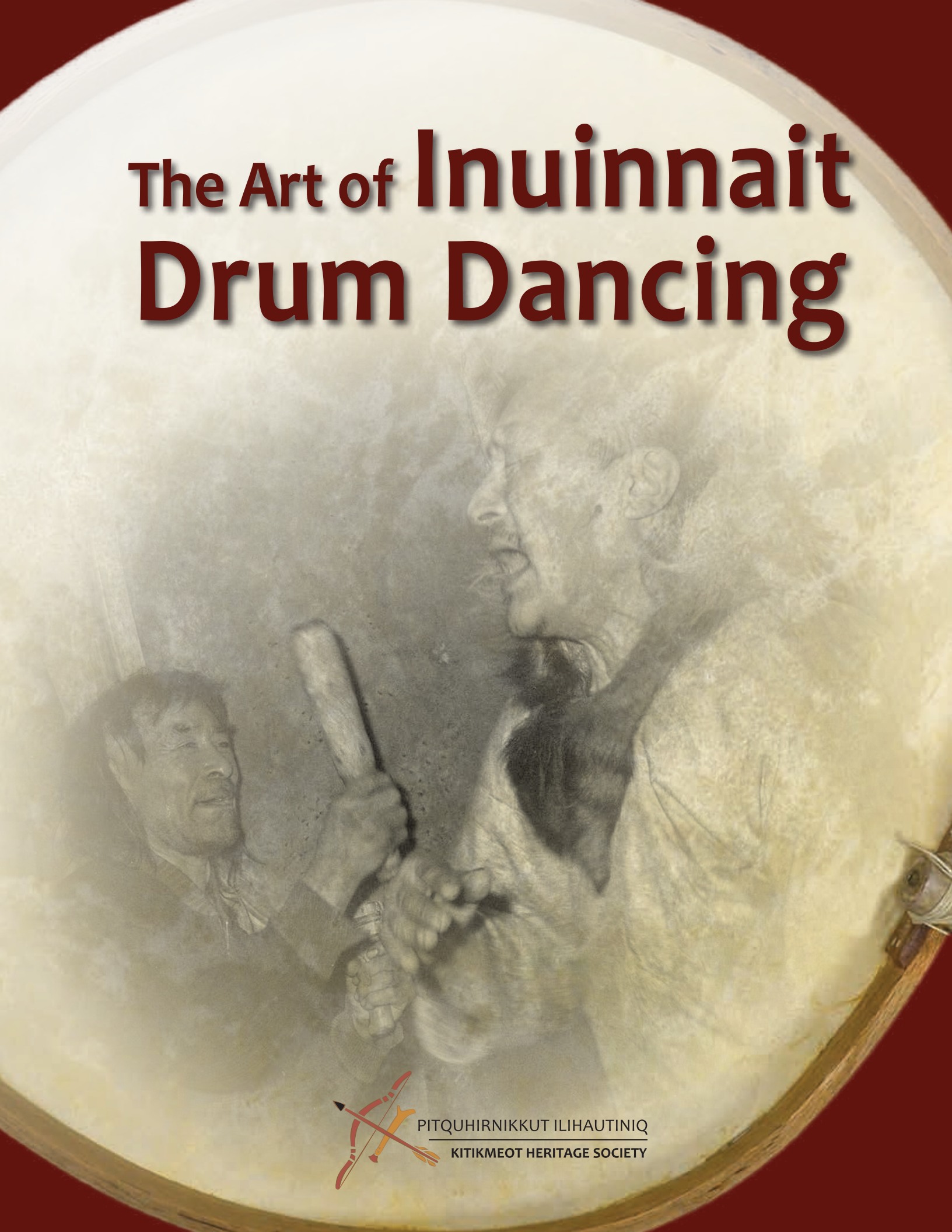
The Art of Inuinnait Drum Dancing



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"I want to share these songs with everyone. When I am no longer here, I want the songs to live on."

~ Roy Inuktalik, 2010

This book is dedicated to all Inuinnait people who have worked to ensure that the tradition of drum dancing remains strong in Nunavut. We would particularly like to acknowledge the lifelong dedication of recently departed elders Roy Inuktalik and Tommy Kilaodluk, whose passion for drumming continues to inspire the songs, dances and spirits of new generations.

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Cover: James Koighok (left) and Pungiak (right) doing a drum dance in which the dancer portrays different animals. Kugluktuk, 1950 (Richard Harrington/Library and Archives Canada/PA-147221).

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Introduction

The Inuinnait Tradition of Drum Dancing

For hundreds – maybe even thousands – of years, the Inuinnait people have expressed their poetry, history and spirit through the practice of drum dancing. Drum dancing commonly took place during festivals held in the middle of winter. For many Inuinnait, these festivals were the happiest time of the year, giving them occasion to tell stories and build friendships with the families who camped together in snow houses on the frozen sea ice. Beneath the cold, blue light of the stars and moon, the Inuinnait would gather together inside a large dance hall built from snow blocks to sing and beat the drum. Everyone sang together, while men and women took turns drumming in the center of the group. Their unified voice created a deep sense of connection, and filled their bodies with warmth. The groups' legends and history were revived and retold in the form of songs so that they might be passed down over countless generations. The poetry of this ancient music captures the cheerful and mischievous character that has sustained the Inuinnait for centuries in the Arctic.

The ritual of drum dancing is intricately woven into the fabric of traditional Inuit life, linking together family, spirits, weather and hunting through stories and performance.

This booklet will present the reader with a variety of scenes connecting drum dancing to the world of the Inuinnait. In its pages, we will visit the dance house during a song feast. We will examine the beautiful dancing costumes sewn from late summer caribou. We will follow the Inuinnait people as they congregate on the winter sea ice after a summer of hunting on the land.

Much of this booklet describes how drum dance existed among the Inuinnait before their culture changed dramatically in the 20th century. For this reason, traditional practices of drumming are described using the past tense. This does not mean that drum dancing has disappeared. Over the past 100 years, drum dancing has been threatened, but ultimately survived. Today, drum dancing is being revitalized as an important way to restore traditional culture and stories to younger generations of Inuit. To celebrate the perseverance of the drum dance, we begin this booklet with a song that pays tribute to the wonders of two things that never change: the migration of caribou and the dance of courtship between men and women.

The following exerpt was originally sung by Netsit, an Umingktormiut man, and recorded by anthropologist Knud Rasmussen during the Fifth Thule Expedition in 1924 (Rasmussen, 1931).

Right: A Copper Inuit woman sews a skin container, 1915 (Wilkins PA-165563).

Below: A caribou herd moves across the tundra at Iqaluktuuq (Griebel/KHS).

Glorious it is to see
The caribou flocking down from the forests
And beginning
Their wandering to the north
Timidly they watch
For the pitfalls of man

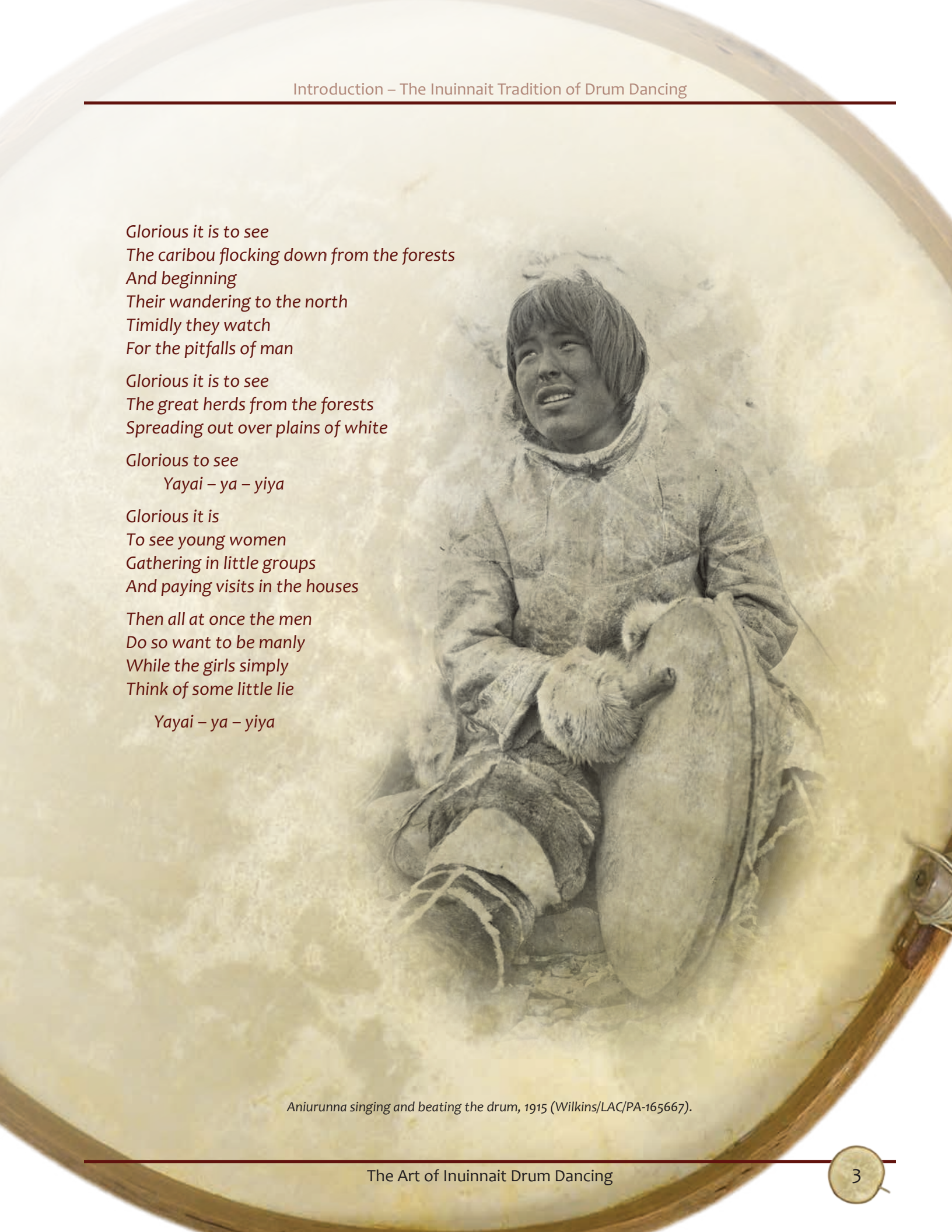
Glorious it is to see
The great herds from the forests
Spreading out over plains of white

Glorious to see
Yayai – ya – yiya

Glorious it is
To see young women
Gathering in little groups
And paying visits in the houses

Then all at once the men
Do so want to be manly
While the girls simply
Think of some little lie

Yayai – ya – yiya



Aniurunna singing and beating the drum, 1915 (Wilkins/LAC/PA-165667).

