

## **Booklet of watercolors by Isak from Igdlorpait (1866-1903)**

This is a pocket-sized booklet (11 x 17 cm) with 24 double-sided leaves of watercolors (48 pages of images) with Greenlandic motifs of daily life, hunting and fishing, and the Moravian mission stations of Lichtenau and Friedrichsthal. There is a Greenlandic caption on each drawing, above which is added a handwritten German translation. Inside the front cover is written in German: "Drawn and painted from his own experience in 1899 to 1900 with the left hand (the right is paralyzed) by the goat-herder Isaak of the Mission station in Igdlorpait in Greenland. Gift of the last Brother missionary in Igdlorpait, Br. Riegel".

Isak was born on April 1, 1866 at the settlement of Igdlorpait (meaning "some houses" in Greenlandic) in Southwest Greenland, and died there on December 12, 1903 at the age of only 37. Igdlorpait was established as a mission station by the Moravian Brothers in 1864. It was abandoned in 1900 when they discontinued their missionary activities in Greenland, and that is presumably the time when Isak gave this booklet to Brother Riegel.

Of Isak's relatives we know that his father, Manasse, was a fisherman and his grandfather, Ludvig, was a hunter, and that around 1890 he became a goat herder for the German missionaries, since as an invalid he could neither hunt nor fish. Like his father, he received a biblical name since it was the missionaries' custom to give biblical-historical names to children they baptized (they were not given last names). However, occasionally Greenlanders were baptized with good German names, such as Isak's grandfather Ludvig, perhaps in memory of the pious circle around Count Zinzendorf, who founded the Moravian Brotherhood and sent the first missionaries to Greenland in 1733.

Very little is known about Isak himself other than what is in the church register. However, in the District records for 1890 Manasse, 49 years old, is listed as a fisherman with an unmarried son Isak, 24 years old, "who is not able to pursue this occupation due to an accident". In 1899 the widower Manasse is again mentioned, now as a hunter, and his son Isak as "unable to use a kayak". Since Isak had to give up his work as a goat herder when the German missionaries left Greenland in 1900, it is likely that he had to move with his father to Sydprøven, where they remained for two years before moving back to Igdlorpait.

Manasse does not appear to have had his own house. In 1890 he and his two children, Isak and his sister, lived with with a hunter, and in 1899 with another hunter. This notation mentions Manasse as a hunter, but already in 1901 he is listed as a "fisherman without a kayak". Isak never had his own house, and lived his whole life with his father.

Based on this information about Isak's family one can assume that he was of pure Eskimo ancestry. It can also be concluded that his father was only a very average hunter who was dependent on others. He was really only a fisherman, and to be a fisherman in those days meant a miserable existence. In the best case one could sell what one caught or trade it privately, but at the settlement's shop fish was not yet trade goods that could yield the cash necessary for purchasing coffee, tobacco, and other things.

Until around 1890 Isak was as far down on the local social and economic ladder as one could go. The invalid fisherman's son was completely dependent on his father and helpful neighbors, and therefore considered as a poor, miserable creature.

It was therefore great luck when the missionaries hired him as a goat herder. It should also be mentioned that the German missionaries did much for the most disadvantaged, the old and the weak,

and it was surely from compassion that they hired him, presumably giving him a small salary and some food. The missionaries also arranged for him to get paper and a little box of watercolors when they noticed that he could draw and paint. In one of the smallest huts Isak could therefore now sit and with his left hand try to reproduce something of the little world that he belonged to.

Isak died shortly before Christmas 1903 only a few months after his father, and one can infer from this, together with other information, that he was socially so poorly positioned and so helpless that when deprived of his last support, he completely succumbed in the struggle for existence.

That Isak's picture books were preserved for posterity is due to the missionary Adolf Riegel in Igdlorpait, who in 1899 sent the first version to the father of G.N. Bugge, who published a facsimile edition in 1969. The elder Bugge, who at that time was colony manager in Nanortalik south of Igdlorpait, was informed, among other things, of the following in a letter from Riegel dated June 24, 1899:

*"Our paralyzed and invalid goat-herd Isak has with these watercolors quite certainly not produced masterpieces, but your dear sister will however be pleased to know that the noble art of painting is in any event also represented in Greenland. One cannot demand much from a paralyzed one-armed Greenlander, but he is in any case a genius among his countrymen, especially since he must do everything with his left hand."*

As is evident from the letter, the book was meant as a little gift to the elder Bugge's sister, who was a painter. She later allowed Dr. Louis Bobé to exhibit it at the Greenland exhibition in Nikolaj's Church in 1921, where some pages were unfortunately removed. Many years later she gave it to her brother, G.N. Bugge.

Riegel mentions Isak as a one-armed Greenlander, but says nothing about how he lost the use of his right arm. Perhaps it was by an accidental bullet wound, which was not uncommon among a population that used rifles every day.

