

## Tlingits — Swaaciit, Kulusut

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### SWAACIIT IMASINAM AKIANI ET'UT. – TLINGITS ARE ACROSS THE BIG OCEAN.

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Photo: Tlingit and Alutiiq dancers work together in a cultural exchange, Kodiak, summer 2011.

The Tlingit Indians of southeast Alaska are the Alutiiq people's eastern neighbors. Their homeland extends from Yakutat Bay at the entrance to the Alaska Panhandle to northern coastal British Columbia. Like the traditional Alutiiq societies, Tlingit communities were once large and affluent. The Tlingit lived in big coastal villages organized around clans, extended families that worked and lived together. They had hereditary social classes, hosted elaborate winter festivals, kept slaves, waged warfare, and traveled widely.

Travel to the west brought Tlingit people into contact with Alutiiq communities. Interaction was most frequent in Prince William Sound. Here, contacts were both friendly and hostile. Traditional stories recount the slaughter of Alutiiq hunters who strayed into Tlingit territory as well as raids on Alutiiq communities that resulted in the death and enslavement of residents. Alutiiq communities took brutal revenge, developing a reputation for fierceness. These same accounts, however, reveal that neighboring communities also invited each other to compete in friendly games, participate in festivals, and trade.

Anthropologists believe that interaction between the two societies became more common in the late prehistoric era. At this time, southeast Alaska trade goods like abalone and dentalium shells appear more commonly in Kodiak's archaeological sites, elements of Tlingit form line art appear in Alutiiq art, and Alutiiqs adopted items of Tlingit technology, like spruce root hats and two-pieced halibut fishing hooks. In turn, early historic Tlingit people are known to have utilized items of Alutiiq technology: skin-covered kayaks and sea otter harpoon darts.