CHAPTER 9. WORKED FIBER—QIPESNGASQAQ

Worked fiber objects are rarely preserved in Kodiak's archaeological sites. However, a few sites have produced examples of woven, braided, tied, and sewn artifacts made from plant and animal tissues. Assemblages from Karluk One and the Malina Creek site include fiber artifacts from the Koniag tradition (Steffian et al. 2015). Archaeologists also recovered fragments of basketry from the lower (Kachemak?) layers of the Uyak site (Heizer 1956:29; Hrdlička 1944:342). The presence of grass combs in Late Kachemak assemblages, including the Uyak site, suggests grass weaving is at least 1200 years old. Similarly, net sinkers found in a site after about 4500 years ago suggest people used plant and/or animal fibers to tie nets, a related technology. Other tools, like line sinkers, harpoons with line holes, multi-component tools that would have been lashed or tied together, suggest the need for cordage. We suspect that Alutiiq ancestors transformed plant and animal fibers (e.g., sinew, baleen) into useful objects throughout Kodiak prehistory (Figure 9.1).

Figure 9.1. Temporal distribution of fiber artifacts

	OCEAN BAY			KACHEMAK			KONIAG								
Woven Tools	7500	7000	6500	6000	5500	5000	4500	4000	3500	3000	2500	2000	1500	1000	500
Bark Sinker														?	
Basket										?					
Container (birch bark)														?	
Cord		?													
Mat										?					
Net						?									
Worked Fiber										?					

Note: Evidence of woven artifacts is based on the presence of tools used in their manufacture (grass combs) and tools that require fiber elements (e.g., nets, harpoons with line holes, etc.)

Baskets are among the best-known fiber tools. Like archaeological evidence of fiber objects, Alutiiq baskets are rare in museum collections. Ethnographic collections provide limited information on the types of woven objects that may have been manufactured in the distant past. Despite their rarity, historic accounts indicate that baskets, mats, and cordage were an integral part of household equipment (Korsun 2010, Lee 2006). Baskets were particularly important. They held small objects, were used as cooking, drinking, and eating vessels, and functioned as containers for food storage and collecting. Very large baskets, fitted with leather straps, even acted as backpacks for travelers carrying clothing and bedding.

Alutiiq people wove much of their basketry from spruce roots that they dug from the forest floor, cleaned of their outer coverings, and split into flexible strands with a fingernail (Lee 1981, 2006). Spruce-root baskets were woven upside down, with concentric rings of extra twining to reinforce their bases. Some were painted or finely decorated with overlays of other weaving materials, for example, maidenhair fern. Other common weaving materials included beach rye grass and baleen. Photos of these materials, as both raw material and woven items, appear in the raw material section below. It should also be noted that kelp was widely used for line and examples are preserved in ethnographic collections (Korsun 2010). This is very strong

material and a line sinker from Karluk One has a band of thin marine algae lining in its pecked groove (part of a kelp frond?). This was probably used to limit friction and help secure a rope to the sinker. However, no kelp tools are described here, as this lining is the only known occurrence of a possible marine algae object in an archaeological collection.

We include birch bark containers in this category, as they are fiber containers made with cut, folded, and sewn plant materials. Similarly, we include sinkers made by wrapping birch bark around a pebble. These tools fit best in this class.

As so little is known about ancient twining techniques and twisted objects, we recognize just a few broad artifact types in this industry (Table 9.1). Each of these classes has been found in Kodiak sites (Figure 9.2). However, each general class likely represents a larger set of objects that have not been preserved.

Table 9.1. Alutiig terms for fiber objects

English	Alutiiq	Comment
Bark-wrapped Sinker	Kicauteq ^m , Kitsuuteq ^c	
Basket	Inartaq ^m	Includes basket starts (performs)
Container	Yaasiiguaq ^c	
Cord / Line	IRafkuq ^m	
Mat	PiRaq ^m , Alliqaruaq ^m	
Net	Kugyaq ^m , Kugyasiq ^m	
Worked Fibers		Of all material types

m = term in modern usage, c = term created by Elder Alutiiq speakers

Figure 9.2. Examples of fiber artifacts from Karluk One (AM193).





