Ainu Creed and Cult

Volume IV

Neil Gordon Munro

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AINU CREED AND CULT

Neil Gordon Munro (1863-1942) was born in Edinburgh where he was educated. Soon after qualifying as a medical doctor, he began to travel in the Far East, first in India and later in Japan. In 1893 he became director of the General Hospital in Yokohama and, although he returned to Europe occasionally, from that time until his death, he made Japan his home. He became interested in Japanese prehistory, and it was during his many visits to Hokkaido that he met the Ainu, the aboriginal people of Japan. His interest then shifted to them and he studied all aspects of Ainu life over several decades, finally going to live among them for the last twelve years of his life. Over several years, and in difficult conditions, he wrote his seminal work *Ainu Creed and Cult.*

Ainu Creed and Cult was the first detailed account of the Ainu to be written by either a westerner or a Japanese. Munro's object in writing it was not only to give an account of his careful observations of the people and their customs, but also to demonstrate to the world at large that the Ainu had an independent culture that deserved respect and preservation. His position of trust among the Ainu enabled him to describe fully their spirit beliefs, homes, ceremonies, social organization, festivities, arts and funerary practices. In it he established the intricacy of Ainu spirit beliefs and ritual practices, which so dominated their culture that daily life could not be understood without reference to religious and magical procedures. Munro's work stands today as a fine example of the anthropological method, as a historical record of those decades at the beginning of the century when the old Ainu ways were still followed, and as an eloquent and timeless plea for the dignity and survival of a minority culture.

AINU CREED AND CULT

NEIL GORDON MUNRO

EDITED WITH A PREFACE
AND AN ADDITIONAL CHAPTER BY
B. Z. SELIGMAN

INTRODUCTION BY
H. WATANABE

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CONTENTS

PREFACE by B. Z. Seligman *page* xi

INTRODUCTION by H. Watanabe 1

I. FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS 7

Ramat, spirit or soul. The *Kamui*, gods or spirits. The *inau*, ritual artefacts which are offered to the *kamui* and themselves retain *ramat*. Classification of the *kamui*.

II. THE KAMUI 16

The trusted *kamui* of the Ainu pantheon. Familiar and subsidiary *kamui*. Theriomorphic *kamui*. Mischievous and malicious *kamui*. Spirit helpers and personal *kamui*. *Kamui* of pestilence.

III. THE INAU 28

Their power and function. Description of various types of *inau*. Signs (*itokpa*) cut on *inau* and *ikubashui*, prayer sticks or libation wands. The correct positions of *inau* outside east window of the house.

IV. EFFIGIES 44

Types of *inau* which may be regarded as effigies of *kamui* and are highly revered. The *shutu-inau kamui*.

V. HEARTH AND HOME 55

The house as place of worship. The roof. The hearth, sacred to Kamui Fuchi; nothing allowed to contaminate its purity. Positions allocated to persons and things. Treasured objects used in ritual. The storehouse and the privy.

VI. HOUSE-BUILDING RITES 66

Purification (*epiru*) of site for a new house. Brewing the sacred beer necessary for the House-Warming Ceremony. Making the new fire. Ritual salutations.

VII. THE HOUSE-WARMING CEREMONY (*CHISEI NOMI*) 74

Shooting arrows into the roof to drive away evil spirits. Invitations to the *pase kamui* and to guests. Ceremonial behaviour of the householder and of the guests. Salutations. Libations and prayers to the *kamui* in the house and outside the sacred window. Importance of the sacred beer. Etiquette of drinking.

VIII. THE FEAST OF ALL SOULS OR FALLING TEARS (*SHINURAPA*) 87

Preparation for the feast. Procession of householder and women to the chaff-thrown *nusa* outside the sacred window. Salutation to the spirits of the doorway. The women's part in the invocation to ancestral spirits. Festivities. Ceremonial seating. Dances by elders. Dances by women.

IX. EXORCISM (*UEPOTARA*) 99

Public manifestation of sympathy, *niwen-horipa*. Ceremonies to drive away evil spirits causing illness or other misfortune. Description of rites performed to overcome Pauchi Kamui. Preliminary offerings given to various *kamui* to invoke their aid. Elaborate preparations made by river bank for purification of the patient: by fire, by water, by beating with switches and by rubbing with water-worn stones. Return to patient's house, further purification, with offerings to the *kamui* of the privy and of the courtyard. Diseases caused by spirits of the dead and by snake spirits. Treatment by water purification. Treatment of hysterical cases. Possession by snake spirit (*imu*); women who may become mediums (*tusu*). Treatment of consumption. Possession by hornet spirit. Magic to protect women in childbirth.

