

YUP'IK ELDERS IN MUSEUMS: FIELDWORK TURNED ON ITS HEAD

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Abstract. This paper describes efforts begun in 1994 to bring Yup'ik elders in direct contact with museum collections gathered from their region 100 years ago to simultaneously preserve their knowledge and make it available to scholars and Yup'ik community members. The museum artifacts that provided our focus were the 7000 objects collected by Johan Adrian Jacobsen from Alaska in 1882–1883. Housed in Berlin's Museum für Völkerkunde, they constitute the largest unpublished collection of Yup'ik artifacts anywhere in the world, including detailed ethnographic and linguistic information.

Bringing information about a major collection home to Alaska is an act of "visual repatriation" that we hope will illuminate the world view of its creators. Yup'ik elders working side by side with anthropologists and museum professionals can help us better understand the artifacts Jacobsen collected from their area. These are first steps in the two-way process of Yup'ik people owning their past and museum curators realizing the full value of the contents of their attics.

Introduction

Fifteen years before the outset of the Jesup North Pacific Expedition, Adolf Bastian, director of Berlin's Royal Ethnological Museum, commissioned a 30-year-old Norwegian jack-of-all-trades, Johan Adrian Jacobsen, to travel to America's northwest coast and collect for his museum. Aware that the Geographical Society of Bremen was sending the Krause brothers to the Pacific Northwest, Jacobsen set his sights on Alaska.¹ He was especially interested in slate blades, nephrite (jade) amulets, and other "stone age" tools, and hoped to bring home evidence of ancient Eskimo adaptations (Jacobsen 1884, 1977; Krause 1956).

Arriving in St. Michael in 1882, the year after Edward Nelson (1899) left, Jacobsen (1977:159) continually complained in his correspondence that "Mr Nielsen" already had gotten all the good stuff. In fact, plenty remained for Jacobsen, and he

returned to Berlin in 1883 to great acclaim. His collection of 6720 objects, a third from Yup'ik communities on the coast of the Bering Sea, was displayed in a special exhibit for Berlin's Anthropological Society, and Crown Prince Friedreich came to view it. This was the first of many trips Jacobsen made for the Royal Museum, which today houses more than 15,000 objects collected by him from all over the world (Fienup-Riordan 1996:219–226).

Jacobsen spent the following winter in Berlin cataloging his collection, but his lack of academic training earned him a cool reception among museum professionals. Franz Boas visited the museum and perused Jacobsen's accession records, complaining about inaccuracies and exaggerations (Thode-Arora 1989:52). In part because of these limitations, Jacobsen's collection remained largely unpublished until World War II, when most of it was thought to have been destroyed during the

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bombing of Berlin (Westphal-Hellbusch 1973). In fact, the Soviet Army took much of Jacobsen's material (along with other museum collections) by train through Poland to Leningrad when they retreated from Berlin. In 1978 these collections were sent to the Leipzig Museum for Ethnology in East Germany and, after the fall of the Berlin wall, returned to the Museum für Völkerkunde (Hopfner 1995).

I first visited the Museum für Völkerkunde in 1994, looking for Yup'ik masks. There I was stunned to find the staff busily unpacking this extraordinary Yup'ik collection, second only to Nelson's in size and scope, yet with accession records still handwritten in old German script and almost completely unpublished (Dissellhoff 1935, 1936; Hipszer 1971). I spent my brief stay in Berlin busily photographing masks. But along with photographs, I brought home a desire to return to Berlin and dig deeper into Jacobsen's treasures.

Yup'ik Elders Travel to Germany

After the mask exhibit opened in Anchorage in 1996, a team of Yup'ik elders and community leaders and I set to work planning for that return visit. The National Science Foundation funded our project through a grant to the region's nonprofit corporation, the Association of Village Council Presidents. After a year's preparation, including a four-month battle with Passport Services,² our seven-member "Yup'ik delegation" set out from Anchorage on September 5, 1997. The group included Marie Meade as interviewer and translator, Andy Paukan, mayor of St. Marys, as videographer, four elders representing the different areas of the region—Wassilie Berlin, Paul John, Annie Blue, and Catherine Moore—and me as photographer and guide (Fig. 1). We spent three weeks working at the museum. As in the mask exhibit (Fienup-Riordan 1996:23–30), what we sought was not so much the collection's physical return to Alaska, but the return of the knowledge and stories, the history and pride that they embodied and that, we hoped, we would be able to bring home.

