## The Native Place Names of Arctic America

(concluded from September, 1967 issue)

## NILS M. HOLMER

HE LOCAL TOPONYMY, owing to the fact that such names have usually a more recent origin than those which are known over a large area, comes much closer to the current language, making use to a larger extent of pure appellatives. As was mentioned by way of introduction to this paper, many of the names quoted and explained by Professor Bergsland from the Aleutian area may be characterized as purely local designations (v. note 15, pt. I). Such names may not outlast a generation. In the Alaskan toponymy we find, among the names studied by Professor Bergsland, some that are provided with an adjectival qualifier: tanar angunar "the big land or island" (op. cit., p. 37) or, what is still more surprising, some that are real compounds in the European (or Indo-European) sense: sidigsa-ki·ru·ca "the Sidigsa-mountain," "the mountain of Sidigsa" (op. cit., p. 28), saru·ga qangu "the Saruga-seal-cave," "the seal-cave of Saruga" (op. cit., p. 29) or even atra-yara-cirsga "Atka-pointshoal," that is "the shoal of the point of Atka (Island)" (op. cit., p. 31). The genuine character of such names is, however, often doubtful and as a matter of fact they may often represent mere translations of Russian or American designations into the Aleut language. Regarding such a name as qanga-tanar "east-island" or "the eastern island," for instance, Bergsland says (op. cit., p. 40): "probably a recent name for Ugidak Island."46 The genuine form of such a name as the above tanar angunar would probably have been \*tanaGag (incidentally the native name of Tanaga Island) "the great island," that is, with an augmentative suffix.

Names of the above type (saru·ga qangu, etc.) are, however, in most cases compounds only in appearance. Such a name as atraya·ra "Atka-point" or "the point of Atka" is in reality nothing but a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> Another case of translation is indicated in op. cit., p. 37.

construction of two words, meaning "Atka, its point." To Other names of this type are the following: Saru-gam igura "the point of Saruga" (on Atka Island, op. cit., p. 29), Igitgim cma "the tail of Igitkin Island" (op. cit., p. 36). There are names in which two relative forms occur: atram acan sisgi "the portage at the mouth of Atka" (op. cit., p. 35), probably referring to some inlet on the coast of Atka Island. Such names of local type are found in Greenland also: Umánap kangilê "the (island) east of Umanak" (see Schultz-Lorentzen, Dictionary of the West Greenland Language, in Meddelelser om Grønland, vol. LXIX, Copenhagen, 1927, p. 112).

Quite often one of the words in constructions of the above type may be left out, normally the word which would have been in the "relative" case form; such names end in the possessive suffix -a ("its," "of it"), according to the model atram ya·ra "of Atka, its point" (cf. above). Hence we get qagalars(g)a or qagalags(g)a (that is Kagalaska) "the land to the east of it" (scil. Adak Island; cf. Bergsland, op. cit., p. 37), unalra (i.e., Unalga Island) "seaward of it" or "the seaward one" (op. cit., p. 40), unimga (i.e., Unimak) "the large one of them" or "the larger one" (op. cit., p. 11) and, finally, unalagsga (that is, Unalaska Island), which means "seaward of it," viz. the Alaska Peninsula (cf. op. cit., p. 12). Local names of this type are of course found in Greenland as well, e.g., Erqua "back of it" or "its back part."

Names in which that part only appears which represents the word in the "relative" case form are quite understandably exceptional. They probably depend mostly on a misunderstanding by those not speaking the native language, when names are adapted into norms of the official toponymy. Whereas it is quite possible and furthermore common to refer to a place by such a designation as "at the back," "in the east," "above" or "below" (for which see more examples farther on), no one would designate a place by a phrase such as "of Adak Island" or "of Alaska," which would not make sense. Yet there are doubtless names in the official toponymy which, translated, would actually convey such a meaning. One example of such an abbreviated form seems to be the name of the Aleutian island of Seguam. The native name (according to Bergsland, op. cit., p. 20)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> The proper construction should have been atram ya'ra "of Atka, its point" (which, incidentally, is used as an alternative form; cf. Bergsland, op. cit., p. 31), but it seems that the use of the relative form (in -m) is optional in Aleut.

