

ROCK PICTURES (PETROGLYPHS) OF THE WHITE SEA

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Rock pictures of the prehistoric epoch are extremely abundant in Soviet Union territories. They occur in the Far East, in Siberia and Middle Asia, in the Urals, the Caucasus, the Ukraine and in the north of the European part of the country. Their number is annually increased due to often unexpected, significant, new discoveries. One of these was made in 1960's by archaeologists from the Karelian Branch of the USSR Academy of Sciences (near the village of Vygostrov), in the lower reaches of the Vyg River from 7-8 km of the place where it flows into the White Sea. The study of the White Sea petroglyphs began somewhat earlier.

The small village of Vygostrov had not attracted the attention of archaeologists, until A.M. Linevsky, a student of ethnography from Leningrad, visited it in the summer of 1926. He was taken by the life of the Pomors. A native, G.P. Matrosov, took the curious youth to the Isle of Shoirukshin, opposite the village in the middle of the stormy and wide part of the Vyg River. He showed the young man Besovy Sledki (Demon's Footprints), a small part of the riverside rock almost completely carved with pictures. This unexpected and extremely valuable discovery altered all of his plans and pointed the interests of the young researcher in an entirely new direction: studying the ancient times of North.

Ten years later, V.I. Ravdonikas, a famous Soviet archaeologist, started copying Besovy Sledki for a subsequent publication on the Karelian petroglyphs. A successful search for new rock carvings was carried out simultaneously on the same island, 100 m to the south of Bes, and on the Isle of Yerpın Pudas, 400 m down the stream.

The main discovery, stunning and unexpected, dates back to September 5th, 1936. V.I. Ravdonikas, had received some information from the inhabitants, and found a big and extremely interesting rock carving in the borough of Zalavruga, on the Island of Bolshoi Malinin, only 1.5-2 km from Besovy Sledki. The abundance of depicted men, the nature of compositions, the vivid artistic quality and the unusual size of the engraved area were rather astounding.

In all, 7 groups of petroglyphs, arranged on the open riverside rocks of the three islands, stretching from the village of Vygostrov towards the sea, have become known in the lower Vyg River with a total of 614 figures. That was the end of the field work in the White Sea area. To sum it up, a magnificent publication by V.I. Ravdonikas was issued in 1938.

In 1957, Karelian archaeologists resumed exploration and excavations of the sites surrounding petroglyphs. The project gained wide scope due to the construction of power stations and resulted in the discovery of new petroglyphs.

On September 5th, 1963, while excavating the site located in the neighborhood of the Zalavruga petroglyphs, the first pictures of Novaya Zalavruga (a boat with 3 oarsmen and an elk), were noticed on the underlying rock.

The excavation of the site and the cleaning of the underlying hard rocks (flat granite ledges) and the slope of the creek bank, continued unveiling new pictures up until 1969. In all, 26 groups were revealed scattered at a distance of 3 to 30 m apart, each one consisting of from 5 to 107 figures. They stretch along the creek for 100 m to Staraya Zalavruga and for 60 m from the bank. Altogether, 1176



Fig. 13
Besovy Sledki. Phallic human figure and boats. (Photo S. Krayev).

pictures were recorded. The White Sea petroglyphs have become the biggest location of the hunters' monumental art in northern Europe. Novaya Zalavruga creates a new link in the evolution of rock art in the White Sea, recording its creative developments in enriching themes, in working out compositions, in employing space, etc.

The discoveries at Zalavruga gave a new impetus to the exploration particularly in the area between Zalavruga and Besovy Sledki. Six more groups of petroglyphs, comprising over 150 figures, were found on the riverside slopes of the islets hitherto almost inaccessible. The biggest group was revealed in 1968-69 in the south-western end of Yerpin Pudas Island, under a layer of soil, at the edge of a large Neolithic site.

As a result of long term research and due to efforts of several generations of Soviet archaeologists, an unique complex of ancient relics was discovered in the lower Vyg River; in an area of ca. 2 km², 32 groups of petroglyphs (about 2000 figures) together with over 50 ancient sites dating back to the Neolithic, Eneolithic, Bronze and Early Iron ages were discovered.

A few words about the petroglyphs themselves: most of them are small, usually 20 to 50 cm, but their size may vary considerably. Big, almost life-size, and tiny, extremely minute ones both occur. As a rule, they are almost always profiles. Only sea beasts and some small forest animals are depicted lying flat, as if viewed from above. Forest beasts are always «biped», while men (with some exceptions) are shown with only one arm and one leg. Pictures were produced by pecking dots with quartz implements on the rock surface. The engravings reach a depth of 0.2 to 0.3 cm and usually cover the entire space in silhouettes; outlined figures are very few.

