

War — Anguyaq

ANGUYARTUT. – THEY ARE HAVING WAR.



Photo: War shield and club made by Andrew Abyo.
Purchased for the Alutiiq Museum's collections with
support from the Rasmuson Foundation's Art
Acquisition Initiative.

In classical Alutiiq society, where social positions were inherited and a small class of wealthy individuals acted as community leaders, warfare was a means of enhancing wealth. In addition to avenging wrongs, elite men led raids on other communities to acquire plunder and slaves, and increase their affluence. Neighboring Alutiiq communities were attacked, as well as more distant Unangax?, Dena'ina, and ?ingit villages.

In battle, warriors carried short wooden clubs, spears, bows, and specially fashioned arrows. The arrows were tipped with bone points that had thin, splintery barbs. Craftsmen designed these barbs to cause extensive internal damage by breaking off inside their victims. In addition to weaponry, warriors carried large shields made from thick planks of hardwood and wore protective vests of wooden armor. Fashioned from small pieces of wood and tied together with sinew, these sturdy yet flexible shirts protected a warrior's chest from enemy arrows.

Warfare is a common topic in Alutiiq stories, where incidents leading to conflict often unfold in predictable ways. In many stories, visitors from a distant place ridicule and embarrass a community member—particularly a chief or a child. After the incident, community members secretly follow the offenders to their homes and take revenge, sometimes with the assistance of neighbors. These stories illustrate the types of events that led to conflict and probably reminded people about the consequences of cruel behavior. They also illustrate that the goal of conflict was not simply to punish the offender, as this could be done anywhere, but to separate the offenders from their possessions. By taking revenge in the offender's home, raiders could acquire plunder.