

## REVIEW

### *YUNGCAUTNGUUQ NUNAM QAINGA TAMARMI* *ALL THE LAND'S SURFACE IS MEDICINE: EDIBLE AND MEDICINAL* *PLANTS OF SOUTHWEST ALASKA*

*Ann Fienup-Riordan, Alice Rearden, Marie Meade, Kevin Jernigan, 2021. University of Alaska Press, Fairbanks; photographs by Kevin Jernigan and Jacqueline Cleveland; plant portraits by Sharon Birzer and Richard W. Tyler. In English and Yup'ik; 368 pages, color photos and drawings, plant lists in English and Latin, notes, bibliography, index. ISBN 978-1-60223-4222 (paper); \$28.95.*

#### Reviewed by Nancy J. Turner

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I truly love this book! I have to say that right up front. From the beautiful photographs of plants and people on the front cover and throughout the book, to the exquisitely painted “plant portraits,” to the rich text featuring Yup'ik plant names, terms, and phrases, the book is exactly what a “peoples’ ethnobotany” should look like. It gives the reader a glimpse, through the photographs, descriptions, and stories, of what life out on the lands of Southwest Alaska is like—and would have been like for countless generations. *Yungcautnguuq Nunam Qaingam Tamarmi* reflects the deep relationships between the Yup'ik peoples and the plants on which they rely. Right at the outset, before the contents, is a page of acknowledgement to the plants: “*Naucetaat quyavikluki*,” or “Thanks to the plants,” with a delicate portrait of cottongrass by Sharon Birzer, one of the two talented artists—the other being the late Richard W. Tyler—whose paintings enhance the photos and text throughout.

“Teamwork has been the hallmark of this book project.” This statement from the *Quyavikelput*/Acknowledgements section summarizes the essence and spirit of the book. It encompasses so much more than even the intriguing title can convey. The book is infused with biocultural knowledge. It reflects—in the words, the stories, the illustrations—the Yup'ik people's respect for and love of plants and the land. With input from almost 100 Yup'ik knowledge holders, language experts, and plant gatherers from diverse Yup'ik communities across Southwest Alaska, the information transcends almost a

century of collaboration and sharing, and it represents the very best in research partnerships. Yup'ik teachers and cultural experts have been the guides in the project, sharing their beautifully grounded knowledge with cultural anthropologist Ann Fienup-Riordan, language specialists Alice Rearden and Marie Meade, and ethnobotanist Kevin Jernigan.

The book is intended not only as a guide to the plants but also as “an enduring record of what Yup'ik men and women know and value about plants and the roles plants continue to play in Yup'ik lives” (p. xv). Beyond the acknowledgements and list of tradition bearers who contributed their knowledge and experiences and stories is the *Kalikam Ayagnera*/Introduction that cites previous work and publications on people and plants in the region, as well as general information about Yup'ik history and the cultural importance of plants, together with two maps of communities and research locales and several stunning photos of the landscapes and people out harvesting. Following this introduction, the book is organized in topical units, starting with two major sections, *Naucetaat Nertukngiat*/Edible Plants and *Naucetaat Iinruktukngait*/Medicinal Plants, followed by shorter sections on *Tuqunargellriit Naucetaat*/Poisonous Plants, *Atsat*/Berries, and *Uugnaraat Negautait*/Mouse Foods. Refreshingly, Yup'ik names of the plants and plant products are given primacy over the English names in the headings and in the sections on individual plants.

A major division of the book, *Qanemcit Qulirat/* Stories and Traditional Tales, which follows the presentations on particular plants, is rich with language and experiences. These stories are organized under the same categories as in the first part of the book: edible plants, medicinal plants, poisonous plants, mouse foods, and berry picking. The narratives and descriptions of plant harvesting, and associated traditional plant knowledge, are beautifully produced, with English text on the left-hand page and Yup'ik versions on the right-hand page, so that one can easily go back and forth between the two versions and start to learn Yup'ik names and terminology. Of course, speakers and readers of Yup'ik can ignore the English version altogether.