From the beginning the Yup'ik reaction to learning about the existence of Yup'ik collections has been gratitude and pride. Andy Paukan stated it well:

I'm thinking that coming to Germany to examine these objects will make it easier for us to explain our culture to our young people and to our children. We will be able to tell them things with no reservations. Our work will make it easier to prepare teaching material about our culture for our younger generations, our children, our grandchildren, to our peers and even our own parents and grandparents. With this work, our roots and culture will come closer to us.



Figure 1. Yup'ik delegation to Berlin's Museum für Völkerkunde. From left to right: Catherine Moore, Wassilie Berlin, Paul John, Annie Blue, Marie Meade, Andy Paukan, and Ann Fienup-Riordan.

This attitude toward collections as opportunities to affect the future was the primary reason elders and regional leaders supported this project and agreed to travel so far and work so hard. While in Germany they saw themselves not as sightseers or solitary researchers, but as representatives of the Yup'ik nation. The elders who traveled to Berlin were the recognized "professors" from their regions and were chosen both for their ability and willingness to share what they knew. Their detailed knowledge was impressive. They spoke in collections not for my benefit or for that of the scholarly community, but to enlighten and empower their descendants.

To understand the magnitude of their trust and dedication, you should know that three of the four elders speak only Yup'ik. Two are in their eighties and the others in their seventies. Yet they made a 24-hour plane trip, crossing 10 time zones, to a place with unfamiliar sounds and sights and foreign food. The first morning we were there, I remember teasing 81-year-old Wassilie Berlin, calling him my *uicungaq* ("dear little husband," or teasing cousin). This endearment has often worked to break the ice with elders. Instead of laughing, he looked at me seriously and said, "No, you are my daughter." He said this in part because, since we had met, I had served him like a daughter. In the weeks that followed, he changed his mind. He and the other elders sometimes called me their mother because, along with Marie, I cooked and cared for them. Catherine confided how scared she was when I went out of sight, and I realized the depth of their dependence. I was humbled one morning near the end of our trip when Paul John, the acknowledged leader of our group, said that we had been chosen by God to do this work. Although we had fun on our trip, this was very serious business.

Elders' Work in Collections

Our work in the museum began with a brief tour of the storage room where 14 large cases with glass doors held the Yup'ik collections. Each elder wore a cotton *qaspeq*, and we stood together and sang "Tar-varnauramken," a song describing the traditional act of purifying oneself with smoke. This song had closed the Yup'ik mask exhibit *Agayuliyararput* (*Our Way of Making Prayer*) in Anchorage, and subsequently opened the exhibit in each of its Lower Forty-Eight venues, including New York, Washington, D.C., and Seattle. Following the "blessing" song, Annie Blue led us in the Lord's Prayer. Three weeks later our work ended with a feast and another prayer as we joined hands in a circle with the German museum staff we had come to know. Our group not only embodied geographic variation but all three religious denominations active in the region—Catholic, Moravian, and Russian Orthodox.

Between prayers we looked at all 2000 objects, one by one. Our major hurdle at the museum was not the German language, but their organization in which "Eskimo" and "Arctus" are comprehensive categories. We were fortunate that although Yup'ik and Inupiaq collections were mixed, most objects from Alaska, Canada, and Greenland were stored separately by type (e.g., net sinkers, spear points). They had not, however, been divided by Alaska region (Yukon, Kuskokwim, Coastal, Bristol Bay), which, as it turned out, would have been a disaster for our regionally diverse group. When presented with a group of bows, for example, the elders would comment in turn on those from their area, being careful to mention the differences from bows of other areas. The separation between men's and women's things that I had anticipated did not take place. For example, Annie and Catherine knew almost as much about the use of bows and arrows as Wassilie and Paul; conversely, Paul and Wassilie spoke eloquently about the making of sinew, technically "women's work."

Group dynamics followed Yup'ik protocols. We had a number of English-speaking visitors during our stay, but we did our best work when discussions were carried out in Yup'ik.

The balance between men and women was critical. Because of his full-time teaching job in St. Marys, Andy Paukan originally planned to return home after the first week. It became clear that if he left the other men would follow him, as he was the only man among them who spoke English and, as their roommate, provided an irreplaceable measure of security. Because of the value Andy placed on this work, he agreed to stay. Had he not done so, the whole trip would have fallen apart.

