

NOTIZIE SCIENTIFICHE

ROCK PICTURES OF LAKE ONEGA

Yu. A. Savvateyev, Petrozavodsk, USSR

Only two clusters of rock pictures have so far been known in the territory of Karelia, one is located in the lower reaches of the Vyg River falling into the White Sea, the other is on the eastern shore of Lake Onega. The distance between them is about 325 km. A short review of the White Sea petroglyphs has already been published. The present paper deals with rock pictures of Lake Onega. They are very peculiar and differ markedly from all other monuments of this type known both in Northern Europe and Asia. They were discovered as long ago as the middle of the nineteenth century and later gained world importance.

It seems worthwhile to recall the main points in the history of the investigation into the Lake Onega petroglyphs. Local inhabitants have always known about them from time immemorial. They attributed those carvings to the activity of the "evil spirit". This resulted both in the name of the nearest village, Besov Nos (Demon's Nose), and in later attempts made by the monks of the neighbouring Murom monastery to neutralize the "devilish pictures" by carving two Christian crosses on the figures of the demon and a swan.

However, it is after C. Grewingk, a Petersburg geologist, and P. Shved, a teacher of the Petrozavodsk secondary school, had familiarized themselves with those petroglyphs independently of each other that they became known to scientists. Short reports presented by C. Grewingk and P. Shved (1850, 1855, 1858) remained for a long time the only published sources on the enigmatic pictures although naively interpreting the carvings as the literal representation of some hunting events in the life of the local people. For example, C. Grewingk wrote: "These groups of pictures are likely to have been created by hunters who exerted great efforts to perpetuate their hunting. These carvings have persisted here for centuries and will probably do so for thousands of years..."

It is not enough to find petroglyphs. They must be copied and this is no easy problem. At any rate, the pioneers failed to obtain accurate replicas. Sketches made by P. Shved and C. Grewingk are very schematic and reproduce only partly the most well preserved clusters. Moreover, they are surprisingly similar and this suggests an influence exerted by one copy on the other which is not yet clear. It became known from some documents found in the archives that there exists one more copy ordered by the governor of Olonets in June 1849.

In due course petroglyphs in Lake Onega attracted still greater attention of both native and foreign investigators. They have been studied by G. Spassky,

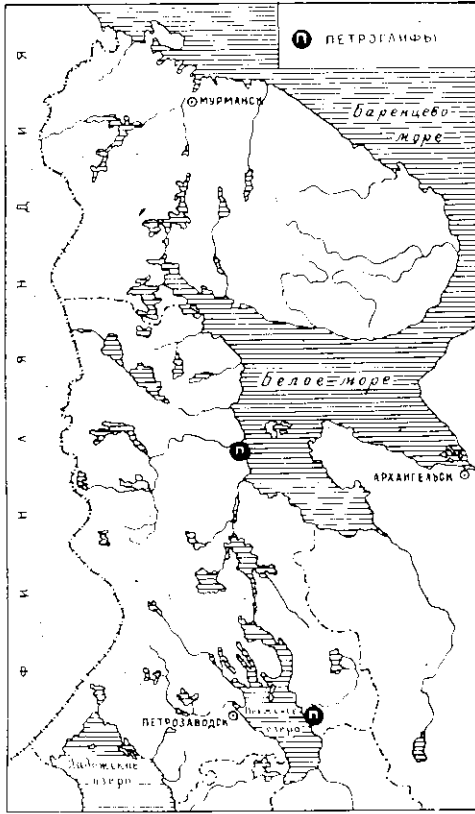


Fig. 5
Location of Karelian
petroglyphs.

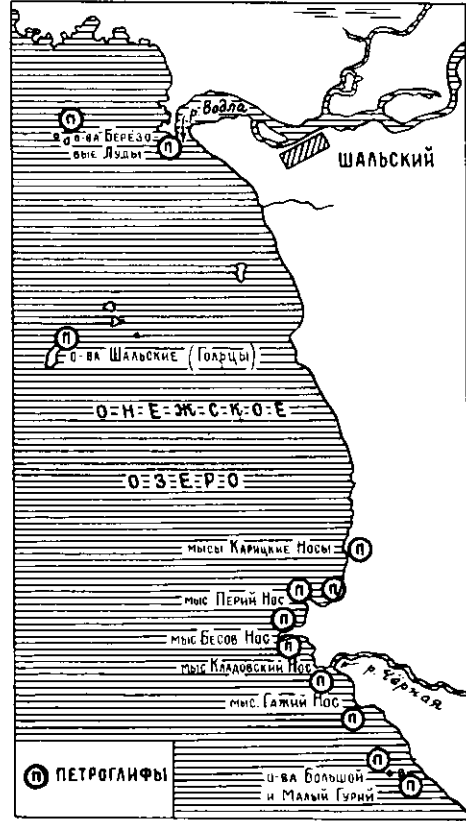


Fig. 6
Sketch plan showing the ar-
rangement of petroglyphs on
the shore of Lake Onega.

