DIS-AM,N-Canada-Tupilaq­

In [Greenlandic Inuit (Kalaallit) traditions](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inuit_mythology), a **tupilaq** (**tupilak**, **tupilait**, or *ᑐᐱᓚᒃ*)[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tupilaq#cite_note-livingdict-1)[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tupilaq#cite_note-cold-2) was an avenging monster fabricated by a practitioner of [witchcraft](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Witchcraft) or [shamanism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shamanism) by using various objects such as animal parts (bone, skin, hair, sinew, etc.)[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tupilaq#cite_note-cold-2) and even parts taken from the corpses of children. The creature was given life by ritualistic [chants](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chants). It was then placed into the sea to seek and destroy a specific enemy.

The use of a tupilaq was risky, however, because if it was sent to destroy someone who had greater magical powers than the one who had formed it, it could be sent back to kill its maker instead,[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tupilaq#cite_note-rebound-3) although the maker of tupilaq could escape by public confession of her or his own deed.[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tupilaq#cite_note-4)

Because tupilaqs were made in secret, in isolated places and from perishable materials, none have been preserved. Early [European](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Europe) visitors to Greenland, fascinated by the native legend, were eager to see what tupilaqs looked like so the Inuit began to carve representations of them out of [sperm whale](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sperm_whale) teeth.

Today, tupilaqs of many different shapes and sizes are carved f­­rom various materials such as [narwhal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narwhal) and [walrus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walrus) [tusk](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tusk), wood and [caribou](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reindeer) antler. They are an important part of Greenlandic [Inuit art](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inuit_art) and are highly prized as collectibles.

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**Publicity versus secrecy**

The making of a tupilaq started most often at night, in secrecy. The shaman ([angakok](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angakok" \o "Angakok)) would don the [anorak](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anorak) backwards, with the hood over his face, and engage in [sexual contact](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_sexual_activity) with the bones used to make a tupilaq, singing and chanting during the entire process, which could take several days.[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tupilaq#cite_note-cold-2) The making a tupilaq was risky to its own maker if the attacked person made it rebound: in this case, public confession was the only rescue.[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tupilaq#cite_note-cold-2)[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tupilaq#cite_note-rebound-3) The magic consequences of situations of concealment, and the neutralizing effect of public confession was believed also in several other areas of life, thus, this is an example of the more general topic of secrecy versus publicity.[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tupilaq#cite_note-sec-5)

**Concealment**

Concealment or secrecy could raise magic consequences in several areas of life:

* Concealed miscarriage or infanticide could give birth to a monster called *anngiaq*.[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tupilaq#cite_note-6)
* It could make harm for the community if somebody concealed his/her [taboo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taboo) breach.[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tupilaq#cite_note-sec-5)
* Secrecy was also preliminary for the functioning of so-called *formulae* (texts or songs used like [charm](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amulet) or [spell](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amulet) in danger, need, hunt, practical everyday situations).[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tupilaq#cite_note-7)[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tupilaq#cite_note-8)

**Neutralizing effect of public confession**

Thus, concealment was a preliminary for several magical effects. If this was broken, unintentionally or intentionally, the effect could lose its power.

* [*Angakkuit* in some groups](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alaskan_Native_religion) resolved the consequence of taboo breach by achieving public confession of the breacher.[[9]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tupilaq#cite_note-9)
* Hunting means killing, and animals were believed to have [souls](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soul) as well. Efforts were made to avoid the revenge taken by the game and to please the game symbolically.[[10]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tupilaq#cite_note-10) Such would be the danger inherent in the first kill of a boy and it was "neutralized" by a public ritual, in which each adult member of the community had to make an incision into the head of the game, or eat a piece from it. Thus, the belief was, that public partaking in a dangerous thing reduced the danger, that it has a neutralizing effect.[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tupilaq#cite_note-11)

**Meanings of the same term in various Inuit cultures**

Inuit cultures were far from being alike, although there were some similarities.[[12]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tupilaq#cite_note-12) The tupilaq concept had variants. It might be a man-made object, a ghost-like being or a haunting soul. In some cultures it was exactly the shaman who had to deal with it.