Formal Yup'ik etiquette dictated our roles as speakers and listeners while working in collections. As the eldest man, Wassilie spoke first, fol-



Figure 2. Wassilie Berlin "hunting" in Berlin. Andy Paukan and Uli Sanner in the background.



Figure 3. Elders at work looking at Yup'ik things in the Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin, September 1997.

lowed by Paul as the recognized expert orator with, as Andy liked to say, "a mind like a computer." Paul directed his explanations primarily to Marie, Wassilie, and Annie, while Catherine (raised at the Catholic mission of Akulurak and consequently less knowledgeable about some traditional practices) often took a back seat. In cases where Paul knew more about an object than Wassilie, he would still listen to Wassilie before giving a full explanation. When we looked at something that both men were familiar with, Paul would often tell Wassilie to go ahead and talk about it. That "talk" took a range of forms, including names, personal experiences, actions, stories, and songs (Figs. 2–3).

Names

The detailed vocabulary associated with the collected objects was a major point of interest. When looking at a box of harpoon points, elders sorted them by named type: *nuusaarpak* (three-pronged fish or bird spearpoint), *kukgar* (attachment to the spearpoint on a seal-hunting weapon thrown with

a throwing board), *kukgacuarat* (small spearpoint), and *kukgarpak* (large spearpoint). Not only were there *akitnat* (arrowpoints), but *meq'ercetaat* (arrowpoints used for hunting), *nuiret* (points for bird or rabbit spears), and *umit* (stone arrowpoints used during warfare). A large needle used to string salmon heads had a special name, as did a rock used as a tool for decorating clay pottery. The comment "*Ayuqluni* (It's the same)" let us move relatively fast through boxes of objects of a type we had already discussed.

During our second week we were confronted with two boxes, each holding a mixture of kayak and harpoon parts. Paul and Wassilie carefully separated them, gave each a name, and described their use, placing kayak parts in one box and harpoon parts in another. When I looked the next day, the museum's collection manager had reordered the ivories according to the original confusion, since that was the way they had historically been located in storage. Fortunately, we had recorded the information about the objects' function so that the elders' ordering could be replicated if and when the museum staff chose to do so.

Regional differences in design and designation were points of great interest. When presented with a box mixing Yup'ik and Iñupiaq ivory spear points (*talutet*), the elders picked out ones from their area to comment on, ignoring those of their northern neighbors. Although technically the handiwork of Yup'ik speakers, things from Unalakleet were dismissed as Iñupiaq and not investigated.

Precontact regional hostilities were referenced. The third day we looked at a box of spear throwers (*nuqaq*). I lay them out on the table, and each elder picked up those made from his or her area. Annie Blue chose the *nuqaq* made by the warlike Aglegmiut, and playfully pretended to use it as a gun to shoot Paul and Wassilie across the table.

Elders made old things familiar in their comments, emphasizing similarity between past and present over difference. Paul John designated an ivory story knife (*yaaruin*) a "cartoon-*alriit*." Catherine called a bladder water bottle (*mervik*) a "Yup'ik thermos." And when looking at ivory pieces, Andy commented, "I guess our ancestors forgot to patent these gas hose connectors."

Personal Reflections: The Past Made Present

Jacobsen's diverse collection also evoked a wide range of personal experiences. Wooden bowls were tremendously evocative. For example, Wassilie took up a young boy's bowl, like one he had used as a child, and related the *inerquutet* (rules) from his area about what could and could not be placed in it. Looking at a large wooden snow

shovel, Paul John recalled that a young man would shovel for four years before he would "graduate" (become a good hunter). After four years he would see a seal head emerging from the path he had been clearing. Again and again I heard the traditional rules for living I had recorded in *Boundaries and Passages* (1994), but in this context they were organized dramatically around real objects and activities, rather than didactically around ideas of what it meant to be a "real person."

The elders continually used objects to make points in an ongoing conversation among themselves. This was never more striking than on the fourth day, when we looked at a model dance house. Its delicately carved ivory figures and unusual costumes drew no comment, but Andy and Paul both gave long explanations of the tiny drum model. In brief, they said that the drum holds the elders and all that is good, but that half of the Yup'ik people today are outside this drum. I was listening to a political statement about what it meant to be Yup'ik in the modern world that would certainly be restated in public hearings back in Alaska.