Chapter 1

Qahapina: The Story of a Song Feast

Qahapina was a small boy who lived with his mother, his father, his baby brother, Uikiak, and the family's whiny dog, Iqitquq. The family knew themselves as *Umingmaktuurmiut*, people of the musk-ox, and occupied the land around Bathurst Inlet in which their ancestors had always lived. In the summer they walked all over the tundra, moving from lake to lake for fishing, and hunting animals as they travelled. During those months, the sun would never set and Qahapina was full of energy, which he spent helping his parents with whatever tasks needed to be done. Sometimes their family met other people travelling across the land and stopped to share stories and food, but mostly they were alone.

One day Father went out on a trip to hunt for caribou and was gone for a long time. Qahapina stayed with his mother, who was busy scraping skins to prepare them for winter. After being gone for several days, Father came crawling back to the tent late one night. He was hurt badly while hunting and had to travel back a long distance with his wound. Father was very thirsty and cried out for water. Mother brought him water and tried to take care of him. He lay in the tent for several days, breathing softly. Mother tried to give him meat to build his strength, but he couldn't eat the food. Father said to Qahapina, "Now you will be strong to hunt for the family." Even though he was very weak, Father smiled and raised his hands like he throwing a spear, making Qahapina laugh. The next morning, Father was gone. They wrapped him in caribou skins and sat with him a long time. Mother folded up Father's clothes and placed them beside him, along with his most important tools, so that he would be prepared for his journey into death. They packed the rest of their supplies and started walking, Mother with baby Uikiak on her back and Qahapina with a bundle of skins and clothing. Even the dog was harnessed with a heavy load. Without Father, they all had to carry more gear. The brisk walking cheered them up. Qahapina asked, "Mom, where will we go now?" "We'll go to the meeting place by the sea," she answered, "Uncle Urhuraq will be there soon. I know the way." It was a hard trip with all the luggage and the group travelled slowly. Luckily, they had fish and caribou meat saved up from the summer. The trip lasted many days, and each day it got a little darker and a little colder. The season was changing to fall and all the caribou were beginning to migrated south, thundering across the tundra in big herds. Qahapina wanted to catch one, but he knew he wasn't big enough to use the bow and arrow.

They arrived at the meeting place and found another family there. They greeted each other warmly. It was good to see familiar faces. More families continued to arrive every few days until the community was formed. All through the summer, Umingmaktuurmiut families travelled on their own, fishing in the sunny bays and streams. When the days began growing shorter and the nights became cold, their thoughts would turn to preparing for the long winter that lay in store for them. Just as the caribou gathered in herds, the families sought each other out to hunt and celebrate the change in season. They would work together to build stone weirs in the rivers, where they would catch hundreds of fish with spears. Eloborate piles of stone inukhuit were built to frighten the caribou herds into the rivers, where the animals became wet and slow and could be killed by hunters in kayaks. While the sun was still high in the sky, the meat was cut thin and laid out on stones to dry so the people would have enough food to last through the long winter. Caribou skins were cleaned and softened to make warm clothes. Any extra food or skins was stashed beneath heavy stone piles to protect them from foxes until a future time when supplies would be needed.

Busy with all of their preparations, the families barely noticed as the summer transformed into fall. The small leaves of the tundra plants turned yellow and red, and the sea froze into solid ice. The women worked

Kumaiak preparing a harvest of fish for drying at Bloody Falls, Coronation Gulf, 1931 (Finnie/LAC/PA-101258).

quickly to finish sewing all the winter clothes, and then the people moved onto the ice and built iglu houses from blocks of hard-packed snow. They built them near to each other so they could visit their neighbours often. Qahapina's family shared an iglu with Uncle Urhuraq's family. They were happy to be together with so many relatives. Qahapina was too small to go on sealing trips with his uncle, so he played with other kids all day and did chores for his mother. The kids had a small drum and they would take turns playing and singing "ayi ya yia ayi ya yia", pretending they were in a big dance house. They laughed their heads off at the game, but knew that some day they would drum for real.

The winter passed like most winters, except that Qahapina ofen missed his father. Storms blew big clouds of snow all around, making drifts that piled up high. The men stayed out of the ice, waiting patiently at the breathing holes for the seal to appear, ready to harpoon and drag them home.

A young girl practices drum dancing, Kugluktuk ca. 1950 (Harrington/LAC/e010869501).

Each day became a little darker and then one day the sun didn't come up at all. The storm was over, and the air was still and quiet. The men had been hunting for weeks and meat of seals was piled high in the storage rooms of the iglus. There was fresh seal oil in the soapstone lamps and every igloo glowed warmly. It had been a good hunt and the hunters were rewarded for their patience and cooperation. Qahapina was helping his uncle Urhuraq stack the frozen seal bodies and said, "Next year I will come with you and help you watch for the seal." Urhuraq laughed and showed Qahapina how to stand with the harpoon over the seal's breathing hole. Just then there was a sound coming from outside, a man calling out, "Qagiava! Qagiava!" He was calling them to the dance house for a feast of dance songs, and hopefully a feast of food too. They smiled to each other. "Ehhh!" Mother said to them, "When you go to the dance hall, you can wear your dance clothes." Qahapina didn't know he had any dance clothing, so when his mother held up a new coat, he was more than happy to put it on.

They all left the iglu and headed over to the dance house. From inside, they could hear the people talking and singing and pounding on the drum. So many people were going in that there was a line up to crawl through the front door passage. Everyone was talking and laughing. Now that it was dark all the time, it was too hard to hunt and work. This was the time to get all the people together to celebrate. As they entered the dance hall, Qahapina's eyes opened up wide and looked at the great scene. There was a big circle of people all wearing beautiful clothing and soft boots for dancing. The clothing had many lines and patterns made from the soft caribou belly. For the women, it matched the lines of their tattoos on their face. Many people had

Inuinnait dressing for a drum dance at Lake Tahirynag (CMC 1V.C.182LS).

fringes of leather dangling down the back, one for each of their song companions. They were in a big circle, singing and talking, some swaying with the music, some giggling and some going for a snack. There was a big pile of food on a bench, with fresh seal meat and dried caribou. A woman was in the middle of the circle swinging the big drum, her eyes closed and her face turned towards the sky. The people were helping her to sing her song, whose words she cried out with emotion. She swayed from side to side with the drum, swinging gently to the beat. The sound of the drum filled the dance hall. When it was pounded loudly, Qahapina could feel it in his cheeks. Qahapina had never been to a drum gathering like this before and it made him feel light inside.

The song feast continued all night long. The skilled hunters did many dances and songs. A man and woman who were visiting from far away in the east were invited to sing some songs and they were thankful to be welcomed to the village where they didn't know many people. There were stories told too. Some were funny and some were scary, about little people and giants that lived on the land a long time ago. When it was uncle Urhuraq's turn to take the drum, he sang his own song about being jealous of the other hunters. He played the drum with an energetic beat, while jumping around. Qahapina thought he looked like a bird that couldn't fly, and he laughed. When Urhuraq finished his song, he held the drum still

and beat the skin softly. He said, "Now, I will sing an old song about a man long ago who dreamed of dying." He paused, still tapping the drum, and the people became quiet. Urhuraq started singing the song and playing the drum, and all the people joined in because they knew the song well. Qahapina had heard the song before too, and he joined in singing, trying to remember the words.

As he played the drum and danced, Urhuraq seemed like he was being carried into the air with emotion. When he cried out, the people sang louder. It was like they all had one voice. Qahapina listened to the song and it reminded him somehow of his father. He closed his eyes, stepped closer into the circle and sang loud during each refrain.

A young boy stands outside of a joined iglu structure, Iglulik (Harrington/LAC/PA-144048).

Urhuraq's Song

Exerpt from a song traditionally sung by Netsit, an Umingmaktuurmiut man. Recorded and trandlated by Knud Rasmussen in 1931:137-38.

I am filled with joy
When the day peacefully dawns
Up over the heavens
Ayi yai ya

I am filled with joy
When the sun slowly rises
Up over the heavens
Ayi yai ya

But else I choke with fear
At greedy maggot throngs
They eat their way in
At the hollow of my collarbone
And in my eyes
Ayi yai ya

Here I lie, recollecting
How stifled with fear I was
When they buried me
In a snow hut out on the lake
Ayi yai ya

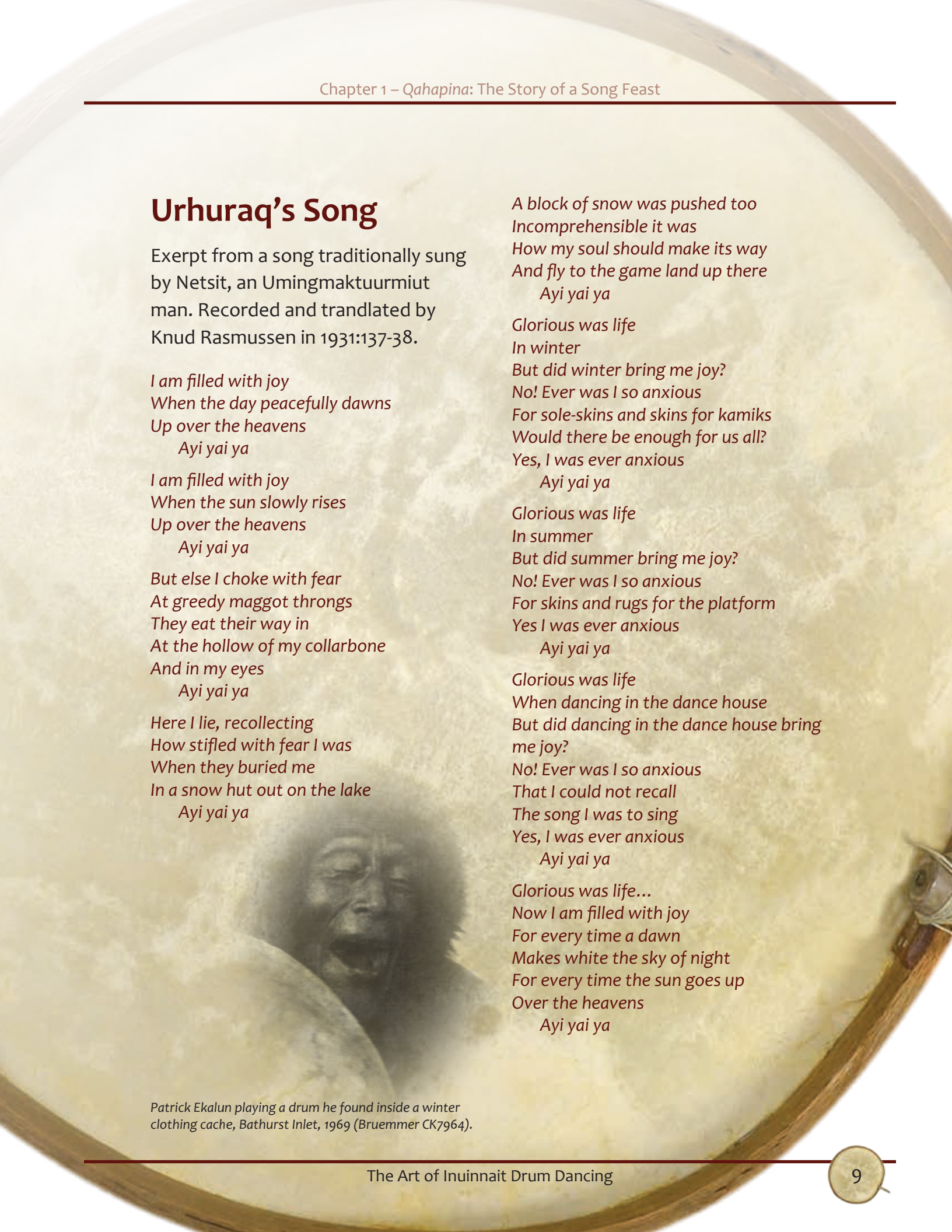
A block of snow was pushed too
Incomprehensible it was
How my soul should make its way
And fly to the game land up there
Ayi yai ya

