

Although Raven did not figure prominently in Yup’ik ceremonies in the past, his presence was felt. Smithsonian naturalist Edward Nelson (1899, 495–96) stated in his account of the origin of the “Inviting-In” Feast that dance sticks represented the outspread wings of Raven, who made the world. Masks were also made and used in the past, depicting both Raven’s serious and not-so-serious personas (Fienup-Riordan 1996, 217, 246, 265, 266) (Figure 2). Although Yup’ik depictions of Raven the Creator are considered rare, A.H. Twitchell and Otto William Geist each collected a pair of Raven masks in the early 1900s. The masks Twitchell collected look as though they may have been comic depictions. Both of the Geist masks are accompanied by brief versions of well-known Raven tales, including how Raven used snowshoes during his journey to find light.

The undersides of wooden bowls were routinely decorated with one or more wide lines of red ochre, sometimes with a small square in the centre and scratches representing the tracks of Raven. Margaret Andrews (December 2002, 65) of Kotlik recalled the significance of this ancient symbol: “I think that it is *yaqulgem itгаа* [a bird’s foot].” Frank Andrew (October 2003, 112) of Kwigillingok pointed out that these designs were not family designs but widely used: “They could not go without making line designs that were not painted but were engraved on the bottoms of bowls. After making a mark on the center, they made scratches to make a design. Many people used that design. But the inside had a different design, the family design, and only those who had that design used it.” Mary Ann Sundown (October 2001, 67) of Scammon Bay remembered her male relatives having “Raven footprints” as their emblem. These designs were far from invisible. Bowls were stored upside down, so they were the most visible part of the bowl and among the first things one saw when entering a home (Figure 3).

1. For unpublished material cited in this text, the meeting date and transcript page number of the statement follow the speaker’s name in parentheses, e.g., Paul John (November 2000, 81). Taped interviews and transcripts are archived at the Alaska Native Language Archives in Fairbanks and in the author’s personal collection in Anchorage.



Figure 1. Southwest Alaska, showing places where Raven the Creator marked the land. Mike Knapp.



Figure 2. Raven mask from the Yukon River collected by Johan Adrian Jacobsen in 1882, with raven feet nailed to the forehead and a raven head sticking out of its thick funnel-shaped mouth. Ethnologisches Museum Berlin IVA4427.

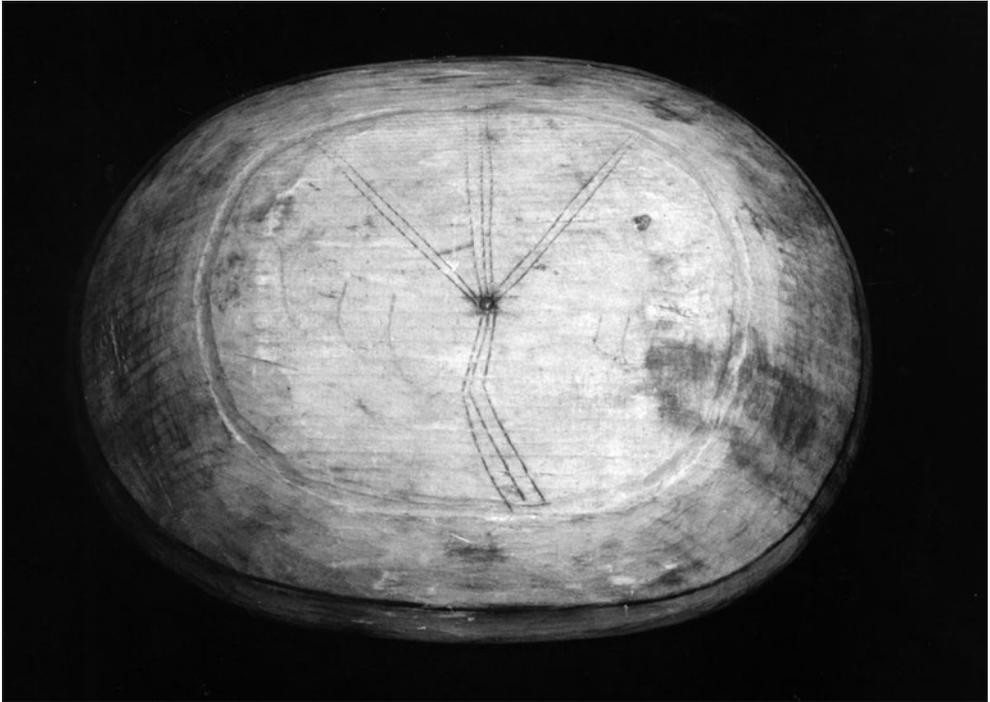


Figure 3. Wooden bowl with incised Raven's foot design.

The preeminence of Raven's footprint on food containers recalls the creative and life-giving power of Raven's touch in other contexts. In the creation story recorded by Nelson (1899, 454), Raven animates the first woman by fashioning an image and holding it in his hands. In the beginning when there was no light, Raven was said to have used his hand to hold up the sun for two days at a time so that people could hunt and get food (Nelson 1899, 461). After the sun was released, Raven created the Morning Star by placing a bunch of glowing grass that he held in his hand into the sky just before sunrise (Nelson 1899, 462). Raven's touch also engendered life, as in the Nunivak tale in which he impregnates his wife by flattening his hands on her stomach (Lantis 1946, 298).

Tulukaruller, shabby Raven

Raven stories abound in southwest Alaska. Most are classed as *qulirat* (traditional tales) as opposed to *qanemcit* (historical or personal accounts). *Qulirat* are legends told by distant ancestors and passed down from generation to generation—what James Ruppert and John Bernet (2001, 9) call distant-time stories. These include origin stories (often involving Raven) as well as tales of the time when the earth was thin and humans interacted freely with animals and other nonhuman persons.

