

WHERE THE ECHO BEGAN AND OTHER ORAL TRADITIONS FROM SOUTHWESTERN ALASKA.

Recorded by HANS HIMMELHEBER, translated by KURT and ESTER VITT, edited and annotated by ANN FIENUP-RIORDAN. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1999. ISBN 1-889963-03-8. 224 p., maps, b&w illus., bib., index. Hardbound. US\$39.95.

Hans Himmelheber spent the summer of 1936 in Bethel, a town on the Kuskokwim River in southwestern Alaska, working with an interpreter to record stories and artistic productions of the Yupik Eskimo. In the autumn of that year, he went on the Bureau of Indian Affairs supply ship *North Star* to Point Barrow. On the return trip he stopped at Nunivak Island, where he overwintered with the Cup'ig Eskimo from November 1936 to March 1937. The three sections of this volume that record his participant observations and extensive collection of myths, tales, and legends (*The Frozen Path*, *Ethnographic Notes on the Nunivak Eskimos*, and *Selected Writings*, which includes his articles on the use of noseblood in paint colours and miracles in West African and Inuit poetry), were originally published in German (Himmelheber, 1951, 1968, 1975, 1980). These contributions were preceded by the publication *Eskimo Artists* (1938).

*Where the Echo Began* opens with a biographic sketch of Hans Himmelheber by Ann Fienup-Riordan, entitled "Making His Own Path." It provides a brief coverage of the research that Hans Himmelheber conducted in Alaska and Africa and valuable insights into the oratory of the Eskimo of southwestern Alaska. I found one of her statements particularly illuminating: "The telling of the tale served to insure that what was described came to pass" (p. xxxvii). That is, the power of the word could affect the future. With this new perspective, we are led into the major section of the volume, *The Frozen Path*. Here we are soon surrounded by creation stories, myths, animal stories, peoples' stories, and ancestor stories. All of these were transcribed in the original language of the Eskimo storytellers and then translated with the help of Eskimos who also spoke English. Stories from both the Kuskokwim River and Nunivak Island areas are presented. Before these narratives, Himmelheber provides a sketch of the culture of the southwestern Eskimo.

The second section, *Ethnographic Notes on the Nunivak Eskimo*, is the result of Himmelheber's participation in four winter festivals: *Asiggluteng* (Women's Dancing), *Nakacugtarluteng* (the Bladder Festival), *Qupluteng* ("Halving It"), and *Petugtarluni* ("Small Things are Hanging"). This extremely important contribution is unique, for, as Himmelheber noted (p. 107), he was the only one to achieve a detailed description of these ceremonies through his role as an active participant, while other authors had to rely on descriptions provided by informants. Less distinctive, but still valuable, is Himmelheber's discussion of religious beliefs concerning the spirit forces of natural objects, animals, and humans; the function of naming; and

shamanistic and ritual practices. At the end of this section we are brought back to the everyday world with descriptions of fire drilling, the manufacture of wooden eating bowls, and Eskimo games.

The third section, *Selected Writings*, includes the article on the use of nose-blood as a binding agent in paint colors and a comparison piece on the unimaginable miracles in the poetry of Western Africa and the Eskimos.

In the book's final section (Translation and Transcription), Ann Fienup-Riordan discusses the structure of the Central Yup'ik Eskimo language and the problems that Himmelheber encountered in his attempt to provide a literal translation of Eskimo myths by reordering the Eskimo sentence structure, first into English and then into German. This section is for the more linguistically advanced scholar interested in the transcription of sounds and the nuances of Eskimo grammatical structure. A 1995 version of the Dog Husband tale is presented to illustrate the persistence of the narrative forms and story lines, but additionally to demonstrate that each narrator emphasizes certain aspects of the story to fit current perceptions or events of his or her own time.

Throughout the book are a great number of Himmelheber's excellent black-and-white photographs, which are valuable ethnographic sources in their own right. To say that the volume could be considered of great value just for the photographs is in no way meant to detract from the text, which provides unparalleled insights into the worldview of another culture for the average reader as well as for the scholar. Ann Fienup-Riordan is to be commended for her efforts in bringing this body of data to English-speaking audiences and for providing marginalia that add materially to Himmelheber's original documents.

As a final statement, I quote the typical ending for the Eskimo tales, "May all my errors take their places and make little noise doing it!" (p. 47).

#### REFERENCES

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Robert E. Ackerman  
 Department of Anthropology  
 Washington State University  
 Pullman, Washington, U.S.A.  
 99164-4910