Equally eloquent was a ten-minute description of a wooden dipper by Paul and Wassilie. Wassilie first described the dipper's use, followed by Paul's detailed account of the drinking restrictions imposed on young boys to make them fleet and strong. Wassilie then described the face designs painted on the inside bottom of drinking containers, which reminded Paul of the story of the boy who was told to look into a water bucket where he observed the face of an old man. This, his grandmother told him, was his own image, as he was destined to live a long life. Wassilie then told of a woman whose husband was lost on the ice. She told her son to look into the water bucket, and there he saw an image of his father in his boat, foretelling his safe return. Paul John concluded reflectively, "If we had continued to channel these customs to the present time, we would still have our own shamans that would be able to do that kind of work for us ordinary people." All this from three ounces of old wood!

The group hotly debated which personal experiences were worth recording. For example, while looking at a large wooden bowl (*qantaq*), Catherine Moore began to describe a similar bowl that had belonged to her father. Andy objected, saying that we should focus exclusively on objects in Jacobsen's collection, while Marie insisted that Catherine's comments were important. This issue came up several times and was never resolved.

Moreover, the handling of the objects was savored as a personal experience that would be talked about for years to come. In the process the elders noticed everything; for example, an ivory story knife carved for a "lefty" and a restored ax

with the blade put on backwards. In three weeks we examined more than 2000 items—feeling each grip and point, looking down the line of each arrow, opening each tobacco box. Our German hosts gave us space to work, permission to touch, and privacy to explore, without which our work could never have gone forward.

During a lunch break Paul John observed Peter Bolz, the Museum's North American curator, moving his hands in enthusiastic explanation, and he called Peter "a real dancer." In fact, all the elders danced through the collection—chopping with axes, shooting arrows, digging for mousefood, shoveling snow, mixing *akutaq*, and making fire with the bow drill. Among the most dramatic explanations was Annie Blue's preparation of snuff tobacco. Assembling seven tools from different parts of the collection she first pretended to cut, pound, and strain the tobacco, mix it with ash, and then sniff it into one nostril, sneezing and wiping the water from her eyes when she was done. Her presentation was so realistic that the group later questioned whether today's young people should be shown the video, lest they want to revive the custom.

Needless to say, we played with all the toys, including tops, darts, balls, and an ivory spindle spun in a bowl in a game called *caukia*. When we looked at an eagle-feather dance wand (*nayangan*), Wassilie walked around the table and stood Catherine up, telling her to sing the *tainaur* "asking song." Then he quickly left the room and returned carrying his coat as a gift, showing his muscles, and dancing to the beat. In fact, every day I had the overwhelming feeling of attending a dance festival. Unlike the mask exhibit *Agayuli-yararput*, where exploring collections had paved the way for a major series of events (Fienup-Riordan 1996), this was the event, not mere preparation. A book might be the result, but the action was here and now.

Songs and Stories

Just as the objects evoked names, remembrances, and dramatic displays, they also conjured a multitude of stories. The numerous bows and arrows started an avalanche of war stories that continued through lunches and long evenings at the hotel. When Annie Blue saw a cutting board, it reminded her of the story of the woman who turned into a bear by dressing in a bear skin with a board behind her back to take revenge on her unfaithful husband Picartuli. When we looked at spear heads, Andy asked Paul to describe the detailed division of a seal after the hunt.

My favorite story was when Annie Blue held a Nushagak carving (IVA5353) in front of her while she related an account of the creature *paalraayak*,

named in Nelson's *The Eskimo about Bering Strait* (1899:444), but until now a mystery. Thanks to Bill Fitzhugh and Susan Kaplan (1982), who asked me what a *paalraayak* was years ago, my ears pricked up when I finally heard the answer.

They have mentioned *paalraayak*. And recently, I think it was the year before last, it was mentioned that there was such a creature in the area behind Assigyugpak. It was said that *paalraayit* were able to move around underground

One spring there was a couple who were up in the mountains hunting squirrels in the area of Assigyugpak. In the past people were told not to go in the area behind Assigyugpak. Since the younger generations don't pay attention to the teachings of the old, they have begun to travel around in that once-restricted area

One day when the couple went up in that area behind their spring camp they saw an animal that looked like a land otter behind them. It was said that *paalraayit* look like land otters.

I'd like to look at that carving while I tell you this story.

The animal they saw resembled a land otter like this, and its face looked like a land otter's face, but as they observed it, it would disappear into the ground and come back up again. And as the couple continued on, the sled they were pulling began to sink into the ground. Normally, the ground in the spring is still frozen hard. As the couple walked and their feet began to sink into the ground, a person suddenly emerged out of the ground near them. A total person appeared right in the direction of their camp as they were heading towards it. And the land otter they had seen disappeared into the ground.

