

Ancestors — Cuumillat, Cuuliallat, Cuulirat

CUUMILLAT LISNGATAALLIT. – THE ANCESTORS WERE VERY LEARNED.



Image: Afogank Man, water color painting by Helen J. Simeonof, Alutiiq Museum Collection AM459.

Concepts of time differ between societies. Western cultures think of time as linear and progressive: species evolve, investments grow, technologies develop, and the past is often seen as outdated or quaint. To many Native people, including Alutiiqs, time is more circular and fluid. From this perspective, the past is part of the present, and events from distant times influence daily life. This view is particularly evident in Alutiiq beliefs about ancestors, forbearers whose lives are beyond the reach of living memory.

Importantly, Alutiiq people view distant ancestors as revered family members. Ancestors may be separated from the living by hundreds or even thousands of years, but they remain aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents. This reverence for ancestors is evident in the respect Alutiiqs feel for ancestral knowledge. Hunting expertise, artistic skill, environmental knowledge, stories, songs, and dance are all gifts bestowed to the living from previous generations.