Such distant groups like the [Caribou Inuit](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caribou_Inuit), [Greenlandic Inuit](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greenlandic_Inuit), [Iglulingmiut Inuit](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Igloolik) and [Copper Inuit](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Copper_Inuit) knew the concept of *tupilaq*,[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tupilaq#cite_note-13) but the details differed:

Igloolik

The tupilaq was an invisible ghost. Only the shaman could notice it. It was the soul of a dead person, which became restless because the breach of some death taboo. It scared game away from the vicinity. Thus, the shaman had to help by scaring it away with a knife.[[14]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tupilaq#cite_note-tupilak-14)

Caribou Inuit

The tupilaq was also an invisible being. Like a tupilaq of the Iglulik, also the shaman was the only one who could see it. It was a [chimera](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chimera_%28mythology%29)-like creature, with human head and parts from different species of animals. It was dangerous, it could attack the settlement. Then, the shaman had to combat it and devour it with his/her helping spirits.[[14]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tupilaq#cite_note-tupilak-14)

Greenland

The tupilaq was manifested in the real, human-made object. It was made by people to the detriment of their enemies. It was a puppet-like thing, but was thought of have magical power onto the victim. It might be made from mixed parts of dead animals and dead children.[[14]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tupilaq#cite_note-tupilak-14)

Copper Inuit

To the Copper Inuit the tupilaq was similar to the [Devil](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Devil) of [Christianity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity).[[15]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tupilaq#cite_note-15)

**See also**

* [Anchimayen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anchimayen)
* [Tikoloshe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tikoloshe)

**Notes**

 [*"tupilak"*](http://www.livingdictionary.com/search/viewResults.jsp?language=en&searchString=tupilak&languageSet=all)*. Asuilaak Living Dictionary. Retrieved 2007-12-12.*

  [*Ehrlich, Gretel*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gretel_Ehrlich) *(2001). This Cold Heaven: Seven Seasons in Greenland. Random House. pp. 33–34, 341.* [*ISBN*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Standard_Book_Number)[*978-0-679-75852-5*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special:BookSources/978-0-679-75852-5)*.*

  Kleivan & Sonne 1985: 23; Plate XLIII, XLV

  Kleivan and Sonne 1985: 23, 10

  Kleivan & Sonne 1985: 10

  Kleivan & Sonne 1985: 14–15

  Kleivan & Sonne 1985:9–10

  [Rasmussen 1927](https://archive.org/details/acrossarcticamer006641mbp): 136–137 (= 206, 209 in PDF)

  Kleivan & Sonne 1985: 26, 28

  Burch & Forman 1988: 96

  Kleivan & Sonne 1985: 16

  Kleivan & Sonne 1985: 2

  Kleivan & Sonne 1985: 22–23

  Kleivan & Sonne 1985: 23

* 1.  *Ohokak, G.; M. Kadlun; B. Harnum. Inuinnaqtun-English Dictionary. Kitikmeot Heritage Society.*

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* *Burch, Ernest S. (junior); Forman, Werner (1988). The Eskimos. Norman, Oklahoma 73018, USA: University of Oklahoma Press.* [*ISBN*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Standard_Book_Number)[*0-8061-2126-2*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special:BookSources/0-8061-2126-2)*.*
* *Kleivan, Inge; B. Sonne (1985). Eskimos: Greenland and Canada. Iconography of religions, section VIII, "Arctic Peoples", fascicle 2. Leiden, The Netherlands: Institute of Religious Iconography • State University Groningen. E.J. Brill.* [*ISBN*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Standard_Book_Number)[*90-04-07160-1*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special:BookSources/90-04-07160-1)*.*
* *Rasmussen, Knud (1927).* [*Across Arctic America*](https://archive.org/details/acrossarcticamer006641mbp)*. New York • London: G.P. Putnams sons.*

**External links**

 *Rasmussen, Knud (collected) (1921).* [*Eskimo Folk-Tales*](https://archive.org/download/eskimofolktales00rasmrich/eskimofolktales00rasmrich.pdf) *(pdf). edited and rendered into English by W. Worster, with illustrations by native Eskimo artists. London • Copenhagen: Gyldendal.*

 *Rasmussen, Knud (1927).* [*Across Arctic America*](https://archive.org/details/acrossarcticamer006641mbp)*. New York • London: G.P. Putnams sons.*