The abundance of «realistic» compositions imparts a narrative nature to the White Sea petroglyphs. There are few clearly supernatural, fantastic features in them. They are concentrated in isolated groups, unequal in the number of figures and their expressiveness, date back to different periods and make up a long, genetically linked chain of relics from a single developing hotbed of primeval rock art. A progressive increase in the complexity of narration, in artistic expressiveness and in the enrichment of themes are well documented. In the early stages figures or simple compositions were the focus of attention, whereas later scenes with men as main subject prevail. The major line of this development is established by the theme of man; this can be verified by considering the principal clusters of petroglyphs in the White Sea.

Besovy Sledki (Northern Group). The pictures run along the edge of the rock, from south to north, for nearly 11 m. The depicted surface is 4 m wide. It is crossed longitudinally and transversally by fractures and breaks which divide in into several parts. The smooth glossy surface of reddish-brownish colour is retained only in the lower part of the rock, where the figures are mainly concentrated. In all there are 470 figures and signs. Among the most well defined figures forest and sea animals prevail. Most predominant are reindeer (45) and elks (18) however it is not always possible to distinguish between the two. Apart from these, bears, foxes and other forest animals are found now and then. The widely accepted view that fish are also depicted in great numbers needs to be reconsidered. Sea beasts — the white whale (a total of 36) and the walrus (5) — are considered as fish.

Small boats, usually with a high hull, often occur. In 19 of these 38, rowers are shown (harpoon belts stretch from four of them), while 16 boats are empty. Men are also portrayed (17; three of them are skiers) as well as human

footprints (12). A large group is available that comprises half-destroyed, unfinished and doubtful carvings (52). The abundance (over 100) of simple signs — rounded or oval spots, triangles, quadrangles, large ovals, stripes, lines etc. — is striking. «Crosses» and «stars» scatter the entire canvas, while dotted lines, a «tree», an obscure sign, a picture of salmon and three arrows (no bows are shown at all) are rare subjects.

As a whole, the carvings are rather diverse. It is impossible to find two identical figures here. Some of them are given fantastic features. For instance, the artiodactyla have unnaturally curved backs, their heads shaped strangely are disproportionately large, etc. The pictures are usually static, although some attempts to reproduce motion are noticeable. Compositions also occur (numbering roughly 30) though small and imperfect according to the arrangement of figures, poorly detailed, they lack proper scale correlation and are sometimes composed of petroglyphs dating back to different periods.

The surface has, however, a single pivot, as though bringing together isolated figures and scenes — a chain of eight prints of a bare foot stretching along the lower edge of the rock; the eighth footprint superimposes the seventh one «pressing» the swan's head down. The chain ends with a large representation of the «Demon» standing apart from the main cluster. His chin, mouth, nose and forehead are outlined in the profile of his face. There is a pointed appendix — presumably part of his head-dress — on his occiput. His bent back, huge phallus and foot, his hand with five fingers stretched ahead and his arm slightly bent at the elbow, are striking. Behind his back and at his feet there are boats, birds and beasts.

Difference in scale and orientation of the figures, unsystematic arrangement of many, almost complete coverage of the rock surface and certain differences in style and carving technique, prove that the rock surface has been filled with pictures for a long time. What was, however, the succession in covering the rock with carvings? A.M. Linevsky seems to be right in assuming that the most convenient central and southern sections of the rock were used first: a wonderful pair of swans and white whales with their heads facing shore-wards appear.

It is still easier to discern the late layer of carvings, first, the clusters at the northern edge of the rock, including the «Demon» figure. The latter was marked by itself on the inconveniently situated knoll on the rock. There was no better place left bare for him. The «Demon» and the footprints that lead to him, were most likely to appear according to a single scheme, representing a new significant stage in the filling of the rock surface, when it is «submitted» to the central image. It is not by chance that the footprints are stretched in a long chain but with an apparent wish to cover the whole rock with pictures. Their «arrangement» is clearly dependent on the earlier carved figures. The terminal footprint goes aside appearing a bit higher, on the head of the upper swan of the pair. These are not common birds but supernatural mythological images hostile to the «Demon». Hitting the swans (one of them is pierced by an «arrow», the head of the other is pressed by a footprint) may be viewed as a victory won by a new anthropomorphous deity and, consequently, as a result of profound re-interpretation of the entire rock assemblage.

Investigators are unanimous in regarding the Demon's figure as major and consider various other ways. A.M. Linevsky identifies the Demon as «a ghost-master» of water. In his opinion the carved rock itself was a place for making donations to the Demon (in the form of pictures), who assisted the Demon in calling the prey out of the sea. A. Y. Bryusov finds the idea of the Demon as being the supreme deity in the surrounding area, to whom all donations were

made while various hunting scenes served for a kind of invocation to make hunting successful, as convincing. According to A. Ya. Bryusov, peculiar hunting and cult festivals and ceremonies were held near Besovy Sledki, before beginning the seasonal hunting. On one hand, they provided successful hunting by magical means during the season and on the other, they served for maintaining peace with groups of hunters from different foreign tribes.