It was said that *paalraayit* were attracted to *caagnitellrianun* [people experiencing puberty, death, childbirth, miscarriage, etc.]. *Paalraayit* resided in the mountains. There are many mountains in our area as you know. Since there were many mountains, the *caagnitellriit* were restricted from roaming in them. . . .

It was said that when *paalraayit* came to a person, they swam all over his body. And many came swimming up and down in front of his nose Once they've entered a person, the person would soon be destroyed.

They were *paalraayit* for many years, then they'd turn into *amikuut*. Out on the lowlands they'd see their tracks. When I was a girl I heard people talking about seeing their tracks. I'd hear them say that they saw some strange cracks in the lowlands back there. They'd say that they were tracks of *amikuut*.

Back when we observed the *eyagyarat* [traditional taboos], they told us not to roam in the mountains during that time. It was said that the *paalraayit* were attracted to *caagnitellriit* And later on in life, the person would begin to suffer from bodily ailments. They throw sharp stones at the *caagnitellriit*. They'd suffer from that later on in life and die (September 10, 1997, Tape 2b).

Annie Blue's account meant different things to those assembled in Berlin. For me it was exciting to hear her solve a long-standing scholarly riddle. But Annie's motive for telling this story was not academic. As she made plain in her telling, rules guided a young person's actions in the past, and we ignore these rules today at our peril. She wants the younger generation to hear her stories and gain awareness of their history so that they can avoid very real dangers in the world today.

Later an enormous king salmon net made of braided willow bark inspired Paul John to tell the story of a king salmon swimming upriver, choosing which net to enter based on its condition. Like Annie's story, Paul's tale was not intended as remembrances of the past as much as advice for the future.

Academics like myself were not the elders' primary audience. Rather, I was the mother, the guide. Yet listening, I learned much that would be of great interest to both the Yup'ik and academic communities. For example, I learned that dog feces was a common binding agent in shaping clay pots. Paul John described how aged seal blood was used as glue, and how carvers collected and dried sea foam to use as sandpaper to polish wooden bowls. Examining two small carved faces with chin labrets, he explicitly stated the connection between humans and animals which I had always hoped to hear (Fienup-Riordan 1990). He said, "The Nuni-vaarmiut used these ornaments on their chins. It was said that these represented walrus tusks. When men wore them they were pretending to be walrus."

Later we looked at a large mask with five-fingered hands projecting from its side (Fienup-Riordan 1996:79, 180-96). Wassilie Berlin recognized it as a representation of *qunguq* reaching its hand out of the sea and putting it down on the ice. According to Wassilie, the hole in the hand was where the hunter aimed his harpoon. Wassilie's comment constitutes the most explicit explanation of this iconographic feature that I have ever heard.

Objects also evoked disclaimers about what they were not. For instance, Paul John looked at one carved figure (IVA3677) and said, "This figure doesn't represent Qupurruyuli. But let me mention it since it suddenly came to mind." He then continued with a rare account of Qupurruyuli, the woman of the sea with flowing hair, who created a pathway through the ice for the hunter who owned her as a power source (see also Fienup-Riordan 1994:258).

When the traveling companions became curious they looked and saw a pair of human hands in front of his kayak visible from down below. And since the hands were extended like this, the ice in the front was being moved to the sides, making a pathway for the kayak to glide through. The

upper part of the person's long hair was visible above the water with the bottom part down below. And when they looked down from their kayaks they saw the rest of her hair in the water. Since Qupurruyuli was a woman, her hair was very, very long. They all continued to move forward in the ice.

Then just before they came out into the open water, the person behind the leader accidentally bumped into the tail of his kayak. Then suddenly the ice jammed up in front of them. But, since they were close to the open water, they dragged their kayaks through the ice the rest of the way.

Since this figure suddenly reminded me of that story I've just recounted it. The man who had Qupurruyuli as a power source was able to use it when he was in trouble in the ocean. He was able to help not only himself, but also his traveling companions using his Qupurruyuli (September 11, 1997, Tape 3a).

Not all stories inspired by the collection were deemed appropriate to be told. While looking at bags made of raven skins, the men remembered a raven story so embarrassing that they could not talk about it in front of us women lest it make us uncomfortable when we had intercourse with our husbands. The women later agreed that they "did not mind not hearing it."

