



PisiRkat (N): Pinguat – BEADS

Makut pinguat cucunartut. – THESE BEADS ARE BEAUTIFUL.

Before the availability of European goods, Alutiiq/Sugpiaq people embellished their clothing and jewelry with a variety of handmade beads. Pieces of shell, bone, ivory, amber, coal, slate, and even halibut vertebrae were fashioned into decorations for parkas, raingear, headdresses, hunting hats, bags, and labrets. In Prince William Sound, people made shiny beads from unbaked clay mixed with seal oil, and on the Kenai Peninsula, they carved beads from soft red shale. A necklace collected in Kodiak in the 19th century, features hundreds of tiny bird claws set into each other to form small loops, like beads.

Some shells were particularly coveted for decoration. Alutiiq people obtained dentalium shells, the curved, white, tusk-shaped shells of scaphopods, in trade with the societies of Southeast Alaska. They used these graceful shells as beads to decorate clothing and as earrings and nose pins. They were considered extremely valuable. Historic sources indicate that a pair of delicate dentalium shells could be traded for an entire squirrel skin parka.

By 1840, trade goods from Asia and Europe began reaching Alaska in large quantities, supplied by merchants in Siberian ports and Hudson's Bay Company outposts in the United States and western Canada. Russian colonists hoarded the finer goods—porcelains, iron tools, and gunflints—for their own use, but traded food and trinkets to the Alutiiq. Traders used inexpensive commodities like glass beads to pay Alutiiq hunters for valuable sea otter hides resold in distant markets.

Manufactured in Asian and European factories, colorful glass beads were cheap, easy to ship, and coveted by Native peoples. On Kodiak, these brightly colored beads fit well into the prestige-based economy and were widely incorporated into ancestral arts—like the production of headdresses. The Cornaline d'Alleppo, a dark red bead made in Venice, was particularly prized, perhaps as its color resembled traditional red pigments.

LEARN MORE:

Cultural Arts—Beading, <https://alutiiqmuseum.org/learn/the-alutiiq-sugpiaq-people/cultural-arts/beading>



Detail of glass beads in an Alutiiq beaddress, Afognak Island, 1872, Pinart Collection, Musée Boulogne-sur-Mer, France. Photo by Will Anderson.



Nacaq – HEADDRESS



JJ Orloff models a nacaq made by June Simeonoff Pardue. Purchased for the Alutiiq Museum with support from the Rasmuson Art Acquisition Fund.

Headdresses were once part of the elaborate clothing worn at Alutiiq/Sugpiaq winter festivals. Participants in these events displayed their prosperity with beautifully crafted garments. The materials and decorative elements used in clothing reflected their wearer's age, gender, and social position. Wealthy Alutiiq people wore elegantly decorated parkas of valuable sea otter, fox, or ground squirrel pelts. Headdresses, jewelry, and tattoos added to the appearance of prestige conveyed by these rich materials. The less affluent wore simple clothing of common materials like bird skins. Whatever your status, your clothes provided a link to the spiritual world. Alutiiq people kept their garments clean, well repaired, and nicely decorated to show respect for the creatures that supported human life.

Women's headdresses were typically made from hundreds of glass beads strung on sinew and embellished with feathers colored with cranberry or blueberry juice. Strands of small beads were tied into a tight-fitting cap with many dangling lengths attached to the sides and the back. These attachments often featured larger, heavier beads that swayed, glittered, and jingled as the wearer moved. In Prince William Sound, the daughters of Alutiiq chiefs wore headdresses of

beads and dentalium shells that extended far down their bodies, sometimes reaching their heels. Beaded headdresses were often accompanied by matching earrings, chokers, necklaces, and belts. Teenage girls and young women wore these lavish ornaments to symbolize their passage into adulthood.

Men also wore headdresses. These garments were hood-shaped, and though they might include beads, they lacked the long strings associated with women's *nacat*. Some were made of ermine skins, decorated with feathers, pieces of animal hair, strips of leather and gut skin, and embellished with embroidery.

Today, headdresses remain a part of traditional dress. Alutiiq people wear them for performances, events, and special occasions.

LEARN MORE:

Nacaq, How to Make a Kodiak Alutiiq Beaded Headdress, 2022, by Kayla McDermott, Alutiiq Museum, Kodiak.

