

## INUIT CONSTELLATIONS & LEGENDS

Source: *The Arctic Sky – Inuit Astronomy, Star Lore, and Legend*  
by: John MacDonald

### **THE PEOPLE WHO BECAME AGRUKS TOLD BY PAUL MONROE**

*This short story nicely incorporates the widespread Inuit regard for the agruk (Aqjuuk) stars as harbingers of the returning Sun and the joy experienced at this event.*

Some people lived down at the coast, including a grandmother and her grandson. The grandson always took his grandmother's potty out, every evening and every morning. One time in the evening he didn't come back for a long time, so the grandmother went out to look for him. Towards morning when the agruks [the two beams of light cast by the sun when it first reappears above the horizon in late December] came out, the grandmother looked for her grandson. It was getting bright and she looked towards the sun and saw her grandson doing an Eskimo dance. He was real lively because he was so happy about the reappearance of the agruks.

The grandmother thought, "What should I do? Should I try to scare or surprise him?" She went over behind the boy, who was real happy, and scared him from the back. The grandson didn't know what to do. He started running and then flying towards the agruks. The grandmother didn't know what to do, so she followed him, flying too. The grandson landed in the sky and became a star. The grandmother stopped below him and became a second star. When the agruks come up the grandmother and grandson always move towards them and become agruks. When the agruks go down they go back to being stars.

### **ULLAKTUT TOLD BY NOAH PIUGAATTUK**

*A legend relating to the constellation Ullakut – the three stars of Orion's belt.*

In the legend they are known as *Ullaktut* (the runners). There are three stars, slanted upwards and evenly separated. They are most visible. Directly in front of these stars is a big star with many smaller stars around it. The big star is called *Nanurjuk* (the polar bear); ...the smaller stars are known as the *Qimmiit* (the dogs).

The three runners-the *Ullaktut*-came across a polar bear at night and are known to have climbed up to the sky; that is the legend. They are quite visible. They are used for navigational purposes because they are easy to identify. The *Ullaktut* legend has it that there were three runners...actually there were four of them. They were out hunting and, during the night, they came upon a polar bear. As they were chasing the bear, one of the runners got really hot and took off his mitts. As he ran he dropped his mitts. After a while, this runner noticed he didn't have his mitts, so he went back for them and that is how he returned to Earth. He was the fourth person. Had he continued after the bear he would have been the fourth star. He was thus the only one of the runners that made it back to camp. That is the legend of the *Ullaktut* stars.

## ILIARJUGAARJUK TOLD BY HERVE PANIAQ

*The narrative's cast, Ningiuraaluk, the old woman, Uttuqalualuk, the old man, and Iliarjugaarjuk, the little orphan boy, are transformed, respectively, into the stars Vega, Arcturus, and Mupbrid. Occasionally, the legendary names are used when referring to them, but, more commonly, as Paniaq points out, Vega is termed Kingullialuk, "the big one behind," while Arcturus and its companion star, Mupbrid, are, together called Sivulliik, "the two in front." The three stars are known by other names. In the legend, Kingullialuk, is known as Ningiuq (or Ningiuraaluk) "the old woman." Of the Sivulliik stars, the smaller one is known as Iliarjugaarjuk ("the little orphan ") and the bigger one as Uttuqalualuk. These names are given to the stars when telling the legend.*

Uttuqalualuk, when he was a young man, had murdered his brother-in-law and kept it a secret. He grew old with this secret. Iliarjugaarjuk, who had lost both parents, was now living with his grandmother. Whenever Iliarjugaarjuk visited Uttuqalualuk the old man would taunt him, chanting: "*Iliarjugaarjuup katuma arnavit pamiallua ailugu kikkaruk, pamaa!*" – "Orphan, go and get your mother's tailbone and eat the meat from it, pamaa!"