One of the first animals children likely heard about was the clever trickster Raven, both the crafty beach scavenger and the creator of their homeland. In our recent story collection (Fienup-Riordan, Rearden, and Meade 2017, 48–70), Dennis Panruk of Chefnak, Frances Usugan of Toksook Bay, and Magdalene Sunny of Nightmute relate a series of *qulingssaat* (short *qulirat*) about Tulukaruller (the shabby Raven) travelling along the shore and sometimes, but not always, outsmarting those he meets. These stories are well known along the Bering Sea coast, and over the years versions have been recorded from a number of narrators.²

Frances Usugan and Dennis Panruk each tell a sequence of five short Raven stories, full of songs and lively dialogue. The first is the story of Raven's encounter with Sea Anemone, who grabs him by the foot as he is walking along the shore. Pleading for his release, Raven offers Sea Anemone various things belonging to his maternal uncle, including a kayak, a seal-gut parka, and his uncle's wife. When Sea Anemone finally releases him, Raven taunts him, saying he has no maternal uncle as he grew from a pit in the ground. In some versions, such as Frank Andrew's (2008, 409), Raven kills the gullible creature with a stick before continuing on his way.

Raven then meets Squirrel, blocking her path and preventing her from entering her den. Squirrel, however, sings a song, and while Raven dances, she quickly slips inside. In the third story, Raven taunts two small birds trying to start a fire—two redpolls in Frances Usugan's version and a redpoll and a chickadee in Dennis Panruk's. Raven next encounters a mother owl singing to her fledglings, who fly away when he sings to them in turn. Finally, Raven comes upon a whale—a beluga in some versions and a bowhead whale in others. When the whale opens its mouth, Raven flies inside where his actions cause the animal's death. Men find the beached whale and begin to butcher it, but once again, the wily Raven deceives them, stealing all the meat and keeping it for himself.

The order of these stories varies, although narrators usually begin with Raven's encounter with Sea Anemone and end with the story of Raven and the whale. Andy Charlie (Orr et al. 1997, 258–71) told only this last story, adding the story of how Raven then married Mink, with whom he shared the meat. Andy Charlie's version is an interesting variation on the story "The Raven, the Whale, and the Mink," recorded by Nelson (1899, 464–67) more than one hundred years earlier, and Mary Worm's (1986, 46–58) account, "The Crow and the Mink." In

2. See Frank Andrew (2008, 406–19) of Kwigillingok, Andy Charlie (Orr et al. 1997, 258–71), and Theresa Hooper (Orr and Orr 1995, 78–99) of Tununak, Mary Worm (1986, 46–58) of Kongiganak, and Marie Wassilie (1978, 99–101). Three versions were also recorded on Nunivak Island in the 1930s, one by Hans Himmelheber (Fienup-Riordan 2000, 50–54) and two by Margaret Lantis (1946, 297–300).

“The Lying Raven,” Theresa Hooper (Orr and Orr 1995, 78–99), also of Tununak, omitted this last story of Raven and the whale but included another short story of Raven meeting men while they were cutting up caribou and tricking them into leaving him all their meat. Magdalene Sunny relates only the first two stories of the sequence, referring to Raven enigmatically as *yun’engqurraulug* (a poor young lad). These stories are probably very old, and divergence through time is not surprising.

In their notes for Theresa Hooper’s story, Eliza and Ben Orr (1995, 364) point out that punning and word play are characteristic features of these short, memorable Raven stories. Indeed, both Frances Usugan and Dennis Panruk chuckled throughout their narrations. Frances noted that Raven is mischievous and naughty, and stories about him are meant to be a bit naughty as well, playing on the names of various body parts and bodily functions. The name for Sea Anemone—*teq*—also translates as “anus.” In Frank Andrew’s version (2008, 411), Squirrel offers Raven different berries, but instead, he wants to eat *qallitek* (the fatty muscles on her chest—that is, her breasts). In the story of the two little birds lighting a fire, the name for redpoll, *puyiiq*, sounds like *puyir-* (to be or make smoky). And both the little birds and owl fledglings taunt Raven with the same words, telling him to eat *uqrun* or *uqrutaq*, which can mean either “butt wipes” or “shelter, windbreak” (from either *uqer-*, “to wipe the butt,” or *uqeq*, “lee side”) (Andrew 2008, 410–11; Orr and Orr 1995, 364).

Although these short stories were often told to children and were, as Frances Usugan noted, “like comics,” they were not simple fairy tales but quite adult in both language and content.³ Both men and women knew and told these stories. In them, the gluttonous Raven lies repeatedly, sometimes gaining his object—a free meal—and sometimes being tricked or scolded in return. In Dennis Panruk’s account, two small birds conclude by taunting Raven, telling him to eat bits of feces (Fienup-Riordan, Rearden, and Meade 2017, 52). In a recently recorded story, Joe Felix (November 2016) of Toksook Bay describes Raven tricking a caribou hunter into leaving his catch, which Raven promptly eats. Then Raven teases the returning hunter by bending his body at the hips and projecting white diarrhea at him, saying, “There’s your back fat!” (Fienup-Riordan 2018, 448–53). The exploits of Raven the trickster were always entertaining and often left both storyteller and listener smiling.

