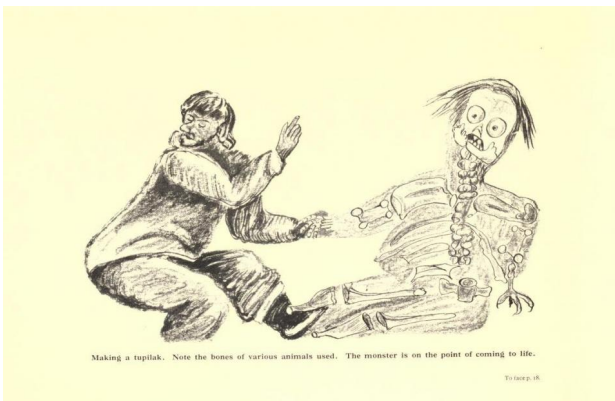


Seeking Environmental Knowledge from an Inuit Shaman

Shane McCorristine


By and large, British Arctic explorers lacked local knowledge of the environments through which they passed and, consequently, sometimes consulted Inuit shamans, whose geographical knowledge was known to be extensive. That these consultations could be made either in the formal atmosphere of the ship with maps and charts or during a shamanic séance in an indigenous hut is significant. Throughout the nineteenth century explorers derided shamanism as a superstition, yet at the same time remained fascinated by the shamanic séance.

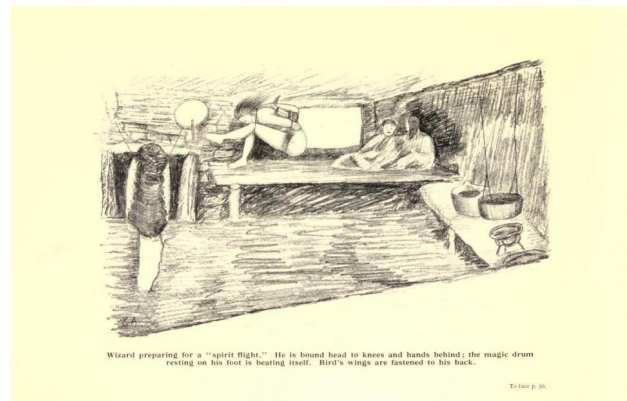


Making a tupilak. Note the bones of various animals used. The monster is on the point of coming to life.

Making a Tupilak

Drawing from Knud Rasmussen's *Eskimo Folk-tales*, to face p. 18
[View source](#) .


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Wizard preparing for a "spirit flight." He is bound head to knees and hands behind; the magic drum resting on his foot is beating itself. Bird's wings are fastened to his back.

Wizard preparing for a "spirit flight"

Drawing from Knud Rasmussen's *Eskimo Folk-tales*, to face p. 50
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For example, during an 1821–23 expedition to seek the Northwest Passage, Lieutenant William H. Hooper described how he asked an *Iglulingmiut* shaman, Toolemak, to perform "some of the ceremonies of Angetkokism." Despite Hooper's scepticism of Toolemak's "conjurations," he wanted the shaman to find out if the expedition's ships could achieve a Northwest Passage. Following some chanting, Toolemak contacted his helping spirit [*tuurngaq*] (calling upon the British officers "to become his auxiliaries" in the process), who answered that their ships would not be able to reach their destination due to the quantity of ice and would then "return to Kabloona-noona" [white man's land].

Further readings:

- McCorristine, Shane. *Spectres of the Self: Thinking About Ghosts and Ghost-Seeing in England, 1750-1920*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- McCorristine, Shane. "The Supernatural Arctic: An Exploration." *Nordic Journal of English Studies* 9, no. 1 (2010): 47-70.

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