Among the most moving accounts was Wassilie's and Catherine's description of a small drum (*apqara'arcuun*) used by men and women in private. Holding the drum in front of their face, they would hit it from the front to summon their *avneq* (lit., "other half," felt presence) with song. All had observed this when they were young and remembered the power of these private ritual acts.

Along with stories, Jacobsen's collection also evoked many songs. A loonskin hat for the sweat bath brought out a song about a loon, complete with its call. Holding two stuffed squirrels from Nushagak, Annie Blue told a story about squirrel and ptarmigan singing a slow-style *ingula* song. Wassilie sang the arrow song of the famous warrior Apanuugpak while we looked at slate blades. In fact, objects made of slate were particularly poignant as they had been used before these elders were born.³

We even recorded the sounds of the objects, holding up a caribou-tooth belt to record the teeth tinkling against empty bullet shells or shaking a pair of thumbless dance mittens to hear the wooden dangles. Marie's response to one song was, "That's a good one, we'll have to bring it back." Just as objects evoked songs and stories, we sometimes treated songs and sounds as objects to take home.

Last but not least, we told jokes. When we looked at a large wooden bowl, Paul said off the record that it was Apanuugpak's homebrew pot, but said he wouldn't say that on the tape because it wasn't true. When examining a fishskin bag with delicately inset raven's foot designs, Paul quipped,

"They represent our impending trip to Germany. It's exactly what happened recently. Here is the jet plane and here are its tracks." When we looked at a double bowl with a handle (IVA3902), Wassilie designated it an *iqvarcuutet*, a device for gathering berries, one side for blackberries and the other for red. Looking at a similar bowl (IVA4217), Paul said it was a bowl for twins, and Wassilie added that one side was for pee and one for poop.

This Yup'ik ribaldry brought on peels of laughter in the privacy of collections. When we were in public, however, Wassilie was constantly putting his finger to his lips in a futile attempt to hush us giggling women. Catherine agreed that we should not laugh in the presence of strangers, as they might think we were laughing at them.

Elders' Reflections on the Broader Significance of Collections

We looked at many rare things while in Berlin: thumbless gloves worn by a young girl during her first menstruation, an eagle-feather hood, a painted bladder, and ice skates carved in the shape of puffins. Yet I think the elders were not as impressed by what they saw as by what they heard from our hosts and from each other. Along with sharing what they knew, each elder eagerly listened to companions, learning as well as teaching. In the middle of our trip Andy said that he was reminded of what his father had taught him—that when you die you are still learning. And we were learning first and foremost from each other.

Wassilie spoke eloquently on the last day of our visit. He expressed his gratitude to Jacobsen, who lived in such a harsh environment so far from home to collect these objects. He also expressed his gratitude to the museum for the good care they were giving these things. He was impressed by the meticulous organization of objects and glad that they would be there for his children's children to observe: "Gosh, I'm so grateful for what he did. If he hadn't collected them, they would have disappeared long ago. Not one of the items would be visible now if our counterparts, the white people, hadn't collected them." Most of all he expressed gratitude to his fellow group members for all they had taught him. He had not realized how much there was to learn from these old things, and he was grateful that he had been chosen to come. Later he added that he would like to do this kind of work again, although he hoped he would not have to travel so far.

Catherine also expressed her gratitude, as well as her desire that the things we had learned be brought home: "I'm thankful that we came here even though it's far from home. My hope is that if these things of our ancestors were seen by a group of our people, or if they were used to educate our

young people, that they would begin to stimulate their minds."

Andy Paukan, the teacher, also spoke of his desire that what we had learned would be brought home for the benefit of the younger generation: "Our work seems to have opened up times ahead and filled it with information. . . . With this work, our roots and culture will come closer to us." Yet his pride was mixed with regret. He concluded, "Evidently, [our ancestors] lived a clean life. Their life was very good. By looking at their work, I envy them."

A determined leader as well as an eloquent orator, Paul John's words on his last day in Berlin were perhaps the most pointed and far-reaching, moving beyond the walls of the museum. Doing his first fieldwork in a non-English-speaking country, he had been observing the German people, and he was impressed: "Here in Germany, I see that people truly live according to their tradition. I see that they have kept their ways and traditions."

He contrasted their cultural integrity to the situation back home in southwestern Alaska.

When I think about our home I feel sad realizing that we Yupiit are not holding on to our traditional ways. And through my observation of this land and its people, I've realized that by not holding onto our traditional ways our home and its people have become confused about their own identity.