Raven’s black colour is said to be a direct result of his mischievous nature—a story widely told throughout the Arctic (e.g., Rasmussen 1931, 399; Thalbitzer 1941, 585; Spalding 1979; Oosten and Laugrand 2006, 189, 196). Elena Charles (April 1997) of Bethel recalled,

3. Readers wishing to listen to Frances Usugan’s versions of these stories can find them online in the Yup’ik Atlas (<http://eloka-arctic.org/communities/yupik/>). To locate the stories, google “Yupik Atlas,” open the “Stories” bar, and click on Frances Usugan’s hometown (Toksook Bay).

Once, Loon and Raven were coloring each other in the *qasgi* [men's house] with *avisqaq* [black pigment] and *urasqaq* [white clay]. Raven said, "Let me color you by switching our colors." When Raven was done, Loon colored Raven and made his back white. He colored Raven's stomach black and put black dots on his back. Then he said, "Raven, when I color your neck, don't laugh at all."

Since Raven had always been naughty, he laughed when Loon was coloring his neck. When he laughed, Loon took black and colored Raven all black for ruining what he had done. After he colored Raven, Loon ran down the tunnel entrance. When Loon ran down, Raven's mind was hurt, so he took ash and hit Loon. You know how the loon's hair is gray, and it sticks up. That is what happened. All the birds were colored at that time.

Ciuliaqatuk, Raven the Creator

Stories about Ciuliaqatuk, Raven the Creator, have also been recorded in southwest Alaska, although less frequently (see Nelson 1899, 452–62, 483–85; Lantis 1946, 313; Fienup-Riordan 1983, 373; Orr et al. 1997, 213–57; Himmelheber in Fienup-Riordan, 2000, 29). In 1897 Moravian missionary John Henry Kilbuck, then living in Bethel, recorded the story of how Raven, identified as Ernerculria (lit., "One in search of daylight"), created Nelson Island as well as a variety of animals (Fienup-Riordan 1983, 373). After his father, identified as the *yuk* (person) Spider, destroys his first wife, Raven leaves home, plunges into the water, walks on the bottom of the ocean, and emerges on dry land, naked and without another living thing around. First he creates an image of a fish, which swims away. Raven then continues filling the sea with living creatures. He next makes a deer, which runs away on land. Travelling farther along, he reaches a river that he wants to cross, but the tide is flooding. After sitting down to wait, he falls asleep, waking only when the tide is flooding again. After this happens several times, he makes a mosquito, which begins to sting and bite him around the ears. The mosquito thus keeps him awake, enabling him to cross to the other side.⁴

Nelson (1899, 452–62) recorded a series of stories of the creator bird from an Unaliq man living at "Kigiktauik" (Qikertaruk, east of St. Michael), noting the wide distribution of these tales. In fact, Raven stories are told by Yup'ik and Iñupiaq people on both sides of the Bering Strait, throughout southwest Alaska, and among Athabaskan, Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian, and Kwakiutl of interior and southeast Alaska and British Columbia. Recent genetic, fossil, and anthropological work confirms what the stories tell us—ravens were in Alaska before humans,

4. Jents Flynn of Tununak also told how Raven created mosquitoes when he became drowsy and wanted to wake himself up (Orr et al. 1997, 251).

greeting hunters crossing into North America by way of the Bering land bridge and other routes (Marzluff and Angell 2005, 83–84).

According to Nelson’s Unaliq account, in the beginning there were no people on the earth-plane until Man was born from the pod of a beach pea. Then Raven approached, raising one of his wings and pushing back his beak like a mask, changing into a human. To feed Man, Raven flew off and created salmonberries and heatherberries (crowberries), followed by mountain sheep, tame and wild reindeer, sticklebacks (needlefish), grayling, blackfish, a shrew-mouse, various birds, salmon, insects, and finally bear to scare Man so that he would not destroy everything Raven had created. Raven then created a woman, as well as other men, then various trees—birch, spruce, and cottonwood—and walrus, whales, and grampus (killer whales).

Because men continued to kill so many animals, Raven took away the sun, but Raven boy brought back the light. Nelson (1899, 461, 483–85) wrote down several versions of this story, which Quinhagak Elder Charlie Pleasant (Tennant and Bitar 1981, 179–81) also knew. According to Charlie Pleasant, Raven boasted in the *qasgi* that he would bring daylight to his people. He then travelled through the air on snowshoes. Arriving at a sod home, he shrank and was ingested by a woman when she drank water. She became pregnant, and when Raven was born, he continually pestered his parents to let him play with the bright bladders that contained the light. When his parents finally consented and gave him the bladders, Raven stole them and took them home, where he gave them to his own people.

One of my favorite Raven creation stories is the account Nelson (1899, 462) recorded at Qikertaruk of the origin of ordinary ravens: “[Raven boy] came to a village where lived the children of the other men last born from the pea-vine. There he took a wife and lived a long time, having many children, all of whom became Raven people like himself and were able to fly over the earth, but they gradually lost their magic powers until finally they became ordinary ravens like the birds we see now on the tundras.” To anyone who enjoys watching ravens, they are still extraordinary. Raphael Jimmy (December 2015) of Nunam Iqua thought so, too. He told the story of a hunter from his village who shared his food with a raven. Later, the bird led him to a bearded seal. Ravens, he said, like humans, remember generous acts and repay in kind.

