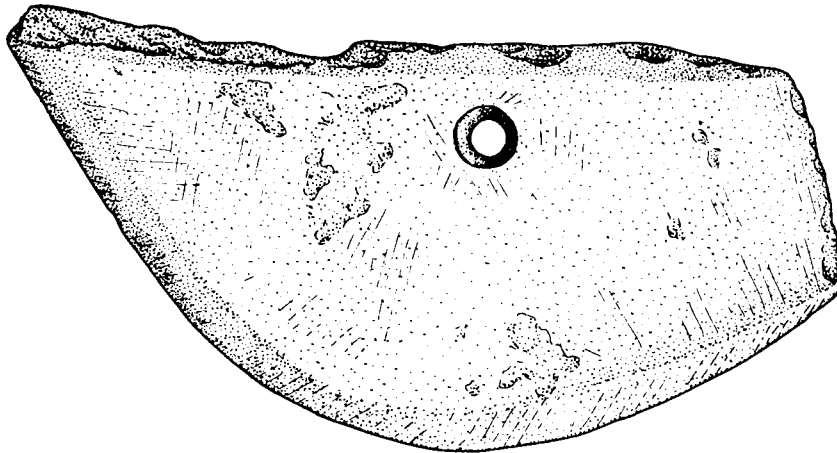




# ULU - *ULUKAQ*



*Prehistoric Slate Ulu  
Illustration by Sarah Moore  
from Workman and Workman 1990. Artifact Description,  
1989 Exxon Valdez Cultural Resource Program, Exxon.*

The ulu - or semi-lunar knife - is an important piece of Alutiiq technology. Ground from a thin leaf of slate, these knives had a long, beveled working edge (u-shaped) well designed for butchering fish. Alutiiq women used ulus to gut, behead, and filet salmon, which were stored in large quantities for winter. The slate blade was hafted to a wooden handle. Some handles had finger grips or were decorated with animal carvings. Baleen or spruce root lashing secured the handle through a small hole drilled in the blade.

Ulus first appear in Kodiak's archaeological record about 3,500 years ago and coincide

with the development of net fishing. Archaeologists believe that slate knives were more efficient than smaller chipped stone cutting tools at processing the larger quantities of fish captured with nets. The ulu can be rapidly resharpened, with little damage to the tool, and its smooth surface is easily cleaned.

Traditionally known as the "Eskimo woman's knife" ulus are an item of technology used by Native peoples from Alaska to Greenland. Across this region, men also used ground slate knife, though these pieces were shaped like a lance and had two sharply ground edges.

