

Book — Naaqisuuteq

NAAQISUUT'KA TERLELLRUMA. – SOMEBODY MUST HAVE STOLEN MY BOOK.

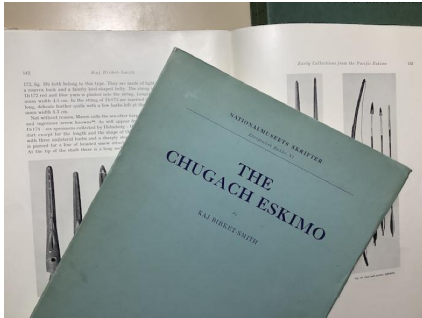


Photo: The Chugach Eskimo, by Kaj Birket-Smith, 1933.

Alaska's gold rush was followed by wave of scientific inquiry. As the state's infrastructure grew and travel became easier, researchers made their way north to study everything from geology to wildlife biology. Anthropologists were among the researchers. In the early decades of the twentieth century, men and women interested in recording cultural traditions visited Native communities across the territory. Their research resulted in a series of ethnographies—books that systematically described the economy, social organization, and spiritual practices of Alaska cultures.

Although there are a number of explorers' accounts that describe Alutiiq culture, there is only one formal ethnography. In 1933, Kaj Birket-Smith, a Danish anthropologist, traveled to Prince William Sound, where he spent three months studying Chugach traditions with the help of American scholar Frederica de Laguna. His study was published in 1953 under the title *The Chugach Eskimo* and remains one of the most detailed written records of Alutiiq traditions.

Why weren't there more studies of Alutiiq culture? By the time anthropologists arrived in the Kodiak region, Alutiiq people had been participating in a western economic system for over a century. Many traditional practices had changed or were hidden from view. This contrasted strikingly with the societies in interior Alaska, where contact with Europeans was much more recent. Most researchers choose to conduct studies in places where western influence was less evident. However, in recent decades, anthropologists have recognized the wealth of cultural information in Alutiiq communities and written recent studies of Alutiiq traditions.