

COLLECTIONS

THE FOSCO MARAINI IKUPASUY COLLECTION

By Aubrey MacKenzie and Christopher B. Lowman

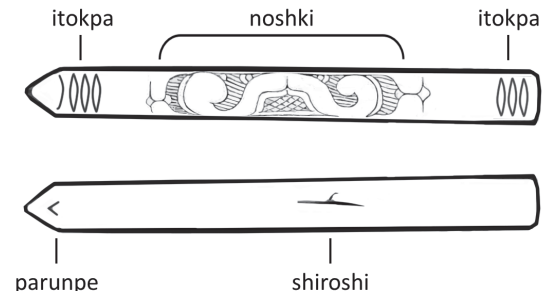
Many museums in the U.S. house collections of objects created and used by the Ainu, the Indigenous people of Northern Japan. Through a combination of long anthropological interest, tourism, and Japanese policy, some of the oldest and most ornate Ainu objects are today located outside Japan in places like the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History, the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, and the Brooklyn Museum. Other collections remain in private hands. One private collection, consisting of 32 Ainu objects, surfaced late in 2022 at an auction in Paris. Tracing its history provides a window into the creation of Ainu collections and suggests future work that can be done to tie them to their communities of origin.

Ainu homelands encompass Hokkaido, Sakhalin, the Kuril islands, and the Tohoku region of Honshu, although today most Ainu live only on Hokkaido. For centuries, the Ainu maintained extensive trade networks with Japan, Russia, China, and other Indigenous peoples around the Sea of Okhotsk. Trade items like metal and lacquerware became deeply embedded within Ainu everyday practices. Conflicts and later forced assimilation efforts by the Japanese government led to restrictions on Ainu trade, religion, and language. Despite this, many Ainu people have continued to adapt and preserve their culture.

After the 1868 Meiji Restoration, Western travelers and anthropologists observed changes in Ainu everyday life occurring because of Japanese policies and the rapid spread of imposed forms of agriculture and industry. Unfortunately, these outside observers conflated change with the assumption that Ainu people themselves would inevitably vanish. This belief fueled extensive collecting by travelers and museum-sponsored expeditions (Fitzhugh 1999). Due to this salvage ethnography approach, collectors often focused on Ainu-made objects, ignoring items obtained through trade despite their importance for the Ainu themselves (Lowman 2018).

Collectors especially desired items used in Ainu religious practices. Traditionally, Ainu believe in many spiritual beings (*kamuy*), whom they worship and describe in poems, sagas, and stories (*yukar*). *Kamuy* differ by region and among individuals but can be both living and nonliving things such as

animals, plants, mountains, rivers, and tools (Yamasaki 2018). Communication with *kamuy* involves material intermediaries like *ikupasuy*, sacred flat sticks carved with meaningful and decorative designs. *Ikupasuy* would be dipped into a cup (*tuki*) containing rice wine and then used to scatter droplets of liquid as offerings to *kamuy*. Due to their ritual importance and unique carvings, they were prized personal items. Ainu activist **Shigeru Kayano** described *ikupasuy* as “a living thing with a soul” (Kayano 1978:241-44). Most *ikupasuy* are about the length and width of a ruler. No two are identical, but many share similar patterns and motifs, especially in the central design (*noshki*), and often included stylized designs of the orca whale *kamuy* (*Repun-kamuy*). Some carvings related to the individual, such as repeated marks called *itokpa* on one or both ends or personal insignia on the underside called *shiroshi*. Other marks were functional: a small notch at the tip of the *ikupasuy*, called a *parunpe*, allows the stick to communicate prayers. The “anatomy” of an *ikupasuy* can be seen below.



Until the late 19th century, Ainu rarely parted with *ikupasuy*. The travel writer **Isabella Bird** recorded in 1881 that it was “not [Ainu] custom” to part with them. Over time, Ainu increasingly sold their *ikupasuy* to Japanese and Western collectors, in some cases driven by increasingly difficult economic circumstances. Shigeru Kayano remembered how, during the 1930s, collectors came to his village specifically seeking Ainu utensils (Kayano 1994). Perhaps no foreigner collected more *ikupasuy* in the 20th century than the Italian ethnologist, writer, and photographer **Fosco Maraini**.

Maraini arrived in Hokkaido in 1938, supported by a Japanese grant for international students which he used to study Ainu culture. He visited Ainu villages (*kotan*) to collect material, staying for days or weeks. He collaborated with missionary and author John Batchelor, who often served as a guide to visitors from Europe and the United States, even facilitating transactions between the visitors and the Ainu (Poster 1999). In just a few years, Maraini acquired an extensive collection.

After the outbreak of World War II, the Japanese government interned Maraini and his family alongside other Italians in Japan. Maraini's Ainu materials at the time numbered 500 objects (Maraini 1999a:420). To safeguard his collection, Maraini turned to his friend **Jean-Pierre Hauchecorne**, who offered to store them in the cellar of the French Institute of Culture in Kyoto. Hauchecorne shipped the Ainu collection back to Italy following Maraini's release and subsequent return home (Maraini 2001:161-196). Maraini later donated this collection to the Museum of Ethnology and Anthropology in Florence. However, the inventory at the museum shows only 468 Ainu objects attributed to Maraini. That leaves about 32 Ainu objects unaccounted for.