Glorious was life
In winter
But did winter bring me joy?
No! Ever was I so anxious
For sole-skins and skins for kamiks
Would there be enough for us all?
Yes, I was ever anxious
Ayi yai ya

Glorious was life
In summer
But did summer bring me joy?
No! Ever was I so anxious
For skins and rugs for the platform
Yes I was ever anxious
Ayi yai ya

Glorious was life
When dancing in the dance house
But did dancing in the dance house bring me joy?
No! Ever was I so anxious
That I could not recall
The song I was to sing
Yes, I was ever anxious
Ayi yai ya

Glorious was life…
Now I am filled with joy
For every time a dawn
Makes white the sky of night
For every time the sun goes up
Over the heavens
Ayi yai ya



Patrick Ekalun playing a drum he found inside a winter clothing cache, Bathurst Inlet, 1969 (Bruemmer CK7964).

Chapter 2

Entering the Dance Hall

In the past, among the Inuinnait, there was no special role for musicians. Everyone in the community was considered to be simultanesouly a singer, a drummer and a dancer. Song and dance was as much a part of life as hunting and sewing, and acted as an outlet for people to express their creativity and spirituality.

In the winter, when darkness and storms made seal hunting more difficult, celebrations were held with drum dancing as the main event. An extra large snow house, known as a *qalgiq,* was built for a dance hall, which could be made to accommodate as many as 40 or more people comfortably. Inside the dance hall, people gathered into a circle, with the drum positioned in the center. People took turns stepping inside the circle to take up the drum. Often, the most respected members of the community had the privilege of going first. He or she would take the drum by the handle in their left hand and the thick drum stick in their right. Holding the drum at waist level, the drummer tapped the skin a few times, making a low rumbling sound like rolling thunder. When the people heard this noise they prepared themselves for a song, clearing their throats and making themselves comfortable.

An Inuinnait drum dance at Tikerak, Coronation Gulf, 1931 (Finnie PA-101172).

"We built three snow houses. In the middle to connect the three, we built a large snow house. This is where the dancing took place and the playing of games – in the center of the igloo. Some akhunaaq [thongs made from sealskin] were put up for people to swing on… We had to wait for the sea-ice to be covered with hard packed snow so we could build snowhouses out on the ice. We also had to wait until the snow on the ice was good for drinking water."

~ Sam Oliktoak, Holman elder

A drum dancer would start his or her performance by singing the first lines of the song in a loud and clear voice. This helped the chorus of singers recognize the melody and the words. The drummer lifted up the drum and struck the inside edge of its rim with the stick. The drum would ring out with a wonderful boom and swing around from the

impact. The drummer would then strike the opposite rim and the drum would swing back in the other direction. The drummer would continue this back and forth motion, beating out the booming rhythm of the song.

The chorus of singers joined the song as soon as they recognized its melody and would continue to sing throughout the entire piece. The songs were composed of poetic words and the chanting of "ayaya-yiya", which was sung as a refrain. People would often close their eyes while singing to better connect with each other and the merged sound of their voices and the beating of the drum. With the chorus of the song carried high by the dance hall's multiple singers, the drum dancer could shift his or her focus back to drumming and dancing. When deeply moved by the song, the drummer would make a special cry that would rise above the drum and voices, carrying his or her joy and emotion to the rest of the group. In response, everyone's song would increase in strength and passion.

'Drum Dance' (1978) by Luke Anguhadluk, Baker Lake.

Drummers' techniques ranged from playing a steady resonant rhythm to a variety of different lighter sounds made from striking the frame rather than center of the drum. The drummers' dance movements were directly connected to the back and forth swinging of the drum. If drummers used only their wrists and arms for this drum's movement they would quickly wear out their strength. Skillful drummers let their bodies swing and turn the drum, reducing the tiredness of their arms. Every dancer would come up with unique footsteps, gyrations and movements to express themselves in the dance. The many hops and steps in these dances explained why the first European visitors compared the drum dance to a European jig.

"When striking the drum, one should try to hit the rims opposite each other. One must not hold the handle too tightly. The beating of the drum is going to keep the drum in place. When you are holding the handle too tightly, so that the drum is secured by your grip, you can get tired very easily. In those days the drums used to be bigger as the drum would have been used as a competing instrument, jovially."

~ George Kappianaq, Iglulik

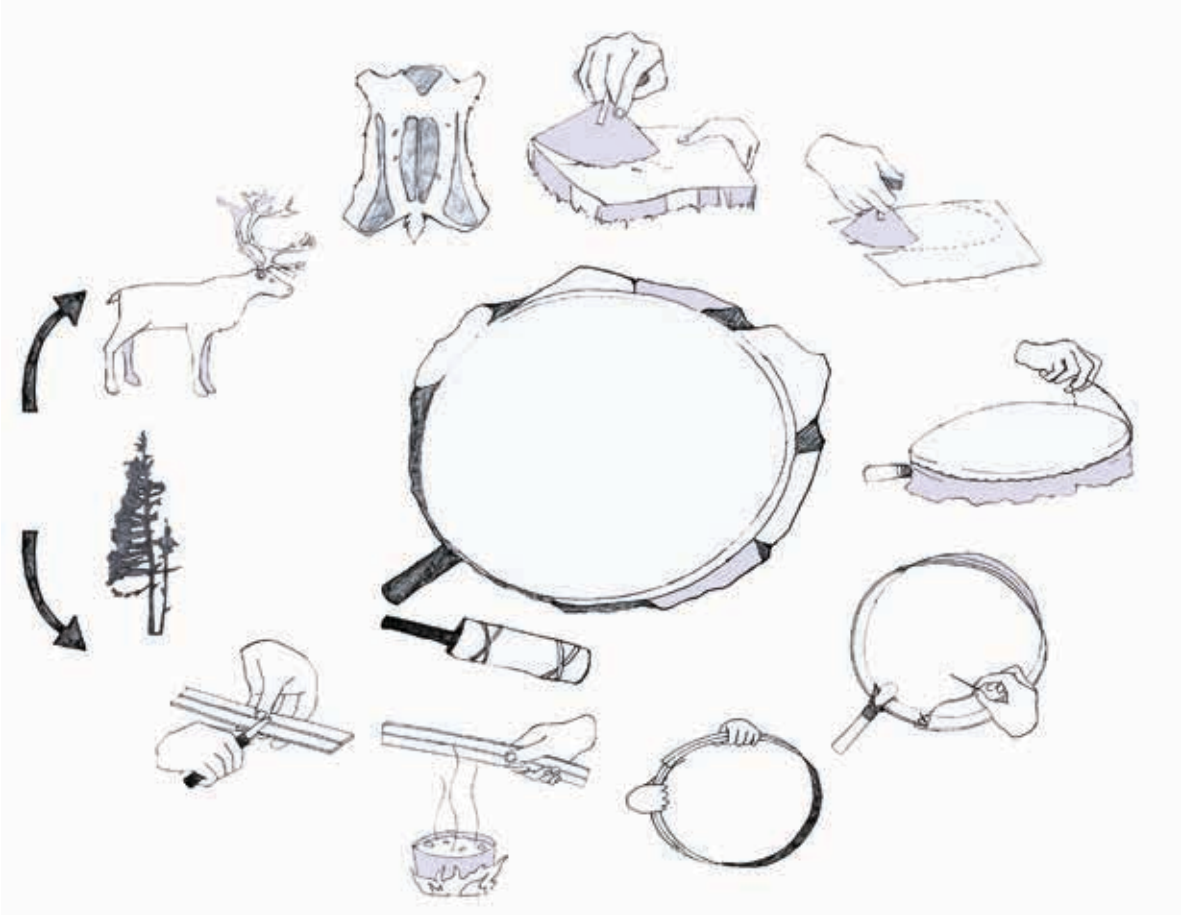
When a new drummer took up the drum, they would continue playing for as long as they could in order to show off their physical strength and their talent as a singer and drum dancer. A strong drummer could play for over an hour before collapsing in exhaustion. Dance halls would often be packed with people eager to take their turn with the drum, resulting in festivals that would often continue for days.

The poetic lyrics of drum dance songs were often related to personal qualities, such as respect and hunting skill, that were strongly valued in Inuinnait culture. The songs narrated tales of good hunters providing their families with fuel and food, good fishermen caching surpluses of fish for the winter, and talented travellers describing journeys of trade and adventures out on the land. Often, the author and singer of a song would tend towards modesty, worrying out loud that they were not skillful enough to properly perform their tasks. Special types of songs were also performed in particular situations. Foolish songs were sometimes sung for the purpose of self-mockery or making fun of other people. Songs associated with spirits and long-departed ancestors were often reserved for singing by shamans, who frequently performed them during their ceremonies. Examples of the different song types will be provided later in this booklet.