is saru·gamag "the very Seguam" or "Seguam itself," but the official name form is evidently based on the basic form saru·ga-, which is a common stem in the Aleutian toponymy and which Bergsland translates "bird colony." Of this shorter name the "relative" form is  $saru \cdot gam$ , evidently heard by Russian speakers as  $sagu \cdot (q)am$  (cf. the sections on Phonology). This "relative" form occurs in a number of local names (saru-gam igura "the point of Saruga," saru-gam tanadgusi "the village of Saruga," cf. Bergsland, op. cit., p. 29), apart of course from constructions with a postposition (cf. saru-gam hadan "to Saruga"; op. cit., p. 72), and in this way the "relative" form has become generalized (as Seguam) in the official toponymy. Another example is possibly the above-mentioned Igitkin Island (if representing a native "relative" form igitgim). The river name Kuskokwim is used as "relative" form in Alaskan Eskimo (cf. Hinz. op. cit., p. 151), as if from a nominative in -wik (cf. above), although it is uncertain whether this name actually has an Eskimo origin,

An interesting name in this connection is that of Nome, the mining town and seaport in western Alaska. According to the current explanation – which is not altogether unacceptable – this name depends on a mapmaker's mistake. But another explanation is not excluded and may possibly be the right one. The city or town of Nome is situated on Cape Nome, a headland on the Seward Peninsula, and may very well at one time have been named something like "the port, village or place of the headland." This would have required the relative form of the native word for a "headland," which is nûk or nûng (nuvuk, nujuk, etc.) in practically all Eskimo dialects. It is true that the relative (or "transitive") form is not \*nûm (which would have immediately resulted in English Nome) in any of the Alaskan dialects of which the present author has available records, but the form would not be impossible as a dialectal variant. Both Point Barrow and Cape Lisburn have been called

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> According to this explanation — which has certain marks of artificiality — the place (which was first called Anvil City) had on one map (1849) been marked "?Name" to indicate that the place in question was still without a name, and successive cartographers had misread and mistaken this for the actual name of the place [cf. *Encyclopædia Britannica* (1963), vol. 16, p. 481d].

Barnum (op. cit., p. 356) gives it as nogum and Hinz (op. cit., 174), as nûgim.
 The stem of the word is occasionally nû- (and not nûk-; cf. Greenlandic nûa

<sup>&</sup>quot;its point") and the paradigm recalls that of Alaskan ydk "man, Eskimo," with the "transitive" form ydm (Barnum, op. cit., p. 11).

Nuvuk (or Novuk) and the Eskimos of the latter region were named Nuvungneut "Cape People," by Father Petitot (op. cit., vol. III, p. XI).

While the linguistic structure of the native toponymy in arctic America is the same as in other parts of the continent, the integrant semantic elements are very different and often unique, depending on the different climatic conditions. The northern coast of Canada is flat and treeless tundra, where rivers, lakes, inlets, points, and islands are the only prominent geographical features. Names denoting mountains or woods are hardly found at all. Most of the names actually signify "the (big, little) river," "the (big) lake," "the (big) point," "the (big, little) island," etc. (cf. the preceding sections). In Baffin Island there is an Eqe Bay, which simply means "the corner, nook or inlet" and the same element (ege, egeq) is frequently found in the Greenland toponymy. There is a Kangeeak Point in Baffin Island, which corresponds to the name Kangeq ("the promontory") in West Greenland, where also we find the name Ikeq "the bay or gulf" (along with Ikerssuaq "the big bay"). In Greenland such names as Sermeq ("glacier"), Sermilik ("having glaciers, conjunction of glaciers"), Sermerssuag (Sermersok, "the big glacier"), Sermiligarssuk ("the small glaciers"), Ilulissat ("the icebergs," the native name of Jakobshavn in Greenland) or Aputiteq (cf. Greenlandic aput "snow on the ground") are all landmarks typical of the climate.

