

Lucky — Asiiriluni, Nakerluni

ILAIT ASIIRITAARTUT. – SOME PEOPLE ARE ALWAYS LUCKY.



Photo: Hummingbird in a Kodiak garden. Photo courtesy of Richard MacIntosh.

Luck was an essential part of hunting in classical Alutiiq society. In addition to promoting hunting success through large public ceremonies that honored the spirit world, Alutiiq hunters collected amulets. Men typically carried these small charms for personal protection and assistance. They could be collected or manufactured but were usually something small and rare.

Historic sources report that hunters collected small, brown, floating rocks, which may have been the seeds of tropical plants transported north by ocean currents. Alutiiq considered these stones powerful good luck charms. Some were worn around the neck, others were kept in a box lined with eagle down and fed with food and red paint. Similarly, hummingbirds, their nests, and their eggs were considered lucky. These rare birds were dried and carried in a bag to promote hunting success.

Other talismans included eagle feathers, raven's feet, loon skins, bear's hair, and certain roots, berries, and old archaeological artifacts. Some talismans were lashed to the inside of a hunter's kayak, near the cockpit where they could be seen. Unangax? hunters tied small, ivory sea otter carvings to their boats. Alutiiq hunters lashed parts of animal skulls filled with eagle down and red paint to their vessels. These amulets were said to illuminate the water and attract sea otters. Talismans were also secured to hunting hats.

The tie between talismans and birds was particularly strong because birds were the personal spirit helpers of many hunters.