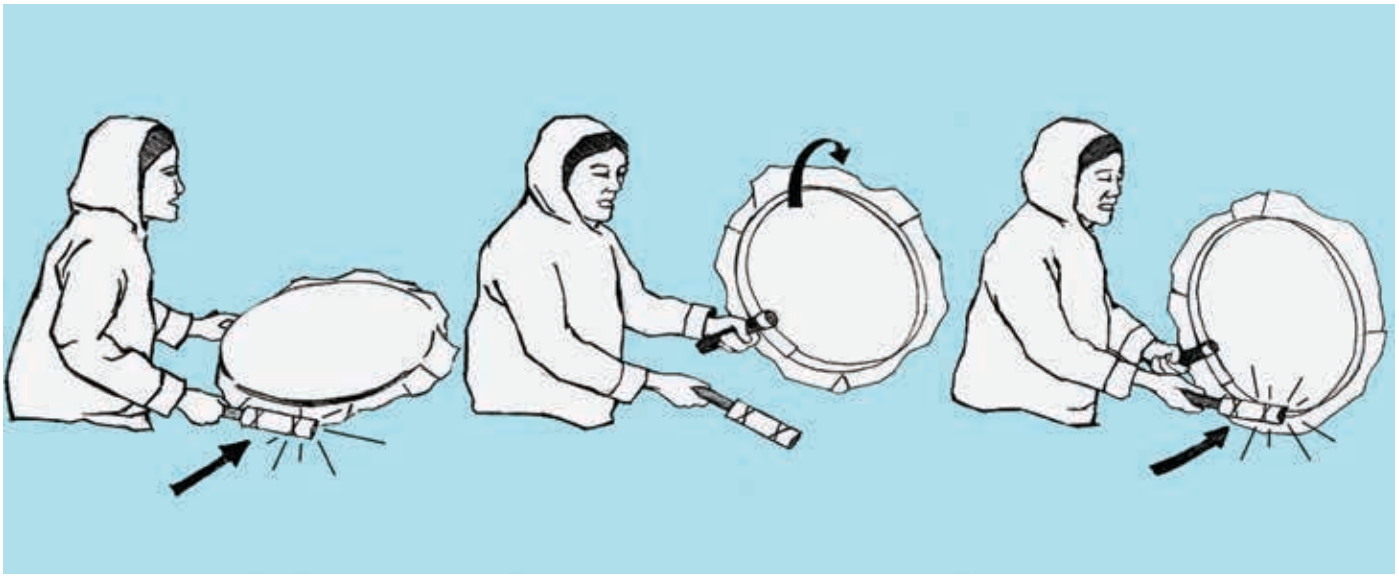
How to Make a Qilaut

Traditionally, the qilaut was made with driftwood, caribou hide and sinew. A long piece of wood was carved and softened with boiling water or steam, and was very gradually bent to form a hoop. The hoop was fastened together with sinew, and long grooves were carved into the wood around its outside length. The handle was typically made from a short piece of wood, which was attached to the hoop and reinforced with sinew. After being harvested from a caribou, the skin for the drum was scraped on both sides to remove hair and bits of fat and meat. A second round of scraping took place to break down the skin fibers and soften the hide. The hide was then stretched over the drum hoop by several people, while another person attached it tightly into the grooved line with sinew. The drum baton was made from a solid piece of wood wrapped with seal skin to soften the sound. Some groups used whalebone instead of wood, and a seal bladder for the skin. Today, vinyl fabric skins and power tools have come to replace the traditional methods of qilaut building.

A qilaut remains property of the community and is shared freely with whoever wants to play.



The stages of drum building. Illustration by Brendan Griebel (KHS, 2011).



The motion of drum dancing. Illustration by Brendan Griebel (KHS).

How to Play a Qilaut

Take the qilaut in your left hand and the katuun in your right. Hold them both at waist level, with a light grip on the handles. Strike the rim of the drum on the underside with enough force to make it swing. Relax your grip so the qilaut pivots in your hand, without having to bend your arm too much. When the qilaut swings around, strike it again at the bottom as it comes to meet the katuun. As it swings back, strike it on the opposite side again. Continue like this until you have a steady, booming beat. Remember to always strike the rim (not the skin), and keep the left hand loose or you'll tire your arm.

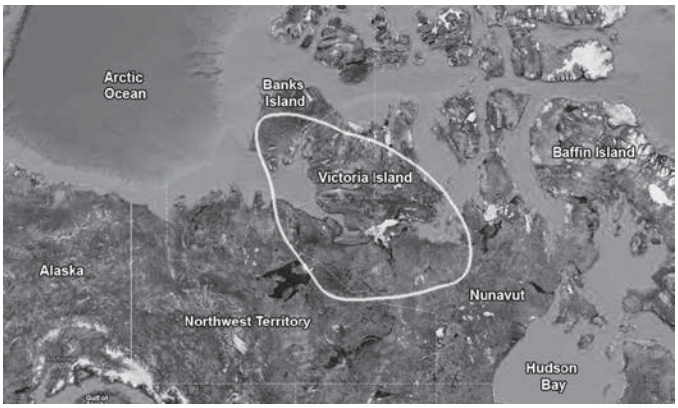
'Drum Dancer' (1970) by Karoo Ashevak, Taloyoak (CMC IV-C-4293 a-c).

Chapter 3

Who are the Inuinnait?

The Inuinnait are the most recent inhabitants of the central Canadian Arctic. Their direct ancestors, known by archaeologists as the Thule culture, migrated to the area from Alaska around 1200 A.D. Since that time, the group developed a unique nomadic lifestyle that allowed them to follow migrating herds of animals and survive from the harvesting of seal, caribou and fish. In the summer, individual families and small groups would travel around the land fishing and hunting. In the fall and winter, extended families would gather and move onto the frozen sea ice, where they would build villages of snow houses with up to 200 people.

The Inuinnait traditionally used native copper deposits to make their hunting weapons and tools, which is how they gained the more common name of 'Copper Eskimos' from Vilhjalmur Stefansson, one of the first explorers to visit them in the early 1900s. Today, their traditional territory is located in the Kitikmeot region of Nunavut, and nearby parts of the Kivalliq, Northwest Territories and Inuvialuit regions. The Inuinnait continue to speak a distinct dialect of Inuktitut known as Inuinnaqtun. Although it is technically considered to be an endangered language by UNESCO, Inuinnaqtun currently has between 800 and 1,500 fluent speakers located throughout various communities in the Kitikmeot region of Nunavut.



A map of the Inuinnait territory (adapted from Terra Metrics, Google, 2011).

Among the Inuinnait, regional groups were often distinguished from one another. Small populations of individuals self-identified according to landmarks and place names in their common hunting and travelling territories. Using the word suffix *miut*, meaning "people of", groups would describe themselves as being related to a particular area of land. For example, a group of people who lived and hunted near the Coppermine River were known as the Qurluqtuurmiut, the people of the rapids. According to information collected by early explorers in the area, each subgroup had a population ranging from a few dozen to around 150 people.

Because Inuinnait moved around according to availability of fish and game animals, they might change the name of their group when they moved to a new area. They had a detailed understanding of the lands and waters that they inhabited, and a subjective, even poetic, system for naming places. Place names were not fixed labels like those presented today on maps. Instead, place names consisted of personal descriptions of a place, dependent on the season the situation and the location relative to which the place was named. One place called the last little island could also be called the first little island when seen from a different perspective. There are hundreds of place names, any of which could be used to identify a group of people .

Above: Nokadluk hunting with bow and arrow at Bathurst Inlet, ca. 1950 (Harrington/LAC/PA-147282).

Below: Inuinnait travellers carrying packs, ca. 1918 (Wilkins/LAC/PA-165669).

Chapter 4

Good Friends, Strong Communities

The word nuatkattia (plural: nuatkattait) means kin or relative. Inuinnait were strongly connected to one another through bonds of kinship. Everyone was responsible for each other's well-being, especially when they were in need. If one man had poor luck in hunting, others would offer food to his family. The bonds between people and families knit the community together as a whole, and were further strengthened through the collective act of drum dancing.

Winter festivals held in the drum dance hall, or *qalgiq*, were often the happiest and most social events of the year. The drum dance hall was a place where old friends told stories of the past and where new friendships were formed. People brought food and exchanged gifts. They introduced their new partners and children. Those who were not married could use the gathering as an opportunity to meet their new mate. Numerous games would be performed as well, with wrestling, boxing matches and acrobatic feats performed on a swing (*akhunaak*) attached to the roof of the qalgiq. Prominent men and women performed in the drum circle and were recognized for their talent, charisma and grace. The beautiful dance clothing worn in the qalgiq showed off the skill of seamstresses and added to the festive appearance of the event. All of these activities helped to bring Inuinnait closer together as a community.

Song festivals in the qalgiq created a setting in which important social roles could be displayed and affirmed. Elders and respected hunters were given the privilege of playing the drum first, if they so chose. Songs of people who had passed away (*ingulrait pihiit*) were sung as a way of remembering and honouring the departed. Old spiritual songs (*aqiutit*) were a link to ancestors from long ago and told the history of the Inuinnait. As the main community gathering place, the qalgiq was also used to make announcements, raise grievances and settle disputes. Religious ceremonies, during which shamans held séances, were also held during the long community festivals.

Illuriik – Song Companions

One of the closest bonds that could be formed between two friends was the relationship of song companions, also known as *illuriik* or *numikattia*. Song companions had a lifelong connection in the dance hall. People who had the same name (*avvariik*) would often become song companions. Having taking up the drum, they would sing to each another, improvising lyrics so that the song became a conversation between friends. In the drum performance, song companions would tease each other and compete; the one who could drum the longest, sing most beautifully and make the most clever comments was deemed the winner. While competitive, this dance was always playful and served to bring the song companions closer together.

The relationship between song companions was not limited to dance and song. The couple would compete in wrestling sports and other games. They traded wives and planned marriages between their children. Most importantly, they helped each other in hard times. Strings of fur and fringes were attached to the backs of their dance costume as a visible symbol of their friendship. Once two people became *illuriik* they remained so for life, or until a conflict arose between them.

A person could have more than one song cousin, and it was common practice that when strangers visited a community a resident would adopt them as a dance companion. This was the best way for a family to be introduced into a new area. It was very important to be formally welcomed into a community to avoid trespassing on hunting grounds or offending the people of the area; acts which could hold servere consequences. Strangers in a region had to make a good display of their drum dancing skills to entertain their hosts and gain favour with the community.

The Story of Ikpakhuak

Ikpakhuak was a celebrated Puivlirmiut drum dancer. His wife Higilak was also well known for her drumming skills. When anthropologist Diamond Jenness came to the Arctic in 1915, he was adopted by the couple and began recording their performances. Much of what is known today about the early songs and traditions of the Inuinnait comes from Jenness' written observations. Ikpak is praised in these writings for his hospitality, his humour and his inspired performances in the qalgiq.