K. Petrov, Yu. Aspelin, E. Barsov, C. Grigoryev, N. Shaizhin, A. Shidlovski, A. Brogger, A. Tallgren, G. Gjessing, H. Kühn, A. Spitsyn, V. Gorodtov, I. Morozov, B. Zemlyakov, A. Linevsky, V. Ravdonikas, A. Bryusov, I. Gimbutas, N. Zamyatnin, K. Laushkin, A. Formozov, N. Gurina, A. Stolyar, Yu. Savvateyev, R. Klimov. Most of them used petroglyphs from Lake Onega for comparison in studying rock pictures of Scandinavia, Middle Asia, Siberia and even more remote areas. Only few chose these petroglyphs as the object of special field study. Among them was G. Hallström, a Swedish scientist. In 1910, he undertook an inquiry into petroglyphs from Lake Onega, "as extensive as possible", but had to interrupt it very soon for domestic reasons. In 1914, G. Hallström came to Besov Nos again now accompanied by M. Burkitt from Cambridge and B. Shnitger from Stockholm. This time a world war broke out and made the investigators return home. During two short visits, however, G. Hallström succeeded in "tracing" seven large groups with 25 subgroups comprising 412 figures. This voluminous illustrative material was to be published but some "other problems and duties" distracted the



*Fig. 7
General view of Peri Nos site.
In the background Moduzb
Island.*



*Fig. 8
Cape Peri III. A rock with pe-
troglyphs which in being
traced to be displayed
in the Hermitage Museum.*

*Fig. 9
Cape Peri VI. General view of
a rock with petroglyphs.*





*Figgs. 10-11-12
Petroglyphs in the Western
Besov Nos. Left: "Demon".
Right: detail of the demon's
head.*



investigator's attention. In 1936, the first volume of V.I. Ravdonikas' edition was issued. G. Hallström considered it to be "an excellent and extremely praiseworthy work". Now he had to abandon the idea of publishing his copies.

Only few of them saw the light, first in M. Burkitt's work on the prehistory of Europe and then in G. Hallström's book dealing with rock pictures in Sweden. Here only pictures available in museums and not included in V.I. Ravdonikas' edition were discussed.

On the whole, although an interest in petroglyphs from Lake Onega increased a little in the pre-revolutionary years, the monument remained poorly studied and almost unpublished, for there was nobody to investigate it thoroughly. Only during the Soviet period a profound scientific interest in the archaeology of the North, including petroglyphs in Lake Onega, arose. In the late 1920s and during the 1930s they were studied by A.M. Linevsky, an ethnographer, who discovered Besovy Sledki in the White Sea in 1926. He views petroglyphs in two developmental stages of rock art in this territory, the early stage represented by the Besovy Sledki group and the later one represented by petroglyphs from Lake Onega.

Long-term investigations conducted by A.M. Linevsky were aimed, first of all, at revealing the meaning and purpose of the figures. This problem being intricate in itself, it became even more complicated owing to the fact that among the petroglyphs in Lake Onega there are quite a lot of enigmatic figures and symbols interpreted in various ways. Here belong, for one thing, circles and semicircles with two (more seldom one or three) stretching line beams sometimes limited by a straight or occasional by a curved or broken line at the end. A.M. Linevsky made use of some ethnographical analogies and guessed that these were hunting traps. For him this became a starting point for analyzing the remaining figurative material on the basis of the magical theory which was dominant at that time. According to A.M. Linevsky, pictures were carved on rocks for utilitarian and practical purposes. They were "to affect the being that served as a pattern for representation" by "committing certain magical actions over them".

Meanwhile, the lack of complete scientific publication of the monument was felt. V.I. Ravdonikas decided to fill the gap and began to prepare it in 1935. The petroglyphs in Lake Onega had been visited a little earlier by B.F. Zemlyakov, a geologist, and A. Ya. Bryusov, an archaeologist, who noticed a number of new pictures. They also discovered some traces of ancient settlements not far from the clusters of pictures and set to their excavation.

V.I. Ravdonikas conducted a thorough search. In some places he removed moss and lichens from rocks and recorded no less than 150 new images. In order to estimate what his work is worth it should be recalled that a little more than 700 petroglyphs had been known in Kareliä by 1935. Of these no more than 100 had been published and no integral group reproduced. The copies published were still fairly imperfect and did not always correspond to the originals. Some attempts were made to interpret the monuments historically but V.I. Ravdonikas considered them to be unsuccessful.



*Fig. 13
Petroglyphs now transferred to the
Hermitage, from Cape Peri III.*

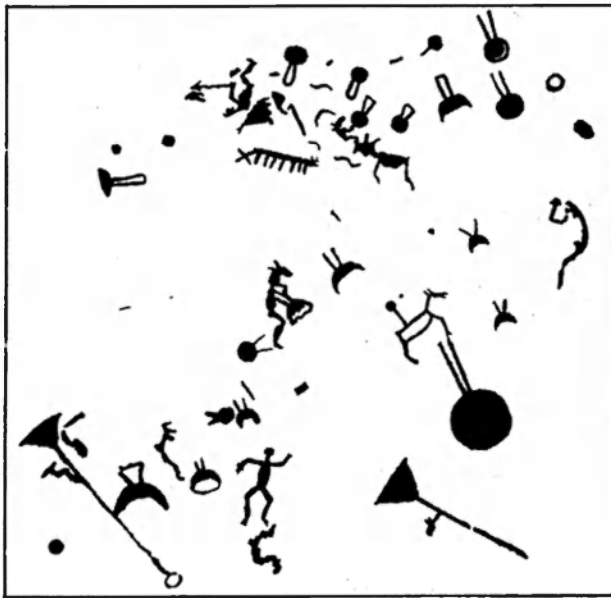


*Fig. 14
Later single image of reindeer between the
Northern and Western groups of Besov Nos.*

The existing gaps were filled by a two-volume edition by V.I. Ravdonikas. The first volume published in 1936 was devoted entirely to petroglyphs in Lake Onega.

