

**Chugach  
Alutiiq**

Kodiak Island

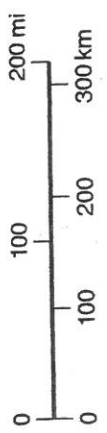
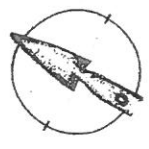
Pacific Ocean

**Kaniing Alutiiq**

81.18.1



**Natives paddling near Port Dick in  
Cook Inlet. From an engraving by  
Harry Humphries made in 1798**  
(ANCHORAGE MUSEUM OF HISTORY AND ART)



# Sugpiaq/Alutiiq

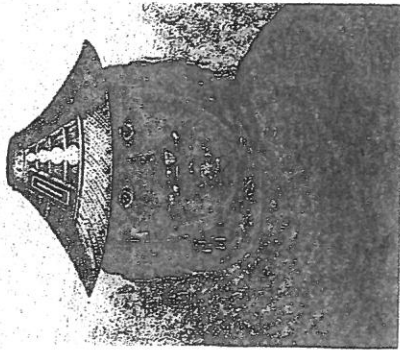
Pacific Eskimos

## Sugpiaq/Alutiiq

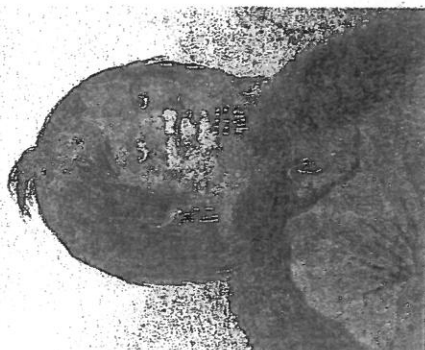
### Pacific Eskimos

The coastal arc of the Gulf of Alaska from the southwest end of Kodiak Island to the Copper River delta might be visualized as a gigantic teeter-totter. Lands dip and rise along the tectonic interface where the Pacific Plate collides and descends beneath the North American Plate. This dynamic and dangerous zone of steep coastal mountains, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions is characterized by a grassy Aleutian-type ecosystem along the Alaska Peninsula and the western part of the Kodiak Archipelago and forested Sitkan-type ecosystem from the northeastern Kodiak Archipelago through the lower Kenai Peninsula to Prince William Sound. In this region are the only heavily-forested environments along the entire sweep from Siberia to Greenland in which bearers of "Eskimo" cultural characteristics developed long-term adaptations. The Kodiak Archipelago has limited terrestrial resources being home only to the exceptionally large brown bears and to foxes, making marine and riverine resources vital to the people living there.

Sugpiaq-speaking people of the Yup'ik language group occupy this region. While the term Sugpiaq is the older term of self-identification, Alutiiq came into usage around 1980 in response to linguistic studies and a desire of speakers to distinguish themselves from their Central Yup'ik neighbors across the Alaska Peninsula. Most Kodiak Archipelago, Alaska and Kenai Peninsula and Prince William Sound people came to self-identify as Aleut after colonization by Russian invaders. The



B86.94.10.46



B86.94.10.47

**Chugach Alutiiq men and women were dramatically adorned for various occasions. The man's spruce root hat suggests contact between the Chugach and Tlingit who wore similar hats.** (ENGRAVING BY J. WEBBER, 1780. ANCHORAGE MUSEUM OF HISTORY AND ART)

term "Alutiiq" was crafted using Sugpiaq word formation principles from the word "Aleut" and will be used in the remainder of this discussion to designate the peoples of this region.

These groups have sometimes been referred to as Pacific Eskimo by anthropologists based on the fact the Alutiiq language is closely related to Central Yup'ik and not to Unangan/Aleut. This characterization, however, is not popular with the Alutiiq people themselves. Linguists have estimated that Alutiiq and Central Yup'ik have been separated as languages for less than 1,000 years.

Three basic subdivisions of the Alutiiq are recognized. The Koniagmiut (now also referred to as Gikertarmiut) occupied the Kodiak Archipelago and primarily the south side of the Alaska Peninsula, the Chugachmiut occupied Prince William Sound, and the Unergkurmiut lived along the south coast of the Kenai Peninsula and along Kachemak Bay.

Koniagmiut and Chugachmiut spoke distinct dialects of the Alutiiq language but communicated easily with one another. The terms Koniag and Chugach will be used in the remainder of this chapter to refer to these regional subdivisions.