Since our ways are confused and our minds are not in harmony, our culture has become weak. If pictures of the things we saw here were seen by our descendants, it might help to reunite the people. And our descendants might begin to believe in themselves and their culture. Perhaps they will soon desire to live like their ancestors and begin to unite in their ways and thinking.

Even though I've heard about the vast ocean I had not pictured it in my mind before. And since I came here, by looking at the time difference I now believe that we indeed have reached the other side of the ocean. When night comes to our families back home it would be morning here. Our places are so far apart.

Though we live far apart we've realized that people here have held onto their culture, and though this place is populated, life here is pretty quiet . . . and we haven't seen any disturbance or problems between people. . . .

God indeed created many tribes of people with our own traditional ways and beliefs which were to be practiced until the end of the world.

Finally, Paul spoke about how our work in the museum might help to remedy this situation.

When we were looking at the objects that were once used by our ancestors I began to realize that they were persevering and hardworking people. They had total control of their lives and were self-reliant. Evidently, they took total responsibility

ity for their lives even though it was a very difficult lifestyle. Though they didn't have excellent tools, their workmanship was so fine. The fact that they had taken care of themselves could be seen by their work. Western-made material was totally gone from their work. Gosh, our ancestors took charge of their lives, truly living in their traditional culture. . . .

Since we have no understanding, we've abandoned our cultural ways. But those of us that came here have been granted more understanding regarding our people. We have a better understanding that we should retain our cultural ways until the end of the world. . . .

My vision is this. Many of us seem to have been in the dark for many years. And now, stories and information about our roots have emerged from this unknown, far away place across the ocean. Now that the knowledge is out, I hope our work together will be written and be presented to our people. I hope that the pictures of our work will be shared with the people. And if it's possible, I hope the objects would be exhibited in the villages or at a museum in Bethel. . . .

If our people begin to see them and begin to understand the culture of our ancestors they might begin to believe and gain pride in their own identity. I envision our people gaining more faith in their own identity by seeing the objects or seeing their pictures or reading about them in books. My hope is that our work will bring our people closer to their own culture.

Much more important than any specific information they evoke, Paul sees collections as tools capable of teaching self-reliance and pride to young people who have grown up as second-class citizens in an English-only world. Knowledge is power, and it is Paul's strong hope that young people use this long-hidden knowledge as ammunition in their battle to take control of their land and lives.

Since our return, these elders have been honored in different ways. Catherine Moore's family gave her a surprise birthday feast on her return to Anchorage. Paul John has publicly described his experiences, eloquently stating how looking at these old things has increased his understanding of his own people. Togiak threw a village-wide potluck dinner for Annie Blue on the Friday following her return, after which she showed the pictures she had taken with her pocket camera and described her experiences. In October she was flown into Anchorage to receive the Alaska Federation of Natives' "Elder of the Year" award, including a beautiful wristwatch which she joked she would keep on German time.

Conclusion

The title of this paper, "Fieldwork Turned on Its Head," refers to the project's reversal of the tradi-

tional fieldwork paradigm in cultural anthropology. Whereas anthropologists are known to travel to distant lands to study the resident natives, in this case native elders traveled to one home of anthropology—the museum—to do their own fieldwork, coming to their own conclusions about the value of the ethnographic collections they explored. Archaeologists and material culture specialists within anthropology have always done research in museum storerooms, and Franz Boas, Alfred Kroeber, and George Bryan Gordon are but a few anthropologists who had indigenous people working in their collections. The thrust of their work was to increase non-natives' knowledge and understanding of native peoples, but in this case it is the natives who seek an understanding of both collections and the collection process so that they can use them for their own ends.

Our project is neither the first nor the only one of its kind. Bernadette Driscoll (1995) traveled to European and Canadian museums with Canadian Inuit seamstresses in the 1980s to study Inuit clothing styles and the terminology and symbolism associated with them. This fieldwork triggered a renaissance in clothing manufacture in some Canadian communities (see also Issenman 1985, 1990, 1991). In the early 1980s Susan Kaplan (personal communication, 1998) invited North Greenland Inuit to work in the museum, and continues to work with Labrador Inuit using the Peary-MacMillan Arctic Museum and Arctic Studies Center collections. In the 1990s the repatriation movement has prompted increased access to and scrutiny of museum collections by members of various native groups, often in collaboration with museum professionals. For example, Deanna Kingston (1999) has worked with King Island elders in the film archives of the National Museum of Natural History, while Steve Loring and Aron Crowell of the Smithsonian's Arctic Studies Center have explored NMNH collections with a number of Alaska Natives.