How Raven marked the land

Until quite recently, most raven stories I was familiar with centred on the mischievous Tulukaruller (shabby Raven) or were creation stories (especially those recorded by Nelson) dominated by accounts of how the Raven Father created animals and helped humans (whom Raven had also created). I had also heard stories of how Raven created Nelson Island and subsequently marked particular places there. Nelson (1899, 426) presciently noted, “Many things, such

as physical features of the landscape, etc., connected with raven tales are pointed out as evidence of the Raven Father's former presence when the earth was new." As an example, Nelson (1899, 426) wrote,

Below Paimut [Paimiut] on the Yukon [River] is a large block of stone resting near the water's edge which they say was dropped there by the Raven Father after he had made the earth. When he had placed it there he told the people of the Yukon that whenever fish became scarce they must tie an inflated bladder to this stone and throw both into the river, whereupon fish would become plentiful. They say that one year, when fish were very scarce, the shamans did this and when the stone and the bladder struck the water the latter immediately sank out of sight and the stone floated like a piece of dry wood some distance down the river; then it returned upstream of its own volition, went to its former place on the bank and fish immediately became very numerous.

As a second example, Nelson (1899, 427) related how an island near St. Michael was said to have been made from the straw pad of a boot that the Raven Father had thrown into the sea.

Raven was also said to have created Nunivak Island (see Lantis 1946, 297; Nelson 1899, 452–62; and Hans Himmelheber in Fienup-Riordan 2000, 29). According to Kangleq, recorded by the German ethnologist Hans Himmelheber in the mid-1930s, Raven cut a small clump of soil from an embankment near St. Michael and set it afloat, attached to the shore with a rope of twisted roots. Later, Raven cut the clump loose and gave it a kick so that it swam away. Once during winter, the clump saw a piece of ice in the ocean and swam to it, and together they became Nunivak Island. Looking at the new island across Etolin Strait, Raven found it unattractive. So, he brought a mountain from far away and dropped it on Nunivak. To this day, one can see the mountain with two strips of snow where Raven's carrying straps once lay. Himmelheber (Fienup-Riordan 2000, 29) continued, "Again the raven looked over, and again he thought, 'It just doesn't look good!' So he had the wind blow from the south. Thus the south side of the island was raised to form mountains, and on the north side it was blown into the sea, which is the reason that the island today has so many spits on that side."

As I have continued to work with Yup'ik Elders, they have continued to share Raven stories. Moreover, to my delight, these stories are unlike any I had previously encountered. This is not surprising, as southwest Alaska covers an area the size of New York State, and the diversity of local histories is sometimes masked by the overarching category "Yup'ik." The Cup'ik narrator Joseph Chanerak, born and raised in Qissunaq in the 1940s, is a case in point. During a visit to Chevak in July 2016, Joe told the following story in the Cup'ik dialect of Central Yup'ik, here translated by Rebecca Nayamin Kelly from Chevak. The

story recounts how Raven shaped mountains and rock features in the ancestral homeland of the Cup'ik people, as he had done on Nelson and Nunivak islands. Most impressive, while travelling up the Qissunaq River in his kayak, Raven used his paddle to create the tributary streams we see along the Qissunaq to this day. Joseph Chanerak explained,

My Cup'ik name is Angass'aq...I used to hear stories that my mother and old people told in the early days.

Then the origins of us Cup'ik people, our beginning, this is how it is understood. It started when the ice age melted. It started from that time.

Then Raven, Tengmiaurluq [Poor dear *tengmiaq* (bird)], arrived from out there. Then back in the mountains back there, he tethered his kayak on a rock; he put a hole in the rock and tied it back there. Since it was windy, he didn't want to travel. The rock is back there in the mountains, it has a hole, the place where our ancestor, Tengmiaurluq, Raven, stayed.

That Tengmiaurluq had eyebrows like this, eyebrows made out of small willows. When some people saw him, they laughed at him...When they poked fun and laughed at him, since he was funny-looking, they would turn to stone.

And those [stone figures] back there, those that are in the mountains, they say those were Cup'ik people, but they turned to stone. They were playing tug-of-war over an *arveq* [bowhead whale]. Those who were stronger were situated on their backs. And the weaker ones were situated this way [pulled forward]; in the middle of them was an *arveq*...

They say there is also an *arveq* back there that looks like this, one swimming back there in the land. That one also turned to stone.

Moving his arms vigorously as though he were paddling, Joe continued:

Then they say when [Raven] arrived here, he created the Qissunaq River. That river, he worked on the Qissunaq River. When he would paddle like this [to his right, going upstream], [he created] Uivertalek River, Uivertalguaraq, and [he created] Qavinaaq River when he [paddled] this way [to his right]. And when he [paddled to his right] this way, [he created] Arvertalek River. And when he [paddled to his left], [he created] Tunuiruka'ar River. The names of those small rivers going upriver are the names [of rivers] along the Qissunaq River that [Raven] paddled [and created]. (Figure 4)

Then he said that the Qissunaq River that he created has no mountains. Then he went north out there to get a mountain. He was holding Ingrissaaq Mountain here [under one arm]. And he was holding Nasqulek Mountain here [under the other arm]. And Kusilvak Mountain [Ingrill'er] back there, he placed it on his back, using those grass [ropes], he put it on his back, he used that carrying device to carry it on his back.

As he was going down, his carrying device broke, and Ingrill'er fell. And when it landed back there, it broke to pieces. They say Kusilvak Mountain back there is broken in many places.

And they say Nasqulek here, since he was holding it, he threw it back there. And they say when it landed, its head here jumped toward over there, and it landed there.



Figure 4. Qavinaaq River, said to have been created by Raven with his paddle as he kayaked up the Qissunaq River. Ann Fienup-Riordan, July 2016.

Then he threw Ingrissaaq again back there. And when Ingrissaaq landed, these hills formed from there all the way over to Hooper Bay. Today, we have hills here [near Chevak].

Then the Qissunaq River that he made, he was thinking to try to fix it, but he saw that he would ruin it if he tried to fix it. Once again, they say he finally left, he went back to the area out there.

Then [I am now] ending that [story].