V.I. Ravdonikas put forward quite a new interpretation of their meaning. He took the enigmatic circles and semicircles to be symbolic representations of the sun and the moon. Thus a solar hypothesis was born that rejected flatly A.M. Linevsky's "trap" hypothesis because of its being groundless and with no prospect. A long dispute had started. Others joined the discussion that is not yet finished.

V.I. Ravdonikas perceived petroglyphs in Lake Onega not as "pictures from nature" but as symbolic images of ancient consciousness, the most valuable source for the comprehension of ancient thinking. Like A.M. Linevsky, he put the problem of semantics of images in the forefront thus postponing "the classification of monuments" and "their differential chronologization". Naturally, obvious underestimation of the historiographical analysis of the monument itself along all possible lines of investigation made it difficult to reveal their main mystery, the meaning and purpose of the pictures, narrowed the documentary basis and weakened the cogency of arguments. Possi-



*Fig. 15-16
Petroglyphs of Peri VI. Solar
and lunar signs and other
figures. In the center of the
tracing the "masked shaman"*

bilities appeared for abstract ideas based on general considerations, guesswork and suppositions poorly supported by petroglyphic material.

Now the main link in analyzing and deciphering petroglyphs became not the complex of indications and observations, not the system of associations within the entire figurative material but the most demonstrative topic from a semantic point of view allegedly capable of throwing light on all the remaining figurative repertoire, i.e. solar and lunar symbols. Boats, birds and other images were perceived as having solar content. The appearance of a

thick stratum of solar and lunar space symbols and a series of other more complicated figures was interpreted as evidence for changing of one stage of primeval thinking by another. V.I. Ravdonikas wrote: "A religious cosmic world outlook with animism and complicated ideas of the next world had developed here, in Karelia, during the epoch of rock pictures by the end of the Neolithic on the basis of old totemic notions going back genetically to the Palaeolithic". Although, strictly speaking, no sufficient grounds have been revealed in the petroglyphic material itself for drawing such an inference, the conclusions made by V.I. Ravdonikas were widely recognized. Now the majority of investigators stick to the opinion that "the mysterious symbols observed in the petroglyphs from Lake Onega indicate solar and lunar cults that were not reflected for some reason in the White Sea". Alternatively, the extremely rationalistic "literal" reading of the petroglyphs in Lake Onega in terms of primitive-magical "ordinary" consciousness was severely criticized.

On the whole, the 1930s proved to be fruitful for studying petroglyphs of Karelia. A few fundamental books and many articles appeared, problems of rock art were discussed lively by Soviet archaeologists. The war hampered both their further study and preparation of the concluding volumes promised by V.I. Ravdonikas and A.M. Linevsky. The study of the ancient camp sites surrounding the petroglyphs and providing reference material for their dating, for revealing ethnic and cultural application and for studying economy and mode of life remained unfinished. Search for new rock pictures was interrupted, although the investigators believed in the possibility of new discoveries. "...I do not doubt that subsequent researches will result in the discovery of new groups and, possibly, new areas of rock pictures", prophesied V.I. Ravdonikas.

Fig. 17

Petroglyphs of Cape Peri III.

A peculiar composition of an

elk, a beaver and a man,

touching each other in a row.

On the sides, two abstract signs.





Fig. 18
 Petroglyphs of Cape Peri II.
 Swans and a snake on top of
 them an astral symbol.

A new splash of interest in petroglyphs from Lake Onega was observed in the late 1950s - early 1960s. It was brought about by the investigation conducted by K.D. Laushkin on the deciphering of the pictures by the method of parallel plots and images in rock canvases and the "Kalevala" epos or in Saam folklore material. It was as if the scientist tried to make the "silent" graphic material sound by using the language of the northern folk-lore. He has brought forth a series of impressive decipherings: "The Ghost Swans", "The Wizard and the Fish", "Mother of the Sun", "The Creation of Man", "The Crime and Punishment of the Wicked Frog", "The Moon and the Witch", "The Beginning of the World", etc. Being a staunch supporter of V.I. Ravdonikas' hypothesis, he does not agree, however, that the ancient meaning of the pictures has dropped out of people's memory. K.D. Laushkin seeks for direct relations between rock compositions and the plots of the "Kalevala" runes and the fairy-tales, legends and traditions of the Saams. In our opinion, however, there are serious drawbacks both in his starting points and in decipherings.

The 1950-60s was a time of the analysis of petroglyphs in Lake Onega in generalized investigations abroad (Kühn, 1952; Gimbutas, 1956; Hallström, 1960). They all drew these petroglyphs nearer to the Scandinavian figurative material, first of all, the richest clusters of rock pictures in Southern Sweden, such as Bohuslan etc., that belong to the Bronze Age. In Kühn's opinion, "petroglyphs in Lake Onega are the continuation of the Scandinavian art of the Bronze Age and they cannot be interpreted irrespective of this Scandinavian art". This unjustified approach to the monuments differing in both chronological and phasic respects has resulted in some mistakes in the interpretation of the Onega pictures and their dating. Inaccuracies in the facts presented observed in the original sources were repeated.



Fig. 19
Petroglyphs of the northern
group of Besov Nos. A
"celestial" swan with a very
long neck.

In 1967 - 1978 archaeologists of the Institute of Language, Literature and History, Karelian Branch of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, resumed field studies that soon led to unexpected results. It was revealed that even the well-known and published clusters had been investigated not so fully and thoroughly as it seemed.

