Atkut (N): Agunat (S) – Clothing

The traditional Alutiiq parka was a long, hood-less robe. Worn by both men and women, Alutiiq people fashioned these garments from bird skins, squirrel pelts, caribou hide, or otter fur. A typical adult parka might require as many as 60 bird skins. Many parkas had slits in the sides so that the wearer could remove his or her arms from the parka’s sleeves to work freely. Pants were seldom worn under Alutiiq robes and shoes were only used in the coldest months. Whale leather was a preferred material for the soles of boots, and beach grasses were woven into socks.

On their heads, Alutiiq men wore hats woven from spruce root or crafted from wood. Similar to Tlingit hats from Southeast Alaska, these garments were decorated with shells and beads, painted with bright colors, and considered a sign of wealth. Some spruce root hats were even passed from father to son. Other indications of social standing included facial tattoos and jewelry. Alutiiq people wore nose pins, earrings, necklaces, and labrets—plugs of stone or bone inserted in a hole below the lower lip. The larger the labret, the older and more important its wearer.

Alutiiq people also fashioned special clothing for hunting and traveling. Every kayaker wore a gutskin jacket, or kanaglluk, cut to his unique proportions and designed to fit snugly over his kayak hatch. Known today by the Siberian term kamleika, Alutiiq people sewed these garments from the intestines of bears or sea mammals. Strips of gutskin were sewn together with sinew and special waterproof stitches. Alutiiq skin sewers rolled a piece of dried beach grass into every seam, then made careful stitches through the grass. When water seeped into the needle holes, it was absorbed by the underlying grass, which swelled and prohibited more water from entering. This ingenious stitching technique kept the hunter dry and protected him from hypothermia.

Learn More:

Bird Math
Consider the number of birds needed to dress Kodiak’s Alutiiq people in a bird skin parka. Archaeologists believe that the Alutiiq must have harvested hundreds of thousands of sea birds. Here are some conservative estimates:

Kodiak’s population about AD 1600
—10,000 people

Number of people wearing the common birdskin parka
—6,500 people

Life span of a birdskin parka worn daily
—5 years

Number of people needing a new birdskin parka each year
—1,300 people

Number of birdskins per parka
—60 skins

Birds harvested yearly for parka production
—60 X 1,300 — 78,000 birds

Birds were harvested around Kodiak and on the Alaska Peninsula. All of these birds were eaten.