X. VARIOUS RITES 112

Protection for hunters. Ritual for death of a hunted bear. Sorcerers. Protection against danger when catching swordfish. Prayer and magic whilst at sea. Boat-building ritual. The bull-roarer. Tattooing. Drugs and medicine.

XI. DEATH AND BURIAL 121

The underworld; its division for good and evil persons. Departure of *ramat* from the body. Funeral food. Salutation of corpse, weeping and farewells. Preparation of the body. Chief mourners in order of kinship. Condolence. Behaviour at funeral feast; instances of reversal of customary usage. Preparations for the burial. Grave-goods. Burial rites. Rite for the corpse of a pregnant woman. Ritual of the grave-post. Purification of mourners by water and by brushing with switches.

XII. SOCIAL ORGANIZATION, by B. Z. Seligman 141

Existence of secret girdles (*kut*) worn by women and inherited in female line. Their importance in regulation of marriage, and their magical properties. The matrilineal kin group limited to four generations. Marriage regulations. Patrilineal descent of males. *Itokpa*. Inheritance. Village chieftainship. Territorial patrilineages and ancestor cult. Summary.

APPENDIX I: Invocations to the *Kamui* for Help in Cases of Severe Illness 159

APPENDIX II: The Bear Ceremony 169

BIBLIOGRAPHY 172

GLOSSARY 175

INDEX 177

ILLUSTRATIONS

PLATES

between pages 30 *and* 31

I. The author with an elder
II. Inau
III. Inau
IV. Curled Shavings
V. Itokpa
VI. Prayer Sticks or Libation Wands (*iku-bashui*)
VII. Effigies
VIII. Dangerous *kamui*
IX. *Itokpa* on stems of *Inau*
X. *Inau*, and model of roof structure
XI. Domestic objects
XII. Household treasures
XIII. Inau arranged for Bear Ceremony
XIV. Inside the house
XV. Ritual salutation
XVI. Ceremonies in the house

between pages 78 *and* 79

XVII—XXII. Exorcism rites
XXIII. Exorcism rites: treatment for Phthisis
XXIV. Funerary objects

ILLUSTRATIONS

PLATES (*continued*)

XXV. Women doing *umusa* (mutual condolence)

XXVI. Women dancing

XXVII. Ainu women

XXVIII. Secret girdles (*upshoro kut*)

XXIX. Tattooing on hands and arms of a female medium (*tusu*)

XXX. House, store house and ceremonial tripod

XXXI. Some of the author's informants

XXXII. More informants

FIGURES

1. Arrangement of *inau* in the *nusa* dedicated to various *kamui* at ordinary celebrations *page* 41
2. Plan of Ainu house 59
3. *Chisei Nomi* 77
4. *Chisei Nomi*: Preparation for the *Shinurapa Iwai* 83
5. Festivity after the *Shinurapa* 95
6. Tree-cutting rite 116
7. Order of Mourners in the Home of the Dead 127
8. Fishing and Hunting Rights 156

PREFACE

by B. Z. Seligman

NEIL GORDON MUNRO was born in Edinburgh in 1863, where he was educated and eventually studied medicine. Soon after qualifying he began to travel in the Far East, first in India and later in Japan. In 1893 he became director of the General Hospital in Yokohama, and, although he returned to Europe occasionally, from that time until his death he made Japan his home. He became interested in Japanese prehistory, and it was during his many visits to Hokkaido towards the end of last century and in the first two decades of this century that he met the Ainu.

His published works are as follows:

Primitive culture in Japan, Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan, Vol. 34, 1906.
Prehistoric Japan, Yokohama, 1908; Edinburgh, 1911.
Reflections on some European Palaeoliths and Japanese Survivals, Yokohama, 1909.
Some Origins and Survivals, Yokohama, 1911.
Various articles on the Ainu in *Nature* and other journals.

He presented his valuable collection of prehistoric remains to the Edinburgh Museum.

Munro became Chief Medical Officer in charge of the sanatorium at Karuizawa, a hill station in Japan. For many years, in the season when the calls on his professional services at Karuizawa permitted, he made long visits to Hokkaido. His main interest shifted from prehistory to the living conditions of the Ainu. He deplored the state of these hardy people who had been forced to give up their hunting and food-gathering life to gain a bare subsistence from agriculture. They were impoverished, were

becoming degenerate owing to alcohol and loss of interest in life, and were declining in numbers.