The characteristic fauna of this region is reflected in names such as (Old and New) Aklavik (Mackenzie river delta) and Adlavik Islands (Labrador), which mean "place of the (black) bears" (Greenlandic agdlaq), Nanortalik (West Greenland) "place of polar bears" (nanoq), Kikerk Lake (District of Mackenzie), which is possibly from kigeq "beaver," Netsilik, Nettiling (Lake and Fiord) "seal colony" (cf. above), Tugtoqortoq (West Greenland) "having great or many reindeer" (tugto), Pangnirtung (Baffin Island) "having (male) reindeer," Arfersiorfik (West Greenland) "whale-hunting place" (cf. above). The importance of sea fowls appears in names such as Tingmiarmiut (East Greenland), which might be translated "bird place people," Appat and Aupparssuit (correctly Agparssuit) "the (big or many) aulks," Akpatok Island (Ungava Bay) "rich in aulks or mergansers," Oqattunguit (Greenland) "the few cormorants," Tulanguit (Greenland) "the little or few ravens,"

Serfat (Greenland) "the black guillemots," <sup>51</sup> and perhaps also Mallemuk Fjældet (northeastern Greenland), if from *malamuk* or *malamoq* "fulmar."

Fishing is represented by such names as Saputing Lake (Baffin Island), meaning "the two salmon weirs," Ekalugad Fiord (Baffin Island) "the polar cods," Uitdlut (Greenland) "shells," Eqaluit (Greenland) "salmon" (plural), Angmassalik (East Greenland) "having caplin." <sup>52</sup>

Of names indicating the typical arctic vegetation we may cite Padle (Baffin Island) "willow," Uivfak (Greenland) "fern," <sup>53</sup> Kuannerit (plural; a plant name, Angelica officinalis or Archangelica), Oqaussaq, which is translated by Thalbitzer (in the list referred to in note 51) "rhododendron" (cf. Greenlandic oqaussat "mountain azalea").

Of the names denoting animals (sometimes also plants) certain ones are of a type described on various occasions by the present writer,<sup>54</sup> namely, those which, when translated, would be the name of the animal or plant itself without any suffix or other element indicating the "place" where these are found.<sup>55</sup> The author has sometimes thought that such names express a kind of animistic personification of the place in question: the "otter," for instance, would be the personification of the "water" in which it lives and therefore in a sense identified with the latter.<sup>56</sup> It may however also be that certain names of animals, occurring as geographical names, indicate some kind of general similarity, but the difference between the two

<sup>51</sup> Some of these names are quoted from Thalbitzer's list (op. cit., pp. 327-406).

<sup>52</sup> Cf. the appellative (Greenlandic) angmagssivik "caplin fishing ground."

 $<sup>^{53}</sup>$  Not to be confounded with the similar Greenlandic word uivfaq "projecting land or point," which also frequently occurs as a place name in Greenland.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> See the author's work referred to in Note 26 (pp. 23, 24) and in *Names* 8:4 (1960), p. 213.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> When the plural form of the words in question is used, the difference is insignificant: "the beavers," for instance, is naturally the same as the "place or colony of beavers"; hence Greenlandic *Kasigianguit* "the little speckled seals" (native name of Christianshaab) is the same as "the place of these."

<sup>56</sup> The English word "otter" is a variant of the Indo-European stem in "water," and the Gaelic word for "otter" (dobrán, dobhrán) is the diminutive form of a word dob(h)ar "water" (cf. the place name Dover). At the same time dob(h)ar means "of a dark color," i.e., that of the water, but also that of the otter, and both being the same shade of gray, the animal is caused to blend with the substrate, as by protective resemblance.

alternative points of view is in reality not significant. As names of either type we may cite the following ones from Alaska, northern Canada and Greenland: Koggiung (Kvichak Bay, southwest Alaska) and (perhaps) Kugong Island (Belcher Islands group in Hudson Bay), of which the former at least would represent the Alaskan Eskimo word kuguyu (Hinz), koguyuk (Barnum) "swan" (the Greenlandic qugssuk or qugssoq), Ivisarak Lake (Baffin Island), with which compare Greenlandic ivisâraq "red-bellied trout," Nagtoralik (a mountain in Greenland) "the eagle" (hence not properly a name in -lik; cf. above), Arfeq "the whale," Teriangniag "the fox" (the latter two in Greenland), 57 Nyac (Alaska) "the hair seal" or "harbor seal" (if from nayak; cf. Barnum, op. cit., p. 356). Adak Island (in the Aleutians) has been explained as representing one of various animal names ("crab, octopus, squid"), but more likely it is - as Bergsland thinks (op. cit., p. 37) - a mountain name meaning "the father" (cf. below).

