

Clothing — Atkut (N), Agunat (S), Aunat (S)

AGUNANEK PILIYUQ. – SHE IS MAKING CLOTHES.



Photo: Cormorant skin parka. Etholen Collection.
National Museum of Finland.

Sewing in classical Alutiiq society was often a social activity. Women enjoyed each other's company as they produced clothing and covers for skin boats. Girls began participating at the age of six, making thread and braiding line. Some communities recognized a young woman's coming of age with a public festival where her mother gave away her sewing tools. This act symbolized the family's preparation for their daughter's new adult life.

In addition to providing protection from the weather, clothes symbolized an Alutiiq person's place in society. A garment's animal skins and decorative elements reflected their wearer's age, gender, and social position. Members of the wealthy ruling class wore elegantly decorated parkas of sea otter, fox, or ground squirrel pelts, or furs imported from the mainland. Jewelry and tattoos added to the appearance of prestige imparted by these rich materials. In contrast, the less affluent wore simple clothes sewn from bird or seal skins. Whatever your status, your clothes provided a spiritual link to the animal world. Alutiiq people kept their garments clean and well repaired to show respect for the creatures that supported human life.