Caguyaq – HUNTING HAT



Wooden hats were an essential piece of gear for Alutiiq/Sugpiaq hunters pursuing sea mammals in Kodiak's stormy waters. They transformed kayakers into magical beings with killing powers, and shielded their eyes from sun, rain, and sea spray.

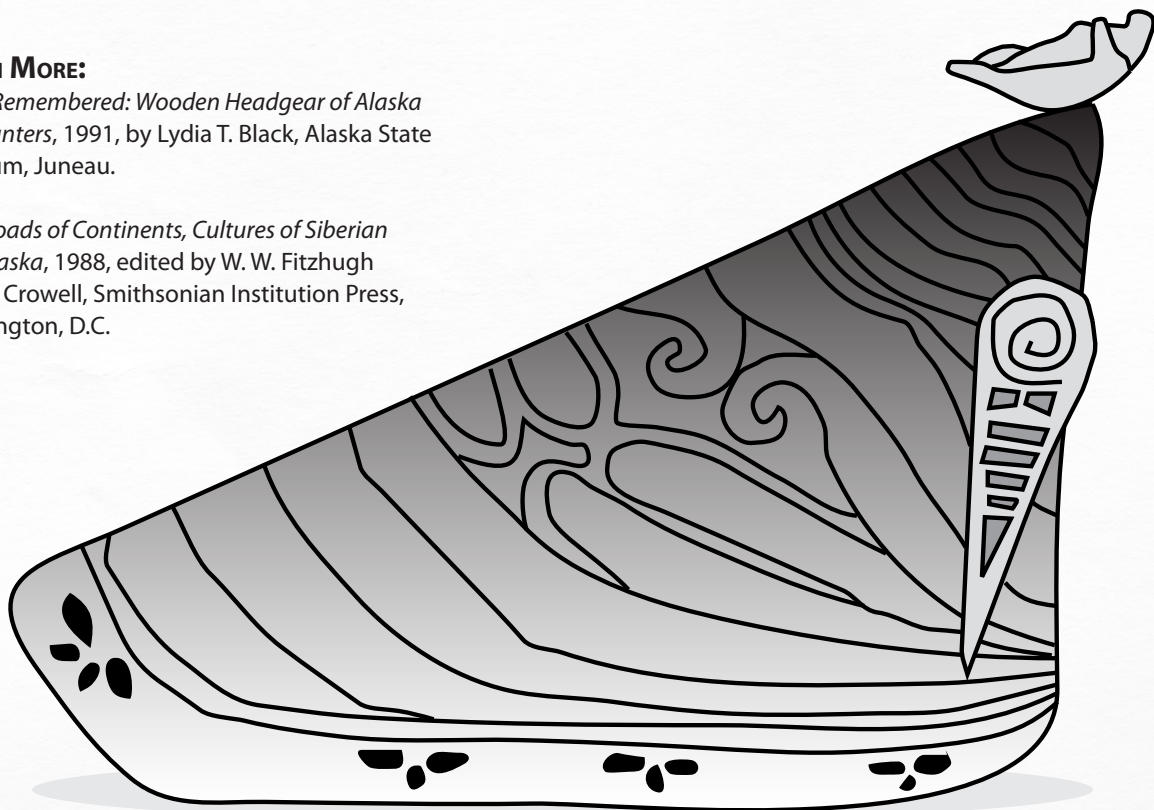
Alutiiq, Unangaġ, and Yup'ik peoples, along the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea coasts, wore similar hats. There were three common styles, a cone-shaped, closed crown hat (see below); an open-crown visor; and a rounded helmet. Hats and visors were made by carving a single piece of wood to a thin layer that was carefully bent to shape with steam. Helmets were hollowed from a single piece of wood and were often decorated with the face of a seal.

Each hat was a work of art, reflecting the owner's personality, achievements, and status. Hats were brightly painted with geometric designs, images of sea mammals, and hunting scenes, and elaborately decorated with ivory carvings, beads, woven tassels, feathers, and sea lion whiskers. Each element was rich with symbolism. Some motifs recounted great chases; others referenced helpful bird or animal spirits. Alutiiq Elders recall that hats were embellished over the course of a hunter's life. Elements were added or changed to reflect individual experiences. As such, each hat was highly personalized. Other hats were woven from spruce root, and were similarly adorned.

LEARN MORE:

Glory Remembered: Wooden Headgear of Alaska Sea Hunters, 1991, by Lydia T. Black, Alaska State Museum, Juneau.