That formations in the landscape are often compared with parts of the human body is a well known fact to students of place names. We find names all over the world which mean "the head" (cf. English Holyhead), "nose" (cf. French Gris-Nez), "mouth," as of a river (cf. English Portsmouth, Dutch Ijmuiden, etc.). Among the particular names with which we are dealing here the following could be advanced: Igiak (western Alaska), meaning "the throat," Akulurak (Yukon delta) "the bridge of the nose" (cf. Barnum, op. cit., p. 322), Okak Islands and Bay (Labrador) "the tongue" (Greenlandic oqaq), hence meaning more or less "narrow land or peninsula" (cf. French langue de terre), Niagornat (West Greenland) "the heads" (from Greenlandic niagog "head"), Niaqungunaq (West Greenland) "resembling a head." 58 Further examples are Aqajarua "its stomach," Pamiua "its tail," Tarto "the kidney" (these three in Greenland and taken from Thalbitzer's list of native names referred to above, in note 51). The Aleutian name Unga (Islands) would mean "its penis" (referring to some characteristic formation in relation to the surroundings). Of this type

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> Cf. Thalbitzer's list referred to in note 51. With the mountain name Nagtoralik one may compare the Venezuelan Tonoro, for which cf. the author in *Names*, 8:4 (1960), pp. 202, 214.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> Thalbitzer (op. cit., pp. 334—35) mentions a Niaqornarsuk from Greenland, which he renders by "the strange or remarkable head."

further instances appear to be the Alaskan name Eek (from ik "the two eyes," a dual form; cf. Hinz, op. cit., p. 8) and Karluk (Kodiak Island, Alaska) "the two lips" (cf. Greenlandic qardloq "lip"). In Greenland another dual form is found in the name Nutdluk "the buttocks" or "posteriors" (a designation not uncommon in local names in Europe also) and the same is undoubtedly the meaning of the Baffin Island name Nudlung Fiord; the reference is most probably to hills suggesting by their form the idea of the corresponding appellative word.

Many of the place names are properly designations of the tribes or people living there, comparable to the European Saxony (German Sachsen), which means "(the land of) the Saxons," Poland (German Polen), "(the land of) the Poles," etc. In the Eskimo language such names usually end in the plural suffix -ut (cf. the above German names), 59 which is generally preceded by a locative suffix (-mi) and often along with one of the local suffixes (-fik, -vik, etc.) mentioned in an earlier context. Such names are in many ways analogous to the Athapascan names in -na (v. note 11). The following are of this type: Napaimiut (Alaska) "the tree or wood people" (cf. Alaskan Eskimo napa "tree"), Sleetmute (Alaska) "the people (-ut) at (-mi-) the whetstone (place)" (cf. Alaskan Eskimo slin "whetstone"), Kwigamiut (on Nunivak Island, Alaska) "the river people" (cf. Alaskan Eskimo kwigame "on the river"), Paimiut (Alaska) "the people at the river mouth" (referring to a tributary of the Yukon; cf. Alaskan Eskimo pai, Greenlandic paq "river mouth" and Greenlandic Pâmiut, the native name of Frederikshaab). In addition there are the above-mentioned Netsilingmiut (Boothia Peninsula) and *Iglulingmiut* (Melville Peninsula), respectively, "the people of (the place of) the seal colony" and "the people of the igloo settlement," Ogamiut (Cumberland Sound) "the people of the narrow land" (or "tongue," ogaq), Tununermiut (northern Baffin Island) "the northerners" (?), Sadlermiut (the name of the Eskimo tribe living on Southampton Island as late as 1906), along with a great many other tribal names.60

In Greenland the following names belong to this type: Ikamiut (West Greenland) "those living over there," "the northerners" (?),

 $<sup>^{59}</sup>$  The suffix is \*-yo-, common in various American Indian languages. Cf. the reference in note 31.