### Archaeology

The Alutiiq region is one of Alaska's great ancestral interaction zones. The people of the region were both initiators and recipients of cultural influences that were shared with other Alaskan groups. Initial settlement of the Kodiak Archipelago and Alaska Peninsula immediately opposite took place slightly before 7,500 ya (years ago) by Paleo-Arctic microblade-bearing people. By 7,300 ya, Kodiak Island's new residents



**This remarkable wooden carving of an apparently-pregnant female was discovered during archaeological excavations at Karluk. The placement of the hands on the lower back suggests the piece may have been used to inform young women on procedures for assisting in childbirth.** (ALUTIIQ MUSEUM/ ABSTRACT OWNED BY KONIAG INC.)



exhibited distinctive elements of a new tradition termed *Ocean Bay*. The implements designed by these peoples include perhaps the first oil lamps and large semi-lunar knives (known later as *ulus*). In addition, long (up to 20-inch) slate blades, barbed bone and antler harpoon heads used for harvesting large sea mammals also proliferated. Steller sea lion, migratory whales (minke, humpback, sperm and gray), harbor seals, and sea otters apparently became the food focus of these early peoples. The *Ocean Bay* tradition is considered one of the ancient sources of sea mammal hunting in the north Pacific Ocean region.

Some people utilizing *Ocean Bay* technologies apparently migrated to the northeast, settling in *Kachemak Bay* on the lower Kenai Peninsula by around 5,000 ya.

Beginning around 3,800 ya, major changes appear to have occurred in the *Kodiak Archipelago*. A new tradition, known as *Kachemak* (based on the name of the bay where it was first identified in the 1930s), is distinguished from its predecessor by among other things, an abundance of notched cylindrical stones. These stones are considered evidence for using weighted nets for fishing, primarily for salmon and herring, and became a major focus of subsistence activity at this time. Hooks for taking halibut and cod from the ocean bottom are abundant in *Kachemak* sites. *Kachemak* people maintained sea mammal hunting and utilization. The beautiful and symbolically rich oil lamps produced during this time illustrate how important marine mammals were to the *Kachemak* people.

The *Kachemak* tradition also is characterized by elaborate and distinctive burial practices involving body dismemberment. Labrets, beads and other items of adornment appear in different sizes and materials with certain burials containing larger and greater numbers of these items. This variability in grave goods indicates that *Kachemak* people likely practiced status differentiation and social hierarchy.

*Kachemak* people expanded northward out of *Kachemak Bay* up the *Kenai Peninsula*, perhaps even for a short period of time into the *Susitna River valley*.

The Gulf of Alaska-fronting coast of the *Kenai Peninsula* has seen little archaeological investigation and, at present, the earliest occupation is dated to about 1,750 ya.

How long people lived in *Prince William Sound* is not as clear as elsewhere in the *Alutiiq* region, but we think it began about 4,000-3,500

ya. Marine mammal hunting was likely the central focus of *Prince William Sound* people but in a less-abundant ecosystem than the *Kodiak Archipelago* provided.

Beginning around 2,000 ya, an important environmental shift is evident as the characteristic flora of the temperate rainforest to the southeast began to gradually spread across the central Gulf of Alaska region. The coniferous forest dominated by *Sitka spruce* appeared in *Prince William Sound* about 2,000 ya and in the northeastern *Kodiak Archipelago* about 1,100 ya. The appearance of adzes and other woodworking tools demonstrate that resident ancestral *Alutiiq* began to incorporate wood into their technological repertoires. Spruce root hats, baskets, wooden vessels and containers and other wood products likely date from this period.

Between 1,000 and 600 ya, another shift in artifacts and cultural practices appears to have occurred parts of the *Alutiiq* region. One of the major developments of this time is the disappearance of riverine *Kachemak* peoples from the central *Kenai Peninsula*. The appearance of sweat baths, ceramics in the western part of the region, incised pebbles, large, multi-room houses and perhaps wood slat armor are considered markers of the new tradition, *Koniag*. This tradition is considered to be the basis of the cultural systems operating among most *Alutiiq* peoples at the time of historic contact. In the discussion of cultural traits that follows, *Koniag* and *Chugach* variations on the *Alutiiq* pattern will be noted where they occur.

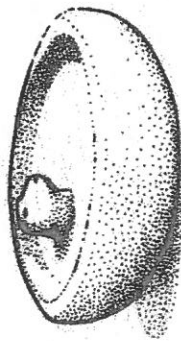
#### *Population and settlement pattern*

Estimates of the size and density of *Alutiiq* populations at contact vary considerably. Based on Russian sources, the pre-contact population of the *Kodiak Archipelago* has been estimated at approximately 8,000 people. Recent archaeological research, however, has revealed very large sites along salmon systems leading some scholars to revise their estimates upward to 12-15,000 residents of the *Kodiak Archipelago* alone. The *Alaska Peninsula* by contrast was probably occupied by less than 1,000 people and the outer *Kenai Peninsula* by less than 500 people.