Long-term visual investigation of the lakeside rocks under favourable sun light, illuminating them using mirrors in the day-time and a searchlight at night, graphitic copying of the most promising lakeside parts of the rocks and, finally, special underwater operations resulted in finding ten new comparatively small clusters comprising about 90 figures. A lot of new images were discovered at each of the eleven localities known earlier. Thus, 55 figures were recorded in Karetsky Nos before, whereas now they account for 134. 152 figures were known in Peri III (excluding 83 figures exhibited at the Hermitage and the Karelian Museum of Regional Study) as compared to their present number 190. Six figures were thought to be in Peri II, now their number is 13. 77 figures were known to be in Peri VI as compared to 84, the number recorded at present. The number of figures found increased from 89 to 115 in the western (central) cape of Besov Nos, etc. Before our investigations the total number of images known did not exceed 566 (an even smaller number was known to most of the investigators) and only 482 were published. Now they account for 872 (not counting 149 doubtful fragments and symbols) and the number of individual localities increased

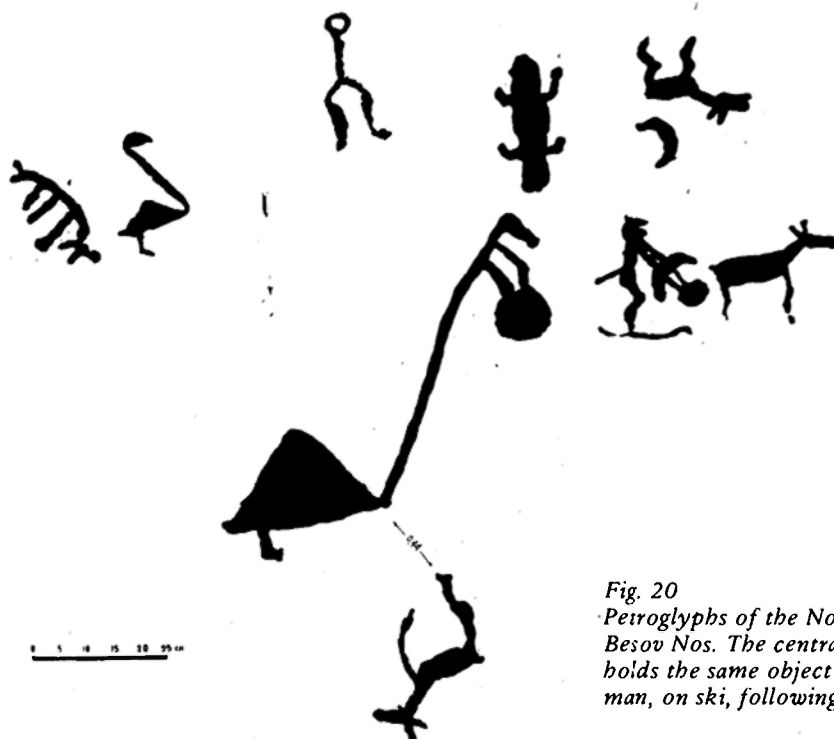


Fig. 20
*Petroglyphs of the Northern
 Besov Nos. The central swan
 holds the same object as the
 man, on ski, following an elk.*

from 11 to 21. Six more groups were added to the only small island group, the most remote of these being as far as 6.5 km. from the shore. The boundaries of the present figurative complex extended mostly north-westwards from 10 to 20.5 km. along the shore. All of the pictures were recopied in various ways and photographed both under natural light and using bias mirror lighting. Numerous mistakes and inaccuracies were corrected in the available publications.

Alongside with searching for pictures the prospecting of ancient settlements was conducted nearby. Twenty-six camp sites dating from different times have been discovered and partly excavated. Among them there are permanent settlements with semi-mud-huts. The camp sites are located at various altitudes above the level of Lake Onega. This has made it possible to distinguish between the camp sites preceding the pictures, those synchronous with them and, finally, those created after the tradition of carving pictures on rocks had faded away.

Underwater archaeological investigations were conducted for the first time. They resulted in finding about ten petroglyphs underwater on lake-side granite slabs that broke off and slipped down into water before capes Peri Nos, Besov Nos, and Kladovets. Swans, a tree (?), a solar symbol, etc. are among them. The procedure of searching for pictures and reproducing them underwater was developed. Night-time prospecting with an underwater lamp proved to be the most simple and efficient method. Lateral illumination of the surface of the slabs made the pictures clearly visible and did not require much effort and experience as, for example, underwater searching "to the touch" in the day-time.



*Fig. 21
Petroglyphs of Cape Peri III.
A pair of birds; near them the
bust of a human in a praying
posture: a scene probably
connected with the cult of birds.*

Neither archaeological material, nor submarine storey of pictures have been revealed, although slopes convenient for carving at the boundary with the present water edge are abundant. The petroglyphs do not seem to have ever been carved below the present lake level. This negative result is also fairly essential.

Being characterized earlier as an immense primeval temple, the Onega complex has proved in fact to be much more both in area and in the number of carvings. If we assume the extremity of Cape Besor Nos to be its centre, from which the artistic utilization of the lake-side rocks had started, then the extreme south-eastern point is as far as 5.5 km. from it, the northern point - 16 km. and the north-western - 10.5 km.