Paul Kiunya (October 2005, 314) of Kipnuk also spoke of Raven's mountain building activities in the Canineq (lower Kuskokwim coastal) area—a flat landscape in which even a low hill stands out as a remarkable feature:

Raven is not a bird when they speak of him. He is Yugpacaryuk [form of a *yuk* (person)]. They speak of him as a person. He used to place things on the land. There are mountains across from us that we call Inгриик [lit., “Two mountains”]. It is said Raven carried them on his back from Nelson Island and brought them over, and he was supposed to place them on the shores of Qukaqliqutaat [above Nightmute]. But his backpack broke, and when the ones he carried fell, he put them where they are now...Since it is a story, that is how Raven is depicted.

Raven's efforts to shape the coastal landscape are significant. According to Yup'ik tradition, in the beginning the delta lowland was covered with water, and the ocean shore reached Kalskag on the middle Kuskokwim River and Iquarmiut on the Yukon River. Nick Andrew (October 2016, 1) of Marshall recalled,

I used to hear a *quliraq* [legend], and sometimes it comes to mind...The Yukon River, [along its shore] is a [high] point going in the direction of the Kuskokwim River where Iquarmiut is located. Up on top of the mountain, it looks like an abandoned village, and there's a lot of grass there. They say that was where Raven once lived.

They say during the time he stayed there, there was water [everywhere]. And there was no land on the other side. And one could paddle from Iquarmiut down to Nunivak Island. Then Raven was living there, the one who they tell amazing tales about. [*Laughs*]

And there in the valley, down below the old village, at the end of the valley are two large rocks sitting across from one another. They say [Raven's] kayak used to sit over that. They say [Raven] would bring his kayak to shore there when he had been paddling. Amazingly, that place was once where the ocean shore was located during the time of that *quliraq*.

Travelling up the Yukon River in May 2017, Nick Andrew stopped his boat just upriver from Iquarmit to show us the two large rocks known as Ulluvagpaguak, each rising twenty feet from the river's edge: "These two rocks are where Raven's kayak was hung, where it used to hang. Raven was probably huge" (Figures 5 and 6). During the same trip, Father Max Isaac (May 2017) of Marshall not only recognized Raven's kayak rest but also pointed out vertical cracks in the cliffside just upriver from Ulluvagpaguak, marking the spots where Raven had braced himself with his paddle while travelling upriver (Figure 7):

When we were going to bed, my father [Alexander Isaac] would tell his story... He said that [Raven] lived in some village upriver [from Iquarmit]...He said that [Raven] used to bring his kayak up on Ulluvagpaguak, and he would keep it there. And then when he was paddling upriver, when the current was strong...What do you call it when you stick your paddle in the ground and push? [My father] would point out where [Raven's] paddle would hit the ground, those cracks under the bluff...

When I would see those cracks, they would be divided, and some were deep.



Figure 5. Two large rocks known as Ulluvagpaguak (lit., “pretend big ulluvak [cheeks]”) rising from the shores of the Yukon River upriver from Iquarmit, which Raven is said to have used as his kayak rest when he lived there along what was then said to have been the ocean's shore. Ann Fienup-Riordan, May 2017.



Figure 6. Father Max Isaac and Nick Andrew sharing a laugh at Iquarmiut, just downstream from Ulluvagpaguak. In 1933 Nick was born at Iquarmiut, which is now deserted. Ann Fienup-Riordan, May 2017.



Figure 7. Vertical cracks in the cliff face upstream from Ulluvagpaguak, marking places where Raven braced himself with his paddle while travelling upriver. Ann Fienup-Riordan, May 2017.

Both Nick Andrew and Father Max Isaac described a time when the ocean still reached far inland. Nick Charles (December 1985), originally from Nelson Island, told how Raven created Nelson Island by throwing soil into the ocean to save his wife from floating away:

My dear old parent said that some distance inland was once part of the ocean. They say the original ocean shore was down there [near Kalskag].

Then that one, perhaps it was Raven, after he hunted, when his wife was getting his catch, the ice broke loose and floated off. When she floated away, her husband threw some soft soil, perhaps from their house. He went down and tossed it out to the ocean. When he tossed it out, that down there became land up to the edge of Qaluyaat [Nelson Island]. And also those below became little mountains. [My dear parent] spoke of them that way.

Twenty years later, Paul John (July 2007, 259) of Toksook Bay shared the same story, speaking to a large audience of other Elders and young people as well as several non-Native visitors, sitting on a beach during a boat trip around Nelson Island. The purpose of the trip was to document Yup'ik history, of which the activities of Ciuliaqatuk are an important part.⁵ Paul John recounted,

They say that Nelson Island was once *evunret* [piled ice]. And after they were ice, they turned into land...

They say that this place was once water before it turned into land. When I heard it in the form of a story, the village of Kalskag inland is where the mountains start. The Kalskag hills are between the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers [where the rivers come together]; there are no mountains down below it.

I heard that Ciuliaqatuk tossed his small amount of ashes and said, "In the distant future, the descendants will live on it." They say that this area turned into land starting from the time that he tossed his few ashes. That's the extent I know the story.

Nick Charles (December 1985) also described the origin and location of *uitera*q (red ochre) found to this day at Qilengpak along the north side of Nelson Island:

5. See Rearden and Fienup-Riordan (2011, 2–13). Jents Flynn and Jack Angaiak of Tununak provide another detailed account of the activities of Ciuliaqatuk on Nelson Island (Orr et al. 1997, 223–47).

They also say that when Raven's daughter began menstruating, when his own daughter bled, he let her sit down at Qilengpak. They say the *uitera*q [from *uita*-, "to stay, to remain," perhaps referring to Raven's daughter's confinement] we use [as a red pigment for paint] down there is the blood of his daughter.