<sup>60</sup> For these, see Birket-Smith, op. cit., pp. 23-30.

Qagssimiut (West Greenland) "the meeting-house people," that is "those living at or near the assembly house," <sup>61</sup> Ikermiut (East Greenland) "the bay, sound, or fiord people," Tingmiarmiut (East Greenland) "the bird (or "sea fowl") people" (v. above), Kungmiut (East Greenland) "the river people," etc. As mentioned earlier (cf. note 45) it is possible that some of these names may imply totemic relations. Some tribe names are closely connected with the name of a locality: the Chugach Eskimos (an isolated tribe of southern Alaskans and neighbors of the Eyak Indians on the Copper river) evidently bear the name of the Chugach Mountains, which in their turn may have an Athapascan as likely as an Eskimo origin.

A number of names have a mythological character. 62 One may in particular think of the Torngat Mountains in northern Labrador. This name actually represents the plural form of a well known Eskimo word, in Greenlandic tôrnag, Alaskan Eskimo tunerag (Hinz) or tungroq (Barnum), meaning a "spirit," especially a shaman's assistant spirit, a "familiar spirit," but the word has also been used of a "demon, devil, or evil spirit" in general. 63 As mountains were often supposed to be the abodes of evil spirits, the name (if correctly interpreted) is rather suggestive. Some kind of personification seems also implied in the name of the Alaskan Great Sitkin Island (from an Aleut word, sitginag, meaning "ordure" or "dung"), originally the name of a volcano, for which Bergsland has a suggestive translation (op. cit., p. 36).64 In connection with this it may be mentioned that Swallow Head and Saddle Point, on Great Sitkin Island, are respectively referred to as "the eastern and western son of Sitkin" (op. cit., p. 36). Mount Moffett (Alaska)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> It could possibly also refer to single people residing in the communal house (cf. Barnum, op. cit., p. 36).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> The present author has given examples of such names from Central and South America, in the work referred to in note 26 (p. 22) and in *Names* 8:4 (1960), pp. 204—5.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Father Petitot, op. cit. (vol. III), p. XXXII, where the spirit actually is considered a god or demon "respecté et adoré parce qu'il est craint." Thalbitzer tried to explain the native word as borrowed from Indo-European, identifying it with the Celtic Tanaros, the Old English Thunor, etc. (see Archiv für Religionswissenschaft, vol. 26, Leipzig 1928, p. 422, note 1, and Meddelelser om Grønland, vol. 40, Copenhagen 1923, p. 581).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>64</sup> Whether the name Aniakchak Crater (Alaska Peninsula) could represent a native form, \*anaktshuak ("little dung") is dubious on phonetic grounds. Cf. the place name Anaik (Alaska); hence, in any case, "little Anaik."

is called by the Aleutians adagaq "the Great Father" (v. Bergsland, op. cit., p. 38), which clearly suggests some form of personification or deification.<sup>65</sup>

An important type of names among peoples with nomadic habits consists of names expressing direction, cardinal points or other similar relations. Such names are in fact very common from the Aleutian Islands to Greenland and are an interesting illustration of the Eskimo and Aleut way of conceiving the world. Just as in the Eskimo languages direction words play a far greater part than in English, so that where the latter would limit itself to a differentiation of "this (one)," "that (one)," "yonder," "the former," "the latter," "the same," etc., among the pronouns, the Eskimo language would have demonstrative pronouns corresponding to "the one in the north, south, east, west," etc. 66 It is however not properly a matter of an exact indication of a cardinal point, because - as is customary in "primitive" languages - cardinal points are not conceived cartographically, but in relation to the local geographical conditions, and correspond rather to "the land side," "the sea side" and such relations; hence what is commonly translated by "east" (kit, kite) in East Greenland and Labrador (since it properly means "seaward") becomes "west" in West Greenland and vice versa.67 Eskimos and Aleuts are, however, strongly conscious of the notion of direction; positions such as "above" and "below," "before" and "behind" constantly recur in the native toponymy.