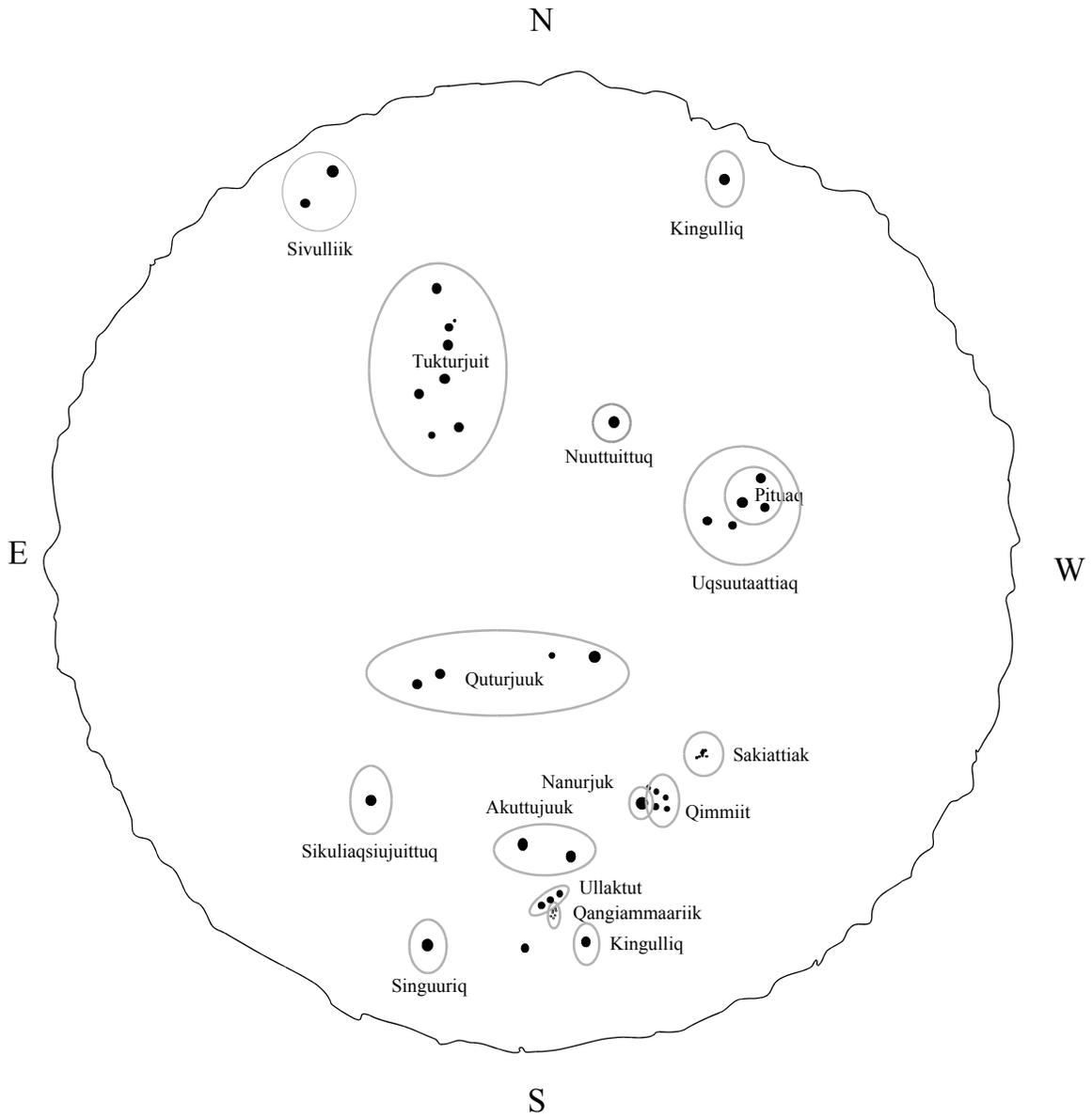
For some time Iliarjugaarjuk did not tell his grandmother about the old man's insults. When he eventually did, his grandmother told him to reply to Uttuqalualuk thus: "*Uttuqalualuup piksuma sakialli angjalli qungnikut sallikut kivi- tipink, pamaa!*" – "Uttuqalualuk, your brother-in-law is your secret. On the crack at the further pressure ridge you did sink him, pamaa!"