Population figures for the *Chugach* range widely as well. At the lower

#### Alutiiq Groups and Estimated Population at Contact

Alaska Peninsula	1,000
Lower Kenai Peninsula	500
Kodiak Archipelago	12,000 to 15,000
Prince William Sound	1,500 to 2,000



**This extraordinary lamp from Uyak Bay would have been a stunning vision when filled with oil. The animal's head would have appeared to be rising from the ocean. The exquisite quality and rarity of such lamps suggest they may have been used only in rituals.**

end are estimates of 800 and at the upper end estimates of 3500. The small size and wide distribution of sites in Prince William Sound have puzzled scholars who now think the Chugach numbered between 1,500 and 2,000 at contact.

The Koniagmiut and Chugachmiut were both divided into approximately eight local sociopolitical groups. These can be considered territorially-based units as they protected their territories against unwanted outside incursions and respected the territories of their neighbors. There were at least 65 communities located in the Kodiak Archipelago, perhaps 10 along the Alaska Peninsula and another 10-12 in Prince William Sound.

Settlement patterns in the Alutliq area include consolidated winter villages as well as numerous spring, summer and fall seasonal encampments. In the Kodiak Archipelago, a major dimension in community size and subsistence orientation is the abundance of salmon runs. Where there are large sockeye salmon systems, fishing was a central focus of activity while in other areas, marine mammal hunting was more important. One of the largest Alaska Native communities (or sets of communities) at contact was the lagoon at the mouth of the Karluk River, second only in Alaska to the Kvichak River draining Lake Iliamna as a source of sockeye salmon. No less than 800 people occupied the lagoon with probably an additional 1,000 people living along the course of the river to Karluk Lake. The continuity of these communities for more than 500 years, depending throughout on salmon, suggests the development of sustainable fishing practices that maintained the resource.

Other than in the vicinity of the largest salmon streams, Koniag communities were small and dispersed. Winter villages, in protected locations and near good areas for winter cod and halibut fishing, ranged from 100-200 residents in five-to 10 houses.

Chugach communities generally fell in the 100-200 person range. These were generally located in areas with nearby access to winter bottom fishing and sea mammal hunting but salmon were also important.

Koniag and Chugach communities also had *refuge areas*. These were hidden retreats such as caves or islands with steep cliffs where people could go in times of danger or attack.

#### Housing and facilities

Buildings in the Alutliq area consist of two basic designs—the house and the community center (or *kazhim* as the Russians labeled it). Among the Koniag, the house (*ctiquaaq*) was partially subterranean with either a surface doorway or in a few cases a tunnel entryway. According to Russian figures, approximately 20 people resided in such a house. The basic floor plan consisted of four partially-buried wooden posts laid out



**The semi-subterranean homes of the Alutliq combined wood, grass and sod materials and were called barabaras by the Russians. (AMY STEFFIAN)**

in a square or rectangle buried in the floor about 10-12 feet apart but house sizes varied substantially. Inter-notched beams were cribbed upward to form the roof. Planks were laid on the along the side of the cribbing and across the roof, then covered with grass and sod. An opening serving as skylight and smoke hole was left in the middle of the roof that would be covered with a translucent piece of animal intestine.

Inside there was a central open area with a hearth in the center. This was primarily a women's work area as well as the cooking area. Some Koniag houses had storage pits near the walls that were covered with stone slabs.

Along the sides of the house, smaller rooms carved out of the earth were used for sleeping. Some side rooms had earthen platforms covered with planks while others had planks inserted into the wall to form a ledge for sleeping. Small entryways connected these side rooms to the main room. At the opposite end of the house away from the entrance was the room typically occupied by the head couple of the household.

Most Koniag houses had at least one side room that served as a steam bath. These rooms can be identified archaeologically by the substantial quantities of fire-cracked rock found buried in the walls or packed into the corners of the room. Steaming provided a combination of cleansing, spiritual purification, relaxation and socializing for the people.

Outside the Koniag house were a variety of pits and racks. The pits were used for food storage, cooking, and refuse. Along the Karluk River,



several Koniag households had clay-lined pits outside the houses. This innovation likely assisted in the retention of oil from sea mammal blubber and preventing non-human uses of the food.