Up there [above Tununak] is a little mound visible in the distance. They call it Qilengpak. That was where she sat. They say it was evident, and his door covers were there, and you could see the imprints of his forefinger on the rocks.

Once again, Paul John (January 2006, 205) added to Nick Charles's account, noting that *uitera*q is shy and only shows itself to some people:

There are teachings concerning Qilengpak, and they make offerings to it... When Ciuliaqatuk's daughter had her first menstruation, he had her go and sit there, and the place where she sat turned into *uitera*q.

And there are various results for those who go and gather [*uitera*q] from there. It is available to some people, and it is not available to some. And those who want to give an offering give it something.

And that person from Nunivak told me a story. When they went to get *uitera*q from there, when they were about to leave that place, his wife removed her bra and left it there. [*Laughter*]

Those who want to give an offering to that place where Ciuliaqatuk's daughter sat. It now has a bra. [*Laughter*]

Frank Andrew (June 2003, 134) also noted that not everyone could find *uitera*q: "They say that it is only visible to some people. *Uitera*q is strange because it disappears. It cannot be taken by some people. They say some will gather a lot, though some are unable to see it." Annie Blue (September 1997) of Togiak confirmed that if someone came in while a painter was using it, he must cover his work, as *uitera*q was shy and would not want to be observed.

Finally, Nick Charles (December 1985) pointed out Cikuliullret, where Raven tried to chop through the thin earth and allow those lost in the ocean to return to life:

I've also heard that Raven tried chopping the ice and digging somewhere above Tununak, at that place they call Cikuliullret [lit., "*Ciku* (ice) that was chopped away"]. Perhaps he aimed to dig all the way through, and people lost in the ocean could return through that hole. He dug in and chopped, but his ice pick broke before it opened.

So when the tip broke off, he put it to the side and left it saying, "I'll just put it there." And he said that if one of the descendants found it he would become wealthy. Up to this day, no one has found it.

They say that in the past Cikuliullret looked like it was actually chopped, and rocks appeared like they had been chopped with an ice pick.

A story fragment recorded by the Eskimo Language Workshop in the 1970s describes what might have happened had Raven succeeded: "Down the [coast from Qilengpak] was a place where the [Raven] father was picking on the ice above Englullugaq [Engelullugarmiut]. They look just exactly like chipped ice. The father, by ice picking, was attempting to make a hole in the earth. He almost did it except that his ice pick broke. If he had made a hole, even though people die, they would have come out of death through there and not died" (Fienup-Riordan 1983, 248n22).

It is said that Raven left marks throughout Nelson Island. Michael John (July 2007, 285) of Newtok noted tracks along the top of a boulder below Engelullugarmiut, said to be made by Raven's kayak sled, and nearby are etchings made by Raven's daughter when she played with her story knife. Simeon Agnus (July 2007, 178) of Nightmute said that Raven stepped on all the points along the north coast of Toksook Bay, giving each a name, when bringing food to his father: "My, how large that Raven was as he made his strides. I wonder where he came from, but I never heard."

Returning to the Yukon River, Father Max Isaac not only told the story of how Raven killed and buried his daughter in a hole in the rocks along the Yukon River, but in May 2017, he showed us her grave site (Figure 8):

Since [Raven] had a daughter, he watched her closely as she was growing up. [My father] said that back then, his daughter went away, or the big bird took her away. And then he looked for her.

And sometimes he would use snowshoes as he searched for her.

And then he found her upriver...and brought his daughter home. [My father] used to say that [Raven] was possessive of his daughter and tried not to have anyone marry her. And then she went off with a man, probably with the big bird. When [Raven] was upset, he killed his daughter.

Then when he brought her home, he looked for a grave site for her. Then after making a hole upriver in a bluff, he buried her. When I was small, I used to see what looked like liquid going down that looked like blood...

Those marks, the red marks where the blood flowed down. He used to tell me that story...I was amazed by that because I used to hear it, and sometimes when we went upriver on the north side [of the Yukon], I would watch those bluffs.



Figure 8. The hole in the cliff along the Yukon River where Raven is said to have buried his daughter. Ann Fienup-Riordan, May 2017.

Our last stop along the Yukon River bluffs was a high rock cliff, marked with tightly spaced sedimentary lines, at the mouth of Tulukarnartuli (lit., “Place with many ravens”). Nick Andrew (May 2017, 190) explained the bluff’s significance (Figure 9):

This river here, this creek, was named by the people of old as Tulukarnartuli. It meanders up between the mountains. And then here, there are many lines up there. They would bring young girls here and have them put their hands up there [on the grooved rock face] so that they would be dexterous seamstresses. They did that because they wanted them to be skillful at making things.

And since people farther downriver [from Marshall] heard about that, they brought their daughters here as well.



Figure 9. Rock cliff face at the mouth of Tulukarnartuli (Place with many ravens), marked with neatly spaced sedimentary grooves, and located just downstream from the once large settlement of Iqarmiut. Young girls who touched the cliff were said to become skilful and dexterous in sewing. Ann Fienup-Riordan, May 2017.

Though Raven was not explicitly mentioned in Nick Andrew’s story, the name Tulukarnartuli suggests an ancient association. Moreover, the connection of Raven with the initiation of young girls as skilled seamstresses evokes the association of Raven with the tattooing of young women in the eastern Arctic (Oosten and Laugrand 2006, 196).