Breathtaking photos of the landscapes, the plants, both growing and harvested, and people of all ages infuse the book. Out on the land, harvesting and demonstrating plant uses, they all look happy, obviously taking great pleasure in their time with the plants and with each other. My favorite parts of the book are the photos of Yup'ik children and youth gathering berries and other plants with such expressions of delight and enjoyment on their faces, it makes one think, "This is the way to live!"

Toward the end of the book are detailed lists of plants within the same categories, first in alphabetical order of their Yup'ik names, with dialectical differences noted, and then in order of their English common names, together with their Yup'ik and scientific names. These lists are followed by endnotes and references. Finally, there is a detailed and meticulously prepared index, with all the plant names (Yup'ik, scientific, and common English) included, and the names of the knowledge holders with references to the information they provided as well as the diverse subjects covered in the text.

It would be hard to pick out a favorite plant or favorite section in the book. Virtually every page contains fascinating details of plants both familiar and unfamiliar to me. My learning about Indigenous plant knowledge and use comes mainly from the Indigenous plant specialists of British Columbia. I had never heard of using some of the edible greens described in this book, for example, and I found the uses and processing methods for *tayarut*/mare's tail (*Hippuris tetraphylla*), *angukat*/wild rhubarb (*Polygonum alaskanum*), *quagcit*/sour dock (*Rumex arcticus*), *muugarliarniaret*/"water weed" roots (*Sparganium* spp.), *nasqapaguat*/nuttysaw-wort (*Saussurea nuda*), *allngiguat*/marsh marigolds (*Caltha palustris*), *kapuukaraat*/buttercups (*Ranunculus pallasii*), and other greens particularly intriguing.

My only complaint is not with the content but rather the design: the tight binding makes it difficult to read the full text without physically holding the book open or placing a weight on the open pages to keep them spread apart enough to read them. I would have preferred if the wider page margins had been on the inside rather than the outside of the pages, and I would have preferred a slightly larger type size. These are minor complaints, though; the book is also available as an electronic version, which would allow one to adjust the type size according to one's vision needs and to read the pages without having to hold them open.

This book has already become a favorite—alongside Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Fikret Berkes's *Sacred Ecology*, and Thomas Thornton's *Being and Place among the Tlingit*. Anyone who wishes to learn more about northern peoples, their environments, culture, language, and, in particular, the plants upon which all of us rely will be amazed at the richness of this volume.

# REVIEW

## *LIFE AT SWIFT WATER PLACE:*

### *NORTHWEST ALASKA AT THE THRESHOLD OF EUROPEAN CONTACT*

*Douglas D. Anderson and Wanni W. Anderson, editors, 2019. University of Alaska Press, Fairbanks; 400 pages, black and white photos and drawings, tables, appendices, index. ISBN 978-1-60223-3683 (paper); \$45.00.*

Reviewed by John Darwent

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*Life at Swift Water Place* is a compilation of 10 papers, edited by Douglas D. Anderson and Wanni W. Anderson, that describe the results of multidisciplinary investigations undertaken at the site of Igliqtisuiŋvigruaq or Swift Water Place in 2010–2013. The site is a multicomponent village on the Kobuk River in the territory of the Amilŋaqtayaaqmiut Inupiaq nation in northwestern Alaska. Although parts of the site date back to the thirteenth century AD, this book focuses on excavations of two houses dating to between ~1740 and 1819. The book weaves together archaeological findings with oral history and ethnography to construct a snapshot of how people dealt with the challenges of living on the Kobuk River—an environment of plenty juxtaposed with deprivation—in the time immediately before the arrival of Europeans.

Chapters 1 (D. Anderson, Lutz) and 2 (DeAngelo, Weiss) detail the site, the artifacts, and the faunal remains recovered during the excavations of two houses (K and I). Although the features extended over 2 km, investigations focused on an 1800 m<sup>2</sup> area with 26 house depressions. Ground-penetrating radar, magnetic gradiometry, and electromagnetic induction work (Chapter 3, Urban) revealed numerous buried features, including houses, caches, and underground tunnels connecting the houses. While Chapter 3 includes a few small, hard-to-read maps depicting the topography immediately surrounding the investigated features, there is no overall site map showing the site in relation to the river. In other words, the features “float” in space.

