

Arnat Calinrit – WOMEN'S WAYS



In Alutiiq/Sugpiaq society, groups of related women lived together with their husbands and children. For example, a pair of sisters might share a sod house. Each family had a separate sleeping room, but worked together on daily chores in a large central room. Here, women raised children, prepared and served food, and manufactured essential items—grass mats, baskets, thread, clothing, and boat covers. Every woman had a sewing bag, a decorated pouch where she kept her personal sewing tools. A woman skilled at sewing was considered an excellent wife.

Outside their homes, Alutiiq women were collectors. They gathered plant foods, harvested bird eggs, pried shellfish from rocks, cut grass for weaving, gathered wood, and carried water. They also processed foods and materials, splitting fish, butchering animals, and cleaning everything from seal gut to bird pelts and spruce roots.

Because of their power to produce life, women in their reproductive years were not allowed to hunt or trap, and could never touch a man's hunting gear. Starting at puberty, they were secluded in special huts during their monthly period, to protect the luck of hunters.

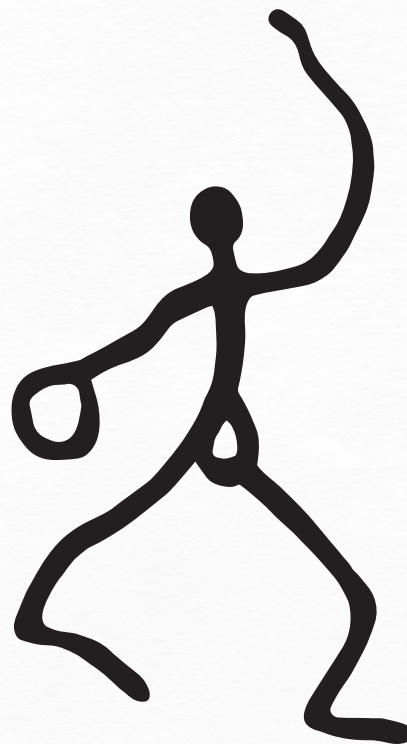
In the spiritual realm, women served as shamans and healers. Shamans were closely connected with the non-human world. They could foretell the future, forecast wealth, predict the success of hunts, or assist people who fell ill from spiritual causes. Healers were community doctors. They made and provided herbal medicines, tended the sick, and acted as midwives. Such women were skilled at massage and bloodletting, and often worked with patients in the warmth of the steambath.

LEARN MORE:

Birth and Rebirth of an Alaskan Island: The Life of an Alutiiq Healer. 2001, by Joanne Mulcahy. University of Georgia Press, Athens.



*Martha Rozelle picks crowberries near Akbiok, 1990.
Photo by Priscilla Russell, KANA Collection.*



*Petroglyph from
Cape Alitak,
Kodiak Island.*