

Week, Saturday, Holiday Eve — Maqineq

MAQINEQ NANGKAN, TANG'RCIQAMCL – AFTER THE WEEK IS OVER, I'LL SEE YOU GUYS.



Photo: Nina and Peter Olsen Sr. Christmas, 1979.
Photograph by Peter Olsen Jr., courtesy of Lydia Olsen.

All human societies have systems of reckoning time, ways of accounting for the sequence and duration of events. However, concepts of time vary greatly with cultural and environmental factors. The places people live, the technologies they use, the structure of their economies, their social organization, and even their ritual systems influence their perceptions of time.

The strict divisions of clock and calendar time are western constructs, originating in the Judeo-Christian worldview and becoming widespread in the nineteenth century with the Industrial Revolution. To Westerners, time is linear and nonrepetitive. It progresses from the past into the future and provides daily structure for the complicated world in which people live.

In contrast, life in farming societies and among high-latitude hunting and gathering peoples is often closely tied to the passage of seasons. Here people tend to see time as repetitive and circular, part of an ever-renewing cycle. This was true in classical Alutiiq society, where people recognized the phases of the moon, seasonal changes in weather, and the cyclical availability of plants and animals.

Alutiiq people began to chart the passage of days and weeks when they became members of the Russian Orthodox faith, using peg calendars to track important events in the church year.

Although an historic construct, the word *maqineq*, for week, seems to be derived from the word for “day before a holiday.” For example, in the Alutiiq language, Christmas Eve is *ARusistuam Maqinera*. The use of the root *maqi-* in relation to holidays may also be related to *maqiwik*, the Alutiiq word for steam bathhouse. In Alutiiq society, people once took steam baths to cleanse themselves before special events.