House I, the smaller house, is interpreted as a family dwelling. Based on its significantly larger size and an

artifact assemblage dominated by manufacturing implements and debris, House K is interpreted to have served as a *qargi* (community house), as the house of a rich man, or as both. Dendrochronology and radiocarbon dating (Chapter 4, Griggs, Kocik, Urban, Manning) indicate House K was built and inhabited ~1740, whereas House I was constructed and occupied in two phases, ~1780 and ~1819. Description of the recovered artifacts follows an ethnographic “functional” approach (e.g., hunting, fishing), with numerous pictures of complete, formed specimens. Unfortunately, image resolution for the artifacts and other graphics throughout this book can be poor, detracting from the story rather than enhancing it. Faunal remains are reported to be overwhelmingly fish (~80%), followed distantly by birds (~12%) and terrestrial mammals (~5%). The authors comment that this pattern was unexpected (there is an undertone of “where are the caribou?” throughout the book), but given the river locality of this site, the relative importance of fish should have been anticipated. One can assume that screens were used during excavation, given the magnitude of fish. However, there is no mention of screen size anywhere in the book, and taphonomic factors related to site formation or preservation are only superficially discussed. There is also little more than a cursory attempt to identify specific species of fish procured by the inhabitants, which would have brought a more nuanced understanding of local subsistence practices.

Scattered partial skeletal remains of a 30-to-40-year-old male, a 35-to-45-year-old female, and a 6-year-old child came from the floor of House I. With the permission of the Kiana Traditional Council, bioarchaeological as-

assessment (Chapter 5, Aronsen), analysis of dental calculus (Chapter 6, Warinner, Ozga, Radini, Sankaranarayanan, Lewis), dietary stable isotope analysis (Chapter 7, Ditchfield, Urban, D. Anderson), and genetic analysis (Chapter 8, Tackney, Fair, O'Rourke) of the individuals was undertaken. All elements exhibited damage from large carnivore scavenging, indicating they were disturbed from primary contexts. The jumbled nature of the interments would seem to be reinforced by radiocarbon dates of  $1172 \pm 25$  BP and  $1356 \pm 26$  BP. However, the authors doggedly stick to an occupational association between the remains and House I and explain away the disparate dates as a freshwater reservoir effect rather than a more parsimonious taphonomic explanation.

Genetic results serve as data points for future ancient DNA studies because of the scarcity of such previous analyses in Alaska. However, of importance to this study is that all three are novel variants of haplogroup A2b1, which connects them to current Inupiat (as opposed to Athapaskan) populations but indicates they are maternally unrelated to each other. Unfortunately, it is challenging to tie three incomplete, scavenged sets of maternally unrelated skeletal remains that date almost 1000 radiocarbon years earlier to the occupation of a house in the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century.

Analysis of the dental calculus of the adult male and the child indicates they had a diverse range of oral bacteria. Those associated with the adult male indicate that he had relatively good oral health, but the child seems to have suffered from chronic inflammation and poor health. The microscopic analysis identified four starch granules—two legume (possibly *Hedysarum alpinum*) and two Triticeae (grasses). The latter sparked discussion as the granules could be from domestic wheat and therefore early evidence of a European flour trade. However, the authors note that a local native plant could also be the source. Until the early skeletal dates can be explained, discussion of trade networks based on such evidence is premature. Of significance to understanding past diets was the analysis of stable

carbon and nitrogen isotopes. Based on comparisons to local fauna, isotopic values indicate all three acquired 60% to 80% of their protein from freshwater fish and only 10% to 20% from terrestrial herbivores. These results reinforce the predominance of fish in the faunal assemblage.

Chapter 9 (W. Anderson) focuses on the oral history of Amil̥gaqtauyaaqmiut of the middle Kobuk River region. According to interviewed elders, the site was the central power of their nation, with seven associated villages. Elders remembered that a wealthy man led the village but a powerful shaman also dwelled there. The importance of Swift Water Place led to the construction of a defensive network of tunnels, such as those noted during the geophysical work.