Crossroads of Continents, Cultures of Siberian and Alaska, 1988, edited by W. W. Fitzhugh and A. Crowell, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C.



Alutiit Kraas'kait – ALUTIIQ COLORS



The world's societies interpret colors in different ways. The Alutiiq language has just four basic color terms: *Kawirtuq* (it is red), *Tan'ertuq/Tamlertuq* (it is black), *Qatertuq/Qat'rtuq* (it is white), and *Cungagtuq* (it is blue). Alutiiq/Sugpiaq people recognized a broader range of colors, but their traditional language describes most hues with these four terms. For example, green is a shade of blue. Alutiiq speakers also describe colors by their similarity to common things. For example, an Alutiiq speaker might say that a brown object is the color of dirt.

IT IS RED – *KAWIRTUQ*

Alutiiq people manufactures red pigments from minerals and plants. They ground ochre, a soft, naturally occurring iron oxide, into a fine powder and mixed it with oil to make paint. On Kodiak, people produced a reddish-brown dye by boiling alder bark. In Prince William Sound, people boiled hemlock bark or a mixture of cranberry and blueberry juices to produce a dark red dye. Widely used in body painting and to decorate objects, the color red may represent ancestral blood.

IT IS BLACK – *TAN'ERTUQ/TAMLERTUQ*

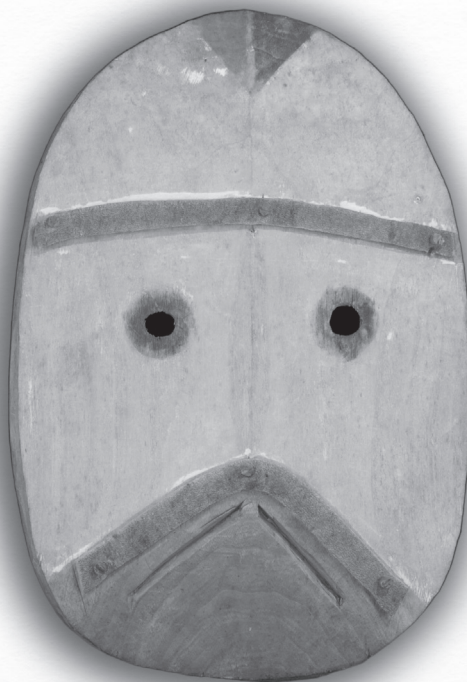
Historic sources indicate that Alutiiq people collected a specific stone to make black pigment. They also produced black pigment from a copper ore and from wood charcoal. With black paint Alutiiq people painted faces, particularly of people in mourning. Black paint also adorned masks, both as a background color and as a design component. Black paint often outlines facial features or illustrates brows and eyes.

IT IS WHITE – *QATERTUQ/QAT'RTUQ*

Alutiiq people made white pigment from limestone obtained in trade with the Alaska mainland, grinding this soft rock into a powder and mixing it with oil to create paint. At winter hunting festivals, the faces of the first two dance performers were often painted white and red, and masks were often decorated with white.

IT IS BLUE – *CUNGAGTUQ*

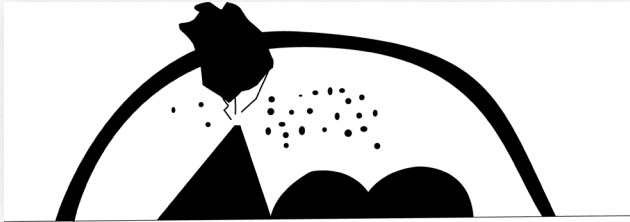
To the Alutiiq, blue is a powerful color. It is associated with the supernatural, particularly the worlds below the sea. Blue pigment was never used in body painting. However, a blue-green paint adorned hunting hats, and whalers, the magical hunters who pursued giant sea mammals, carried blue or green stones.



*Payulik—Bringer of Food, painted wood and leather mask, Pinart Collection, Musée Boulogne-sur-Mer, France.
Photo by Will Anderson.*



Namiutat – GRAPHIC ARTS



Drawing of painted wooden box panel showing an erupting volcano, ca. AD 1550, Koniag, Inc. Collection, Karluk One site.

In classical Alutiiq/Sugpiaq society, graphic arts had many functions. Careful decoration added beauty to objects, showing respect for the plants and animals that provided for people and ensuring future prosperity. Pictures also preserved history. Like books, they created a physical record of the past, recording events and stories.

