

Open Skin Boat — Angyaq

ANGYAKUN AIWIKUTARTUKUT. – WE ARE GOING (AWAY) BY OPEN BOAT.



Photo: Model angyaq by Teacon Simeonoff, 2016.
AM813.

The Alutiiq *angyaq* is a large open boat much like the umiak of northern Alaska. These twenty- to thirty-five-foot vessels were used for traveling and trading and could hold up to twenty people. They had a sturdy driftwood frame covered with sea lion skins that was well designed for carrying cargo and landing in the surf. Resting on their knees, paddlers propelled *angyat* with the same beautifully decorated, single-bladed paddles used for kayaking.

In the early years of western colonization, Russian traders confiscated and destroyed *angyat* in an effort to disable Alutiiq communities. Without large boats it was difficult for villagers to gather, flee subjugation, or mobilize attacks. However, the Russians recognized the great value of these vessels and adapted some for their own transportation needs. In Russian, these were known as *baidara*.

The art of *angyaq* construction has faded from living memory, but museum collections preserve a few boat models. With the help of these models and boat parts recovered from archaeological sites, Alutiiq carvers are exploring the *angyaq* and relearning this boat-building tradition.