Tulukaruum Tanglurallri/Raven’s snowshoe tracks

Raven not only marked the land. Many recall how he left his mark on the night sky, creating Tulukaruum Tanglurallri (the Milky Way, lit., “Raven’s snowshoe tracks”). Nick Charles (December 1985) remembered, “Our forefathers said that our ancestor was Raven, and up in the sky they told us to see his footprints. The stars up there are tracks of his snowshoes. When the weather is clear at night, the stars up there are recognizable. When you look up in the sky they look like someone’s snowshoe trail. Those are the tracks of our ancestor, that Raven.”

Some, such as Charlie Pleasant (Tennant and Bitar 1981, 179–81) and Annie Blue (Fienup-Riordan 2005, 243), say that Raven made these tracks when he retrieved the sun and that the staff he used while walking along can be seen

today as the three stars in Orion's belt, known in some areas as Tulukaruum Ayarua (lit., "Raven's walking stick"). Others say that Raven made the tracks when he travelled north in search of a wife (Wassilie Evan, March 2004, 112; Frank Andrew, August 2003, 24). Father Max Isaac (May 2017) had heard his father identify Raven's snowshoe tracks as those he made when looking for his daughter: "Sometimes at night [my father] would show me those small stars, we call them the Milky Way in English. He would point to those, [Raven's] path, his tracks. And they look like snowshoe tracks. "Those are the tracks he made when he was looking for his daughter.' My father used to tell me that story."

Wassilie Berlin (September 1997) noted that Raven's trail was more distinct in the past: "It is said that he traveled across the sky, *ellam ayanra aturluku* [clockwise, following the universe]. When he reached the middle of the sky, he popped the bladder filled with light." Wassilie Berlin also recalled part of the beautiful song that accompanied the story.

Tulukaruut, ordinary ravens

Because they feed on all sorts of waste, ravens are considered inedible and generally were not hunted in the past except to make fire-bath hats or bags from their skins. John Moses (1978, 6) of Kwethluk recalled an episode in a story of the renown warrior Apanuugpak, who wore a raven-skin hat to trick his enemies into thinking that he was a poor man of no consequence. Ravens were, however, considered intelligent and were closely watched.

While stories of Raven the Creator are less common today, ravens are still recognized as important to pay attention to as they can reveal the location of animals. Alexie Nicholai (March 2016, 294) of Oscarville noted, "One has to pay attention to ravens in the wilderness. They are in places not far from animals to catch." Yako Andrew (March 2016, 294) of Napaskiak agreed:

Ravens show us where there are animals to catch. After it has been at a particular location, it will return to that place. Evidently, it is because that location has [an animal].

And once, when I went by snowmobile, the raven wasn't [flying] high. It passed me, since I wasn't going at a fast speed.

I said this, "Raven, raven, remove what you're carrying on your back." Then it completely flipped over. It was making its call, too. As I was traveling, I came upon caribou [*laughter*]...

They say that when they do that [flip and remove the packs on their backs], [their packs] become animals to catch. These ravens show them [where there are animals].

Many Elders make the association between ravens flipping in the air, “removing their backpacks,” and the presence of animals. Nick Andrew (March 2004, 569) spoke from experience: “They say ravens circle when they see a moose in the fall, since they will eat its guts if we kill it. Ravens are wise. When they started to circle, we would go into the woods and find a moose.” Like Yako Andrew, Nick Andrew was told to yell at ravens flying overhead, telling them to remove their packs—*Akmaliar atmaiqerli* [Raven, take your pack off]!—and they would do somersaults: “They never refused when we did so and would flip over.”

Koyukon people in Alaska say virtually the same thing. In his book *Make Prayers to the Raven*, anthropologist Richard Nelson (1983, 83) writes, “The power of this enigmatic bird is most directly manifested in its ability to grant human wishes, to answer brief prayers that are made to it...A hunter will sometimes shout, ‘Tseek’aal [Old Grandfather], drop a pack down to me!’ If the raven rolls partway over in flight, as if it is dropping a loaded pack from its back, the hunter will find game. If it just keeps flying normally, the contents of raven’s metaphorical pack are not forthcoming—it will be a poor hunt.” Such a striking similarity should not be surprising. Yup’ik and Koyukon people have lived close to one another for hundreds of years. Also, perhaps, Yup’ik and Koyukon hunters learned independently that ravens sometimes respond to a shouted request by somersaulting in the air, to show hunters where to find animals (Richard Nelson, pers. comm., May 2018).

For both Yup’ik and Koyukon hunters, Raven remains a giver of gifts. Joseph Jenkins (May 2003) of Nunapitchuk recalled, “He was telling about the raven. That’s what I experienced, too, when I started traveling to the wilderness. When I finally saw a raven, I yelled at him, ‘If you have something on your back, remove it for me.’ Because he probably heard me, the raven began to fall and started moving his wings around, and before he reached me, he flew away. Sometime, not long after raven does that, you see a red fox or you see a mink. They tell us that if we believe in the *qanruyutet* [oral instructions] and follow them, they will end up being true for us.”

Ravens lead people not only to animals but also to humans lost in the wilderness. John Andrew (November 2017, 53) of Kwethluk described how several years ago ravens helped villagers find one of his relatives:

Then after searching, not far from the runway, suspicious of the ravens, they went to them and saw that the person’s body was there. They had already tried to eat his body, his face. One eye was missing. My family members were upset, and they told them to shoot at those ravens, too.

Since we were warned against that, I told them, “We were told that if a raven finds a person’s body, we should be grateful for them. They show them the location of one who people cannot find.” Even if it’s an animal or a person, when they find that body, they will show its location.