Some images were also family symbols. Imagine that a hunter killed two seals with one harpoon strike. This very lucky event might be symbolized in paintings on his household implements. When people saw the painted tools, they would be reminded of the hunter's skill and good fortune, and know the objects belong to his family. The picture preserved a story, celebrated the hunter's talent, and expressed ownership.

Painted images, including geometric designs, animals, human figures, boats, celestial bodies, and spirits, were the final decorative touches on many objects. Alutiiq people painted pictures on wooden objects—hats, paddles, arrows, bows, boxes, masks, and many other implements. They also pecked pictures on boulders, etched designs into stone and bone weaponry, and created images through weaving and embroidery.

PAINT

Before the availability of commercially made pigments, Kodiak artists created paints from plants and minerals. Artists extracted colors from hemlock bark, grasses, and berries. They also created colorful powders by crushing red shale, iron oxide, copper oxide, charcoal, or even sparkling molybdenite with a mortar and pestle, and mixed the resulting powder with a binder of oil or blood. Artists applied paint to objects with their fingers, a small stick, or possibly a paintbrush made with animal hair.

Painted miniature skin working board showing a swimming otter, AD 1400–1750, Koniag, Inc. Collection, Karluk One site.



LEARN MORE:

Eskimo Artists, 1993, by Hans Himmelheber. University of Alaska Press, Fairbanks.

Yaamat Igarua'it – PEBBLE DRAWINGS

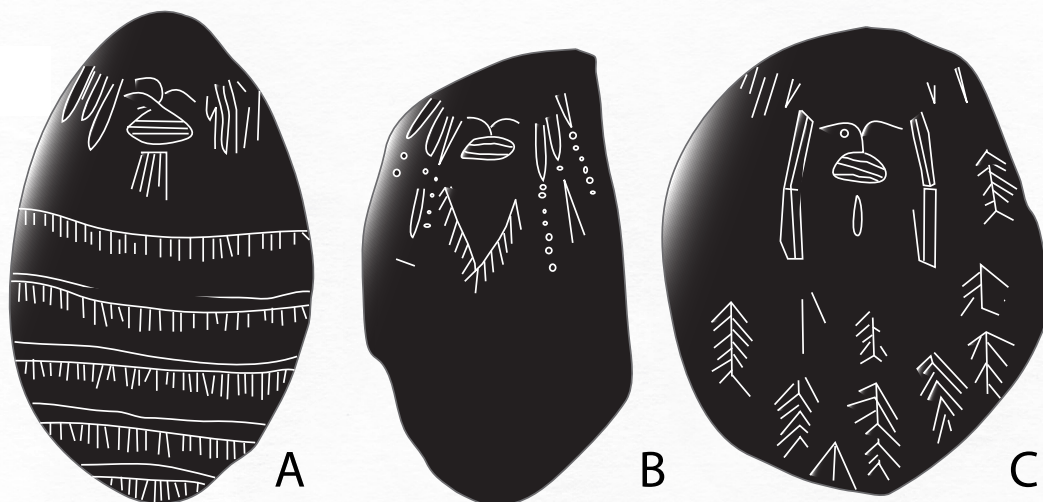


Objects left in archaeological sites tell many stories. Tools indicate the tasks people performed, and animal remains record ancient meals. In the Kodiak Archipelago a unique type of artifact also documents how people dressed. Between AD 1300 and 1500, Alutiiq/Sugpiaq ancestors sketched images of people on small pebbles, cutting designs into the rocks. These pebble drawings show human faces, but many also include drawings of clothing, jewelry, and headdresses. Some individuals are even pictured with a ceremonial item—a drum or a rattle. These pebbles provide information that is not available from any other source.

These pebbles illustrate different types of clothing and jewelry. Example A (below) shows an individual wearing a decorated gut-skin garment (represented by horizontal lines) and a labret (lip plug) with hanging attachments.

Example B shows an individual with a V-neck garment and a headdress decorated with beads. Example C displays a person in a bird-skin garment (represented by a feather motif) with a labret and a headdress. Patterns seen in these pebbles suggest that people in different parts of the archipelago once wore different styles of parkas and labrets. People all over the world use clothing to signal their affiliation with social groups. Perhaps each Alutiiq community had its own unique dress code.