One spring, Ikpakhuak and his wife Higilak were camping at Lake Tahiryuak, and some Kanghirjuarmiut came to visit them by sled. A dance was held in their honour that lasted several days. Two skin tents were joined as a cover for snow block walls to make a simple springtime dance hall. Everyone put

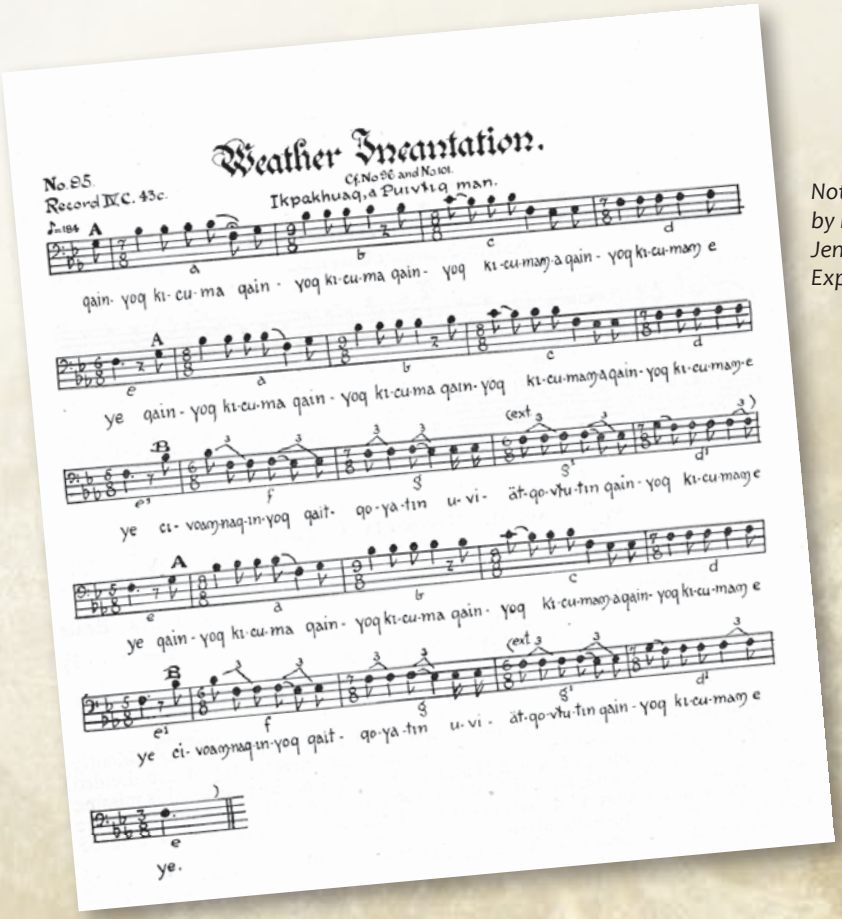
on their best dance clothing. As the hostess of the gathering, Higilak began the drum dance, performing some well-known songs that all could join in singing. During her last dance she called out to her guest, the woman Allikammik, to run circles around her, first one way then the other. After the song, they embraced in the Inuit way, rubbing noses, and became *numikattait*. Now that Allikammik was part of the family, it was her turn to dance, and she expressed her joy at the meeting with cries and wild dancing. Her drum dancing turned out to be rather clumsy, but Higilak did her best to sing well in support of her new song companion.

Next, Ikpakhuaq took a lively and beautiful turn in the center. He was known as a celebrated drum dancer and did not disappoint. He called out to Allikammik to run around him during his song, and then invited the man Kunana to make circles in the opposite direction. Following tradition, the man took the inside track, the place of honour. The men were now *numikattait* too. They attached strings of fur to each other's dance costumes. For three days the dancing continued, the visitors and hosts taking turns in the drum circle, always showing respect as they celebrated. After giving this warm welcome, Ikpak and Higilak could expect a similar welcome whenever they chose to travel to their friends' region.

Because Inuinnait spent much of their time moving about, situations such as Ikpakhuaq's welcoming dance were considered to be

Ikpakhuak and his wife, Higilak, in full dance costume, Bernard Harbour, 1916 (Wilkins/CMC/36913).

customary. The Inuinnait and their neighbours demonstrated hospitality and affection wherever they went, and took pride in being able to entertain guests. A respectable man or woman could perform drum dance songs, improvise kind words and clever phrases about their new friends, and learn new songs quickly to sing well in the chorus. All of these qualities helped keep harmonious relations within a community and between neighbouring groups.



Weather Incantation.

No. 85
Record IV.C. 43c.
Cf. No. 86 and No. 101.
Ikpakhuaq, a Puivtiq man.

qain· yoq ki·cu·ma qain · yoq ki·cu·ma qain· yoq ki·cu·maŋ·a qain · yoq ki·cu·maŋ e

ye qain · yoq ki·cu·ma qain · yoq ki·cu·ma qain· yoq ki·cu·maŋ·a qain· yoq ki·cu·maŋ·e

ye ci· voaŋ·naq·in·yoq qait· qo·ya·tin u·vi· ät·qo·vtu·tin qain· yoq ki·cu·maŋ e

ye qain · yoq ki·cu·ma qain· yoq ki·cu·ma qain · yoq ki·cu·maŋ·a qain· yoq ki·cu·maŋ e

ye ci· voaŋ·naq·in·yoq qait· qo·ya·tin u·vi· ät·qo·vtu·tin qain · yoq ki·cu·maŋ e

ye.

Notation of a weather incantation sung by Ikpakuak and transcribed by Diamond Jenness during the Canadian Arctic Expedition (Jenness 1925:310).

Ikpakhuak singing in the dancehall, Coronation Gulf, 1931 (Finnie/LAC/PA-101175).

Chapter 5

Variations of Inuinnait Song

The Inuinnait were known to perform many different types of songs, not all of which involved drum dancing. These song types differ greatly in their social function, their origins and the situations in which they were performed. Song types can be distinguished from one another by features in their melodies, lyrical content and accompanying dance style.

Pihiit and atuun were the two types of song that traditionally accompanied the drum dance. Drum dance songs are often referred to as 'ayaya' songs, because these sounds are present in the beginning and chorus of the piece. These songs were performed very freely and often differed in length, tempo and lyrics every time they were played. The melody, however, always stayed the same so that the chorus could support the drummer with their words.

"Pihiit were composed for others to hear. The lyrics told of the composer's accomplishments in life, especially those that deserved to be heard by other people. Some pihiit contained words that could help others lead a better life. Some seemed to imply resentment to something and others seemed to portray a person's great abilities in many things. The lyrics were about all sorts of things because composers were free to develop songs of their choice that spoke of many things."

~ Bruce Mikitoq

When learning a new drum song, first the melody and then the words would be memorized. The importance of a strong melody can be best understood by listening to a live performance. The melodies of *pihiit* and *atuun* are based in the chanting of 'ayaya', repeated in all the songs. These melodies dwell on the root note, and move up and down the musical scale, pivoting from the root note. There are not many pauses in these melodies, so singing is almost continuous, with only pauses for breath. The continuous aspect of the songs is demanding on the lungs and bodies of the singers. When the pulse of the drum beat stops, the singers' voices quickly die out. The drum dancer might introduce or conclude a song with a little speech, to offer whatever words are suited to the moment. This could be warm words to his fellows, an explanation of the song or a clever remark directed at his song companion.

Pihiit and Atuun

Pihiq (plur. *pihiit*) and atun (plur. *atuun*) songs are divided up into verses and refrains. Songs can be short or last up to 20 minutes and longer, depending on the strength of the drummer. The refrain sections are filled with chanting of 'ayaya'. The verses contain the poetry and the storytelling of song, with long Inuinnaqtun words forming interesting rhythmic twists from melodic phrases. Most songs are presented in two parts, with two unrelated songs put together back to back. The second song part is called the *putuhauta*, literally meaning 'that by means of which one knocks a hole through it'. This second part is understood as a conclusion or continuation of the first. Sometimes a more direct reference name of *uviua*, meaning 'its increase', is chosen.

Each drum dancer had their own song that was inspired and composed from life experiences. Depending on their musical ability, they could either choose a standard melody with added words or compose an original melody. Personal songs changed as new life experiences inspired new words. New words of flattery and charm could be improvised in a *pihiq* performance for the benefit of the audience. When Ikpakhuaq first met Diamond Jenness and the scientists of the Canadian Arctic Expedition, he sang a song of welcome in which he improvised humourous stories about them.

In the performance of a personal song, the drum dancer relives events from his or her life, and the ensuing story becomes part of who they are. The performance allows the performer to express strong feelings and raise sensitive issues with people under the guise of playfulness, or *pinnguartuq*. Whether a *pihiq* is about a hunting trip, a personal dispute, waiting for a seal at his breathing hole, or feeling insecure as a drum dancer, it is equally part of its singer's identity. For that very reason, Inuinnait haven always taken the composing of new songs seriously.

New drum dance songs came about through introspection and reflection, and often with inspiration from old popular songs. It was a significant accomplishment when a person composed a song and performed it in the dance hall. In 1931, the Netsilik shaman Orpingalik gave this explanation for how new songs are composed:

"Songs are thoughts sung out with the breath when people are moved by great forces and ordinary speech no longer suffices. Man is moved just like the ice floe sailing here and there out in the current. His thoughts are driven by a flowing force when he feels joy, when he feels fear, when he feels sorrow. Thoughts can wash over him like a flood, making his breath come in gasps and his heart throb. Something, like an abatement in the weather, will keep him thawed up. And then it will happen that we, who always think we are small, will feel still smaller. And we will fear to use words. But it will happen that the words we need will come of themselves. When the words we want to use shoot up of themselves – we get a new song."

When Diamond Jenness set out to record Inuinnait drum dancing in 1915, he asked the singers what type of songs they were singing. Most of the songs were *pihiit*, and a few were *atuun*. Listening to the music and words, Jenness could not tell any difference between the two. When an atun was performed in the dance hall, the drummer would hand the drum over to a singer in the circle mid-way through the song, and then proceed to dance wildly and freely. In these dances singers sometimes acted out animal pantomime, called *aquarmuitaaq*, imitating the loon, the ermine or other animals. These dances were a perfect time to wear the loon dancing cap, adorned with the beak of a loon and strips of ermine fur.

Jenness concluded that *pihiit* and *atuun* are distinguished mainly by the accompanying dance style.

A song feast at Dolphin Straight, in which the singer performs with the loon cap (Hansen in Rasmussen, 1932).

When Jenness compared Inuinnait drum dance songs with the music of the Inuvialuit, from the Mackenzie delta region further west, he made an interesting discovery. While most Inuinnait dance songs were *pihiit*, the Inuvialuit performed mainly *atuun*. Jenness had a theory that the two types of songs were once very distinct; *pihiit* belonging to the Inuinnait and *atuun* to more western Inuvialuit groups.

Aqiutiit

Aqiutiit, also known as *sakausiit*, were old spirit hymns passed down through generations. Shamans commonly sung these songs for ceremonial purposes. They were sung to *hilap inue*, the spirits of the air, and to Arnakaffaaluk, the mistress of the sea beasts, in hopes of gaining their favour in regards to weather and hunting. In some cases, the incantation was sung from the spirits' perspective as a way encouraging them to respond.

Unlike most songs, the performance of *aqiutiit* in the dance hall was a serious and solemn affair. The words were vague and mysterious, and most people did not fully understand their meaning. Shamans used language in a different manner than other people, replacing normal words with riddle-like descriptions. A shaman, for example, might refer to a seal as a 'broth provider', or replace the word 'feet' by 'that on which one rests'. It was believed that by singing these mysterious songs the spirits would be enticed to listen in.

