

## Copper — Kanuyaq

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### KASAAKAT KANUYAMEK TAIT'LLRIIT. – THE RUSSIANS BROUGHT COPPER.

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Photo: Rebecca Pruitt stores a copper kettle donated by Larry Matfay in the museum's collections.

Copper is one of the few metals that Alutiiq people used prehistorically. Artists ground copper oxide, a mineral available on southeastern Kodiak Island, to make pigment. However, they obtained copper suitable for tool manufacture in trade with the Alaska mainland, particularly the Kenai Peninsula and Prince William Sound. Historic sources indicate that the Ahtna Athabaskan Indians mined copper in the Copper River basin, which they traded annually to the Dena'ina Indians, who in turn traded with Alutiiq societies. By the time copper reached Kodiak, it had passed through many hands. Most copper use dates to after AD 1000.

From copper Alutiiq people fashioned arrowheads, which were used in warfare, as well as spears and knives. Craftsmen worked the metal raw, shaping it into tool forms by cold hammering.

In historic times, Russian traders also brought copper items. Among their imports to Kodiak were copper kettles, copper rings, and thimbles made with a copper alloy.

Alutiiq stories suggest that copper tools were both prized and powerful. A tale from Prince William Sound describes how Raven, the wily hero of many Alutiiq stories, bribed a blue crane with the gift of a copper spear to help him retrieve his kidnapped wife. Another story relates how an evil spirit killed people with a copper spear.