What were pebble drawings used for? Some archaeologists think they were pieces for a throwing game; others suggest that they were used to record the pictures of powerful people. Whatever the answer, they continue to speak to archaeologists, providing valuable information on ancient Alutiiq life.

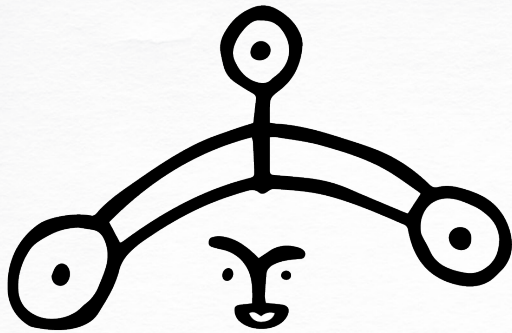


Slate pebbles with etched designs, ca. AD 1500, Koniag, Inc. Collection, Karluk One Site.

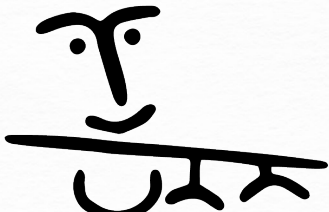
LEARN MORE:

Igaruacirpet: Our Way of Making Designs, 2018, edited by Amy Steffian. Alutiiq Museum, Kodiak.

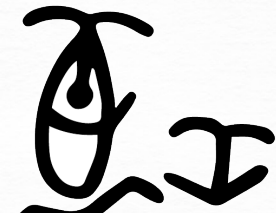
Yaamat Igait – PETROGLYPHS



Petroglyphs are designs pecked into boulders, cliff faces, and other stationary pieces of stone. This type of artwork is rare in Alaska. The Lingít of Southeast Alaska made such carvings, and a few pieces of rock art are known from other parts of Alaska. In the Kodiak Archipelago, there are at least 17 petroglyph locations that depict human figures, animal forms, and geometric designs.



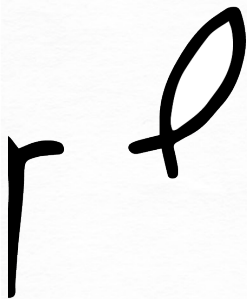
HOW DID THE ALUTIIQ/SUGPIAQ CREATE PETROGLYPHS? There are clues in other types of stone tools. Kodiak’s prehistoric residents made many objects out of hard greywacke and granite beach cobbles by pecking. Craftsmen used stone hammers to shape water-worn rocks into lamps, mauls, fishing weights, and even anchors. With similar tools, people probably pecked petroglyph images into Kodiak’s bedrock. Experiments suggest that artists used two handheld stones to hammer away fragments of rock and create designs, perhaps employing a hammerstone to drive a pecking stone. However they were created, Kodiak’s petroglyphs are finely made. Artists made deep, clean lines and carefully formed shapes and silhouettes. Some of these images are quite large, more than a meter (three feet) across. They must have taken a very long time to craft.



No one knows the precise age of this art form. Alutiiq people believe the petroglyphs are very old. Even a hundred years ago, Elders had no knowledge of this art form. Archaeologists suspect that some images date to the centuries surrounding AD 1000, as other types of stone carving flourished at this time, and many of the petroglyphs occur near village sites of this age. But why did Alutiiq people make petroglyphs?



Other Alaska Natives used rock art as territorial markers, permanent signs that linked families to particular subsistence harvesting areas. Perhaps the Alutiiq did the same. Kodiak’s petroglyphs commonly occur at the entrances to bays, facing outward toward the open ocean, and would have been easy to see when freshly carved. It is also possible that the images are part of a hunting ritual. Historic accounts report that whalers carved images into rocks to bring them luck before the hunt. At Cape Alitak, both explanations seem possible. Here, there are thirteen clusters of petroglyphs with more than 1,300 individual images. Petroglyphs showing faces tend to appear below old village sites. In contrast, petroglyphs showing whales appear at the tip of the cape, overlooking an area where whales swim past.



Petroglyphs from Cape Alitak, Kodiak Island. From a drawing by Sven Haakanson, Jr.

LEARN MORE:

Rock Art, 2018, by Amy F. Steffian and Sven D. Haakanson, Jr. In *Igaruacirpet—Our Way of Making Designs*, Pp. 32-66. Alutiiq Museum, Kodiak.