Here is a part of a hymn from the Kiluhiktuurmiut people, recorded by Knud Rasmussen (1932:181):

Soul whence have you gone?
Let me fetch you, let me fetch you!

They who live south of us, south of them again, you have gone!
Let me fetch you, let me fetch you!

Soul where have you gone?
They who live east of us, east of them again, you have gone!

Let me fetch you, let me fetch you!
Whither have you gone my souls?

Ingulrait Pihiit

Another form of ancient song are *ingulrait pihiit*, the songs of the departed. These are the pihiit of ancestors from long ago, their songs passed down from generation to generation. The name of each pihiq's original singer is known for some of the songs, but not for all. Often, all that is known about a song's original author is provided in the song itself. Unlike normal *pihiit*, *ingulrait pihiit* are more sentimental and often seek to express some philosophy of life.

Erinaliotiit

Erinaliotiit are songs composed of ancient magic words. These songs were to be safeguarded by their composers and not performed for others. If they became common knowledge, they lost their power to provide good luck, heal sickness and bring about good weather. Tatilgak, a Kiluhiktuurmiut man, once shared magic words with Knud Rasmussen (1932:113). He said the words were given to him by his grandfather and he gave this explanation for their power:

"One makes magic songs when a man's thoughts begin to turn towards another or something that does not concern him; without his hearing it, one makes magic songs so that there may be calm in his mind, to make his thoughts pleasant – for a man is dangerous when he is angry."

Tatilgak also explained that magic songs were to be recited only inside the house early in the morning before anyone has set foot on the floor. On rare occasions, they could also be recited under an open sky, but only in places where there were no tracks in the snow. In this magic song sung to Knud Rasmussen by Tatilgak (1932:115), the singer imagines himself as a wolf, the best hunter of caribou, thus bringing good luck to the hunt:

"Nau-nau-nau Nau-nau-nau
A wolf am I, just wait for me!
A caribou bull's – perhaps – head
With throat and lower jaw hanging on
With throat hanging on!
Nau-nau-nau Nau-nau-nau
A little fox am I and as a fox I expect
A young bull-caribou's head
With lower jaw hanging on
With throat hanging on!"

Iviutiit

Iviutiit, or songs of derision, were likely not present in Inuinnait culture. Such songs were typically sung further to the east. This form of song was meant to embarrass someone by insulting them and listing all their faults. *Iviutiit* were used in song duels, which were arguments between two people performed through song. The song duel would help the individuals resolve their dispute by allowing them to act out their anger in a playful and public way. On some occasions, a dispute would escalate into violence. In Greenland, song duels were used as a form of trial, with the qalgiq as courthouse and the audience as jurors making judgment between the accuser and the accused. The Inuinnait also had song duels between song companions, but the tradition was playful rather than focused on dispute.

While the Wind Whispers

An excerpt from Qingordleq's song recorded by Knud Rasmussen in 1932.

What, I wonder, bearing in his thoughts
That dear south wind out there
Whispers?

Those who live north of us out there the little people
Bearing in their thoughts
It whispers

Ajai-jai-ija!
Ayai-yai-iya!

What, I wonder, bearing in its thoughts
The dear east wind out there
Whispers?

Ajai-jai-ija!
Ayai-yai-iya!

Those who live inland behind us perhaps – in there
The little people in there bearing in their thoughts

Mary Ekalukpiak and Edith Egialak with their babies at a drum dance gathering, Kugluktuk area, ca. 1950 (Harrington/LAC/PA-147236).

Chapter 6

The Spirits Who Hear the Drum

The act of drum dancing was strongly connected to spiritual rituals and practices. While Inuinnait did not have organized religion, they did possess many beliefs about spirits and good behaviour, and followed strict social rules and taboos. They believed that the human spirit lived on after the death of the body. They believed that animals had accompanying spirits that could intervene in the human world for either good or bad purposes. Every person was also believed to possess their own *tornaq*, or guardian animal spirit. Like many Inuit groups, Inuinnait believed that a woman called Kannakapfaluk lived at the bottom of the sea and decided whether to send seals in the winter or punish people with famine. The act of drum dancing was thoroughly interwined with all of these beliefs, providing a voice through which communication with the spirit realm could occur.

According to anthropologist, Knud Rasmussen, the literal translation of *qilaut*, or drum, means 'that by which the spirits are called up'. The rumbling drum invited the souls of ancestors back from the land of the dead, where all songs were believed to originate. The link between songs and spirits extends back to the sacred origins of drum dancing when only shamans could wield the drum as part of a séance or ritual. Despite drum dancing being gradually adopted as a form of entertainment, a distinction still exists between shamans' hymns (*aqiutiit*) and more popular dance songs (*pihiit*).

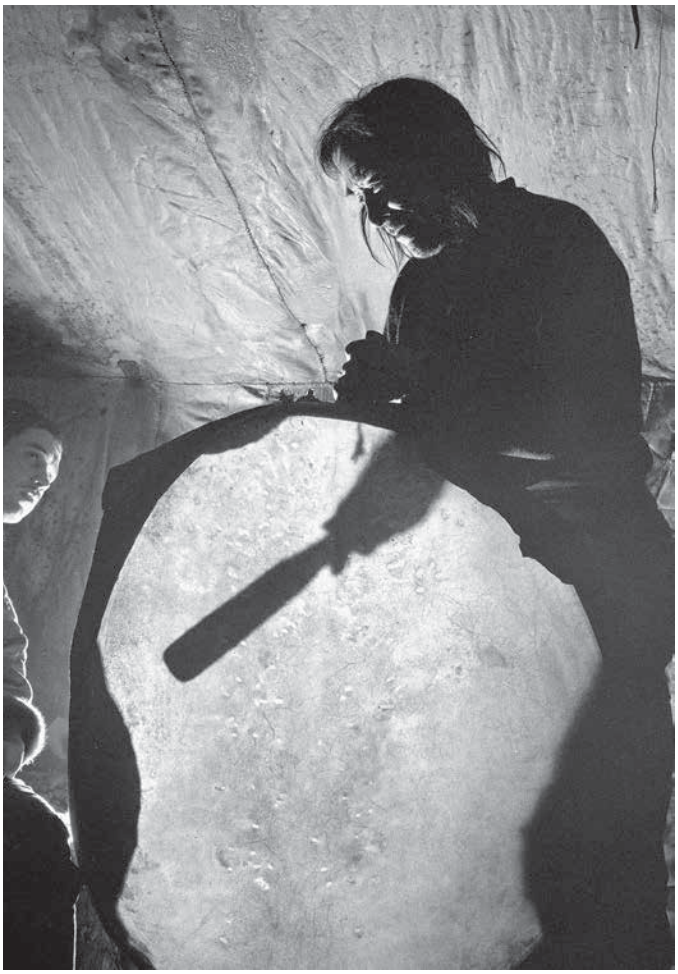
Aqiutiit were led by the shaman and sung solemnly in respect of the ancestors. The songs of the departed (*ingulrait pihiit*) were sung with similar reverence. These songs were designed to invite the spirits of the ancestors into the circle of the dance hall, while *pihiit* were performed for the benefit of the living.

Heq, an Umingmaktuurmiut shaman (Hansen in Rasmussen, 1932).

Shamans' hymns were used in preparation for séances, which sought direct contact with individual spirits. Shamanic ceremonies could take many different forms. Sometimes a shaman would invite a spirit into his or her own body to communicate with the audience using mysterious words and dramatic displays. Other times, shaman would act out a battle with an unseen, tormenting spirit by running about the dance hall and struggling violently. Conjuring tricks added to the excitement of these supernatural duels. These ceremonies were ultimately for the benefit of the village: they helped to encourage favourable weather and prosperous hunting, to cure the sick and find lost hunters, and to make peace with (or defeat) the spirits who were threatening the group. Sometimes, however, shamans had more selfish motivations for their rituals, such as personal profit or revenge.

Another function of the shaman in the community was to enforce the many taboos that governed the lives of the Inuinnait. Almost every aspect of daily life was regulated by proper forms of behaviour. There were taboos dictating when women could sew and where men could butcher animals. There were strict rules about living on the sea ice, when and where to cook, hunt and fish. Even objects such as driftwood, oil and tents had to be handled in a specific way so as not to offend the spirits. While many people did not know why specifically an action or object was taboo, the rules were upheld by stories about the severe punishments awaiting those who disobeyed.

Drum dancing was not exempt from these rules. One taboo insisted that drum dancing should always take place indoors so that the song did not drift away and cause death to the singer. Songs were seen as originating from breath, which, in turn, was understood to be the spirit of humans. If this breath was sung into open air, it became vulnerable to being snatched away by hostile winds. While the process of singing was a joyous experience, it could also make the spirit vulnerable and had to be treated with caution.



James Koighok preparing a drum for playing, ca. 1950 (Richard Harrington/LAC/PA-147222).

‘The Woman and the Spirit of the Singing House’

This story was recorded by Franz Boas on Baffin Island in the 1880s (Boas 1888).

Once upon a time, a woman entered the singing house when it was quite dark. For a long time she had wished to see the spirit of the house and, though the Inuit had warned her of the impending danger, she had insisted upon her undertaking.

She summoned the spirit saying, “If you are in the house, come here.” As she could not see him she cried, “No spirit is here; he will not come.”

But the spirit, though yet invisible, said, “Here I am; there I am.” Then the woman asked, “Where are your feet; where are your shins; where are your thighs; where are your hips; where are your loins?” Every time the spirit answered, “Here they are; there they are.”

And she asked further, “Where is your belly?” “Here it is,” answered the spirit.

“Where is your breast; where are your shoulders; where is your neck; where is your head?” “Here it is; there it is,” but, in touching the head, the woman all of a sudden fell dead. It had no bones and no hair.

An iglu lit up at night, Kugluktuk, ca. 1950 (Harrington/LAC/e010869531).

Chapter 7

Drum Dance Clothing

In traditional Inuinnait life, women typically took care of all household chores, such cooking, cleaning, collecting fuel, preparing skins and making clothes. Garments in particular were sewn with expert attention in order that they could withstand intense cold and wind. Most clothing was made from caribou hides, with waterproof accessories, such as boots, being made from seal skin. When available, the fur of ermines and polar bears was used for clothing fringes and ornamentation. Lengths of raw copper were hammered into needles, and caribou sinew was split and used as thread. Harvested skins were scraped, dried in the sun, cleaned and softened with tools and chewing prior to being made into clothes.

Having durable clothes for the winter made the difference between life and death for many hunters. These hunters spent long hours on the unsheltered ice waiting for seals at breathing holes. A small rip or a bad seam in the coat would let in cold air and send them home early, with no meat for the hungry mouths that awaited them.