Through his colorful drawings with their amusing decorative ornamentation, Isak wanted to show how one lived in Igdlorpait. The drawings, to all of which Isak added his own Greenlandic text, cover a number of different situations and motifs but where seal hunting and especially fishing occupy the most prominent place. The fisherman's son did not forget his father's occupation.

When Bugge's facsimile edition of Isak's picture book was published in 1969, 70 years after it was made, he asked himself whether there was still anyone who remembered Isak, and found that remarkably enough there was. When in 1963 Bugge was in Nanortalik, he had the occasion to spend time one evening with an old sheep farmer from Igdlorpait. When he showed him the book, which he was very interested in, he vividly remembered Isak, who had strewn around him colored and uncolored drawings. When Bugge asked him whether he thought that there might still be some of Isak's drawings remaining, he replied that they had disappeared long ago since at the time no one was interested in them.

Bugge later corresponded with an old German woman who had been born in Greenland as the daughter of missionary Schärf, and in the 1890s lived in Igdlorpait. She wrote that she clearly remembered Isak, and as a little girl often looked on as he drew and painted.

Teacher Ove Bak of Sydprøven, who gave Bugge considerable help in assembling the background material on Isak, also had the occasion to speak with the youngest son of Hanserak, the Greenlandic interpreter on Gustav Holm's famous 1884-85 umiak expedition in which he "discovered" the Ammassalik Eskimos of East Greenland. This son could also clearly remember Isak, because "he drew angels who smoked a pipe". Isak was thus not forgotten.

This information concerning Isak has been translated or summarized from G.N. Bugge's publication of *Îsâp ássilialiai - Isaks billedbog* (1969), a 73 page facsimile reproduction (with explanatory text and figure captions in Greenlandic and Danish) of a book of watercolors very similar to this one, and then thought to be Isak's only surviving work. The book reproduced in Bugge's publication was owned by the author's family since around 1900, and was donated to the Library of Greenland (Det Grønlandske Landsbibliotek, now Nunatta Atuagaateqarfia) before publication of the 1969 facsimile edition. In addition to the booklet reproduced here and the similar one in the Library of Greenland, a third 48-page album of watercolors by Isak is in the library of the Scott Polar Research Institute in Cambridge, England:

<http://www.spri.cam.ac.uk/museum/catalogue/polarart/artists/igdlorpait%2c+isak/>

### **Literature:**

- Bugge, G.N. (1969): *Îsâp ássilialiai - Isaks billedbog* [Isak's Picture Book], Det Grønlandske Landsbibliotek & Stadsbibliotek i Lyngby (reprinted by Det Grønlandske Forlag, Nuuk, 1977).
- Kaalund, B, ed. (1969): *Grønlandsk kunst fra Aron til i dag*, Louisiana
- Kaalund, B. (2010): *The Art of Greenland*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Glydendal, Copenhagen



**Moravian mission station at Igdlorpait (Photo by Adolf Riegel, 1899)**



**Isak with his herd of goats outside of the mission station (Photo by Adolf Riegel, 1899)**





Gættisnat mit gætt  
 mit der lückin Land (da mesta  
 ist gættisnat) von dem Zingur,  
 firtin der Missionsstation in  
 Igdlorpeit in Grönland, mit  
 Namen Isakke nach dessen  
 signatur seiner Erfindung  
 1899 auf 1900.

Gættisnat der letzten  
 Gründer Missionsstation in Igdlorpeit  
 Dr. Riegel.

Cover of Isak's picture book and inscription inside cover by Br. Adolf Riegel



Erzucht und gewollt  
mit der besten Land/da wachst  
es galant, vor dem Engen,  
jetzt der Amerikaner in  
Hollstadt in Grönländ, mit  
Namen deute und abzu  
regeln seiner Gefährdung  
/ 899 auf 1900.

Geheert als luyden  
van de Mill. was in Jodorpast  
de Riegel.

Lassa f. Hoopai. iglamosuata rita issinga.







assat.  
Frauen.



der Gein



der Gericke



H. Scherf.

Grüßw bei Jgdloppait.



angutit.  
Männ.

hassa tiako.

ilesfil.



Männ im Rajak fiffant.

hassa tiako rajat aulissat.



Isfuntjägar auf dem Aufwand.

tassa tässä kajit rassassut issinga.



joenläänne auf dem fja fipant. fittlwg.

tassa tässä ritar rassassut ilulian





Ruopanda deuffen frowen im Weiberboot.  
 tassa länko umiat nöltil kajatitko.



Juonijonin ainal Weiberbootet auf Land.



Kajetman sinen Isfand buqjivant.

tassa umiamik amussut kajatko kaligtok.



Jaot sind jõuländerid.