Expeditions are equipped much better now than those undertaken earlier and this results, naturally, in successful search. Suffice it to say that the archaeologists had a research ship at their disposal during several field seasons. G. Hallström pointed out that the conditions under which V.I. Ravdonikas had worked ("in peace and calmness") were the best, whereas our facilities have surpassed those that V.I. Ravdonikas and, all the more, A.M. Linevsky had, not to mention that our studies were conducted at a higher developmental stage of archaeology.

Now the Onega figurative complex that has considerably enlarged and expanded in territory comprises 21 localities with petroglyphs present. True, in three cases only one, two, and three figures are available. The bulk

of petroglyphs is concentrated in three neighbouring capes: Peri Nos, Besov Nos and Kladoverts Nos, having a common basement that projects slightly into the lake. 602 figures (including those exhibited at museums now) of 872 are concentrated here. Karetsky Nos situated 1.7 km. north of the extremity of Pery Nos is also rich in pictures (134 figures). Although they stretch for almost 200 m. along the entire south-facing slope, they are all assumed to be a single group. In Peri Nos, which is most rich in petroglyphs (411 figures), there are seven groups separated by bays, whereas in the Island of Moduzh only one group is present. In Besov Nos two groups (38 and 115 figures) have been recorded with a single figure between them that was carved later. In cape Kladoverts there is a sole solar sign at a considerable distance from the main cluster (48 figures), four figures being concentrated on the other side. Gazhy Nos (13 figures), the Island Maly Gury (13), the Island Bolshoi Golets (5) and the mouth of the Vodla River (53) each have one group. There are two clusters in the Isle of Bolshoi Gury (11 and 11 figures) and a sole figure in the islets Beryozovye Ludy.

Such is the topography of the Onega petroglyphs. They occupy the fourth place in total number of petroglyphs among the relics of the monumental hunters' rock art of Northern Europe yielding only to the White Sea, Nömforsen and Vingen.

These images appear as silhouettes carved over the entire area or only outlined at a depth of 2 to 3 mm. They used to be clearly visible owing to a sharp contrast between the whitish carved surface and the dark or reddish background of the rock. Hence elements of polychromy are observed here: even now (all the more, just after carving) the figures appear as distinct bright light-grey spots against the darker or reddish background. Dark spots were frequently used purposely: they served as a frame enclosing compositions and isolated figures.

Now many petroglyphs are covered by dark patina, so they are almost indiscernible against the surrounding rock background. It is no easy problem to find them, even though publications are employed. Yet a considerable part of carved pictures are noticeable both under oblique sun-light, which is most favourable for examining petroglyphs, and on cloudy days. The petroglyphs vary in size commonly from 20 to 50 cm, reaching occasionally 285 cm.

The commonly shared opinion of the predominance of sole figures here hardly corresponds to the facts, although, on the whole, they are fairly numerous. Yet most of the images are part of compositions.

The diversity of plots enriched by a series of new figures and signs is striking. However, the correlation of major plots remains unchanged. Birds clearly predominate sharing 322 images (about 37 % of the total number of figures). All forest beasts (elks, reindeers, bears, etc.) are less numerous. They account for altogether 102 figures or roughly 12 %. The number of solar and lunar signs has markedly increased - 103 (125 including circles).

The presence of anthropomorphous images is a very important feature of the

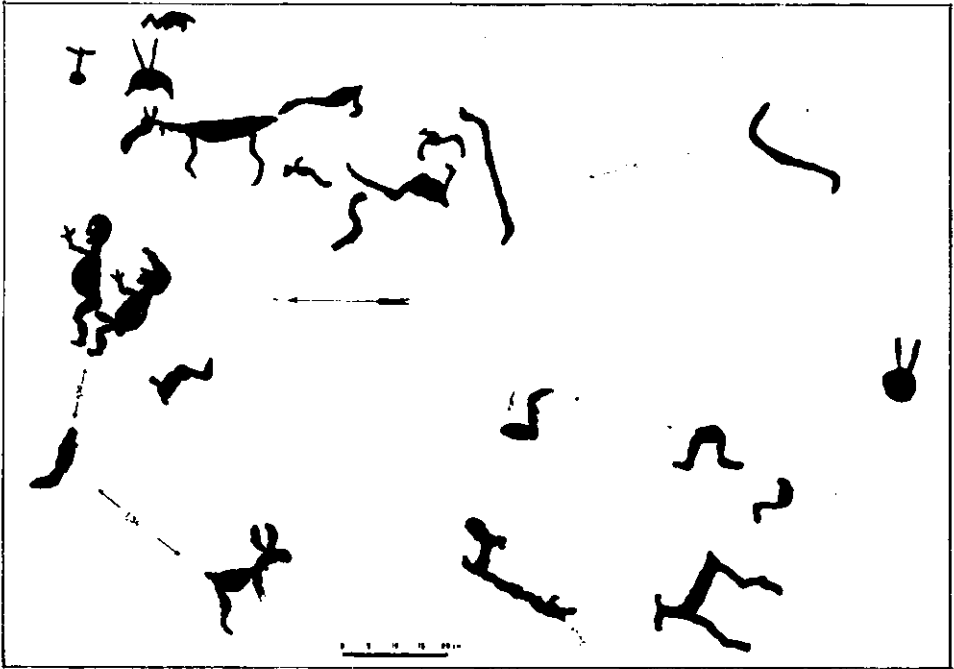
Onega petroglyphs. Their number is 77, not counting 216 oarsmen in 40 boats. There are many symbols here, such as stripes and lines (68) and small spots (41) that have not yet attracted serious attention of investigators: the abundance of rare figures - the demon, an otter, a sheat-fish, rods, dogs, beavers, trees, a human leg, fish, sea animals (seal), etc. Compositions arranged in different ways seldom reproduce one another. The figures vary greatly in size, style, their orientation, "density" of carving, etc.