The following names (of which some have been mentioned already) are examples illustrating the way geographical position is expressed among the Eskimos and Aleuts. Unalaska means "the

<sup>65</sup> The present author's suggestion is substantiated by a statement in Geoghegan (op. cit., p. 87): "But, although few Alaskan hills had native names, there are several exceptions in the Unangan (i.e., Aleutian) area, where certain volcanoes had been deified."

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Schultz-Lorentzen, A Grammar of the West Greenland Language (in Meddelser om Grønland, vol. 129, No. 3), p. 41. The same is found in Aleut. For the wealth of demonstrative pronouns in this language, see Geoghegan, op. cit., p. 31, where a series of six different pronouns is given, varying according to distance from the speaker and counting from the person nearest to the latter to the one nearest to the door, etc. Incidentally, one of these pronouns (meaning approximately "the one far away") is also the name of Akun Island.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> Cf. Schultz-Lorentzen, *Dictionary of the West Greenland Eskimo Language* (in Meddelelser om Grønland, vol. 69. Copenhagen, 1927), p. 124.

seaside of it" (scil. the Alaska Peninsula; cf. above), Kagalaska Island (in the Aleutians) is to be translated "to the east of it" (scil. Adak Island; the Aleutian stem gaga-"east" or "northeast" is possibly the same word as the (West) Greenlandic kange "east," both originally denoting "landward"),68 and Unalga Island (in the Aleutians) means "the seward one" (cf. Aleut unanga- "the seaside of something"; by this word the Aleutians were called by the mainland inhabitants: unangar, plural unangas "an Aleutian, Aleutians"). The Alaskan name Kotlik (Yukon delta) could be interpreted as meaning either "the uppermost" or "the outmost," and Kanakanak (southwest Alaska), as "the west (wind)" (cf. Bernum, op. cit., p. 300). The name of Ungava Bay is probably to be related to Greenlandic ungavaq "region beyond," whereas Saglek Bay (Labrador) would be related to Greenlandic sagdleg "the one in front or nearest to the steerer (of a canoe)." In Alaska we find the Eskimo name Atanik, which recalls the Greenlandic names of the type Ata ("its lower part"), Atangmik, etc. (from a stem at- "the lower part").69 According to the areas, "back" (Greenlandic tuno) is either the "east" (in West Greenland) or the "north" (Baffin Island); many names are derived from this stem: Tununermiut (cf. above), Tununuk (Mackenzie river delta), Tununark (Father Petitot; "Ile Richard"), Tunulik river (northern Quebec), Tunungayualuk Island (Labrador; cf. Greenlandic tunúngavog "turns backward"). An analogous name is Kingurutik Lake (Labrador; cf. Greenlandic kingoraq "behind"). As was seen in an earlier context, the word in relation to which the direction is expressed is most often left out.

It was mentioned by way of introduction to this paper that the Eskimo and Aleutian languages – along with three languages

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>68</sup> The suffix -alags(g)a in the native forms of these names (cf. above) is probably the same as in the Aleut name of Alaska, alags(g)ir, which would have arisen through some kind of abbreviation of an original longer name (of the same type as Unalaska). Regarding this name R. H. Geoghegan says (op. cit., p. 87), "It is commonly stated that Alaska is an Aleut word meaning 'great country.' This is incorrect. The Aleut name ... refers only to the Alaska Peninsula and can not be translated as 'great country.'"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> However, a better explanation would perhaps be found in comparing the Greenlandic word *ataneq* "watershed," common in place names. Cf. Birket-Smith (*op. cit.*, p. 49), who states that this word means "portage" on the upper Kazan river.

(Chukchi, Koryak and Kamchadal) spoken in Asia — are of indubitable Amerindian type and that the former two belong to the same sub-type as a number of American Indian languages, generally spoken along the Pacific coast, from Kwakiutl in the north to Araucanian in the south. The author of this paper hopes to have proven, or shown, that even in the toponymy the peoples of arctic America reveal themselves as speakers of typical Amerindian languages and that there is every reason not to exclude Eskimo and Aleutian place names when dealing with the native names of America.

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