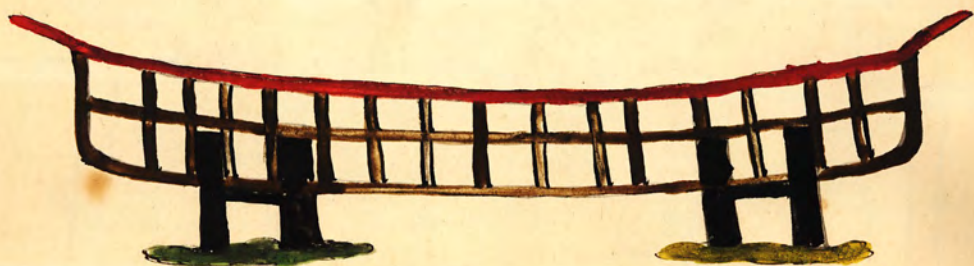
Tässa täuko kalätelid igluissa ässinge.



Joanin nimen LooHübenjag näfend.

Tässa täuko aunnat amigariistat umiak.





Lod afun Fallübröyng.

Lassa Lassa umiak (AER) Amerangipoor.



gegd auf Weiffiffen.

Lassa Lasso rajat silaluanriortut.



Röyppä.



grönländska galle.

tässä täuko kalatut lupiat igassutlo.



tuoväppä galle.

tässä täuko, saavutet lupiat issutlo.





grönländsk vägt pinnu kajak.

tässä tässä kajami-nik maskitor.



igdlorpaik. - firtuwanpift.

tässä tässä igdlorpaik. igdlorpaik. tussuata  
assinga.



Lifula in jgallorpaik.

tässä täuna jgallorpaik iliniastafiata sätä  
ässinga.



tässä täuna rakortup piata ässinga.  
liniastafiata sätä.





grönländska Luffa fangand.  
 tassa tunko insuit kume exalysiorut.



tassa tanna Avlut. <sup>Lichtenau. Nordwanfjth.</sup>  
 sup iglorsuata rata  
 asinga.





*Röfufael in Söðlenau.*  
 tássa höfufael og sa- lufiata sata ássinga.



*Söfnufufjel og.*

tássa táufs og og sa- sarnastut, karname,





tässä tunko <sup>jollylunda</sup> esmat <sup>Fransen.</sup> rissuglastut.



Fanggewafffaffen zum Rajak geförm.

tässä tunko rajat <sup>per. utait.</sup>

Skandjungen i Luleå



Kissa tåuko säsfa-ssuit kinsutlo.



Jävingsjöfjär.

Kissa tåuko umiat ang-magmanik valästut.





pegt auf einen fithäven.

Nässa täuna rajak. nanumik ruersagana.

fithäven uklethven nimen fithäven.



tässa. täuko nanumik it ilhli amsagannut  
rakissut. ragatso. malersasut.



fitbörjagd men nimer fitfolla  
ant.

tärra täuko angutit ilait pikup säne narut-



Isfjördsjagd:

tärra täuko kajat. 12.

puissimik malerss otut.





Surfunt jagt u. Mören.

lässa rajar. peissisik nueriagsrasor näjatke.



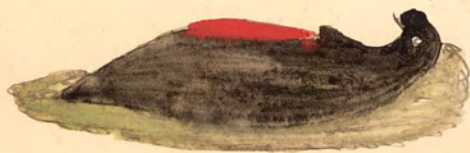
gefangene Surfunt wird auf Land gezogen.

lässa täukopuissi mik amussut nēmat.



Das Kind der gutfalt worden soll

Lassa Lassa pisse sark ulas ningitsar.



Ein Lassa, die den Lassa und die Lassa soll

Lassa Lassa aasak pilgkistartox.





Siinder, ifoan Känbippan folant.

Kässa Käuho

Kamautsassinastut.



fin in der Steinfalla gefangener Fuchf. Raben.  
Kässa Käuho Kessiango Kissa. Tuluykatto.



Ein Kajak ohne Verwanzung in fin. Lappland.  
 Tässä tässä kajak amekangitsoa in ualo.



Ein Farn Fäffe auf dem Land gefunden.  
 Tässä. tässä amak. iohaniik uniautor.





Wibersboot auf dem Lager.  
Inwendig Kleider zum Trocknen aufgespannt.

tassa taina umiak ilisivingmitok.



tassa taino koffiffr. sulugpärkat.



großer fatter Leuchtstich.

hassa häuna

kaleralik.



friedrichsthal. - Mordensstich.

hassa. häuna. Nassap

hessenswata sata isinga.





Wanſſen ſinnſt zu Kirch geſamt.

tässa kũk. inuit mälagiſſiastut.



Groenlænden auf dem Antiffberg.

tässa kũk. Ixtorpaſ inue saamutut. Jisæolo.



Dänische Fregatte im Weibseloch.



des Begleiters im Rajak.

Lassa. Laka. Kasser. mit Rajatitel.



Jak des Zingensicht in Zingent.

Wasserträger für Missionen.

Lassa Laka Kivlat imertat. F. M. N.







tassa Jêsusip saningassuata  
assinga.

Jepu Rung.