When in Japan in 1929 my husband, the late Professor C. G. Seligman, F.R.S., met Munro, he was distressed to learn that all Munro's notes on the Ainu, his specimens and photographs, had been lost in the great earthquake of 1923. At the same time, he had suffered severe financial loss and was unable to continue his Ainu studies at his own expense. Seligman was convinced of the value of Munro's accurate observation and of his intimate knowledge of the Ainu people. On his return to England he applied for funds to the Rockefeller Foundation to enable Munro to continue his investigations. Funds were granted in 1930, and Munro immediately had a small house built at Nibutani in the Saru district of Hokkaido, and settled there, with his Japanese wife, to make an intensive study of the Ainu.

His method of work was to open a clinic—in which he was aided by his wife, a trained hospital nurse—and to give free treatment to all who flocked to him. Having gained the confidence of the Ainu, he kept open house for all who came there to gossip, sing songs, tell legends and talk of past times. He was thus acquainted with a number of elders (*ekashi*), who became his regular informants, and to whom he referred as friends and teachers.

In December 1932 a second misfortune befel Munro. Before dawn one morning his thatched house at Nibutani was burnt down. He and his wife escaped from the flames, and managed to save a tin box in which he kept his Ainu notes, but all his belongings, his books, his photographic and other scientific material, were destroyed. Exposure to the bitter cold of the Hokkaido winter impaired Munro's health, and the disaster left him all but penniless. However, he did not give in.

Seligman applied for further grants. In 1933 the Rockefeller Foundation made another contribution, and grants were made by the Royal Society and the British Association for the Advancement of Science. The Asiatic Society of Japan sent a donation. A small committee for the British Association was formed, and this now comprises Professor Daryll Forde, Lord Raglan, F.S.A., Mr Arthur D. Waley, C.H., C.B.E., F.B.A., with myself as chairman.

Munro's health deteriorated. It is not quite clear in which years he returned to Karuizawa to do a summer season's work at the sanatorium and when he remained throughout the year in Hok-

kaido, but some time in 1934 he wrote saying he intended to remain in the Ainu country permanently.

In his letters he mentioned that he had recorded in the Ainu language, and translated, a large number of songs and legends, fifty invocations for the treatment of various ailments, many treatments for difficult childbirth, and descriptions of ceremonies and exorcism rites. He had also made notes on music and pastimes. He took some films when interesting ceremonies were held in the neighbourhood, and as he was not satisfied with these he engaged a professional photographer to work under his direction, while taking stills himself. Munro also mentioned that films were taken of rites and ceremonies connected with fertility, pregnancy, parturition, spirit possession and the treatment of diseases; also of ritual dancing and the Beer-straining and the Bear Ceremony. Unfortunately, only the last of these films reached this country. It is now in the possession of the Royal Anthropological Institute, where it was shown on the 10th January 1933. Recently, a positive was made from the original negative, and was shown in Athens in September 1961, at a meeting of the Comité International du Film Ethnographique et Sociologique.

The Bear Ceremony is the best known of all Ainu rites. Munro witnessed it several times but did not include a description for his book. He did mention, however, that the part of it which is performed inside the house is similar to the House-warming Ceremony, and he sent a photograph (Pl. XIII,) of the *inau* set up for the rite. For it, a bear cub was caught and tended with great care and reverence, and actually treated as the representative of the god, or perhaps the god (*kamui*) itself. When grown to suitable size, the caged bear was killed ritually. It seemed a serious omission for a book on Ainu religion to have no account of the most important rite. I have therefore added an account made from the captions Munro wrote for his film (Appendix II).

Munro also saw, on many occasions, the ritual with which a hunted bear was killed, but neither is there a written account of this. There is a short description of the former rite by Batchelor, in Hastings' *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. I, p. 249.

Various adverse circumstances made the progress of work slower than Munro expected. The rigorous climate and the hard and lonely conditions of life at Nibutani told severely on his health. Seligman raised money from private sources to enable him to carry

on until about 1938 when Munro sent him the bulk of his manuscript. Although it was arranged in book form, it was not complete nor fully prepared for publication, and none of the subjects mentioned above was included. Correspondence continued until it was broken off abruptly by Japan's entry into the war in 1941. After the war I received information from the British Consulate that Munro had died in April 1942, and that his wife's address could not be traced.