Jean-Pierre Hauchecorne died in 1995, and his wife passed away in 2013. Their children inherited the estate, and in late 2022 they sold the art collection

from Japan proper once a year to lacquer them" (Kayano 2006, 42). Others retain natural wooden surfaces. The patterns range from abstract to naturalistic motifs such as animals. One prayer stick shows six three dimensional birds across the noshki. Another has been broken at the midpoint and expertly repaired using wooden pegs and indigo-colored thread. A handful have *shiroshi* marks which are similar to *shiroshi* that appear on other *ikupasuy* collected by Maraini. Their decorated high-relief carvings and quality lacquer work match museum collections dating to the 19th century.

There is only one near match from the collection of 30 *ikupasuy* to the 120 pictured in Maraini's 1942 book, *Gli Iku-bashui degli Ainu*; however, only about 1/4 of his *ikupasuy* collection is pictured in the book. It may be that Maraini collected most of his collection after photography for his book concluded, or that he only included a subset of his collection in the book. I



The 30 Ikupasuy, photo by Christian Baraja, PIASA Auction House



Ikupasuy Details. Photo by Christian Baraja, PIASA Auction House

at auction in Paris. Included in the auction were 30 *ikupasuy*, one elm-bark (*attush*) robe, and one knife (*makiri*)—perhaps the 32 missing pieces!

At about 4:00 A.M. PST from my home about 5,000 miles away, I (**Aubrey**) was able to purchase the 30 *ikupasuy*. At the time, I had no idea that they could have once belonged to Maraini; I just knew that they were 30 of the best looking *ikupasuy* I had seen in the ~3 years I had been independently researching the Ainu.

The collection of *ikupasuy* from the Hauchecorne estate are beautifully carved with intricate, complex designs. Some have decorative paint and a lacquered surface. This may have been added by Japanese artisans after the Ainu carved them (Maraini 1999). **Shigeru Kayano** described how "Ainu asked medicine peddlers coming

(Aubrey) remain convinced that they were collected by Maraini due to the fact they came from his friend's estate. I am working with a colleague in Italy, Dr. **Sabrina Battipaglia**, to confirm.

Although some *ikupasuy* remain fixed in their display cases by thread ties, a handful have *shiroshi* marks recognizable as orca motifs of *Repun-kamuy*. These } bracket-shapes, S-curves, and lines with hooks all appear among the styles illustrated in the iconographic work of **Bronislaw Pilsudski** (1912) and Maraini (1942). Others have X-patterns associated with the bear spirit, *Kim-un-kamuy*. Several have two or more marks. According to Shigeru Kayano, "When the owner changed, a new 'family-crest' could be added in front of or behind the original one" (Kayano 2006:42). These

multiple *shiroshi* suggest age: they may have changed hands several times, potentially across generations.

The 30 *ikupasuy*, *attush* robe, and *makiri* from the Hauchecorne estate sale are “missing pieces” to multiple puzzles. First, given their recent provenance, they likely represent missing objects once in the collection of Fosco Maraini. Further documents or museum records could confirm that information. Second, by virtue of their preservation and markings, these *ikupasuy* may be over a century old or older, evidence of both trade and the passing of important objects among Ainu people. Today, many *ikupasuy* still in Japan are relatively recent, while these have the potential to reveal older techniques and craftsmanship in designs, methods of repair, and symbolic significance. Finally, when collections like these appear, they offer hope for future research and collaboration. Marks and artistic styles could help trace these objects back to their communities of origin. In Hokkaido and elsewhere, Ainu today continue to carve new *ikupasuy* and use them in important ceremonies and events. As research continues, the significance of the *ikupasuy* will likely continue to change as new connections are made.

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AN ASC/NMNH—UPENN MUSEUM COLLABORATION

By Elisa Palomino and John Cloud

An interesting research collaboration was initiated by **Elisa Palomino** as part of her continuing research on both historic uses of fish skins for clothing and accessories by pan-boreal peoples of the North. The project also studies contemporary uses and applications of fish leather and other natural raw materials as important alternatives in a world drowning in plastics. Materials 'made from nature' and derived from plants and animals return quickly to nature, so museum historical collections are important repositories of past artifacts, tools, and even techniques that might be preserved.

In December 2022, Elisa and **John Cloud** went to Philadelphia at the invitation of **William Wierzbowski**, the Keeper of Collections of the Americas, at the Penn Museum. His domain includes an extraordinary collection of fish skin artifacts, with interesting provenance. In the late 19th century, Philadelphia was at an apex of scientific research and industrial development. The city government had a Department of Commerce, and one of its activities was to send out people searching for samples of raw materials and the 'products of native industry' all over the planet, to bring them back to Philadelphia. These included now extremely rare sets of clothing and artifacts made of fish skins, leathers, sinews, bird skins, etc. The Philadelphia Commercial Museum collection included artifacts originally sent by the Khabarovsk Regional Museum for display at the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris, in the era of great world's fairs. After the close of the Paris Exposition, **William Wilson**, Director of the Commercial Museum, had this collection shipped