

## **The meaning and function of drumming in before Greenlandic Christianity society.**

By Juaaka Lyberth, cand mag in Inuit culture and religion.

Greenlandic drumming is now recorded on the UNESCO Intangible World Heritage. Congratulations to all of us in Greenland. Many have in one way or another helped to achieve the goal, not least the performers of the songs for generations, which has made it possible that the drumming tradition is now immortalized as the world's intangible cultural heritage. And thanks for that. Inngerutit is the Greenlandic term for drum songs and drum dances. Inngerutit is often accompanied by a drum rhythm, therefore they are called drum songs in Danish, although many inngerutit can be performed with or without drum and dance. Today, we know inngerutit mainly as entertainment songs and cultural elements. In their origin, inngerutit was part of the Greenlandic social organization and religion and can be divided into several different main groups. I will get to that later, but start with the inner function of Inngerutit in the original Greenlandic belief.<sup>1</sup>

### **The drumming - part of the social organization**

In the original Greenlandic social organization, inngerutit had an important function that covered all aspects of life. From joy to sorrow. From entertainment to the local community's view of the individual's place in social contexts. Resolving inconsistencies between individuals and communities. Not least, and importantly, within the religious life, especially practiced by spirit manners. Author and former high school principal H.C. Petersen writes in the book the drumming tradition in Greenland that at Inngerutit studies one quickly discovers a social organization associated with the drumming tradition in Greenland and other Inuit areas.

### **Special shaman as bearers of ancient traditions**

The beliefs and religion of our Inuit ancestors depended on an immortal soul, the tarni, who kept many different types of bodies alive. They also believed that all living and non-living have a soul that can be evoked by means of special types of inngerutit. H.C. Petersen writes in the mentioned book that it was special types of spirit manners (shamans) that were bearers of ancient traditions, because these types of shamans were trained in preserving the faith through generations and over enormous distances. Behind the transmission of knowledge of faith and original religion to the Inuit lay a secret organization, writes H.C. Petersen. This form of social organization is called in ethnography esoteric organization with knowledge reserved only for the elect. The elect were then the shamans, who were able to see "the invisible", both in man and in the universe. With the permission of the parents, young boys were trained as spirit manners and underwent ancient tests. If you pass the education and the exams, you become a shaman. In West Greenland, the education was up to 6 years, while it was up to 10 years in East Greenland ”.

### **Inuit religious universe**

The drum qilaat had special function in connection with the exercise of the various forms of inngerutit. To understand the function of the drum, one must also know the Inuit's original worldview and religious universe. On the, for ordinary people, visible world, man / inuk lives and lives, while the visible, in the invisible world, lives and lives spirits and souls. The invisible place is called qila / qilak (heaven). In order for the shaman to come into contact

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<sup>1</sup> In my university thesis, however, I have described how the drum song in a revitalized way in West Greenland, has helped to create a new and popular movement, which I call the neo-religious field with pre-Christian beliefs in the present. You can read it in my thesis.

with the invisible universe, he must use the instrument qilaat - drum. In the old spelling, drum is written with the suffix -ut (qilaut). / -ut / is an attachment for all kinds of tools for specific purposes. Therefore, the word qilaat / qilaut originally means the instrument of entering the world of spirits. The drum was thus the key to entering the invisible universe when used by spirit men. (When Europeans began to introduce instruments foreign to Greenlanders, European musical instrument was called "qilaat").

In her interpretive possibilities in Sonne's base from 2005, Birgitte Sonne writes the following: " spacious there were three interconnected" other worlds ", one behind the visible in the human world, one under the earth and sea, and one behind the firmament). In other words: "The Other World" covers both the hidden world of spirits and the inner world of humans, which the fetus sees in its mother. Shamans have the ability to look into them both".

#### **The drum - tool to get in touch with the spirits.**

In the original pre-Christian religion there were 2 kinds of drums. The one for general entertainment use and the one for religious use. According to Inuit belief, the shaman can only evoke spirits in the dark. (Invocation of auxiliary spirits, in which the audience participates, therefore occurs only in the dark period of winter). Only in dark place the shamaning can take place, for when there is light, the spirits disappear. The Shaman, who was given the Christian name George Quppersiman, told the author Otto Sandgreen that all kinds of drums had to be tied to the room before the spirit man started. Once the spirits have arrived in space, the drums start playing by themselves because the spirits play on them. Quppersiman says that even the small children's drums can start moving around the room and can be very annoying to the shaman if they were not tied up. If a shaman, who in his first session can make his drum dance by itself on his back, and evoke an icy feeling in the neck cavity, he gets expanded "sila" - all the world's knowledge, in other words: an extended vision of light ". Therefore, the spirit drum was an important part of the religious esteem and practice before the introduction of Christianity in Greenland.