Yup'ik elders' work in the Museum für Völkerkunde is an example of what I have described elsewhere as "visual repatriation" (Fienup-Riordan 1996:23–30). As in Yup'ik elders' comments on masks and mask-making in preparation for the *Agayuliyararput* exhibit, their primary concern was not to reclaim museum objects but to re-own the knowledge and experiences that the objects embodied. And, as in the mask exhibit, instead of resentment at what has been lost and taken from them, elders expressed profound gratitude toward both the collectors, without whom the objects would surely have been destroyed, and the museums, who so carefully preserve these objects today. While repatriation and struggles for the physical control of objects remain contentious issues, Yup'ik elders' work in collections provides a

lesson in how native access to collections can work for everyone's benefit.

There is a lesson here for museology as well. During recent decades, museum professionals have become more specialized, often training in curation and conservation rather than anthropology or history. They are not researchers themselves, and their primary responsibility is to the objects, not to the people whose ancestors made them. Their focus on the care and protection of objects can have disastrous consequences for visiting indigenous groups. I have accompanied Yup'ik elders on visits to museums thousands of miles from home and watched as their days in collections shrank to hours as they waited for museum handlers to access objects, present them one at a time, and remove them before going on to the next piece. In contrast, our German hosts provided ideal circumstances to explore collections, giving us the space, time, and privacy we needed. As a result elders moved into collections, owning them in ways more restricted access would have made impossible.

Although a number of indigenous people have made short visits to the Museum für Völkerkunde's world-famous ethnographic collections, ours was the first native group to carry out a systematic study of an entire collection. Staff members were initially both concerned for the safety of their collections and wary of native efforts to reclaim them. They were, however, willing to allow the visit, and their respect for these indigenous researchers grew as the days went by. Our workspace was in a large, well-lit, open hallway between the museum's storage room and exhibit space, and passing staff members often stopped to watch the elders' animated interactions with collections, ask questions, and share in their excitement. Moreover, elders' expressions of thanks reassured them that it was not the objects that elders coveted but the opportunity to use them both to teach and to learn. Not one object was broken or damaged during our three-week stay. Instead each was enriched with myriad bits of information, stories, and songs.

As I boarded the plane to Berlin, exhausted by efforts to get passports for elders with multiple names and dates of birth, I vowed that I would never again try to take elders to objects. A week later, however, I knew absolutely that it was worth the effort. Ironically, though fragile objects like grass socks and gut-skin parkas will endure in museum collections, elders will not. If we do not bring elders into museums over the next decade, we will lose an opportunity to understand collections in ways that Jacobsen and his contemporaries never imagined. More important than any specific information, in the hands of community leaders throughout southwestern Alaska this knowledge of the past has the potential to shape the future.

End Notes

1. In fact, the outset of the Krause expedition was a major reason that the Royal Museum was able to secure funding for Jacobsen's expedition. Berlin high society had no intention of being bested by Bremen.

2. I mention this battle to alert future researchers to problems I encountered while obtaining passports for Yup'ik-speaking elders. Our negotiation with Passport Services was more than difficult. In the end neither Paul John nor Catherine Moore could receive a regular passport as neither could produce two qualifying documents with the same name and date of birth. Both had baptismal certificates and recorded birthdates in Catholic mission records, but as Paul John was a much-loved only child with a multitude of names and Catherine was born during the 1918 influenza epidemic, following which her parents died and she was adopted, names and dates in these official records were conflicting. Thanks to the intervention of Senator Ted Stevens' office, both elders received temporary passports, but otherwise neither would have been able to make the trip.

3. This is a real strength of Jacobsen's collection, as he had intentionally sought out "ancient things."

Acknowledgments. I want to acknowledge my friend and teacher, Jim VanStone, as the inspiration for this article. Jim was originally invited to travel to Germany with our group, not as an outside expert but as an elder among elders. A bad back prevented him from making the trip, and I especially wanted him to share in the high points of our expedition.

Jim is a renaissance anthropologist of the first order, and his interests are among the most diverse of any arctic scholar I know. From our first meeting in Chicago in 1974, when I was an energetic student completely lacking in the experiences he already possessed in abundance, he has never failed to offer sound criticism and good advice. On my draft dissertation he politely inquired, "Are you sure red salmon run before kings?" No other colleague has given me more encouragement, a debt I can acknowledge but never repay.

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