



**Plate 4:** Point Hope dancer Herbert Kinnevauk performs the hunters' spinning-top dance, where hunters catch flying white feathers to determine whaling success.

The spring Whaling Feast is an important seasonal event for the Inupiaq; almost all of the protein consumed in winter derives from whale meat previously stored in underground frozen chambers. Building the sturdy walrus-skin boats and hunting the whale requires much skill and experience; this is reflected in the language, which has twenty different words for the bowhead whale alone, depending on whether one has sighted a young female whale, a young male, a fat mature female, an old male, a complete whale family, etc. The bowhead whale grows up to seventy feet in length. In 1964 Amos Lane of Point Hope caught one sixty-four feet in length. In 1970 Simeon Patkotak of Barrow caught one sixty-seven feet in length (Frankson 1980: 3).

Numerous dishes are made with the whale meat, including *mikigaq* (fermented meat), pickled *maktak*, and *mamaaq*, from the base of the baleen. The bones of the whale are used as rafters, arches, and fence-posts. The lower jaw bones are used as sled-runners and in the construction of the posts of the boat-rack which protects the boat-skins from the dogs in summer.

The baleen is used for scrimshaw carving and for making baleen baskets. The lung- and liver-lining is used for making drumheads, and the blubber for light-oil and heat-oil. Thus, for the Inupiaq, whaling is an essential occupation and a core social and economic activity, and the whal-

ing feast and its associated music-making may be seen as a crystallization of Inupiaq values in the matter.

Before the whale hunt, the crew gather inside their whaling lodge and perform the ceremonial spinning-top dance. This is when a handful of bird feathers is inserted loosely into a hole in the whalers' spinning-top, and the top is spun, ejecting the feathers at random into the air. The whaler catching the whitest feather (snow owl) is predicted to make the first whale catch of the forthcoming season.

When the hunt is underway upon the ocean, and the whale is sighted, the song called *qagru-gautaiyaun* is sung, thus slowing the whale's progress. Once the whale is caught, its parts are ceremonially distributed throughout the community according to rank and status. There are three main whaling feasts: (1) the *aqirruk* feast held in the fall, (2) the *aqirruk* feast held in the spring, and (3) the Whaling Feast held in June. The spring *aqirruk* must take place before the *qupal-luich* sparrows lay their eggs after arriving when the snow starts to melt in May.

For the June Whaling Feast, the beach is marked out with special markers where each whaling lodge is to deposit its upturned boat; this acts as a shelter and windbreaker for the dancing, which features the *nalukataun* blanket-toss and its dance and song. Formerly, the walrus skins were tied to immobile posts made from three large whale bones, but now everyone is positioned around the perimeter of the walrus skin, and helps to pull, lift, and bounce it while the jumper, called the *nalukataqtuaq*, is thrown into the air. During the jumping, the drummers and singers perform the special songs traditionally associated with this ceremony, and the jumper opens a bag while jumping, spilling out communal gifts, which shower down upon the people below. The song-text topics reflect the whole range of whaling activities, including men's role, women's role (women take care of the meat), sea mammal behavior, mishaps out on the ocean, whaling mythology, and a mystical union between the land (humans) and the sea (whales, walruses, seals).

### The Inviting-In

In addition to the Whaling Feast, the Inupiaq hold frequent Inviting-Ins. In this, pairs of neighboring communities such as Barrow and Wainwright participate in competitive athletics, music-