

Yaamat Igarua'it – PEBBLE DRAWINGS

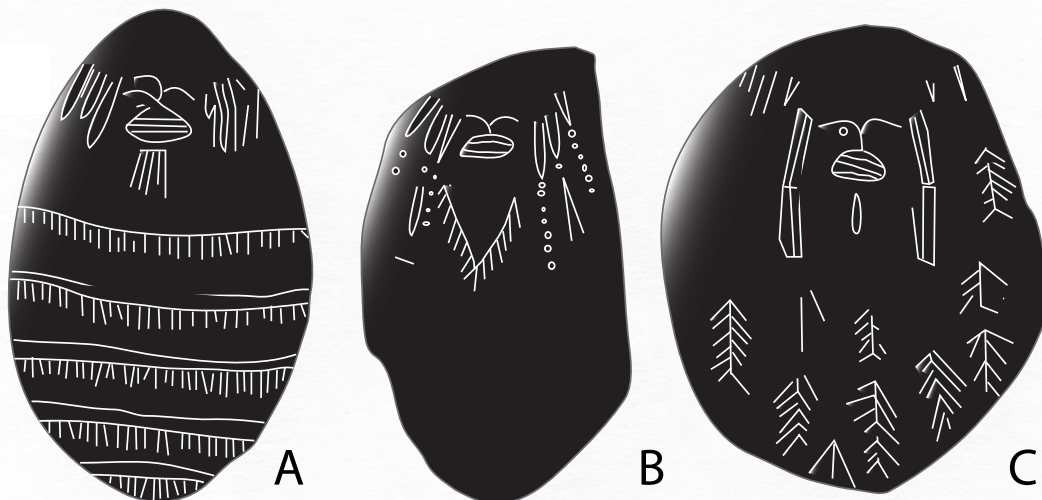


Objects left in archaeological sites tell many stories. Tools indicate the tasks people performed, and animal remains record ancient meals. In the Kodiak Archipelago a unique type of artifact also documents how people dressed. Between AD 1300 and 1500, Alutiiq/Sugpiaq ancestors sketched images of people 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.