The Onega petroglyphs are very diverse in figurative respect. Even images of the same type have many variations. This concerns both the birds and elks portrayed and solar and lunar signs. The figurative analysis of the Onega petroglyphs made by A.M. Linevsky, R.B. Klimor, A.D. Stolyar and other investigators has enabled at least three layers belonging to different times to be distinguished between them. The general development seems to proceed from a "realistic" (naturalistic) form to a more schematic, geometrized form as if repeating the development of style of monumental hunters' art of Northern Europe as a whole.

It is interesting to note the parallel existence of silhouette and outlined figures here. They were common at all developmental stages of the given complex. Here occur also "hybrid", i.e. outlined - silhouette figures. Space inside the outlines is sometimes filled. It is noteworthy that the outlined style is generally considered to be an earlier phase of development in the "hunting" rock art of the North. It would be tempting to view the Onega petroglyphs as a transitional link between the outlined pictures available, say, in Nemforsen and the White Sea petroglyphs that have consolidated the tradition of the unbroken carving of a silhouette as has also been admitted by G. Hallström.

One of the most important problems in studying the Onega petroglyphs is to determine their age. Dating of the pictures has so far been based on the material obtained from the nearest camp sites (viewed as contemporary), on comparing individual petroglyphs with flint and bone sculpture and pictures on pottery and, finally, on comparing them with rock carvings in other territories, mainly Scandinavian. Investigators proceeded from these, on the whole, correct starting points but arrived at different conclusions. Most of them attributed the Onega petroglyphs to be Bronze Age, i.e. the late 2nd millenium B.C., and some even to 1st millenium B.C. But if we consider each of the dating factors enumerated separately (and even altogether), it is easy to see that they are not yet valid enough.

More reliable reference points for the elaboration of chronology are to be sought for in two directions: in the systematics (from this point of view) of petroglyphic material itself, and, above all, in search for more reliable relations with surrounding settlements. In other words, it is necessary to relate the petroglyphs strictly confined to a definite level of Lake Onega to those shore terraces on which the settlements were located. Of great importance in this respect is the fact that the shoreline of Lake Onega did not remain unchanged during the past millenia - contrary to what had been thought before (B.F. Zemlyakov and others). On the



*Fig. 22-23
Petroglyphs of Cape Peri III to
the left, a copulation scene. The
photo shows a detail of same.*

other hand, it is striking that the petroglyphs of all the known groups are situated close to the present water edge, although nothing seems to have side slopes. The overwhelming majority are at a height of 0.5 to 1.5 m. above the present lake surface and only some reach 2.5 m. This confinement to the narrow shoreline a little above the present level facilitates markedly relating the petroglyphs to the shore terraces and the camp sites located there. The transgressive - regressive phases of Lake Onega during the Holocene are, of course, taken into account.

According to G.A. Pankrushev the rock belt used for carving slowly and gradually emerged from water within the time span of 4800-2100 years B.C. About 1850 years B.C. there was a fairly marked (3.5 m.) and rapid uplift of Lake Onega. The petroglyphs and the camp sites surrounding them appeared to be submerged for a long time, almost till the turn of this era. This is convincingly evidenced by numerous Aeneolithic settlements dating back from the second quarter - the middle of 2nd millenium B.C.-that proved to be arranged fairly high, occupying the area of more ancient Mesolithic settlements or even overlying it. Then the water level began to decrease slowly. By the year 1200 B.C. it remained to be 1.5 m. : : the present level and only by the onset of this era had it reached the ma..., at which the Aeneolithic transgression of early 2nd millenium B.C. commenced.

When was the lake side rock belt first used for carving? It was A.M. Linevsky who arrived at the conclusion that the famous triad comprising large figures of the demon, a sheat-fish and an otter at the extremity of Besov Nos forms the earliest layer of pictures in the Onega complex. It is noteworthy that the demon is carved as high as 105-146 cm. above the lake level. It was engraved when the water level had approached the present level and, in any case, could not exceed it by more than 0.5-0.7 m. Otherwise, it would have been impossible to carve this figure. This occurred not earlier than 3000 B.C. Higher parts of the rocks were not used before. This is evidenced by a sheat-fish possibly synchronous with the demon but carved above it (as high as 140-184 cm.) on a completely free part of rock. Probably, after the lake-side rocks acquired an appearance close to the present



*Fig. 24
Petroglyphs in Karetsky Nos.
Copulation scene, showing a
posture very similar to that
of the previous illustration.*

one, a certain time was required for their "spiritual" development. It cannot be ruled out that they had become holy before the emergence of engraved pictures and the worshipping of the fissure crossing the demon almost along the axis had begun before the figure itself was created. No evidence of coloured paintings is present but we cannot be sure that engraving has been the only technique used. It appears that petroglyphs were carved in the Neolithic, during the interval between the early 3rd and the first quarter of 2nd millennium B.C.

The emergence of individual petroglyphs above the major belt, i.e. at a height of 1.5-2.5 m., is probably related to the above-mentioned water uplift that made the people use higher rock sites and then break the tradition of rock art. Indeed, the majority of figures in the upper layer created later are schematic, coarse. They lose their figurative expressiveness and gradually turn to abstract symbols. If the observations presented are correct, then the Onega petroglyphs are much older than it was thought before.