Fig. 14
Besovy Sledki. Animal figures, footprints and other symbols. On the upper left side of the photograph, a peculiar «standing elk» seems to hold a fish with the front legs (Photo S. Krayev).

V.I. Ravdonikas also categorized the Demon among «the deities, ghosts and various mythological characters» from Besovy Sledki, assuming it to be the main figure, presumably relating to «the magic of fertility, the magic of biological reproduction or reproduction of hunters' prey». To outline more specifically «the functions» of this «deity» is a task for further investigation.

It remains to be added that now, in the vicinity of Besovy Sledki, there is a dam of the Vygostrov hydro-electric power station, while the rapids of Shoiruksha have vanished. In short, the locality has considerably changed. To preserve the carvings, a small pavilion of concrete and glass was erected over them.



Fig. 15
Yerpin Pudas.

Yerpin Pudas. The limits of the present paper do not enable us to dwell upon smaller groups which occur on the way to the major cluster, i.e. Zalavruga. We shall confine ourselves to mentioning only the large rock art groups on the Isle of Yerpin Pudas that have been found quite recently. Its length is 21 m, and the width varies from 2.8 to 6 m. In all, over 100 figures and signs were recorded here. Elks prevail among the more distinguishable scenes (32). Practically all of them are depicted with two ears but antlers are only marked in two cases, each in a different way. About one third of the elks have no «ear-rings» below their throats — one of the inherent features of the elk.

Men (19) are usually portrayed half-faced in peculiar poses — squatting or sitting — and only two are depicted full-faced. Unusually, at least 5 men are two-armed. On the whole, they are schematic, their proportions elongated and, as a rule, they are bigger than the animals. Two of the pictures may be taken for dogs, another two, extremely schematic and rough for bears, and 13 — for white whales. Of 8 boats, 3 do not raise any doubt. All of them are smaller than the beasts hit by harpoons. Isolated birds, 3 harpoons, 3 small holes and 2 unfinished figures are also noteworthy.

Nearly all of the pictures are parts of compositions, both simple, comprising 2-3 figures, and more complicated, consisting of 10 or more images variously arranged.



Fig. 16
Tracings of petroglyphs in the Island of Yerpín Pudas, representing hunting and fishing scenes.

These show the result of the fairly long development of rock art in the White Sea. Newly-found petroglyphs in the Isle of Yerpín Pudas are most likely to occupy an intermediate position between Bcsóvy Sledki and Zalavruga. Scenes, themes and an abundance of human images draw them closer to the carvings in Zalavruga.

Another five isolated assemblages of rock art are situated still further down the Vyg River on nameless islets. They make a total of about 50 images, mainly boats. These petroglyphs, not numerous and inexpressive at first sight, are



Fig. 17
Island of Yerpín Pudas. Elk figures.

smoothed by water, nearly melting into the background of the dark patinated riverside rocks; they are of much value because they document more fully the evolution of rock art in the White Sea from Besovy Sledki to Zalavruga.

Staraya Zalavruga (Zalavruga I). The locality of Zalavruga with 3 groups of petroglyphs on the bank of the creek which dries up in summer, has also changed due to the construction of the hydro-electric power station and excavations that lasted many years. A storage reservoir is nearby. Hitherto gneissose granite

