

Feather — Culuk

MAS'KAAQ CULUNGQ'RTUQ. – THE MASK HAS FEATHERS.



Photo: Puffin skins sewn into a parka, Etholen Collection, National Museum of Finland.

Birds were a central part of classical Alutiiq society, both as an economic resource and as spiritual beings. In addition to eggs and meat, they provided a variety of feathers with important everyday uses. Eagle feathers were used in mattresses and as fletching for hunting arrows and toy darts. Waterfowl down could be used to start a fire, and feathered pelts were a primary material for clothing. Beautiful parkas were stitched from the skins of puffins and cormorants and worn as everyday clothing.

Feathers were also used for decoration. Inserted between the strands of spruce-root baskets, woven into grass mats, or sewn into the seams of clothing made from bear or sea mammal gut, feathers helped to accent the beauty of Alutiiq objects. Feathers also adorned spiritually powerful hunting hats and ceremonial masks, symbolizing the magical ties between people and birds. Birds were seen as helping spirits. They fed families, helped fishermen find schools of fish, marked currents and rocks, and led mariners to land in Kodiak's dense fog. Modern fishermen still appreciate birds for these qualities.