English Names	Bark-wrapped Sinker	Alutiiq Names	
Industry	Weaving Activity Fishing	Fund	Line sinker
Common Materials	Strip of kelp twisted around a pebble		
LxWxD (cm)			
Tradition	Ocean Bay Kachemak	✓ Koniag	Alutiiq
Miniature	Yes Example Sites Found	Karluk One	
	No/Unknown		
Description	These are two piece artifacts. In the cegreywacke). Around this pebble is wra candy wrapper around the pebble, creend. Presumably, the sinker was tied to	pped a thin, cut piece o ating a tight twist again	of birch bark. The bark is twisted like a st each end of the pebble and a flared
References	Steffian et al., 2015		
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Sinkers made of bark wrapped stones, Karluk One (AM193)



English Names	Basket	Alutiiq Names	Inartaq
Industry	Weaving Activity Cooking/St	orage Func	ction collecting, cooking, storing
Common Materials	Spruce root, beach rye grass, baleen		
LxWxD (cm)			
Tradition	Ocean Bay	✓ Koniag	✓ Alutiiq
Miniature	Yes Example Sites Found	Karluk One, Malina (Creek
	○ No/Unknown		
Description	This is a diverse class of objects, represe of basket is tied to the material used in its		nber of archaeological finds. Often the type cribed below.
	to smaller baskets for storage and perhal concentric rings on the base—these may However, these is an unusual oval exam Fragments of spruce root basketry were woven material that look like pieces of "V collections, particularly as charred fragm one side and flat on the other. The mater It is interesting to note that spruce trees containers were collected / trader for fror Given the volume of spruce root weaving (2) Grass: Grass basketry is less common these pieces for collecting things like rootstrands are flat and thin, much more deliblack after being buried. (3) Baleen: The remains of one very large.	se vessels range from ps holding food (like whe both reinforcing a ple from Karluk One.) common at the site at the vertical ents. Worked fragmental often appears dand the northern Kodian, this must have been the spruce root, processed the vertical elements of the vertical elements on strands are grey, the vertical elements of the strands are grey, the vertical elements of the vertical elements of the vertical elements of the strands are grey, the vertical elements of the vertical elements o	m very large collecting / cooking baskets a bowl). Most are round with set of and symbolic of the Alutiiq universe. Some have braided handles. and are often squares or rectangles of We have also seen these in avocational ents of spruce root are typically round on the brown after being buried. Aluk area, so the roots used to make these k Archipelago or the Alaska mainland. In a commonly moved material. Alubia to differential preservation, pen style weave, suggesting the use of ers, etc. It has a braided rim. Grass to robaleen. The material often appear The found at Karluk One. This piece is with well-spaced rows of twining holding flat, and have a hairy appearance (little
References	Lee, M. 1981 Lee, M. 2006 Steffian et al. 2015		
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BASKET



Left: Fragment of an open weave baleen basket from Karluk One.

Below: Fragment of spruce root basketry from Karluk One.

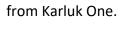
Bottom: Spruce root basket from Karluk One.





Right: Grass basket start from Karluk One.

Below: Miniature grass basket









English Names	Basket	Alutiiq Names	Inartaq
Industry	Weaving Activity Cooking/	Storage Fund	ction cooking, storing, sewing?
Common Materials	Birch bark body held together with spr	uce root stitching	
LxWxD (cm)			
Tradition	Ocean Bay Kachemak	✓ Koniag	Alutiiq
Miniature	Yes Example Sites Found	Karluk One	
	No/Unknown		
Description	prehistoric trade item or introduction to bark. This is not the thin, papery, white inner bark that is less platey. The bark its shape. Fragments of both round an assemblage, although none are complexample was a kakiwik (sewing bag). One distinctive characteristic of these stitch is common a small distance belocovers the cut materials in a continuous.	the Kodiak region. The material on the outer to material on the outer to is cut to shape, then for directangular container ete. Elder Lucille Davis containers is the treatment of the edge, and then to is set of wide spruce rounded of paper birch barerial if the bark was in containers.	nent of their cut edges. A simple running he edge is finished with a whip stitch that ot stitches. rk harvested on the mainland. However, good shape when the log reached Kodiak.
References	Steffian et al. 2015		
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CONTAINER

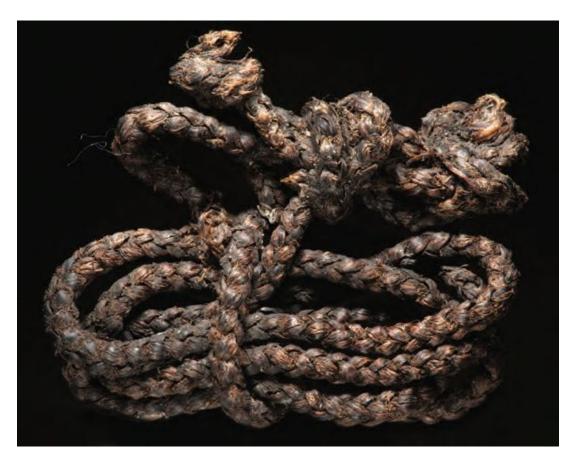
Folded and stitched birch bark containers from Karluk One. From top left: fragment of a round container, folding rectangular container, stitched edges of containers.





