

Woman — Arnaq

ARNAT PEKNARTUTAARTUT. – WOMEN WORK HARD.



Photo: Female doll by Coral Chernoff. Purchased for the Alutiiq Museum collections with assistance from the Rasmuson Foundation.

Women had important economic, social, and spiritual roles in classical Alutiiq society. In addition to collecting plant foods, they processed fish for storage, tanned hides, sewed the skin coverings for kayaks, wove baskets, and manufactured clothing. In winter villages, groups of related women lived together in large sod houses with their husbands and children. A pair of sisters, for example, might share a household. Some anthropologists believe that Alutiiqs were a matrilineal society. Descent may have been traced through women, with children gaining their family identity from their mother's side.

In the spiritual realm, women shared their powers as both shamans and healers. The shaman was a mystical person. They communicated with the spiritual world and could foretell the future, forecasting the wealth or predicting the success of subsistence activities. In contrast, healers were community doctors. They manufactured herbal medicines, tended the sick, and acted as midwives.