#### **Hans Egede and the religious drumming**

When the missionary Hans Egede arrived in Greenland 300 years ago, he obviously had no sense of the social organization and importance of drumming and drum dancing among Greenlanders. When he visited Greenlandic settlements, where, the shaman's evocation of spirits, he of course linked the drumming to the religious acts. Egede came up with a religion whose doctrine begins with "Thou shalt have no other gods before me". It is the first commandment out of ten that Moses received from God himself on Mount Sinai, 1000 years before Jesus was born. Seen in that light, the understandable motive for Egede is to ban drumming among the new Greenlandic Christian congregations. I'm not trying to excuse Egede's ban. I'm trying to understand why he did it. Despite the ban, however, drumming and dancing were used in West Greenland for the next 200 years. Some drum songs were written down by missionaries such as Poul Egede and H.C. Clann. But we must go all the way to 1860, before there was a systematic collection of drum songs in West Greenland.

#### **H. J. Rink collected West Greenlandic drum songs**

Inspector of South Greenland, the geologist H.J. Rink, had a sense of drumming in the 1860s and tells the importance of tradition for the Greenlandic social organization. But it was disintegrating. He therefore embarked on a reform work in Greenland, introduced the board of trustees and set about collecting drum songs and Greenlandic myths and longings. Rink's collections are unique cultural treasures. Most of them were translated into Danish by the hymn writer Rasmus Berthelsen. To understand the "drum song disappears" from West Greenland, one must also understand the historical development in Greenland. From the mid-1800s, the mission began the systematic

teaching of children in primary school. At the same time, the training of Greenlandic catechists was started in the 2 seminars in Nuuk and in Ilulissat. Both in the seminars and in the primary school, there was teaching in a European way of singing and playing music. At that time, the Greenlandic language had begun to distinguish between the old culture and that of the Danes. In the old days, songs were called inngerutit, while the new songs in the Danish way were called erinarsuutit (songs) or tussiutit (hymns). Similarly, 'to sing' was formerly called 'inngerpoq', and later became 'erinarsorpoq' (sing songs) and 'tussiarpoq' (sing hymns). When dancing before Christianity, the verb 'tivavoq' was used. When people started using European dances, they said 'qitippoq' or 'taparpoq'.

At the same time as greater European interest in understanding the culture of indigenous peoples around the world came the technological revolution, which enabled the recording of sound on tape. This means that around the 20th century, a not insignificant number of inngerutit were collected and recorded from West Greenland and were followed up in East Greenland and in the polar region. At the same time, and despite renewed interest in the original culture among intellectual Europeans, Greenland's catechetical seminary was so successful in training catechists who had almost all learned to write hymns and songs in Greenlandic that the modern way of singing songs and hymns became all the dominant way, both in choral singing and in church. Rasmus Berthelsen has e.g. wrote countless songs and hymns, published song and hymn books in Greenlandic, and taught children and catechism students music and singing for 50 years. My guess is that the main reason for the disappearance of the West Greenlandic drum song is due to the success of the seminary and the Greenlandic catechists in introducing the modern songs and hymns. The West Greenlandic drumming only re-emerged in revitalized form many years later. Inngerutit, however, they had been used in small local communities right up to our days in West Greenland. H.C. Petersen writes that it was in 1950/51 that he met the remains of Inngerutit in the Ummannaq district, from where he began collecting texts and performing practices through the use of drum songs. H.C. Petersen's interest in drum songs is also already expressed when in 1959 he published H. J. Rink's collections of West Greenlandic drum songs with the title: ivngerutit, H.J. Rink-ip katersortitai".

#### **Subdivision of inngerutit into main categories**

In conclusion, I will mention the main categories of inngerutit. There were, for example, signal songs / kalerrisaarutit; entertainment song and songs for fun (inngiinerit, tippalersornerlu); battle and duel songs (ivertut), as well as 'anersaatit' (battle songs of the poor); mountaineering songs; shamans songs and the songs of the audience, while the shaman is in the process of evoking auxiliary spirits (the religious songs / aquutit); serratit / magic spell with supernatural power (can be performed by ordinary people who own the song) ; drum dance (tivasut) and mask dance songs (uaajeerutit, soqulaneq). Then there were the refrains and their use in inngerutit, which interested parties can read about themselves.