As John Andrew (November 2017) noted, people should feel gratitude toward ravens: “They say these animals are what clean the wilderness. And they say they are a help to people.” He added that ravens can sense a dead animal from a great distance: “And we heard it as a *qulirag* when we were small, that these ravens see a dead animal’s smoke from far away. When [a raven] stops a great distance away, [the animal’s] spirit or smoke wafts upward. That’s why they say no matter where they are, they go to it and don’t miss it. They say when some come upon [a dead animal], they circle around for a little while. And if there are other [ravens], they will gather around it, if the carcass is large.”

It is also said that ravens themselves are never found dead and can disappear when killed. Ravens, they say, are surprising and can foretell death. Nick Andrew’s wife, Nastasia (March 2004, 570), added to her husband’s observations: “They say they don’t make noise at night in the dark after the sun goes down. They used to tell us that when something was going to happen in our village, they would make noise before the sun rose. When you hear them make noise at night, then not long after someone dies.”

In February 2018, I shared a meal with Alexie Jimmie of Toksook Bay and his family. Talking about ravens, Alexie commented that only a *nukalpiaq* (great hunter) could catch a raven. He then told the story of the son-in-law who never brought home food. His father-in-law advised him to go after the ravens, indicating that the young man should follow them, as they would lead him to animals that he could bring home to eat. But the son-in-law misunderstood and went out and hunted ravens. When he brought them home to his father-in-law, it proved that he was, in fact, a capable hunter.

Twenty years before, Paul John (April 1997) had remarked on how difficult it was to hunt ravens: “I have heard a story of ravens attesting to their adeptness at dodging arrows. The arrows of an unworthy man never hit them because they are adept at dodging, but they let the arrows of a great hunter touch them.”

While discussing place names with Akulmiut Elders, Johnny Berlin (September 2015, 259) of Nunapitchuk mentioned a high bluff known as Tulukarnartulik, used as a landmark when travelling: “I guess they called it Tulukarnartulik [Place with many ravens] because there are many *tulukaruut* [ravens] there. When I was young and traveled there I always saw ravens flying around.” Nick Pavilla (September 2015, 264) of Atmautluak explained, “When strong winds continually push up on the side of the bluff there, the ravens stay in flight right over the land...I think they like to play in the winds, just like us.”

One motivating factor for sharing information with young people today was the Elders’ deeply held view that times of food shortage are in our future as well as our past. Paul John (May 2004, 92) described the signs that he and others have observed, including people disregarding their relatives and animals speaking to people in the wilderness. Because the animals speak in Yup’ik, however, people do not understand them: “This person was bewildered by a raven. While he was traveling by snowmobile in the wilderness, the raven would

talk to him, but he didn't know what it said. These signs that should bring us to our senses have appeared, and we will go through a great famine if people no longer have any sense and relatives begin to quarrel with one another." In fact, ravens are the most verbal songbirds on the planet, having more than two hundred different vocalizations and many dialects.

Paul Kiunya (October 2005, 314) concluded, "Raven, the one they told about, wasn't a bird. They started talking about the ravens recently. The ravens are plenteous in my village down there. They are survivors. Even though an object is hard those ravens can manage. Their jaws are strong. Even in winter, they don't get cold. When they tell of that person [Raven], it's amazing. Maybe since it's true they tell about him."

Conclusion

Yup'ik Elders continue to tell stories of how the land was formed and altered through time. They share with geologists a deep appreciation for how much has changed from the days, as they say, *nuna mamkitellrani* (when the land was thin). Then, the boundaries between the ordinary and extraordinary were more permeable, and people encountered unusual, sometimes frightening things. In these distant times, there was no light or human life. Both were brought by Ciuliaqatuk, Raven the Creator. Nick Andrew (October 2005, 311) declared, "Beginning from long ago, people have seen and thought of that Raven who has done much. They really cherish it."

As in other parts of Alaska, Yup'ik people know Raven as paradoxically both a lazy scavenger, relying on others to hunt for him and not adverse to eating human flesh, and the creator of light and life. Raven in southwest Alaska is also known as the creator of many landforms seen to this day, especially on coastal headlands where archaeologists tell us hunters first settled when they arrived in Alaska, before gradually moving inland and upriver. In this they resemble their Iñupiaq neighbours to the north. For example, the creation story of Tulungigraq (the Raven man) tells how he harpooned a whale-like creature whose body then transformed itself into the earth of Tikigaq Point (Point Hope) (Asatchaq, Lowenstein, and Tukummiq 1992; Lowenstein and Tukummiq 1994, 4). In southeast Alaska, Raven is also associated with the creation of many landforms (Thornton 2008, 2012), and the Dry Bay–Alek River area in Tlingit country is the epicentre of Raven names and narratives that stretch from Prince William Sound to Cape Spencer (Cruikshank 2005; Deur et al. 2018).

In contrast, linguist James Kari (pers. comm., February 2009) was struck by the use of place names by Yup'ik narrators in these Raven stories, noting that specific places are never cited in Athabascan creation stories. Similarly, Raven does not appear to be associated with specific places in the eastern Arctic (Oosten and Laugrand 2006). In Yup'ik Raven tales, however, place names are omnipresent.

The fact that I have not read of or heard stories of Raven creating specific places in interior Alaska or the eastern Arctic does not necessarily mean that these stories do not exist. I can only speak from my own experience. I leave it to younger scholars—perhaps Inuit and Alaska Native—to explore how Raven marked the land beyond southwest Alaska.

What I do know is that Yup'ik narrators today continue to refer to particular places, all across southwest Alaska, where Raven and his daughter left marks on the landscape recalling their activities in the distant times. Change may be constant on the delta lowland between the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers. Yet it is likely that the places Raven touched will remain for many generations to come and that ravens will continue to play and to feast in their delta homeland.

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