

Backpack, Hunting Bag — Atmak, Ekgwik, Ekguiyutaq

ATMANGQ'RTUQ. – HE HAS A BACKPACK.



Photo: Skin bag, Etholen Collection, National Museum of Finland, Helsinki.

Packing well for a hunting or fishing trip was as important in the past as it is today. Alutiiq men filled their kayaks with useful things: wooden containers filled with fresh food and water, sleeping blankets, and even inflated seal bladders for emergency buoyancy—the personal flotation devices of the past. Each hunter also carried a special skin bag with smaller necessities: harpoons and arrowheads to equip hunting tools; needles, sinew, and skin to patch tears in the skin of their kayaks; and in the historic era, ammunition and tobacco.

These bags were exquisitely made and decorated because beauty in clothing and personal articles was considered a sign of respect for the animals a hunter pursued. One such hunting bag, collected on Woody Island in the late nineteenth century, is elaborately decorated with colored thread, caribou hair embroidery, and strips of dyed gut—perhaps sea lion esophagus.