A prosperous person would typically own two good sets of work clothes: a thick set of winter clothes for travelling and a lighter set of ornamented summer clothes. This last set of clothes was typically worn inside the dance hall for ceremonial occasions like song feasts. Dance clothes were sewn with both form and function in mind. They needed to be light-weight and comfortable to support long hours of vigorous singing and dancing. They would also have to be the most beautiful garments an individual owned. Caribou hides would be harvested in the late summer for dance clothing. At this time of year, caribou skins are thin and dark in colour, with delicate pelage that makes them light to wear and soft to touch. White belly fur (*pukiq*) stained with red ochre was used as decorative strips up the front of the coat. Strips of ermine fur were attached down the back of the coat as ornaments and in recognition of dance companions.

In addition to a hooded coat, pants and boots, a dance costume might also include a cap. There were two types of hats. One was a simple cap made from thin strips of fur, with a string to tie under the chin. The other dance cap had the beak of a loon sticking straight up from the crown and strips of ermine hanging down the back. Dance shoes were often made from white seal-skin (*tuatuatsiak*), crimped around the bottom and with a black triangle insertion over the toes. Gloves would be worn while dancing, even in spring and summer. Ornaments, such as polar bear teeth or claws, and knuckle-bones of the seal, were often suspended from a dancer's coat.

Traditional Inuinnait clothing was designed with symbolic reference to animals and their characteristics. Caribou ears were attached to the hood of a man's coat as camouflage for hunting. A short tail of white caribou belly fur (*pukiq*) down the back of a coat represented the wolf, the caribou's enemy. The combination of opposing animal forces was characteristic of Inuit designs. The combination of a graceful loon and cunning ermine on dance caps was also a common mixture of imagery. While this form of design was found on everyday clothing, it was more clearly expressed in ceremonial garb.

Annie Kalotifaluk preparing her sewing (Harrington/LAC/e010869480).

Taktogon softening caribou skin using her teeth, ca. 1950 (Harrington/LAC/PA-130003).

Haikok wearing traditional Copper Inuit style winter clothing, 1931 (Finnie/LAC/PA-101143).

The Loon Dance Cap

The loon cap is one of the most distinctive elements of the Inuinnait dancing costume. The hat was made from thin strips of fur and a string which attached the cap around the chin. A single loon's beak was attached to the cap's crown so that it pointed straight up. A strip of ermine fur would hang loosely down the back of the hat and could swung around in display.

"When someone could do the bird dance and dance with the drum, then that person could wear the fancy outfits with all the fringe. It showed that they can dance without the drum. But the dancer had to be able to dance the two ways before they could wear this fancy dress outfit."

~ Nellie Hikok, circa 1993

The loon was greatly admired by Inuinnait for its elegant song, speed and elaborate mating dance. Because of these properties, loons were often included in the manufacture of clothing and artifacts. The loon beak was seen to represent courtship and fertility. The ermine, in contrast, was admired for its intelligence, alertness and ability to camouflage its fur colour during winter. Ermine pelts were valued for their ability to guard their wearer against both human and spiritual enemies. The scarcity of materials required to make a loon dance cap meant that a community generally only possessed one or two of the hats. Their owners would share the cap during dances alongside the drum.

A loon dance cap (CMC IV-D-1214).

A traditional loon skin storage bag sewn by Cambridge Bay elders, 2011 (Griebel/KHS).

June Klengenberg: Profile of a Drum Dancer and Seamstress

Born in the 1920s, June is a descendent of Patsy Klengenberg, a famous Inuit trader from the Kitikmeot region. June is one of the few remaining elders who not only grew up on the land, but who also lived traditionally as an adult. She possesses a wealth of knowledge about Inuinnait crafts and traditions that she readily shares with her grandchildren and community. She makes richly decorated garments using traditional methods to prepare the skins. Her clothes are featured throughout many books and museum exhibits.

Despite being over 90 years of age, June continues to join the drum dance circle whenever the elders get together at the Brighter Futures Elders Centre or the Kugluktuk Recreation Hall. Her song can be heard on a forthcoming album of Kugluktuk drum dance songs.

June Klengenberg drum dances wearing a home-made ground squirrel-skin dance coat (featured in detail, below), Kugluktuk, 2011 (Krucas/KHS).

Chapter 8

A History of Drum Dancing

The history of the Inuinnait people is recorded in songs and stories. While many of these accounts are timeless, the specific details of historic events, such as the massacre of Inuit at Bloody Falls on the Coppermine River (1771) and early encounters with Nordic explorers and whalers, are safeguarded through storytelling and the lyrics of songs. Having no form of written text, Inuinnait took care to accurately preserve details when passing their oral traditions down through generations.

Inuit drum dance is among the world's oldest existing musical traditions, though its precise origins are not exactly known. Drum dancing was originally a practice particular to shamans. To this day, many of the older shamanic hymns contain lyrics and poetry so antiquated that they can no longer be understood. With no written records and few archaeological clues, the time depth of this shamanic practice can only be guessed at.

Inuinnait shamanism has its origins amongst the early indigenous groups of Siberia. The drum was an important shamanic tool amongst all of these groups, its droning beat able to dissolve the barriers between the world of spirits and of the living. Based on the many similarities in dress, design and social role that exist between drum ceremonies performed by both Inuit and Siberian shamans, it seems likely that Inuinnait shamanism and drum ceremonies extend all the way back to Yupik origins in Siberia.

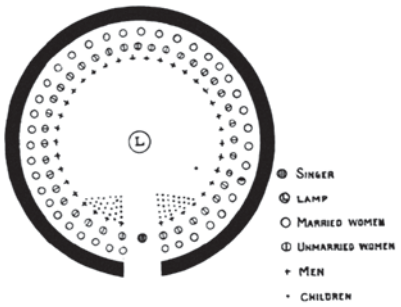
Explorers, Whalers and Anthropologists Discover the Drum Dance

Until the 19th century, Inuit had very little contact with Europeans, save for scattered encounters with explorers searching for gold and a passable trade route to Asia. In the 1850s, with an expanding market for whale-derived products, such as baleen and oil, British and American whaling companies began making regular trips to the Arctic in pursuit of the animals. Inuit were hired to work on whaling ships and were quickly introduced to manufactured goods, such as cloth, iron and rifles. While these materials greatly enhanced the Inuit quality of life, it also made individuals financially dependent on commerical activities.

This period of intense contact resulted in an increased interest in recording the culture and traditions of the Inuit people. While the details of northern life were originally recorded through observations in explorers' journals and ship logs, a more dedicated form of cultural study developed through the field of anthropology. These researchers were more concerned with understanding and documenting Inuit culture than changing it, and are responsible for much of the written knowledge we have today regarding early practices in the Arctic.

Drum dancing was a custom that proved to be particularly interesting to many northern researchers. The following time-line highlights the significant early studies to be made about drum dancing:

1819-1820: British explorer Sir William Edward Parry commands an expedition in search of the Northwest Passage. In an ensuing narrative of the expedition by accompanying Captain George F. Lyon, the first account of Inuit drum dancing is published, complete with illustrations and several transciptions of songs.



A diagram showing the interior of an eastern Baffin Island dance hall (Boas 1888).

Inuit dancing on Winter Island, north of Hudson's Bay. Illustration by George F. Lyon, 1821.

1883-1884: Franz Boas (1858-1942), considered the father of modern anthropology, visits the Arctic as a young geographer to map and record unexplored areas of Baffin Island. During his travels by dog-team, he encounters and lives with Inuit people, learning both their langauge and customs. This experience inspires him to change careers and commit to the study of human culture. His resulting book, *The Central Eskimo* (1888), includes detailed cultural descriptions of drum dancing as well as a selection of songs. Boas' understudy in ethnology, Captain George Comer, would later make the first phonograph recording of drum dancing in 1903.

1912-1933: Knud Rasmussen (1879-1933) is recognized as the father of Eskimology for his extensive studies of Inuit peoples from across the Arctic. Born in Greenland to mixed Danish and Inuit parentage, he grew up with both the language and cultural skills of the Greenlandic Inuit. From 1912-1933 he embarked on a series of seven Arctic dogsled voyages known as the Thule Expeditions, designed to document the natural and cultural environment of the Arctic. The most renowned of these extended from Greenland to Nome, Alaska, and catalogued an extensive collection of artifacts, scientific data and cultural practices. Being a native speaker of Inuit languages, Rasmussen managed to capture the beauty, humour and subtlety of the poetry present in drum dance music. This can be especially seen in his transcriptions of numerous Inunnait songs.

Above: A drawing of a song feast by Palaiyak, a Mackenzie River youth, included in Jenness' book 'Life of the Copper Eskimos' (1923).

Right: Nookudluk looks though Richard Finnie's camera on the set of the first ever drum dance movie, 1931 (Finnie/LAC/e002342726).

1913-1918: Diamond Jenness (1886-1969) was a New Zealand-born anthropologist hired to work on the Canadian Arctic Expedition from 1913-1918. Over the course of the expedition, Jenness befriended, lived with and learned from various Inuinnait families. He produced five hours of audio recordings of drum dance music and completed the largest ever study of Inuinnait music with musicologist Helen Roberts of Columbia University.

1931: Richard Finne (1906-1987) created the first moving pictures of drum dancing with the Puivlirmiut people. The movie starred Ikpakuak (mentioned earlier in this booklet), and featured a special open-air dance hall so that the performance would have enough light to be filmed.

Silencing the Drum: Missionaries, Residential Schools and the RCMP

Throughout the beginning of the 20th century, the Canadian Arctic saw a period of rapid cultural change. The era saw an influx of southern missionaries competing to convert Inuit to the Catholic and Anglican religions. At the same time, trading posts were being set up throughout the north, encouraging Inuit to exchange trapped furs for material goods, such as rifles, tobacco and metal tools. Settled Inuit communities began to form around these posts as people started to abandon their semi-nomadic lifestyles in favour of trapping and trading small game. While their quality of life improved from access to foreign goods, Inuit grew increasingly dependent on material exchange rather than self-reliant hunting and gathering.

The 1930s saw a collapse in the fur trade, with the prices provided for skins falling dramatically. Combined with a decrease in local caribou populations, due to over-hunting with rifles and changing migration routes, it became more difficult for Inuinnait to feed themselves according to traditional means. Many people starved. This prompted many debates in the Canadian government as to whether Inuit should resume a traditional lifestyle or become assimilated into southern ways of life. Throughout the 1930s and '40s, impoverished camps grew larger around trading posts, aggravated by problems of disease and alcoholism. In the 1950s the federal government implemented a policy of sedentarization and assimilation, using such drastic measures as relocation and the slaughtering of sled dogs to force individuals to remain in constructed settlements.

Trading furs for supplies at the Hudson Bay Company post in Kugluktuk, 1949 (Harrington/LAC/PA-143236).

A woman signs a document in the Kugluktuk RCMP office, 1949 (Harrington/LAC/PA-129879).