The other basic building found in Koniag communities was the kazhim or community house. This structure was built by a group of families, usually headed by male relatives, and served as the men's work and meeting area during the day. They were larger than normal houses as the four corner posts were positioned 20-25 feet apart in a near square design. Benches were built into the walls for sitting and storage. Men's implements and tools were manufactured and maintained here. According to Russian sources, kazhims were used as assembly halls on certain occasions when the entire community would gather to discuss events that would affect everyone. Finally, the kazhim became the ceremonial structure during the winter festivities, religious rituals and ceremonies.

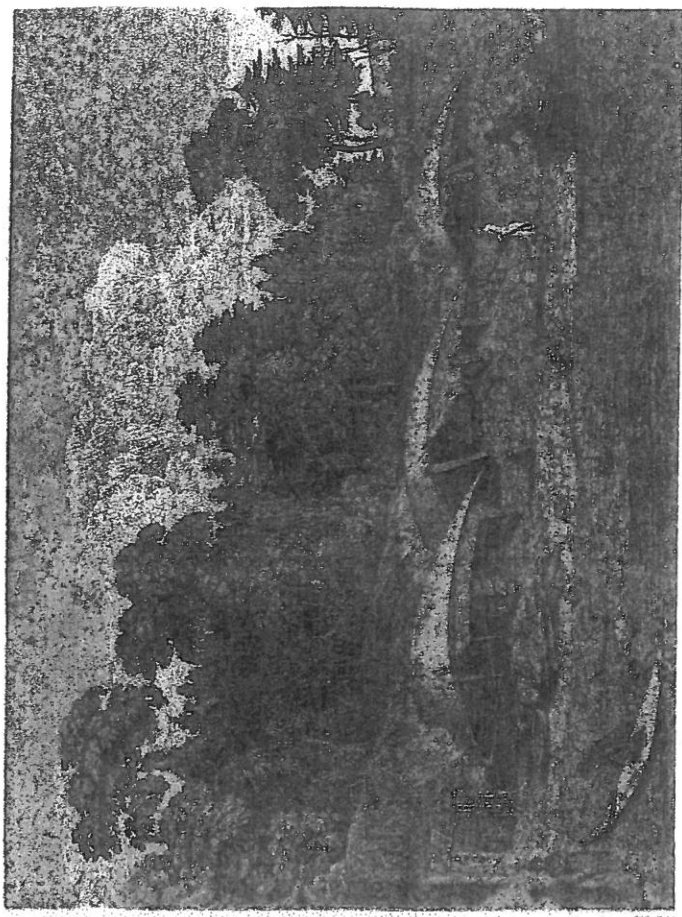
The kazhim was apparently not a general feature of Chugach life but may have been utilized by one or two groups.

#### *Subsistence: technologies and practices*

Stone tools were fundamental in the making of various implements. Various flints and cherts were chipped or ground into sharpened edges to make ulus for cutting skins, making sinew out of whale muscle, scraping and cleaning skins, and numerous other uses. A wide range of materials was used for other tools including bone, antler, shell, ivory and wood. Bone and antler were commonly used for fishhooks and barbed harpoon heads. Shell was used for small sharpened points and ivory appeared as beads and pendants in various adornments. Wood was commonly used in the Prince William Sound, lower Kenai Peninsula and northeastern Kodiak Archipelago areas for containers, headgear and, of course, everywhere as framing material for boats.

The Alutiiq cultural pattern is based on the ability to successfully function in the cold but ice-free waters of the north Pacific Ocean. There can be no doubt about their success in this regard as the Koniag traveled to isolated Chirikof Island and established a community and the Chugach traveled to and from Middleton Island, a lonely spot of land more than thirty miles south of Prince William Sound in the Gulf of Alaska. Among the Koniag, the wood-frame, skin-covered baidarka was most commonly of the two-holed variety, however both single and triple-holed varieties were also used. This meant that the primary marine mammal and ocean fishing productive unit consisted of two males, more than likely related. Among the Chugach the three-holed variety apparently became most common following the arrival of the Russians.

In addition to the baidarkas, the Alutiiq built and used larger open boats consisting of frames covered by skins, usually of sea lion, carefully



**At this Chugach camp in Prince William Sound, the use of wood is apparent in the shelters erected on shore. The baidarka and upside-down baidars show the Chugach used the same type of water transportation as their Koniag relatives.**  
(ALASKA AND POLAR REGIONS COLLECTION, UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA-FAIRBANKS)

stitched together. These could be up to 20 feet in length and were used to transport families or groups of men on visiting, trading or war activities.

When in their Baidarkas, Alutiiq men wore a translucent, water-repellant *kamleika*. Alutiiq women sewed a slender strand of grass along the stitch line joining two strips that would absorb moisture and expand thus improving the waterproof quality of the garment.

