



CLOTHING

The traditional Alutiiq parka was a long, hood-less robe. Worn by both men and women, Alutiiqs fashioned these garments from bird skins, squirrel pelts, or otter fur. A typical adult parka might require as many as 60 bird skins. Many parkas had slits in the sides so that the wearer could remove his or her arms from the parka's sleeves to work freely. No pants were worn under Alutiiq robes and shoes were only used in the coldest months. Whale leather was a preferred material for the soles of boots, and beach grasses were woven into socks.

On their heads, Alutiiq men wore hats woven from spruce root or crafted from bent wood. Similar to Tlingit hats from Southeast Alaska, these garments were decorated with shells and beads, painted with bright colors, and considered a sign of wealth. Some spruce root hats were even passed from father to son. Other indications of social standing included facial tattoos and jewelry. Alutiiqs wore nose pins, earrings, necklaces, and labrets - plugs of stone or bone inserted in a hole below the lower lip. The larger the labret, the older and more important its wearer.

Alutiiq people also fashioned special clothing for hunting and traveling. Every kayaker wore a gutskin jacket, or *kanaglluk*, cut to his unique proportions and designed to fit snugly over his boat hatch. Known today by the Siberian term *kamleika*, Alutiiqs sewed these garments from the intestines of bears or sea mammals. Strips of gutskin were sewn together with sinew and special waterproof stitches. Alutiiq skin sewers rolled a piece of dried beach grass into every seam, then made careful stitches through the grass. When water seeped into the needle holes, it was absorbed by the underlying grass, which swelled and prohibited more water from entering. This ingenious stitching kept the hunter dry and protected him from hypothermia.

LEARN MORE:

The Ethnohistory of Alutiiq Clothing, 2001, by Dolores C. Hunt. Master Thesis in Museum Studies, San Francisco State University, San Francisco.



Man's Ground Squirrel Parka - made by Susan Malutin and Grace Harrod, 1999 with support from the Alaska State Museum. Based on a parka collected in Ugashik for the Smithsonian Institution in 1883.

Bird Math

Consider the number of birds needed to dress Kodiak's Alutiiq people in a bird skin parka! Archaeologists believe that Alutiiqs must have harvested hundreds of thousands of sea birds. Here are some conservative estimates:

Kodiak's population about AD 1600

13,000 people

Number of people wearing the common birdskin parka

10,000 people

Life span of a birdskin parka worn daily

5 years

Number of people needing a new birdskin parka each year

2,000 people

Number of birdskins per parka

60 skins

Birds harvested per year for parka

production = 60 X 2,000

120,000 birds

All of these birds were eaten.

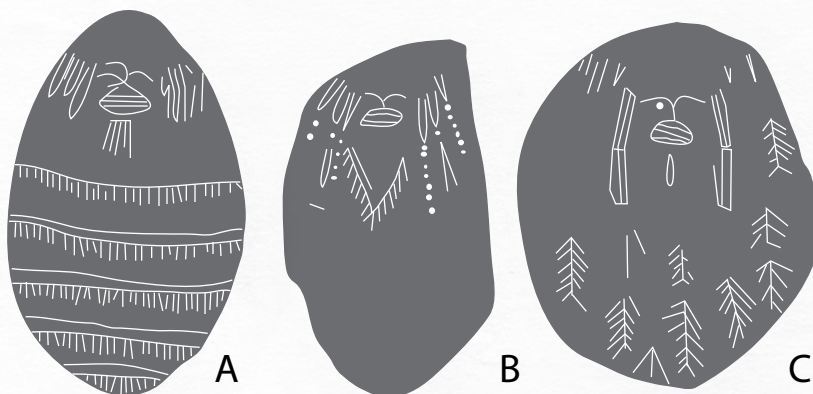


TALKING ROCKS

Objects left in archaeological sites tell many stories. Tools indicate the tasks people performed and animal remains record ancient meals. In the Kodiak archipelago a unique type of artifact also documents how people dressed. Between AD 1300 and 1500, Alutiiqs sketched images of people on small slate pebbles, cutting their designs into the rock. These “talking rocks” show human faces, but many also include drawings of clothing, jewelry, and headdresses. Some individuals are even pictured with a ceremonial item - a drum or a rattle. For archaeologists these pebbles provide information that is not available from any other source.

These pebbles illustrate different types of clothing and jewelry. Example A (below) shows an individual wearing a decorated gut skin garment (represented by horizontal lines) and a labret (lip plug) with hanging attachments. Example B shows an individual with a V-neck garment and a headdress decorated with beads. Example C displays a person in a bird skin garment (represented by a feather motif) with a labret and a headdress. Patterns seen in these pebbles suggest that people in different parts of the archipelago once wore different styles of parkas and labrets. People all over the world use clothing to signal their affiliation with social groups. Perhaps each Alutiiq community had its own unique dress code.

What were talking rocks used for? Some archaeologists think they were pieces for a throwing game, others suggest that they were used to record the pictures of powerful people. Whatever the answer, they continue to speak to archaeologists, providing valuable information on ancient Alutiiq life.



Slate pebbles with etched designs, ca. AD 1500, Koniag, Inc. Collection, Karluk One Site.

LEARN MORE:

Incised Slate Images and the Development of Social and Political Complexity in South Alaska, 1992, by Chris Donta. In, *Ancient Images, Ancient Thought: The Archaeology of Ideology*, edited by A. Sean Goldsmith, S. Garvie, D. Selin, and J. Smith, Pp. 11-18. University of Calgary, Calgary.