#### **Drumming tradition in Greenland 2.**

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#### **Anersaatit - songs to clean the air out between families.**

The Greenlandic drumming and drumming tradition also includes a special group of songs, which were called 'anersaatit'. The word means something with breath driers. It can also be interpreted as "cleaning the air out through a song". Such anersaatit songs were used between warring parties or by people who feel unfairly treated. Anersaatit is divided into 2 main groups, **iverneq** and '**anersaatit**'. And there were very clear and definite rules that had to be followed carefully. Thus, the one who sings a different song was protected from any revenge from the accused counterpart.

### **Iverneq - duel singing competition to prevent blood feuds**

Songs written for iverneq purposes were called 'pisit'. In Iverneq, the whole family and the whole winter settlement were involved. Iverneq is the way for bigots - the rich - to resolve conflicts. Duel singing - iverneq - arrangement was costly. The families involved had to meet in new clothes, the challengers and a whole lot of other people gathered to watch the duel had to be fed. One traveled with umiaq and kayak to the duel square. Along the way, an inner rite was sung, which was called 'kalerrisaarutit' - signal songs. For an umiaq/boat who was on his way to a singing duel, there was a duty to sing signal songs announcing their errand. Signal songs can also be other different communication songs. Berry-picking women can communicate through signal songs, or kayak rowers on the way home can signal through signal song how the catch has gone, etc.

The purpose of iverneq - song duel - or battle song, is to avoid strife leading to family feuds and blood feuds for generations. After the first duel singing competition, the two duelists therefore often became friends for life, and had to confirm their friendship with the singing competition year after year. The claim that one party must win and the other party must lose by iverneq is, according to H.C. Petersen a Danish way of thinking about a trial that was not used or known in the traditional duel song. Rather, the duel convention was a reconciliation convention between two warring parties. Therefore, it is a misconception in the present that the loser of a singing duel was so ashamed that he went to the mountains to become a qivittoq - mountaineer. On the contrary, the duelists became friends for life and thus ensured that there was no blood feud killing between the 2 families. Once one became enemies, blood revenge was unlimited in terms of family and time. I.e. all members of a family could risk being killed by their enemy family and the blood feud continue into the next generation.

### **Anersaat - accuse songs of social injustice treatment**

Poor hunters or single women who have no one else to protect themselves cannot afford to hold singing duel rallies. It was too expensive. However, they had the opportunity to "purify the air" by making an 'anersaat' song, where they can tell about the injustice that has been done to them. As soon as one could hear by a drum beat that now there is an 'anersaat song', certain rules should be followed, where everyone should be silent and listen to the 'lament', which is directed at the person who has wronged the other person. There were certain rules an anersaat singer had to follow that protected the singer from revenge from the accused. If the accused tried to take revenge on an anersaat singer, he got an unfortunate stain on his reputation.

Songs that were called ileqqorsuutit, which were known and used all the way into recent times, are a subdivision of anersaatit songs. To an adult who had crossed the line of permissibility, an ileqqorsuut song was made. Thus, ileqqorsuutit songs were socially preventative songs.

### **Qivittut's songs**

We know Qivittut's songs mainly from southwest Greenland and from Disko Bay. A qivittoq is a person who for some reason had to seek away from society and live alone out in nature and gain supernatural powers. Qivittut's songs are unknown in East Greenland, where many duel songs - iverneq - had taken place. H.C. Petersen writes that the metrics of qivittut's songs are clearly different from other songs by other groups. The songs are divided into two-three parts. It begins with ordinary speech, a narrative that explains the background of the person having to seek away from other people. The person is mentioned in the third person. Then the story continues as part of a song. The person now stands in I form (first person) and tells about his experiences as qivittoq. In some songs the song ends here, in other songs the narrative continues in ordinary speech, where the person is again mentioned in the third person.

My main source for this talk about Greenlandic drum songs and drum dances is the book "Drumming tradition in Greenland, written by H.C. Petersen and Michael Hauser (Atuagkat Publishing House, 2006).

**Kilder:**

<sup>1</sup> HC Petersen og M. Hauser, 2006. P 15.

<sup>2</sup> HC Petersen og M. Hauser, 2006. P 17.

<sup>3</sup>Åndemanderen (shaman).

<sup>4</sup> B. Sonne 2005: doc. 1206, 2283, 967, 1312, Rasmussen 1938: 110; Thalbitzer 1933: 51. J. Rosing1963: 242).

<sup>5</sup> Bibelen findes de 10 Bud i Anden Mosebog kapitel 20.

These 2 articles about Greenlandic original drumming traditions have been published i.a. in the newspaper Sermitsiaq and the magazines Grønland and Kalaaleq - 2022.