

CHAPTER 6. INCISED STONE—*QELLUUGNGASQAQ*

There are many types of Alutiiq objects that include incised designs. For thousands of years, craftspeople embellished harpoon points, slate knives, lances, and ulus, wooden masks, ivory carvings, and other objects with engravings (Figure 6.1). For these objects incising was a decorative touch. It was a finishing element and not the method of object manufacture. However, there is a distinct class of stone artifacts manufactured solely by incising—incised stones. A recently coined Alutiiq term for these pieces is *yaamaruaq* (“like a rock”) (Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.1. Examples of stone objects with incised designs.



From left: Incised slate knife, Horseshoe Cove site; Coal labret from the Uyak site.

Although incising is an ancient technique, found on Ocean Bay slate lances and a piece of sandstone artwork, objects made entirely by incising seem to date to the last 1200 years (Table 6.1). Some of the most dramatic incised stones are schematic pictures of people cut into waterworn pebbles and leaves of slate (Clark 1964, 1970, Donta et al. 2016). About twelve hundred years ago, Alutiiq people began drawing patterns in stone. The earliest designs are geometric. They resemble motifs from parkas, including a feather-like design. Late designs show stylized faces, jewelry, and clothing (Steffian and Saltonstall 2019). And in the historic period incised stones feature words written in Russian Cyrillic characters as well as drawings.

Although some of the designs on these stones are detailed and complex, the choice of materials and manufacturing techniques are uncomplicated. To make these drawings, crafters

cut fine, shallow lines into the surfaces of stones—probably collected on nearby beaches. All the stones were designed to be seen up close. Many of the incised lines are faint. Today, to see the details, it is often helpful to wet the stone. Most of the incised stones have a design on one side, although a small number have pictures on both sides.

Figure 6.2. Temporal patterns of stone incising

Incised Stone Objects		OCEAN BAY								KACHEMAK					KONIAG	
		7500	7000	6500	6000	5500	5000	4500	4000	3500	3000	2500	2000	1500	1000	500
Decoration	Incised Sandstone Object															
	Incised Slate Projectiles															
	Incised Slate Knives & Ulus															
Artifact	Incised Stones - Geometric															
	Incised Stones - Faces															

How did people make these engravings? Cutting designs into an object takes strength and sharp-edged tools, particularly when artists work by hand with hard materials like bone or stone. Early Alutiiq artists used specially shaped chipped stone tools called burins and graters to cut and incise bone. Burins have a chisel-like edge used to gouge material. Graters have a small, sharp knob used to puncture or score material. At times, people may have used bone hammers to drive engraving tools, like the way that pecked stone objects and Kodiak’s petroglyph images were made (Haakanson 2019).

Formal chipped stone engraving tools are uncommon in Kodiak’s archaeological record, however, and they faded from use as slate working became popular. How did people engrave this new material? Perhaps they used small chips of stone. By knocking flakes off a chert cobble, craftspeople could rapidly make many small, sharp pieces of stone. Experiments shows that flakes of Kodiak’s red chert are effective tools for cutting designs into slate (Figure 6.3). People may also have used flakes of chalcedony, another glassy stone, for engraving. Chalcedony flakes are often found in late prehistoric sites in assemblages with incised stone artifacts.

Figure 6.3. Patrick Saltonstall incises a piece of slate with a flake of red chert (left); incised stones from Uganik Bay (right – Daniel Boone Reed Collection).





Alutiiq Technological Inventory

Artifact Class Summary Sheet

English Names

Alutiiq Names

Industry

Activity

Function

**Common
Materials**

LxWxD (cm)

Tradition

Ocean Bay

Kachemak

Koniag

Alutiiq

Miniature

Yes

Example Sites Found

No/Unknown

Description

References

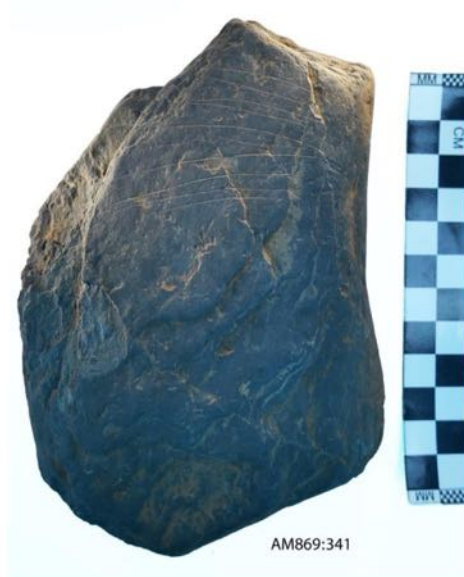
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INCISED STONES



Incised Stones from the Settlement Point site showing face, jewelry, and clothing elements.



Incised stones from KAR-310 at Karluk Lake.

INCISED STONES



Pebble with writing and drawing from Igvak, AFG-016.