Iliarjugaarjuk's grandmother taught him these lines. For some time the orphan was anxious and uncertain and would not risk to say these words to the old man even though Uttuqalualuk continued to taunt him as before. His grandmother, however, kept asking if he had yet responded to Uttuqalualuk in the manner she had taught him, adding that if the old man became aggressive on hearing these words she would come to Iliarjugaarjuk's rescue.

So once again the orphan boy visited the old man and, as usual, Uttuqalual sang: "*Iliarjugaarjuup katuma arnavit pamiallua ailugu kikkaruk, pamaa!*" – "Orphan go and get your mother's tailbone and eat the meat from it, pamaa!"

This time, when Uttuqalualuk had finished, the orphan boy summoned all his courage and responded in the manner he had been taught by his grandmother: "*Uttuqalualuup piksuma sakialli angjalli qungnikut sallikut kivitipink, pamaa!*" - "Uttuqalualuk, your brother-in-law is your secret. On the crack at the further pressure ridge you did sink him, pamaa!"

Having said this, Iliarjugaarjuk, following his grandmother's instructions fled the igloo. All at once the old man took his knife and started to chase the boy. They ran round and round the igloo, the boy fleeing and the old man following. The grandmother did not immediately notice that Uttuqalualuk was chasing Iliarjugaarjuk, so she was late in coming to the rescue. As she joined the chase, the two in front of her, the boy and the old man, suddenly rose upwards into sky. The grandmother followed and they all turned into stars. The first two are therefore called *Sivulliik* and the late one, that is the one behind, is called *Kingullialuk*.



*Night Sky Above Igloolik (Central Nunavut) at Winter Solstice*

## STARS AND CONSTELLATIONS

| Inuit Name  | European Constellation | Principal Star(s)                   |
|---|------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <i>Aagjuuk (sunbeams/ beams of light)</i>           | Aquila                 | Altair, Tarazed                     |
| <i>Akuttujuuk (two placed far apart)</i>            | Orion                  | Betelgeuse, Orion                   |
| <i>Kingulliq (the one behind)</i>                   | Lyra                   | Vega                                |
| <i>Nanurjuk (having the spirit of a polar bear)</i> | Taurus                 | Aldebaran                           |
| <i>Nuuttuittuq (never moves)</i>                    | Ursa Minor             | Polaris                             |
| <i>Pituaq (lamp-stand)</i>                          | Cassiopeia             | Schadar, Caph, Cih                  |
| <i>Qimmiit (dogs)</i>                               | Taurus                 | Hyades                              |
| <i>Quturjuuk (collar-bones)</i>                     | Gemini and Auriga      | Pollux, Castor, Capella, Menkalinan |
| <i>Sakiattiak (breast bone)</i>                     | Taurus                 | Pleiades                            |
| <i>Sikuliaqsuijuittuq (name of a murdered man)</i>  | Canis Minor            | Procyon                             |
| <i>Singuuriq (flickering)</i>                       | Canis Major            | Sirius                              |
| <i>Sivullik (the first ones)</i>                    | Bootes                 | Arcturus, Muphrid                   |
| <i>Tukturjuut (caribou)</i>                         | Ursa Major             | Dubhe, Merak, Phecda, Megrez        |
| <i>Ullaktut (runners)</i>                           | Orion                  | Alnitak, Alnilam, Mintaka           |
| <i>Uqsuutaattiaq (seal-skin oil container)</i>      | Cassiopeia             | Schadar, Caph, Cih, k Cassiopeia    |
| <i>Qangiamaariik (nephews or nieces)</i>            | Orion Nebula           | M42                                 |
| <i>Aviguti (divider or separator)</i>               | Milky Way              |                                     |