English Names	Cord / Line		Alutiiq Names	IRafkuq
Industry	Weaving	Activity Hunting	Fund	ction
Common Materials	Spruce root, grass	s, baleen		
LxWxD (cm)				
Tradition	Ocean Bay	✓ Kachemak	✓ Koniag	Alutiiq
Miniature	-	kample Sites Found	Carluk One	
	No/Unknown			
Description	collections but a si used for different p Examples from Ka something like a b Line is a very imporing to collecting b	tudy of ethnographic as ourposes and help to ful irluk One include braide asket handle, to a heav ortant part of many harv	semblages could shather classify archaed grass and spruce ier baleen line plaite esting tools, from housed for a wide va	e root, which might have been used for ed with a lanyard style stitch. arpoon assemblages to deep sea fishing riety of daily tasks - hanging food container
	Cheffing at al. 2004			
References	Steffian et al. 2018			
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Example of cordage from Karluk One







English Names	Mat	Alutiiq Names	PiRaq, Alliqaruaq
Industry	Weaving Activity Cooking/Sto	rage Func	Etion Beding
Common Materials	Grass		
LxWxD (cm)			
Tradition	Ocean Bay Kachemak	✓ Koniag	Alutiiq
Miniature	Yes Example Sites Found	Jyak Site, Karluk On	ie
	No/Unknown		
Description	Woven mats were part of the common fur bedding, door and wall coverings, househ dead. They were woven from dried and bl with designs made of colored grasses or a mats took a great deal of time to make. We the late nineteenth century. Instead they for prized by westerners and could be used at the area of the mats in the Karluk may be fragments of mats. Hrdlicka describes fragments of grass mat together by widely spaced row of stitches.	old partitions, kneel eached beach rye gadorned with fabric, leavers stopped male ocused on producing surrency. One collection, how ts from the Uyak site	gut, or decorative attachments. Large king these large, labor-intensive pieces in g smaller baskets, which were highly vever, two pieces of open weave twining
References	Steffian et al., 2015 Hrdlicka 1944:342		
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English Names	Net		Alutiiq Names	Kugyaq, Kugyasiq
Industry	Weaving	Activity Fishing	Func	Net fishing
Common Materials	Baleen			
LxWxD (cm)				
Tradition	Ocean Bay	✓ Kachemak	✓ Koniag	Alutiiq
Miniature	Yes Exa	ample Sites Found	arluk One	
	No/Unknown	L		
Description	tied in a diamond sh with a variety of hol suggesting that this harvested with nets Based on the prese	haped pattern. Net gau e sizes. The holes in the net could have been uses set on the beach.	iges from the same ne Karluk One examused for small fish o ched pebbles) in sit	ne site. It is made of fine strips of baleen site illustrated that craftsman made nets aple (see next page) are just 1 cm across, r birds. Sea mammals were also es after about 4500 BP, we suspect that ition as well.
References	Steffian et al., 2015	j		
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Net fragment of baleen from the Karluk One Site





English Names	Prepared Fiber	Alutiiq Names	
Industry	Weaving Activity Manufacturing	ng Fund	etion
Common Materials	Grass, Baleen, Spruce root		
LxWxD (cm)			
Tradition	Ocean Bay Kachemak	✓ Koniag	Alutiiq
Miniature	Yes Example Sites Found	Carluk One	
	No/Unknown		
Description	This is a catch all category for fiber debita been twined, braided, sewn, etc.	ge - prepared or pa	rtially prepared materials that have not yet
	As knowledge of Alutiiq manufacturing de accumulates, it may be possible to divide and / or manufacturing technique (e.g., sp	these materials into	
	Chaffian at al. 2045		
References	Steffian et al., 2015		
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PREPARED FIBERS



Tied bundle of grass from Karluk One



From Top: strips of baleen, a tried bundle of baleen fibers, baleen fibers wrapped around a stick