Alutiiq men wore two primary varieties of headgear at sea, a circular, spruce root hat and a bentwood visor. A very elaborate type of visored headgear was worn by the Koniag whalers that was a symbolic component of their ritualized hunting transformation into a type of killer whale.

Alutiiq men hunted with the throwing board for sea otters, harbor seals, sea lions and whales. In Prince William Sound the Chugach also hunted porpoise. The hunter sat in the bow while his partner in the stern did the paddling and orienting.

The most elaborate and ritualized food-procuring practice among the Alutiiq was whale hunting. Whalers were ritual and knowledge specialists who were viewed with both awe and horror by their fellow Alutiiq,

Alutiiq whaling was designed to take advantage of the convoluted shoreline of both the Kodiak Archipelago and Prince William Sound. Koniag whalers left their villages and went to solitary retreats in caves or secluded coves in April, perhaps a month prior to the arrival of whales, to ritually transform themselves. Whalers had special symbols, such as stars and crabs, and colors painted on their baidarkas and paddles. They had to activate their amulets or talismans through ritual procedures to access their power. Some may have applied aconite poisoning to the tip of their whale harpoon heads.

Perhaps the most unique practice of the Koniag whaler was the use of rendered human fat in their hunting. Whalers exhumed the bodies of recently buried persons—former whalers or persons of high status were preferred—carved off the fleshy, fatty portions of the body and boiled them. It was believed that whales were repulsed by human fat and would not come near it. When a whale was found inside a bay, the whaler would go to the narrowest area at the entrance and pour a line of fat across the entrance. Then he would proceed into the bay and after vocally calling on his spiritual supporters and the sun for assistance, would go and harpoon the whale. Once the whale was struck, the whaler would use song and motion to “tow” the whale ashore. Throughout these preparations and practices, the whaler’s wife, who had remained behind in the village, had a strict set of behaviors she was to follow including not leaving the house, limiting her movements and keeping her voice down. Once the whale died and was beached, other village residents would come to cut it up and transport the portions back to the village.

At the conclusion of the whaling season, the whaler had to ritually cleanse and “decommission” himself. Only by transforming himself back to his other human form would he be able to return to the village and live.

Among the Chugach, whaling was conducted in a related but different fashion. Whalers had to go through a similar set of ritual preparations and also were said to use human fat to keep struck whales in the bays. Chugach whaling may have occasionally involved more than one whaler and actual towing of the whale ashore may have been practiced. In both areas, it appears that whaling was an inherited activity, passed from father to son. The mummified burials found in the Kodiak Archipelago and in Prince William Sound are thought to have been whalers.

In addition to sea mammal hunting, salmon fishing, and bottom fishing, Koniag and Chugach subsistence included collecting shellfish and other intertidal organisms, harvesting greens, and collecting large quantities of berries in the fall.

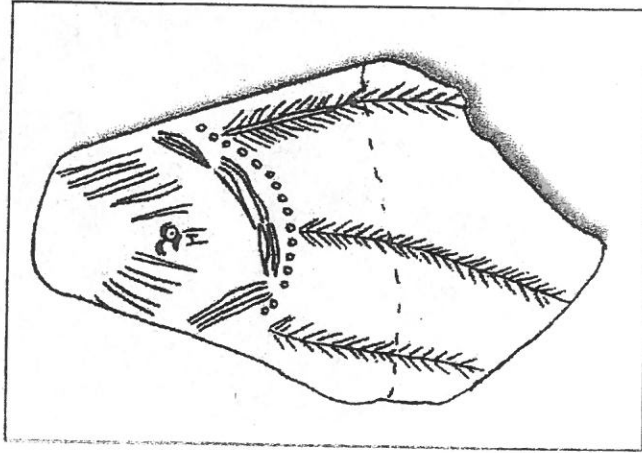
### Material culture: objects and adornment

Alutiiq material culture was rich and varied. A variety of objects were created to meet varied needs and objectives characteristic of the Alutiiq cultural system. Various kinds of rock art are found in the Koniag, lower Cook Inlet, and Chugach regions. Petroglyphs, created by engraving a design in rock, are found at various locations in the Kodiak archipelago. Rock paintings made by the application of ochre-based pigments to flat stone surfaces are found in lower Cook Inlet and in Prince William Sound. The Chugach paintings in Prince William Sound are believed to be ritual art forms made by whalers to call up powerful spiritual assistance for their hunting efforts.

