

## GLOSSARY

**Arctic Small Tool Tradition (ASTt)** The name given by archaeologists to the remains left by the earliest peoples to occupy most northern Arctic regions. The flint tools made by these peoples are characteristically very small and are similar in style to those made by Siberian peoples of about the same time. The Denbigh culture of Alaska and the Canadian Independence, Pre-Dorset and Dorset cultures all belong within this tradition.

**Blubber Lamp** A lamp, usually made of pottery or stone, that burns oil rendered from the fat of sea mammals. The smokeless flame of the blubber lamp can be used to light and heat a well-insulated winter house. Its invention made possible the use of the snowhouse, which could not be heated with a smoking, open fire.

**Bow Drill** An efficient type of drill consisting of a spindle, which carries the bit, and a small bow. A loop of the bowstring is wound around the spindle, which is then rapidly turned by moving the bow back and forth.

**Burin** A flint tool used for cutting grooves in bone or ivory as a first step in removing strips from which tools or weapons could be made. Arctic Small Tool tradition burins are made in a specific style, from thin, mitten-shaped flakes of stone. Tiny spalls were removed from one corner of these flakes in order to form a chisel-like cutting edge.

**Burin-like Tool** The Dorset people, as well as the contemporaneous Norton people in Alaska, formed the edges of their grooving tools by grinding the flint, rather than by striking off spalls to form true burins.

**Eskimo** A European word that was first used in the sixteenth century to designate a group of Algonkian Indians who lived on the north shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The name may be derived from the Algonkian word meaning "eaters of raw meat," or from the French word meaning "the excommunicated." By the eighteenth century, it was applied to the peoples of Greenland, Labrador, the Canadian Arctic and Alaska. In this volume, it refers to all peoples who speak related languages of the "Eskimo" family.

**Flakes** The waste material produced by knocking chips of stone from flint tools in order to shape or sharpen them. Large, sharp-edged flakes could be used as cutting tools without further shaping.

**Harpoon** A specialized weapon for hunting sea mammals. Its head is attached to a line held by the hunter, or tied to a float or drag. The head, detachable from the shaft, holds the struck animal either by barbs or by toggling (turning sideways) in the wound.

**Ice-creepers** Strips of bone or ivory cut with sharp notches and designed to be worn under the feet to prevent the wearer from slipping on the ice.

**Kayak** A hunting boat used throughout the Eskimo world, covered with skin stretched over a light wooden frame, and completely decked, except for a hole to accommodate the single hunter. These boats were used for hunting sea mammals, fishing, setting nets, spearing caribou at water crossings and ferrying people across short stretches of water. The forms of kayaks were quite different in various areas, and each was designed for a specific purpose and specific sea conditions.

**Labret** Small carved plugs of ivory, stone or other material worn as decorations in holes pierced through the lower lip or cheeks. These were worn by Alaskan and Mackenzie Delta Eskimos.

**Microblade** A small, parallel-sided flake of flint with very sharp edges, struck from a specialized microblade core. Large numbers of microblades were made by Arctic Small Tool tradition people

and were probably used as cutting and carving tools.

**Radiocarbon Dating** All organic material (wood, bone, etc.) contains a large amount of carbon. While most of this is stable carbon with an atomic number of 12 (C12), a very small proportion is a radioactive isotope (C14), which decays with a half-life of approximately 5,500 years. By measuring the relative proportions of C14 and C12 in an ancient piece of organic material, we can approximate the time that has elapsed since the death of the plant or animal from which the material came. This allows us to give approximate dates to archaeological materials found with such samples.

**Scraper** A tool made from stone or bone, used to remove the flesh and fatty tissue from animal hides in preparing them for use as clothing or as coverings for boats or tents. Some of the flint objects that archaeologists call scrapers may have been used to carve wood or bone.

**Shaman** A doctor/magician, someone who has an especially close relationship with the spiritual world. The Eskimo angekok used his spirit helpers to cure or cause illness, to control the weather, and to bring animals to the weapons of hunters. Shamanistic practices are similar across the northern world, both in Eurasia and North America, and may have a common origin in Palaeolithic religious thought.

**Sideblade** A flint tool mounted in the side of a harpoon or lance head, or in a knife, to form a sharp cutting edge. Arctic peoples seem to have derived this technique from Neolithic cultures of Eurasia.

**Sled Shoe** A flat slab of bone or ivory pegged to the bottom of a sled runner to prevent its damage by rocks or rough ice.

**Snow Knife** A large, flat knife made from whale bone or ivory and used to cut snow blocks to build a snowhouse.

**Soapstone** A soft stone found in scattered quarries across arctic Canada, used by ancient Inuit to make lamps and cooking pots, and by their modern descendants to make commercial carvings.

**Tundra** The vegetation of the area north of the tree line, composed of lichens, mosses, sedges, heaths and other small flowering plants. Vegetation cover is almost continuous in the southern tundra, while on the northern islands only small and scattered patches are found among the rocks and gravel.

**Ulu** The semicircular "woman's knife" of the historic Eskimo, used to cut meat and fish, as well as to cut hides for clothing. In prehistoric times, the blade of the ulu was generally made of slate ground to a sharp edge.

**Umiak** A large, open boat, about ten metres long, covered with skins over a wooden frame and propelled by paddles. This boat was used historically for hunting whales and as a freight boat for moving camp or for travelling long distances.