I know from numerous references to her in Munro's letters that his wife had been a great support to him, not only in looking after his health but also in his work. An elder had mentioned to Munro that women could exercise magical power by means of a secret girdle (*upshoro kut*), which they wore under their clothes. Because of the confidence the Ainu women felt in Mrs Munro, he was able to follow this subject up, and discovered that these girdles played an important part in Ainu social organization. Mrs Munro was able to persuade Ainu women to weave exact copies of five of them, and these have been given to the British Museum. It was in 1934 that a number of articles by Munro appeared in the *Japanese Advertiser* on Ainu customs, in which he mentioned the matrilineal descent of the secret girdles, their magical power and their use in regulating exogamy.

Munro's object in writing a book on the Ainu was not only to give an account of his careful observations of the people and their customs, but also to demonstrate to the world at large, and the Japanese in particular, that the Ainu had a culture of their own which was worthy of consideration, and that they were not a low grade people believing only in absurd superstitions. He emphasized this view, and when recording beliefs or ritual that might appear irrational, he took pains to compare them with European folk customs. In fact, he intended the book to be 'A Plea for Toleration', as one of his unpublished articles was entitled. To readers of this book such a plea should be unnecessary, and the parallels have been omitted.

Munro's investigation was carried out at Nibutani in the Saru River valley in south Hokkaido, but he worked with informants from other districts, and made several visits to Kitami in the north. He intended to go to Sakhalin in order to make investigations there, but was never able to do so. His chief informants were elderly men and women still versed in Ainu lore. But for Munro's efforts, much

of their knowledge would have died with them, as the old way of life was fast disappearing under growing Japanese influence, and with new conditions the old rituals, beliefs and legends were neglected. It is unlikely that any of his informants are alive today.

Munro sent an excellent series of photographs, many of which are reproduced in this volume, but unfortunately, only the prints reached this country, and I have been unable to trace the negatives. The prints and all his original manuscript will be deposited at the Royal Anthropological Institute.

Publication during the war was not possible, and afterwards, the difficulty remained of finding someone competent to revise the manuscript. It was fortunate that Mr Hitoshi Watanabe, a lecturer in the Anthropological Institute of the Faculty of Science at the University of Tokyo, who had come to London to study at University College, was eventually able to go through it. He had been a research member of the Tokyo Joint Research Committee on the Ainu, and had carried out field work in four expeditions from 1950 to 1952, so his assistance has been of great value. Besides making general comments on the manuscript, he has added footnotes drawn from his own experience, and from Japanese and other sources, and has written an historical introduction to this book.

Although Mr Watanabe saw the work as prepared by Munro, he did not see the other articles and papers. He criticized many details and one major interpretation made by Munro. Most of these differences, and all his additional information, are incorporated in footnotes. In considering the differences, some facts must be taken into account. As already mentioned above, Munro visited the Ainu country in the early decades of this century, and went to live among them in 1930, making Nibutani his home until he died there twelve years later. Already in the thirties he found that the younger generation was not keeping up the old customs, and his reliable informants were all old people. His information was based on events seen and heard, supplemented by discussion with elders. When the Tokyo Joint Research Committee made their investigations in the fifties, religious ideas may have been known more as theological systems than as living belief. This may account for some of the major differences in interpretation. As to the differences in facts, Munro pointed out that his records referred to those districts with which he was familiar, and to others from which he

had reliable information; he expected the existence of local variations.

The chief difference in interpretation is in regard to the spiritual essence in vegetation. Munro states that Shiramba Kamui is the god of vegetation and that all vegetation derives *ramat* (spirit or soul) from him. Trees have *ramat*, thus wood also has *ramat*. Some kinds of wood have more spiritual power than others, hence are more sacred, and are specially valuable for certain purposes. Mr Watanabe states that every plant is the 'incarnation of a spirit, all beasts, birds, fishes and insects are *kamui*-spirits. . . . In the country of the *kamui* they take human form . . . and live as human beings.' When they visit the Ainu 'they disguise themselves as trees and grass, etc.'. The ceremony translated in this book as 'ritual dismissal' sends the spirit home to the land of the *kamui*. According to Mr Watanabe, the sacred objects made of vegetable matter derive their virtue from the spirit of the individual plant from which they are made, not from Shiramba Kamui.