Archaeological excavations at sites in the Karluk Lagoon region have recovered a rich array of wood and stone objects. Some of the smaller objects include bear’s heads and an extraordinary figurine that depicts a human to bird transformation. Carved wooden figures demonstrating excellent representational artistry of males and females, usually four-to-eight inches long, are another type of object.

Another type of figure is the shaman’s doll. Each village was reputed to have one. It was used by the shaman only during the winter masked ceremonies. Prior to the beginning of the masked ceremonies, the shaman brought out the doll and visited each household where the heads placed markers on the doll indicating what they hoped the spirits would provide for them during the upcoming season.

One of the most distinctive types of objects found are flat slate stones with pecked designs into them known now as “talking rocks”. The rocks discovered at Karluk depict humans, basically the upper two-thirds of the body, with various types of clothing, jewelry and headgear.



Incised pebble (circa 1300-1550 AD) excavated from the Settlement Point Site during Dig Afognak. (ARTIFACT OWNED BY AFOGNAK NATIVE CORPORATION. DRAWING BY BRIAN DAVIS)



Personal adornment took various forms among the Alutiiq. Men and women had different styles of ceremonial clothing and headgear. Male clothing was of sea mammal skins and female clothing was of bird skins. The basic garment was a long, hoodless tunic-style robe that could be made from a variety of materials or dressed up with various designs and embellishments. Labrets were of different size, styles and materials with ivory and jet stone being among the most valuable. In addition, ceremonial self-presentation included septal pins, earrings, and necklaces. Some men and women also had relatively limited tattoos, usually single lines encircling the face or crossing the cheeks. Facial painting was used by both the Koniag and Chugach with black and red being the primary colors. Among the Koniag these were utilized by shamans and others who participated in ritual ceremonies. Chugach appear to have utilized facial painting on more occasions.

#### *Social organization*

Kinship practices, such as descent and marriage patterns, indicate that Koniag and Chugach were likely matrilineal and that inheritance followed lineage lines. Women owned the houses. Monogamy was standard but both polygyny (occasional) and polyandry (rare) were also practiced. Divorce was uncommon but relatively simple to accomplish. Bride service, whereby the prospective groom lived with the prospective wife's family and contributed his labor and production to their household for a period of time, was the common practice. Perhaps for this reason, Russian observers believed that Koniag parents valued daughters as much, if not more, than sons.

Both fathers and mother's brothers (uncles) played important roles



**At dances and feasts, young girls wore elegant, beaded headresses with long trailers cascading down their backs that demonstrated elite social position. Prior to contact, dentalium (slender white shells from Vancouver Island obtained in trade) was the preferred material to indicate elevated status here and elsewhere in Alaska. (COURTESY OF ARCTIC STUDIES CENTER, NATIONAL MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY)**

## Alutiiq Knowledge Specialists

Among the Alutiiq, "knowledge specialists" were present whose expertise covered different domains such as medicinal healing, divination, marshaling spiritual forces, and maintaining social order.

Apparently unique among Alaska Natives, Koniag Alutiiq communities had persons known as "wise men" (Koniag-*kas'at*), revered elders who were the ritual leaders of the winter masked ceremonials. Observers of these events noted that *kas'at* instructed the participants in practice prior to public performances, coordinated the activities of different dances, and essentially ran the entire performance. They were also poets and songwriters. As bearers of the cosmological truths, *kas'at* were capable of communicating with the most powerful spirits as well as with the spirits of the animals. They were also looked to for advice and arbitration of disagreements in daily life. For Koniag Alutiiq, *kas'at* influence and capabilities were viewed as separate from, superior to and more important than the shamans (Koniag-*kaliak*).

The shaman was an important figure here as in other parts of Alaska. *Kaliak*, both men and women, had spiritual assistants whose powers they called upon to predict the outcome of hunts, battles and travels, and to discern and endeavor to alter weather, prevent calamities, and heal certain kinds of sickness. Some sources suggest that certain shamans obtained powers from evil spirits and that "bad" shamans used their powers to bring harm to humans. Shamanic powers were activated spiritually through unusual clothing, facial painting, special objects, rattles, whistles, song, dance, gestures, and formulaic verbalizations. The Koniag whaler (Koniag-*arwasu/ek*), discussed elsewhere in the text, was considered a type of shaman.

Shamans were highly competitive and sought to demonstrate the superiority of their powers over their rivals. In one famous encounter, an upstart shaman from the Alaska Peninsula undertook to test himself against the most renowned of Koniag shamans, Abshala. The challenger traveled to the spiritually-significant Augustine Island, an active volcano located in lower Cook Inlet, where he found Abshala. In a *kazhim* on the island, Abshala was ultimately victorious as his spectacular display of fiery rockets overwhelmed the rival, forcing him to admit defeat and depart.