The importance of books like *Life at Swift Water Place* cannot be understated because they serve as accessible data nodes for current and future researchers and a direct link between oral history and archaeology. Excavated sites rarely receive such coverage. However, this is at the root of my main frustration with this book, particularly the first chapter. While there are low-quality photos and general descriptions of the recovered artifacts, there are no tables summarizing what was found and where. The only two tables in chapter 1 list the colors of trade beads, for whatever it's worth, and the percentage of artifacts related to food procurement. While the counts for many artifacts can be dug out of the text, this is a slow process and not possible for items such as stone or bone debitage. The fundamental archaeological data are obfuscated. Luckily, this is not the case for the other chapters, but the lingering issue of association between the human remains and the house continues to be troublesome. Given previous reports by the senior author on Onion Portage and Cape Krusenstern, my expectation for a clear presentation of archaeological data was high. Sadly, my expectations were crestfallen. Despite this, there is still a considerable amount of valuable information in *Life at Swift Water Place*, and I hope that we will see more about this investigation come to light in the future.

## REVIEW

### ***INUIT STORIES OF BEING AND REBIRTH: GENDER, SHAMANISM, AND THE THIRD SEX***

*Bernard Saladin d'Anglure, 2019 [2006]; preface by Claude Lévi-Strauss; translated by Peter Frost. University of Manitoba Press, Winnipeg; 400 pages, illustrations, maps. ISBN 978-0-88755-830-6 (paper); \$34.95.*

**Reviewed by Ulla Odgaard**  
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French anthropologist Bernard Saladin d'Anglure, through his lifelong studies of Inuit myths, cosmology, and shamanism, contributed significantly to the understanding of Inuit lifeways, especially on the topics of gender, cross-dressing, and transsexualism. In *Inuit Stories of Being and Rebirth*, he describes how his interest in the phenomenon of pre-birth memories—which he learned about from people in several places in the eastern Arctic—led to more than thirty years of fieldwork at Igloolik Island at the northern end of Hudson Bay, Eastern Canada, starting in 1971.

*Inuit Stories* is engaging and easy to read and can be recommended to the interested public but also to scholars for its important contribution to anthropological theory. In the first of three main sections, after a short preface by Claude Lévi-Strauss, the author describes his arrival in Igloolik and how he became integrated in society. He presents his informants, two of whom, Iqallijuq and Ujarak, a woman and a man, both descendants of families of shamans, were the main contributors. When they met with the author, Iqallijuq and Ujarak were both elderly; they had had several partners and many children. In their childhood and early youth, both had lived as transgendered people.

The second, and largest, part of the book is fifteen chapters of stories and myths. In the first one, Iqallijuq, the female informant, describes in detail how she remembered life in the womb, metaphorically described as an igloo. On her way out of the igloo during birth she had to choose between two sets of tools. To the left of the entrance were tools for a man (a knife and a harpoon shaft with detachable head); to the right were the tools for a woman

(ulo, cooking pot, and soapstone lamp). The two sets of tools symbolize the gendered division of labor among the Inuit. Iqallijuq reincarnated as her deceased grandfather, whose soul (a miniature double of the person) wanted to return as a girl to avoid the cold and risks connected with hunting. Therefore, Iqallijuq chose the woman's tools and her genitals changed during birth from male to female. However, newborn Iqallijuq was recognized by her mother as her own beloved father, and the child was thus initiated into male activities and thought of herself as a boy. At her first period, when her mother unwillingly made women's clothes for her, Iqallijuq realized she was a woman, a fact that took her time to accept. She learned women's tasks, and her later spouses were very satisfied with a wife who was both a housekeeper and a hunter.

Ujarak, the male informant, had been dressed as a girl in his childhood because he was given female names at birth. When Ujarak was eight, his uncle cut his braids and dressed him as a boy and guided him to his first hunting kill. Thereafter his older brothers taught him men's tasks.