With regard to the animal world, the difference in interpretation is not so great. Munro does not suggest that the Ainu believe that all animals are *kamui*, but that there are good and bad animals of the same species, and this is specially noted of bears, snakes, foxes and hornets. Protection from bad animals can be obtained by appealing to their *kamui* chiefs, who can restrain their own bad subordinates.

Differences in spelling also occur, mostly in regard to labials, palatals and gutturals. Munro transliterates them as b, d and g (Shiramba, *iomande* and *ongami*), Mr Watanabe as p, t and k. I have retained Munro's spelling, and for the sake of consistency have had to alter Mr Watanabe's. In support of this decision, I may mention that Nibutani is the official postal address for the village in which Munro lived.

It was Munro's intention to write a complete historical and cultural account of the Ainu, as well as descriptions of their technology. He called it *Ainu Past and Present*. However, after consideration of the material at our disposal, our committee came to the conclusion that it was best to include in this book only that part of his work which deals with ritual and belief and their effect on Ainu daily life. An article on the 'Building of an Ainu House', compiled by Lord Raglan from Munro's notes, was published in *Man*, Vol. LIX, No. 285, October 1959. It is hoped that other

notes on hunting techniques, weaving, and other activities may be published in due course.

Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 11 remain more or less as Munro wrote them. In chapters 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 I have rearranged valuable material contained in some separate articles that Munro wrote (but as far as I know never published), as well as information scattered about in his original work, and notes from numerous letters to C. G. Seligman. Munro did not realize the importance of some of his own observations with regard to ancestor worship, matriliny and patriliny. (And, I may add, that I did not do so myself until I had been through all his manuscripts and letters several times.) I have therefore written Chapter XII on Social Organization, bringing together all the information I have been able to collect on the subject from Munro's own work, as well as that from the Japanese writers, who, working in the field some years after Munro, were able to follow up on scientific lines Munro's information on the secret girdles. The reader may find Chapters 2, 3 and 4 heavy going. *Kamui*, *inau* and the effigies are (or were still in the thirties of this century) vitally important to the Ainu, and the careful descriptions and photographs are a tribute to Munro's integrity. Should anyone care to skip these chapters, interest will doubtless arise later, and these chapters may be used only for reference.

Through the efforts of Mr Hugh Gibb when he was in Japan, I was able to get in touch with Mrs Munro in October 1959. She was delighted to know that her husband's work on the Ainu was to be published at long last. She wrote that Signor Fosco Maraini had been in Nibutani at the time of her husband's death and that she had entrusted him with a rucksack full of typescript. I had great hopes that the missing material referred to in Munro's letters, and perhaps the valuable films, might at last come to light, and wrote to Signor Maraini via his publisher. Six months later he came to London and brought me the rucksack. Unfortunately, it only contained a carbon copy of the book prepared by Munro and a few legends and invocations which have been included here as Appendix I.

My thanks are due to all members of the British Association's Committee: to Professor Forde for going through the original typescript of Munro's book and for giving assistance to Mr Watanabe; to Arthur Waley for checking the spelling and translation

of Ainu and Japanese words; and especially to Lord Raglan, who, in a revision and rearrangement of this work, did much to render it more concise. He has also prepared the index.

I must thank Mr W. H. Gilbert of the Library of Congress, Washington, for an up-to-date bibliography on the Ainu. Miss Kirkpatrick, Librarian of the Royal Anthropological Institute, has kindly helped me check this list, and we have decided only to include those works directly bearing on the subject matter of this book. Unfortunately, we have been unable to include works in Japanese and Russian which have neither titles nor summaries in English.

B. Z. S.

London, 1962

INTRODUCTION

by Hitoshi Watanabe

THE AINU are the aboriginal people of Hokkaido, southern Sakhalin, and the Kurile Islands. They have been noted for their hirsute bodies, wavy hair and long heads. In 1939 the Ainu population of Hokkaido was estimated at 160,000, and there had probably been little change since 1854. There were possibly another 10,000 scattered in the other islands.

Hokkaido is an island of about 30,000 square miles, situated north of the main Japanese island of Honshu, between 41° 30′ N. and 45° 30′ N. and 140–145° E. The northern end of Hokkaido is about twenty nautical miles away from Sakhalin, and to the north-east the Kurile Islands stretch away towards Kamchatka. The climate of Hokkaido is sub-arctic; yearly mean temperature varies between 5·2° C. and 7·6° C., with a long snow season from November to May. The island is well wooded with fir, spruce, birch, oak and elm. Most of the rivers rise in a range of mountains which runs through the centre of the island from north to south. Grizzly bear and deer are found in the mountains, and salmon run in most rivers from May till October. In the past the Ainu lived mainly by hunting and fishing, and also collected wild plants and berries.