Another category of "knowledge specialist" was the medicinal curer who utilized a diverse array of more physically-based techniques in their healing practices and passed their knowledge on to descendants. Included in the repertoires of these healers were herbs for beverages, foods and poultices, acupuncture, blood letting, surgical procedures and bone setting.

In Koniag oral traditions involving interactions between *kas'aq* and *kaliak*, the superiority of the *kas'aq* shines through, in part due to their consistent benevolence. Following the coming of the Russian Orthodox clergy to Kodiak, the term *kas'aq* was extended to them and the clerics gradually took over these functions in Koniag Alutiiq communities perhaps due as much to their advocacy for Alutiiq welfare as to their religious practice

in the upbringing of their sons and nephews. Fathers sponsored their sons to be admitted into the collective of the adult males of the kazhim. Fathers, supported by their kinsmen, were responsible for hosting the feast and distributing food and gifts to guests who were invited to witness the ceremonial transformation of a young man after a successful sea lion or bear hunt.

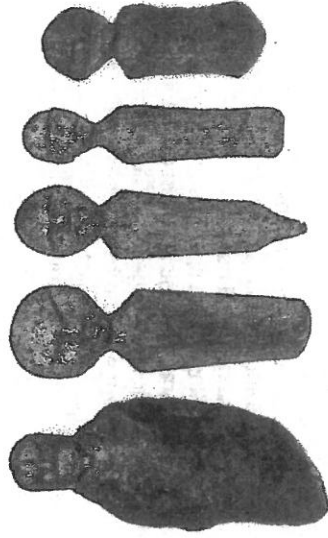
Young women were trained at home by their mothers and her relatives. At her first menses, a young woman was secluded in a corner of the house or in a separate tent structure for a period of time. During the seclusion, she received focused training on her physical transformation, on the behavioral taboos and requirements during her menstrual period, on technical skills for processing skins and food, making clothing, and sewing the skins for the baidarkas and baldars. At the conclusion of her seclusion and training, a ceremonial recognition of her change of state was held in the kazhim usually incorporated into one of the fall ceremonial feasts.

Among the Alutiiq, gender roles for men as women and women as men were both recognized. A father was able to have a daughter raised as a man admitted to the men's house by distributing three times the normal quantity of goods on the occasion of being accepted into the kazhim.

Clear social strata are identifiable in both Koniag and Chugach society. The families who owned and headed the household made up a "noble" segment who organized production, oversaw distribution, acquired and distributed exotic goods through trade, and were major figures in the ceremonial activities of the community. The majority of the society, mostly younger or extended relatives, were commoners, the major workforce of the communities. The Koniag also held a substantial number of *katiurs* (slaves), who consisted primarily of women and young people captured in raids or battles. These persons were responsible for the more onerous of the daily tasks such as acquiring wood and water, attending to the hearth, and answering to the needs of the nobles. They could be traded or killed by their owners.

#### *Political Organization*

Political practice in pre-contact Alutiiq society is another area where information is relatively limited and uncertain. Among the Koniag, the heads of households in a community comprised an informal executive council apparently headed by the most senior, experienced, or authoritative members. In addition, all adult males constituted a body that made decisions about relations with other Koniag groups. Finally, all adult males and females apparently comprised an assembly that met in the kazhim in the spring to discuss deployment to seasonal camps and production levels for the economic season with an eye toward possible



**The Koniag used small carved wooden dolls for several purposes. These may have been used in ceremonial performances or attached to dance masks.**  
(ALUTIIQ MUSEUM/ARTIFACTS OWNED BY KONIAG INC.)

upcoming ceremonies in the fall. After returning to the villages in the fall, a similar adult assembly would be held to inventory production, identify ceremonies, assume task responsibilities, and coordinate travel and visiting arrangements.

#### *Trade and warfare*

Trade was a significant aspect of Koniag and Chugach cultural practice. In the Koniag case this primarily involved traveling to the Alaska Peninsula or northeast to Prince William Sound. Caribou skins for high status male clothing and other furs were also obtained in exchange for whale products. Trade with the Chugach brought distant goods such as copper and dentalium to the Koniag. The Chugach traded with the Atna' for furs and copper, often using their Eyak neighbors as middlemen.

Warfare was a significant part of the cultural landscape among both the Koniag and Chugach. Among the Chugach, parties of men in baidarkas would travel to specific communities elsewhere in the sound to mete out damage. Koniag military apparatus included slat and hide armor, plank shields, and larger skin and wood protective frames. The Koniag were reported by Russian sources to have traditionally tortured some male captives prior to killing them.