The author presents the narratives as they were told, interrupted by his own comments and explanations, especially when discussing aspects of reproduction, kinship, and gender. In this way Saladin d'Anglure takes the reader by the hand through myths—some well-known from other parts of the Arctic—about the beginning of life, babies coming from the earth, male–female relationships, and the ambiguous relationships among humans and animals. There are also historical tales, including “Atanaarjuat, the fast runner,” which was made into an award-winning movie in 2002. The final story of this section is another womb memory told by a woman in 2003.

The meaning of myths can be difficult to grasp for nonspecialists, but guided by the author, the reader can safely immerse in the mythical world of humans, animals, and spirits and come out with a better understanding of the Inuit worldview. In the concluding chapter, Saladin d'Anglure explains how Inuit oral tradition blurs boundaries between opposing worlds such as male/female, human/animal, and death/life. The blurring “brings back the undifferentiated universe of primeval times” and is expressed in shamanism, which can regain balance after crisis.

In the third part, “Afterword,” the theoretical implications of the work are discussed and examples from the myths are extracted and condensed to create a circular vision of life and reproduction in three different modes: (1) at birth, with changes of sex; (2) before puberty, with cross-dressing of children who have been named after persons of the opposite sex; and (3) in adulthood, with shamans who cross-dress in their rituals. And here the idea of the “third gender” and the Inuit logic of the “included middle” as an explanatory model is presented.

The late structuralist anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss was among Saladin d'Anglure's colleagues and

friends at the Laboratory of Social Anthropology at the Collège de France. Saladin d'Anglure challenges the strong tendency of structuralism to see all cultures in terms of binary oppositions and criticizes social sciences for being dominated by binary logic. Scholars studying the sexual division of labor, especially, have used this binary logic and categorized all cases falling outside their categories as exceptional and atypical. And although queer theory has criticized binarism, this school of thought has confused gender with sexual orientation.

In 1970, an estimated 2% of Inuit people were thought to have changed sex at birth; 15% were cross-dressed or had in the past. In the 1920s, around 20% of all adults were recognized as shamans, and the author conceptually links these three categories together. Finally, the “third gender” as an “included middle” in a triangular system of gender categories is suggested as a means of integrating structuralist and holistic approaches. The author suggests this could make way for future research to overcome the extremist temptation of radical binary oppositions, historically incorporated in Western societies.



## REVIEW

### *RAVEN'S WITNESS: THE ALASKA LIFE OF RICHARD K. NELSON*

*Hank Lentfer, 2020; foreword by Barry Lopez. Mountaineers Books, Seattle; 256 pages, illustrations. ISBN 978-1-68051-3073 (hard cover); \$24.95.*

Reviewed by Lisa Schwarzburg

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The impacts of colonization and industrialization on Alaska wilderness and Indigenous cultures are well-known through numerous publications, firsthand accounts, and others. Richard K. Nelson's *Hunters of the Northern Ice* (1969), *Make Prayers to the Raven: A Koyukon View of the Northern Forest* (1983), and *The Island Within* (1989)—along with his numerous other works and radio programs—add to these accounts through his ethnographic fieldwork. In *Raven's Witness: The Alaska Life of Richard K. Nelson*, Hank Lentfer depicts Nelson's life journey.

Lentfer's biography of his close friend, colleague, and fellow nature lover reads more like a tribute to a well-loved, like-minded soul than an analysis of Nelson's contribution to anthropological thought. But there is also a slight nod to Nelson's contribution to the development of ethics in anthropology, almost like a non-Indigenous precursor to Tuhiwai-Smith's (1999) *Decolonizing Methodologies*.

Lentfer describes Nelson as an unlikely student with an everlasting childlike wonder of nature turned anthropologist, and then passionate conservationist. He explains how Nelson began his adult schooling by Alaska Native teachers and members of the Wainwright community, where he was sent to study and learn Arctic survival techniques. Like Farley Mowat in *Never Cry Wolf*, Nelson discovers something more than he set out to: the lifelong impact of learning how to see and listen.