Next is a more intricate problem: what was the purpose of carving pictures? What is their content? All the investigators are unanimous in assuming that the Onega petroglyphs were the centre of the primeval sanctuary where some very important rites were performed during a long period without which the people could not imagine their well-being. True, each of the investigators perceives their essence in his own way. A.M. Linevsky views the carving of pictures and invocation over them as a magical action that aims at providing successful hunting. V.I. Ravdonikas, K.D. Laushkin, A.D. Stolyar, R.B. Klimov and many others have rejected this interpretation as being too straightforward and naive-rationalistic. K.D. Laushkin has developed V.I. Ravdonikas' idea of the mythological nature of the carvings. He perceived it as an immense primeval temple, the main function of which was to worship the Sun. It was here that peoples paid the last honours to the dead, prayed for success when hungers broke out. Yet its major purpose was the Cult of the Sun.

We do not think that petroglyphs in Lake Onega are "pictures from nature". They cannot be viewed as simple reproduction of those things and objects which the people living at that time came constantly across in their everyday life: food, animals and hunting implements, fellow hunters and real episodes of their life. They do not correspond to the aims of common fishing and hunting magic. They cannot also be considered to be "notes" of memorial nature in commemoration of some real events that took place in the past or at present. Fishing and hunting themes, the cult of animals, the magic of fertility and yearning for perpetuation of certain topics are present but they are interspersed with mythological ideas broader in comprehension of the surrounding reality. Petroglyphs are the outcome of elaboration and reflection of some conceptual schemes of the world outlook that aim at supporting the order necessary for vital activity in the surrounding world, revealing and indicating the decisive relations by figurative means and directing the natural course of events in the desired direction.

Behind every image and every scene some capacious content of public significance is hidden. Unfortunately, we cannot decipher every composition and, all the more, every image as yet. Profound analytical work, which is being

done by A.D. Stolyar, a Leningrad archaeologist, R.B. Klimov, a Moscow art critic, and others, is needed to draw rigorous conclusions.

The diversity of images, the presence of complicated compositions, the profound, although not always noticeable, relation of petroglyphs both with each other and with the most important features of the external world, this all can be regarded as the reflection of the complexity of primeval religious-mythological ideas.

It is significant that anthropomorphous beings play the part of active and main characters. Among them is the "demon", the supreme deity of the sanctuary marked out both by unusually big size and by being located at the extremity of Besov Nos, farthest among the capes jutting out into the lake. The emergence of such images that came to the fore and ousted images of a beast dominating for thousands of years is evidence for profound alterations in early consciousness and its considerable enrichment. Images depicted on rocks and related rites and actions fixed the established ideas of the world, certain social aims and a social program to be followed by tribal associations in public consciousness and passed them on from one generation to another. Such rites were performed with a certain periodicity, most likely in summer time since in winter ice and ice hummocks made these pictures inaccessible.

Petroglyphs are a system of intricate links between the habitats of their makers and the surrounding world, land, water and sky. This is a form of spiritual "mastering" of the surrounding world by man and an attempt to affect it in the desired direction by available mythological means.

We do not know many details: under what conditions were the pictures carved? Who were they intended for? How often were they addressed? It is clear, however, that this creative work pursued very important public aims. It indicates the ability of consciousness to abstract from specific-sensual object form. Complex symbolic images, often composite, appear.

This is early-religious consciousness at the stage when "deities" common for families and tribes (in this case the demon and images accompanying him) appear. Their definite hierarchy is established. "Heroization" of ancestors takes place and mythology grows.

It is possible to penetrate the meaning of the pictures in two ways: by analysing the material to reveal its internal natural relations and by searching for physically similar ideas and concepts in ethnographic material accumulated, first of all, by the peoples of Northern Eurasia that were backward in the past. Naturally, the pictures cannot be considered out of touch with the epoch of 3rd millenium B.C., the surrounding natural-ecological environment and the general standards of spiritual and social life of the primeval epoch.

The study of the Onega petroglyphs in comparison with rock pictures in Scandinavia, the Urals, Siberia and Central Asia occupies an important place in scientific literature. Such comparisons have become an integral part of many investigations and almost every author has found certain links with pe-

troglyphs in Bolusleam, Nömforsen figures, and from the Urals, petroglyphs of Lake Baikal and even Pegtymel in Chukotka. The pictures of Lake Onega were most often viewed as a branch of Scandinavian rock art of the Bronze Age. Sunny boats, solar signs, etc. were even thought to be evidence for the influence exerted by the ancient civilization of the East. Most of these comparisons are not quite justified and the conclusions drawn on their basis are largely hypothetical.

It can be asserted that rock carvings of Lake Onega have a poor resemblance to those of the Bronze Age in Scandinavia, although identical images are occasionally recorded in the latter. They differ greatly even from the nearest petroglyphs of the White Sea. This peculiarity is due, first of all, to the local ecological and ethnic-cultural environment and local public-labour practice. The role of interactions and contacts with other regions cannot, of course, be denied. A special, very specific centre of rock art with its own themes, style and line of development was probably formed here. There are motifs in it represented nowhere else in the hunting art of Northern Europe.

