

Weather, Sky, Outdoors, Universe, World — Lla

LLA ASIRTUQ. – THE WEATHER IS GOOD.



Photo: Morning sky over the mouth of the Karluk River, 1994.

The world's cultures have a great variety of beliefs about the sky. Tlingit people see the sky as an upside-down bowl with a hard surface. Their sky has layers that provide a home for the souls of those who died from violence. The ancient Inuit saw the sky as a dome covering a flat earth resting on pillars. In their worldview, there were rich lands filled with animals both in the sky and beneath the tundra.

Alutiiq cosmology offers another view. The world lla can mean weather, sky, outdoors, world, or universe. The Alutiiq sky is a tangible place, a layered universe inhabited by powerful, immortal beings. These include the moon, the sun, the stars, and the aurora borealis. This world mirrors Earth. The sky world has paths, houses, community gathering places, and game. People from Earth can visit and even live in the sky world. Alutiiq legends tell of women who marry beings from the sky and have children with their sky husbands.

In Alutiiq artwork, a series of concentric circles can represent the layers of the sky. Many Alutiiq baskets feature a circular motif on the base, rings of decorative twining. Why decorate a part of a basket that people seldom see? According to Alutiiq legends, people could travel between the Earth and sky worlds inside baskets, a belief the Alutiiq share with Yup'ik people. The decorative rings may reflect this special connection between baskets and the worlds above the Earth.