Contact between the Ainu and the Japanese is of long standing and has taken different forms. Before 1599 contact must have been limited. In 1599 Japanese who had established their headquarters in the south-western end (Matsumae) of Hokkaido were recognized as the Japanese Matsumae clan by the Tokugawa Shogunate. They were given rights of ownership in this and the adjacent area as the clan territory (Matsumae-chi). Settlement of Ainu in the area was

prohibited except for those already established there. Japanese civilians were also prohibited from living outside this area in the Ainu territory. The Matsumae had exclusive trading rights with the Ainu, and established trading and fishing posts along the coast. They traded rice, rice wine, tobacco, salt, pans, knives, axes, needles, thread, lacquer ware, trinkets, etc. for salmon, skins, craft objects and certain goods from the mainland such as Manchurian trinkets and clothing.

During this period, the Ainu retained their independence. But in 1799 this part of Hokkaido was brought under the direct control of the Tokugawa Shogunate in order to protect Japanese interests from Russian mercantile aggression. In those days, foreign vessels (Dutch, Russian, English and French) were often seen off the coast of Hokkaido, and the Russian colonization in the northern Pacific became active. The Tokugawa Government became aware of the Russian colonization in the Kurile Islands (1771). A Russian ship came to the coast of Hokkaido in the hope of establishing commercial relations (1779). Thereafter, Russia sent her representatives to Japan, hoping to enter into diplomatic relations (Lacsman in 1792 and Resanov in 1804). The trading stations became military posts and the Japanese established a limited administrative organization in Ainu territory, but did little to interfere in their internal affairs, except as required for defence. Trade continued as before. In 1821 the Matsumae again administered the territory and continued this policy. Ainu were employed by the Japanese at these coastal posts. From 1854 to 1867 the south-western part of Hokkaido was again under the direct control of the Tokugawa Shogunate.

Before 1854 the Japanese had little effect upon Ainu culture, except in the distribution of Japanese goods. But in 1868 the island became a part of the territory of Japan, and thus began a process of Japanese colonization which greatly changed Ainu culture. Today the Ainu language is rarely spoken, and then only by the aged; pure-blood Ainu are nearly extinct; and the whole traditional economy has been profoundly altered.

The Japanese Government established administrative headquarters in Hokkaido. The Ainu were included in Japanese census registers and their territory became Government property with land laws enacted to grant plots of land both to Ainu and to Japanese settlers. The Ainu were forbidden to fish for salmon or

to hunt deer and bear. The Government encouraged Japanese settlers to take up farms and keep cattle. Japanese fishermen and hunters used techniques which were more advanced than those of the Ainu. Forestry and mining undertakings were set up. As a result of these changes, the resources on which Ainu had depended for subsistence became inadequate. Game and fish resources decreased, food-collecting sites were broken up, and from 1884 onwards the Government encouraged the Ainu to take up agriculture. Each household was allotted a plot of land, given agricultural implements and seed and taught agricultural techniques by specialist Japanese officials.

Before this date the coastal Hokkaido Ainu had farmed by shifting cultivation, but only on a small scale, and probably under Japanese influence. The cultivation of millet, the main crop, was done by women. After the snow melted, suitable plots on river banks were cleared with small wooden picks (*shittap*), and sown without ridging. Weeding was done only between sowing and harvest. Millet was harvested by cutting off the heads with a shell knife (*pipa*). The area cultivated by a household was probably between 240 and 360 square metres. When the soil was exhausted, the plot was abandoned and a new one prepared; there appears to have been no shortage of land for cultivation in this period. Once a person had cultivated a plot of land it was called 'the place which is expected to be cultivated by so-and-so'. The cultivator could control the use of the plot and the crop until it was abandoned. The cycle of shifting cultivation appears to have varied from area to area.[1]

The more general acceptance of agriculture by the Ainu, with the encouragement of the Japanese administration after 1884, resulted in considerable displacement of traditional groupings, since these had depended on areas suitable for fishing, hunting, and collecting, rather than on terrain suitable for farming. The old food-gathering system, especially that of hunting and fishing, had been closely linked with the religious beliefs of the Ainu. So long as it remained untouched, down to 1884, the religion of the Ainu

[1] Takakura (1942) says that early Japanese documents reported this type of agriculture as practised by the Ainu in the south-western area of the island. The origin of the old agricultural system is unknown, but it may have been learned from the Japanese. The grounds for such an hypothesis are that the area is nearest to the Japanese mainland (Honshu) and that contact between the Ainu and the Japanese had been one of long duration.

remained intact, and the Japanese religious beliefs and practices made little headway.