In connection with making the dating of the Onega petroglyphs more accurate, we have to introduce some corrections in the general historical appraisal of the monument and, to a certain extent, the Neolithic epoch of the North as a whole. The Neolithic of the North was not "remnant" in essence as it is often called. It was not associated closely with the fields of production. It had possibilities for a more prolonged and "natural" conclusive development than in southern regions. In R.B. Klimov's opinion, thanks to this the Neolithic made use of its internal possibilities more fully. An appreciable progress is observed in the development of economy (more complicated forms of hunting, development of sea fishery), public life (appearance of burial grounds, large settlements) and culture (development of rock art, ornament, sculpture on flint and bone). Consciousness comprises and reflects still new aspects of the surrounding reality.

The importance of rock pictures for the history of culture is not confined to the richness of information engraved in them. The art itself has played a significant part in the evolution of primitive consciousness. Behind every new image, composition and group of figures the strenuous efforts of human mind that overcomes the already established standards are caught.

Rock pictures are rich and versatile documents and their study is far from being completed. They require a long investigation. We are to overcome a narrow archaeological approach to petroglyphic material itself. Investigation of the pictures, their topography, figurative stratigraphy, orientation and pattern of relations both between each other and various natural features will make it possible to shed new light on the monument and to reveal its most essential traits and features.

It is possible even now to state a certain progress achieved in studying the Onega petroglyphs. Their number has greatly increased thanks to newly-discovered clusters and themes that had been unknown before. The territory of their distribution has appreciably grown. It has been proved that the complex itself was forming for a long time, passed through several stages and underwent substantial changes. The age of the petroglyphs has been

determined more accurately. The completion of the studies will make it possible to have a new look at the rich complex of the Onega petroglyphs and to use it more fully in studying the rock art of Northern Europe, on the whole, in revealing its regularities and peculiarities, general line of development, the objective role of rock art in the history of culture and, finally, in the reconstruction of the comprehension and perception of the world by the people who lived during the Neolithic epoch of the European North.

It should be noted in conclusion that at present the Publishing House "Iskusstvo" (Moscow) is preparing a full scientific publication dealing with petroglyphs of Lake Onega by Yu. A. Savvateyev and R.B. Klimov. It is supposed to comprise the discussion of investigations and a complete catalogue of rock pictures containing colour reproductions and graphic copies of all the petroglyphs.

Résumé: Les gravures rupestres près du Lac Onéga, en Carelie Soviétique, sont très différentes des autres représentations rupestres connues dans le nord de l'Europe et en Asie. L'Auteur trace l'histoire des découvertes et des recherches effectuées durant un siècle. En quinze années, le nombre de figures connues est passé de 566 à 872, et le nombre des localités de 11 à 21. Les explorations ont été facilitées par l'utilisation de nouvelles méthodes, comme la recherche sous-marine. Parmi les figures nous trouvons des oiseaux, des animaux de forêt, des hommes sur des barques; demi-cercles, symboles lunaires et solaires. Suivant les analyses de l'Auteur et d'autres savants, trois phases stylistiques ont pu être déterminées, la première étant réaliste, la seconde schématique et la dernière géométrique. En ce qui concerne la datation, et prenant en considération la culture matérielle provenant des fouilles ainsi que des changements de niveau du Lac Onéga, l'Auteur date les gravures du début du troisième millénaire jusqu'au second millénaire av. J.C., dans la période Néolithique.

L'interprétation du sens des figures découvertes est douteuse pour deux motifs: pour la prédominance de figures symboliques et énigmatiques, et pour les théories différentes qu'en donnent les savants. L'Auteur les considère comme le reflet d'un ensemble mythologico-religieux et émet l'hypothèse que les sites aient été des sanctuaires où se déroulaient des rites périodiques. L'Auteur fait appel à une recherche plus vaste et plus concentrée afin de comprendre de manière plus approfondie les problèmes posés.

Riassunto: Le incisioni rupestri presso il Lago Onega nella Carelia Sovietica, sono molto differenti dalle altre raffigurazioni rupestri conosciute nel nord Europa e nell'Asia. L'Autore traccia la storia delle scoperte e delle ricerche effettuate nel corso di un secolo. Negli ultimi quindici anni il numero di figure rupestri conosciute nella zona è cresciuto da 566 a 872 e le località da 11 a 21. Le scoperte sono state facilitate dall'utilizzo di nuovi metodi, come la ricerca subacquea.

Tra le figure rinvenute vi sono: uccelli, animali della foresta, uomini su barche, antropomorfi raffiguranti demoni, cerchi, semi-cerchi e linee interpretate come simboli lunari e solari.

In base alle analisi dell'Autore e di altri studiosi si sono individuate 3 fasi stilistiche, prima una realistica, poi una schematica ed infine una terza geometrica.

Riguardo alla datazione, prendendo in considerazione la cultura materiale proveniente da scavi effettuati presso i campi circostanti e i cambiamenti di livello del Lago Onega, l'Autore data le incisioni più antiche, fra l'inizio del III millennio e il II millennio a.C., nel periodo neolitico.

L'interpretazione del significato delle figure scoperte è dubbio per due motivi: primo, la

predominanza di figure simboliche ed enigmatiche e, secondo, per le diverse teorie degli studiosi. L'Autore considera le incisioni come riflesso di un insieme mitologico-religioso ed emette l'ipotesi che i siti siano stati santuari dove si svolgevano riti periodici. Le caratteristiche specifiche delle incisioni rupestri del Lago Onega non si trovano in altre regioni. Queste diversità si verificano a causa dell'ecologia e dell'etno-cultura locale. L'Autore fa appello a una più vasta e più concentrata ricerca al fine di comprendere più approfonditamente i problemi posti dalle incisioni rupestri del Lago Onega.

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