Structured in four parts ("Niglik," a teasing Inupiaq name for Nelson; "Making Prayer"; "Island Years"; and "True Wealth"), chapters are organized around themes reflected by memories shared by Nelson: life on the land, sense of community, importance of learning and observing nature, and listening. Lentfer passionately describes the life of a man whom he regarded (as the foreword's author and fellow nature writer, Barry Lopez, reminds us) as a "monk."

Lentfer offers this chronicle of Nelson's life as something akin to scripture—to spread the word about the sacredness of wilderness and nature. As the "Raven's Witness," Nelson, through his work (and Lentfer's biography), is basically proselytizing for this worldview and the Koyukon teachers through whom Nelson learned this way of knowing.

Perhaps some of us, as ethnographers of cultures different than our own, can relate to the angst expressed by Nelson through Lentfer's telling. The description of how Nelson sometimes felt more membership in the culture he set out to learn about, and then was subsequently forced to translate those life-changing experiences into scholarly works for his livelihood, highlights the absurdity of what cultural anthropologists are sometimes called to do.

Again, this is merely the side story of Lentfer's tale of Nelson's life and work. Lentfer also details a restless life of jostling between the loneliness of fieldwork and the harried life of an accomplished author and academic. Readers may relate to Nelson's struggle, expressed by Lentfer, as the anguish of having to write, and the anxiety of the responsibility to what will be written, became almost crippling for Nelson at times.

Woven within this tale of discovery of purpose are accounts of Nelson's relationships. Lentfer uses Nelson's letters, extensive field journals, photos, and personal conversations with his subject and former significant others (as significant as they could be with this acolyte to the solitary life) to portray this journey. These ups and downs are almost a backdrop to Nelson's internal philosophical development of a conservation mindset that took ultimate priority. Close ties with friends and fictive kin that Nelson established with Wainwright Inupiaq families and the

Koyukon Atlas, however, turned out to be the most important in his life, especially at the end.

If readers take away anything from this tender account of Nelson's life by nature sound-recorder and writer Lentfer, it is that Nelson lived the gifted, privileged life of someone able to solely dedicate himself to his values and beliefs in a profound way. Not many of us are able or choose to do that, but through his writing and ever-deepening relation to the Alaska wilderness, Richard Nelson navigated a sometimes conflicted but ultimately fulfilled life, placing himself at the altar of his natural surroundings.

Lentfer wrote of the power Nelson brought to conservationism through his call for us to heed the teachings of nature and the Indigenous stewards he learned from. He hands this biography down as the "ten commandments." In some sections, however, Lentfer takes on his subject's own voice. While these narratives are derived from journal entries and personal conversations, they became distracting instead of adding authenticity. Nelson's commentary on anthropology, too, as relayed through his biographer, comes across as ethnocentric (p. 140): "How anthropology, a discipline devoted to understanding the human species, became so removed from whole vast, dimensions of human experience is beyond understanding," as if he were the only one privy to the idea that Alaska Native ways of knowing were not just important scholarly materials but

philosophies and approaches that could be looked to for guidance in science and life.

But Lentfer is not an ethnographer, and he and his subject shared a purpose of getting this message out in this manner. With that in mind, Lentfer can be considered successful. If we can get past the sometimes glossed-over difficulties Nelson had in forming intimate relationships in his own culture, Lentfer's account of how he overcame his loneliness by embracing his place of belonging in the universe—through the spiritual connection to nature and his Koyukon teachers—is a beautifully told story of a well-lived life.

When asked by his students about Nelson's writings, Paul Ongtooguk, Iñupiaq from Nome and professor of Alaska Native studies at University of Alaska, Anchorage, said, "Ah, Richard Nelson....My father and his brothers...decided that somehow an Iñupiaq wandered far from home and died in the Midwest. His soul was reborn in Richard Nelson, who finally made his way back home" (p. 222).

I'm not sure the biography creates the transformation that Lentfer and Nelson hoped for, but if nothing else *Raven's Witness* is a fine tribute to Richard Nelson, Lentfer's friend, learner, teacher, and fellow admirer of Alaska wilderness and its first peoples.