The basic social unit among the Ainu was the simple family. A group of families formed a settlement or hamlet (*kotan*): the number of families in a settlement varied from one to over twenty, but was usually less than ten. Settlements were made near rivers, and sites were usually selected for their proximity to fishing grounds, especially the spawning grounds of the dog-salmon.

A settlement or group of settlements constituted a politically autonomous local group, the unity and integrity of which was expressed by the common ownership of salmon spawning beds and common participation in certain rituals.[1] Members of the local groups regarded the river valley as their territory, and had exclusive rights to exploit its resources, which they defended against the trespass of outsiders. For all economic purposes, the local group was self-sufficient.

Among the fishing rituals practised by the Ainu the most important was the dog-salmon ritual (*kamuichep kamuinomi*). The elders of each household in the local group, owning common salmon spawning grounds, joined under their headman to perform the rites. There was a ritual to ensure the success of the coming salmon run, a first salmon ritual, and a ritual to return the spirits of the captured salmon to the land of the kamui.

Hunting, particularly bear hunting, required strict adherence to ritual. The bear itself is a deity and the Bear Ceremony is the best known of all Ainu rituals.

London, 1956

Postscript by B. Z. Seligman

It is well known that, from the earliest historical times, the Ainu were gradually driven north by the Japanese in Honshu. Frontier posts were established in the northern province of Mutsu to 'keep out the barbarians'. Sansom[2] states that in 805 a memorial to the

[1] I received the following information from Mr Watanabe after further researches in 1957: In the Tokapchi district these groups are called *shine itokpa uko kor utar* (one and the same male ancestor-mark together possessing people). Characteristics of the group are: strong group consciousness, exclusive claim to the resources of the river basin, and collective ritual. There is no single authority, at least in normal times.—B.Z.S.

[2] G. B. Sansom, *Japan, a Short Cultural History*, The Cresset Press, London, 1931.

throne complains of the drain on the treasury caused by constant fighting with the Ainu. The neighbourhood of Akita was laid waste by them; they 'gathered together like ants, but dispersed like birds'. The Ainu inflicted heavy casualties on the Japanese in 789. Two years later a stronger and better organized force was successful in driving the enemy northwards. In 811 a commander was praised for 'destroying the lairs of the barbarians and exterminating the tribe'. Ainu chieftains were put to death, other prisoners were banished to the extreme south.

From these records the question of Ainu chieftainship arises, and the capacity of a non-agricultural people to combine in such force. Sansom suggests that pioneer Japanese settlers in the north of Honshu may have combined with the Ainu and organized their resistance.

Since the translation of the *Ainu Seisaku Shi* into English by Mr. John A. Harrison and its publication,[1] information concerning the earliest contacts with the Ainu in Hokkaido have been available to western readers. Professor Takakura's motive in spending many years in research on the subject of Japanese and Ainu contacts, and Japanese colonial policy, was similar to that of Munro. Both men were distressed by the miserable condition of the Ainu, cut off from their traditional means of livelihood. Professor Takakura was incensed that, during his youth, 'nothing was being done to improve the lot of the Ainu'.

He records that in 1514, when the founder of the Matsumae family settled in Hokkaido, the Japanese settlements were already fortified against attack from the Ainu.

The Ezo of Ou (the Ainu of Honshu), who had been powerful in the ninth century, had been almost exterminated, and their remnants were completely assimilated by the end of the eighteenth century. Some contact with the Ainu of Hokkaido had been established by the Japanese at the end of the eighth century, but it was not until the sixteenth century that numbers of Japanese immigrants settled in South Hokkaido. Hokkaido then became a Japanese trading colony. When the Matsumae clan was granted a decree of enfeofment in 1604 the Ainu were living by hunting and fishing; they bred dogs, both for hunting and haulage; they used stone and

[1] Takakura, Shinichiro, *The Ainu of Northern Japan, a Study in Conquest and Acculturation*, translated and annotated by John A. Harrison, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, April 1960.