Oral traditions from both groups testify to substantial conflicts internally among the sociopolitical groups that were motivated by a variety of insults or violations of agreements.

There are also oral traditions concerning conflict with non-Alutiiq neighbors as well. Koniag waged war with the Unangan with large baidarka flotillas from both groups periodically venturing into the territory of the other. The Koniag also raided Alaska Peninsula Alutiiq as well as Denaliine villages on the west side of Cook Inlet. The Chugach



battled with the Atna' and also with the Dena'ina. The most significant neighbor for the Chugach was the Eyak who occupied the coastal region to the east. While there was conflict between the two groups, the Eyak were both buffer between and trading intermediary for the Chugach with the Tlingit from southeast Alaska. Chugach and Koniag Alutiiq were on good terms and traveled back and forth between the two areas.

Despite the traditions of warfare, it was not a central focus of Alutiiq society. For example, no specialized warrior role or warfare leader is cited by either group and there are no accounts of efforts to capture territory or extinguish other social groups.

#### *Beliefs*

Koniag Alutiiq cosmology was elaborate consisting of origin accounts involving a primeval sun-man, accounts of spiritual forces, and numerous oral texts about how the universe functioned and how humans were supposed to behave. The purest of being, *lam sua*, lived in the sky. The concept of *sua* indicates the sensate, intelligent, volitional force of a form, its "person." The universe was conceived to be hierarchically-organized planes of existence with five levels above the world and five levels below the world. Both good and evil spirits existed. A central premise of existence was that of spiritual recycling between planes and the management of the boundaries and pathways for appearance into this plane of existence.



#### *Ceremonies*

Central to the religious practices of the Alutiiq were the masked winter dances and ritual performances conducted in the *kazhim*. A primary focus of these activities was to thank and show respect to spirits controlling the availability and abundance of game. Some representations were of specific experiences of hunters. Among the Koniag and lower Kenai Peninsula Alutiiq, dances to mollify evil spirits were a part of the ceremonies.

Alutiiq masks were the presence and embodiment-

**Alutiiq masks were essential to the conduct of ritual dances and performances indicating the presence of powerful spiritual forces among the people. A wide variety of masks were used indicating the richness of the spiritual consciousness of the Alutiiq.** (ALUTIIQ MUSEUM/ ARTIFACT OBTAINED BY KONIAG, FIG. 1)

ment of spiritual forces. They have a distinctive appearance with a long axis from top to bottom and a tripartite division into top, middle and bottom like a human face. Some masks are symmetrical in design while others have a bilateral asymmetry in terms of coloring or features represented (mouth, nose). A variety of types and sizes existed which could be worn on the head, held in the hand or mouth, or carried.

Accounts indicate that masked performances could go on for several days. Presentations included dramatic appearances and disappearances from the smokehole in the ceiling. There may have been a liturgical order to certain of the presentations referred to as the "six-day mystery" by one scholar.

#### *Eyak*

The Eyak, speakers of a language distantly related to the Athabaskan languages spoken in the interior, lived along the coast from Eyak Lake eastward to Icy Cape. During the historic period, they were primarily riverine people who had several villages in the Copper River delta among which they traveled in small dugout canoes. Squeezed between the expanding Tlingit to the east, the Chugach on the west and the Atna' to the north, the Eyak nevertheless retained an important position as middlemen and traders between these groups until the late 19th century. When the commercial salmon industry landed in the vicinity of their settlements in the 1890s, disease and exploitation soon devastated the remaining Eyak.

#### *European Contact*

European interaction with Alutiiq populations began in the middle of the 18th century when they became aware of the Russian presence and subjugation of the Unangan. The Russians endeavored to penetrate Koniag Alutiiq territory as early as 1763 but were effectively rebuffed for 20 years. In 1784 from Vancouver Island, the Russian Shelekhov mounted a sizable force and occupied Three Saints Bay on the southwest corner of Kodiak Island. Following a devastating shelling of Refuge Rock where many Alutiiq had retreated, the Koniag were defeated and many hostages taken. In the aftermath, Russians began asserting total control over Koniag life, acquiring hostages and requiring males to hunt sea otter, often in distant waters. The Chugach Alutiiq, initially contacted by Captain Cook came under Russian subjugation led by Baranov in 1792. The vast majority of Chugach moved to Nuchek on Hinchinbrook Island where they remained until the transfer of Alaska from Russia to the United States in 1867. At that time, Chugach began to reoccupy many of their ancestral villages around Prince William Sound and the lower