At the same time, the government expanded their residential school program, in which large numbers of school-aged children were forcibly removed to distant schools for nine months of the year. Churches were put in charge of educating Inuit children and assimilating them into mainstream Canadian society. Children were forbidden to speak their native language and to practice their culture. Priests often treated traditional religious beliefs, which included the drum dance, as a form of witchcraft. The combination of homesickness, alienation from culture, and, sometimes, abuse was often too much for these children to bear. When students began to graduate and return home in the 1960s and '70s, many were severely traumatized and resorted to alcohol and violence, which passed the cycle of abuse along to their to their own children.

As a result of residential schools, many important cultural practices failed to be passed down to new generations of Inuinnait. Drum dancing was kept alive by individuals who grew up on the land prior to being sent to residential school or who escaped residential school entirely. The disapproval of many churches meant that drumming had to remain hidden in communities. While traditions of drumming and dance halls fell silent, knowledge of the practice continued to beat within the hearts and minds of Inuinnait people.

Children staying at the school hostel in Kugluktuk, 1958 (LAC e004923640-v6).

Chapter 9

A Time of Healing and Renewal

"Churches or missionaries forbid the practice of drum dancing, saying it was bewitching. So, Inuit stopped drum dancing for many years, until around 1970s, when we got brave and decided to take back our culture. When Inuit Tapiriisat of Canada was established, its aim was to take back Inuit culture and so we did. We then decided to talk more about Inuit culture. Residential schools did not have anything like promoting culture or language."

~ Peter Irniq

The past 20 years has been a time of healing and renewal in Inuit society. The Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami was founded in 1971 to help Inuit preserve their culture and establish a distinct Inuit homeland within Canada. This goal was achieved when the territory of Nunavut was founded in 1999. The last residential school closed in the 1990s, around reports and investigations relating to student abuse. In 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper made a formal apology to the survivors of residential schools, recognizing that policies of assimilation were wrong and caused great harm to indigenous people. Despite these advances, many challenges remain. These are gradually being overcome through a return to more traditional forms of education. Elder and youth land camps are being held to instruct younger generations in the skills of their ancestors. Healing initiatives are helping residential school survivors to re-connect with heritage they lost. Throughout this whole process, drum dancing has surfaced as a strong symbol of pride and revitalization of the Inuit culture. Elders are once again picking up the drum and recalling the songs they heard in their youth. Inuinnait elder Mary Kilaodluk shares her personal story of learning to drum dance:

"I'm so proud because I started to drum dance. I learned to drum dance in the 1990s. I never danced as a child. I always just watched. I loved watching my father and grandfather. My grandfather had a really big drum. He had to help me hold it. I can never forget about when my mom, dad and I would watch drum dances when I was growing up in Bathurst Inlet. When my parents wanted to go back home I started really crying. I wanted to stay. I still remember, I was really crying. I wanted to stay and watch the drum dancing all night. I loved it so much. When I was older, I decided that I would teach myself how to drum dance. I am proud that I taught myself. Drum dancing makes me feel so happy."

~ Mary Kilaodluk

Inuit youth have also begun looking to the drum as a way of understanding and re-connecting to their traditional culture and language. Numerous drum dance groups have begun to form around Nunavut. While dedicated to learning the old songs and stories, performers are beginning to experiement with new styles of drumming and song-making to better meet the interests of young and modern Inuit society. As a form of entertainment, history, healing and remembrance, drum dancing continues to draw communities closer together.

In the winter of 2011, the Kitikmeot Heritage Society hosted a drum dance workshop in the community of Kugluktuk. Once again, elders and youth gathered together around the drum. For two weeks, the windows of the local community hall glowed brightly against the swirling snow and perpetual darkness of the landscape. Songs were sung, ancestors were remembered and stories were exchanged. A nearly lost tradition was lifted from out of the past, and placed into the hands of a new generation. To commemorate the event, the Kitikmeot Heritage Society has since released a full CD of studio recorded drum dance songs from the workshop to help ensure that the music will never be lost again.

"I have no words in English for how I feel about my culture. It hits right at the bottom of my heart and soul. When I'm drum dancing, when I'm on the land, hunting and fishing, I learn something new every time. I hope that youth will begin to speak Inuinnaqtun more. I hope that we won't forget words and their meanings. I don't want us to lose any parts of our culture."

~ Fred Kataoyak, Uluhaktok

Mary and Tommy Kilaodluk singing and drum dance in a modern snow qalgiq, Cambridge Bay, 2006 (KHS).

Joseph Niptanatiak performs a song while being accompanied by his grand-daughter Priscilla Niptanatiak and his sister Nancy Kadlun, Kugluktuk, 2011 (KHS).

References and Recordings

Recordings

Published recordings of drum dance music remain rare. Inuit elders sometimes have personal collections of tapes recorded at drumming sessions and traded with other individuals. If you know an elder, don't be shy to ask them for a copy. Only a few albums have ever been published commercially, some of which are already out of print. Check at your local library or search for them on the Internet. The Kitikmeot Heritage Society will be publishing a new series of drum dance music in 2012. They can be contacted through their website at www.kitikmeotheritage.ca for questions or to order a copy. Other sources of drum dance music include:

Music of the Inuit: The Copper Eskimo Tradition. Recorded by Jean-François LeMouël and Alain Desjacques. UNESCO, 1994.
Chants et tambours inuit, de Thulé au Détroit de Béring. Ocora C559021, Paris, 1988.

Inuit Songs from Eskimo Point. Ramón Adolfo Pelinski, Luke Suluk, and Lucy Amarook. Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1979. (This is a book that comes with a record.)

Music of the Netsilik Eskimo A Study of Stability and Change. Beverley Cavanagh. Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1982.

Inuit: 55 Historical Recordings of Traditional Greenlandic Music. Compiled by Michael Hauser. Sub Rosa, Le Coeur du Monde, SR115. Belgium.

Inukshuk Productions is an Inuit music label located in Inukjuak, Nunavik. The album Tradition (2001) is a compilation of traditional music styles from across the arctic. It can be purchased from www.InukshukProductions.ca.

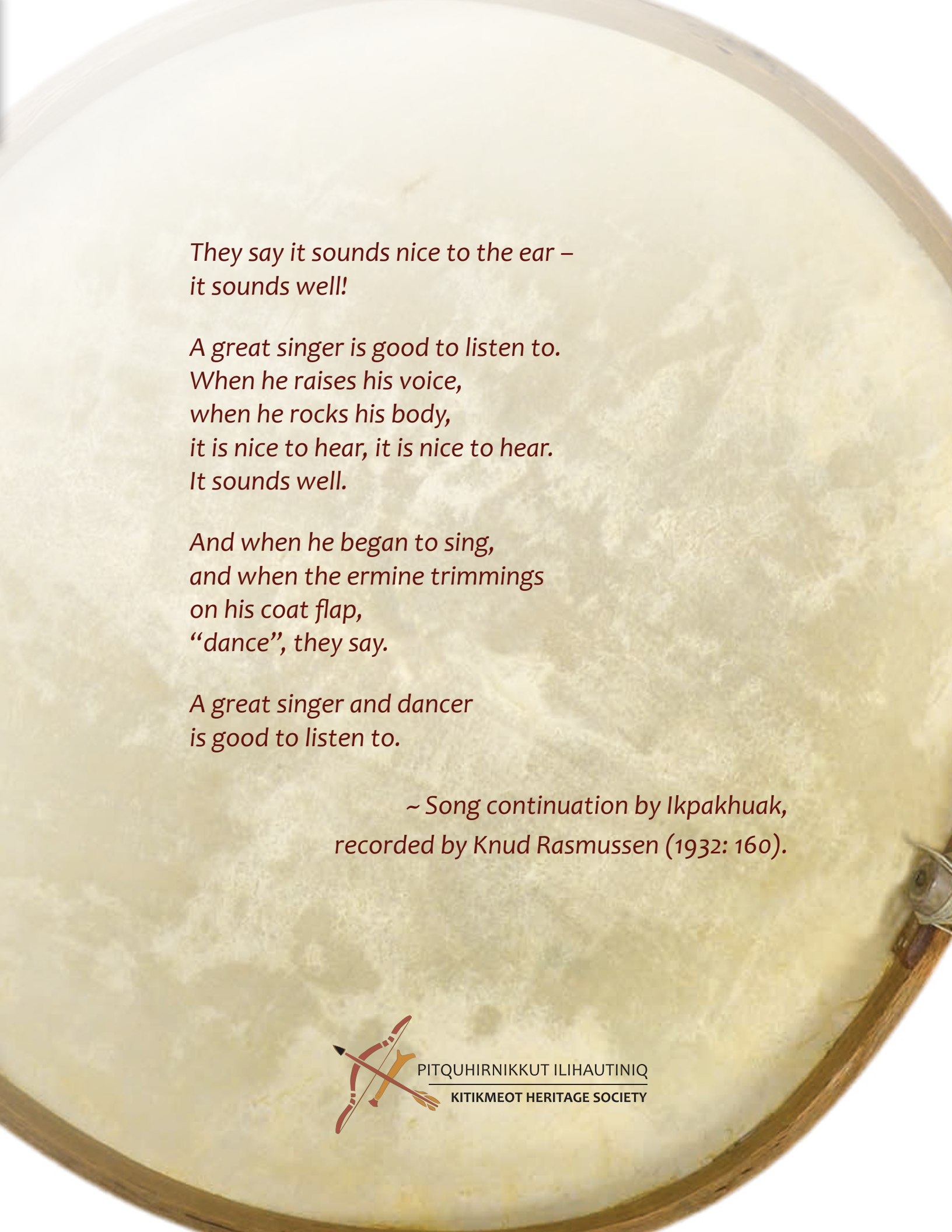
At the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Ottawa, there is a large archive of sound recordings relating to drum dancing. Notable Inuinnait collections include the Diamond Jenness recordings (Coronation Gulf 1915) and the Doreen Binnington collection (Kugluktuk 1973-74). Museum archivists are happy to share these recordings with the public. The museum's website can be found at www.civilization.ca

References

Boas, Franz. 1888. *The Central Eskimo.* Washington, DC: Bureau of American Ethnology.

Jeness, Diamond. 1923. *The Copper Eskimos. Part A: The Life of the Copper Eskimos.* Report of the Canadian Arctic Expedition, 1913-1918, vol. 12.

Rasmussen, Knud. 1932. *Intellectual Culture of the Copper Eskimos.* Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition 1921-1924, vol 9. Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, Nordisk Forlag.



They say it sounds nice to the ear –
it sounds well!

A great singer is good to listen to.
When he raises his voice,
when he rocks his body,
it is nice to hear, it is nice to hear.
It sounds well.

And when he began to sing,
and when the ermine trimmings
on his coat flap,
"dance", they say.

A great singer and dancer
is good to listen to.

~ Song continuation by Ikpakhuak,
recorded by Knud Rasmussen (1932: 160).

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