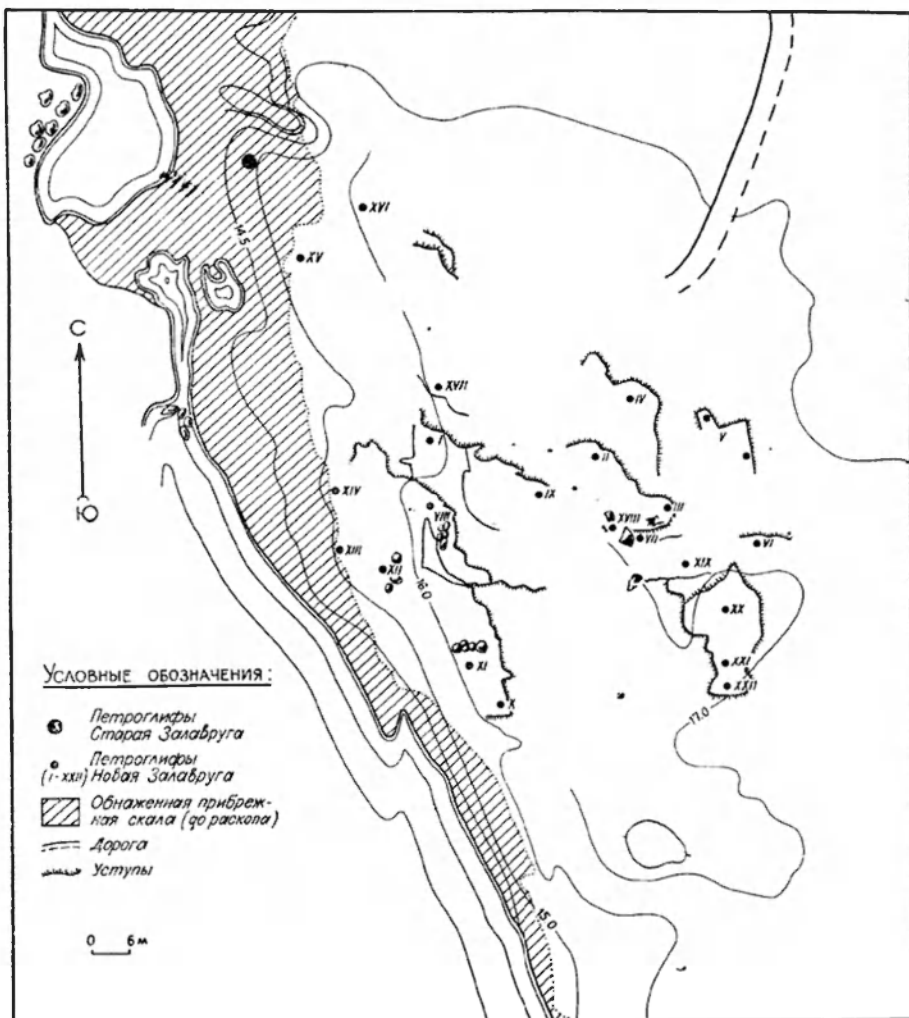


Fig. 18
Distribution map of carved rocks at Zalavruga.

Fig. 19
General view of Novaya Zalavruga.

Fig. 20
Staraya Zalavruga. Graphite tracing of skiers.



outcropped here only along the forested bank, while now it is exposed on the area of over 1.5 ha. The main group occupies a wide rounded jut of the riverside slope of the rock with a flat, slightly slanted top, limited on the left by a deep ravine, on the right, by a low jut and, from above, by a strip of completely destroyed hilly surface. According to V.I. Ravdonikas, there are 216 images here but many of them are hardly visible.

Other two small and almost invisible clusters are situated on each side at a distance not exceeding 10 m. One of them includes 16 carvings, seven of which are men. The other (southern) one is comprised of 10 figures. The latter was reproduced quite inaccurately and incompletely. A plurality of figures and scenes involving men were revealed during the control copying.

Within the central accumulation, petroglyphs on the spacious top site and on the narrow side slope falling into the granite ravine are distinguished. Now the carvings on the top site, which was used earlier than the north-eastern side slope, less convenient for carving, can hardly be discerned. On the extensive slightly slanting, chipped light-grey rock, huge reindeer are depicted which are hard to trace, although hitherto they clearly stood out with enormous whitish spots visible from a distance. They are 2.8, 2.8 and 2.5 m, long respectively and 3.2 m high. Two of them are shown with particularly impressive, very long, branchy antlers. It looks as if their way is blocked by a chain of 6 multi-oar boats with about 100 oarsmen. Along the right-hand edge of the surface two herds of reindeer are portrayed, consisting of 7 and 11 heads and running to the same corner from two sides.



Fig. 21
Staraya Zalavruga. General tracing of a carved rock where different phases are represented. Some elk figures are superimposed on boats.



Fig. 22
Novaya Zalavruga. Fishing scene. (Photo S. Krayev).

In all, 63 figures have been recorded by V.I. Ravdonikas on the top size, viz: elks and reindeer (24), boats (19), human figures (8), bear's footprints (6), a few single footprints and some obscure, unidentified figures. He found that all three rows of animals were shown running towards the same place, i.e. the terminal point of the enclosure, thus forming a single composition: a scene of magical hunting by forcing the animals into the enclosure. They are chased by a deity with a bow, protecting the hunters and giving them power over the animal world. Agreeing with a compositional link between the huge boats, the researcher was in doubt as to their participation with forcing the reindeer into the enclosure. According to V.I. Ravdonikas, there are 126 figures in the lateral accumulation, viz: men (55), boats (11), flying arrows, human or animal footprints, reindeer, lines, a number of obscure figures and a few isolated vivid images: a dwelling (?), a frame boat, a whale, etc. Have they been carved according to a single scheme or do they represent the result of repeatedly adding figures without an internal relationship to the earlier ones? This point remained obscure to the investigator. The presence of several (not less than 5-6) small scenes seemed quite clear to him.

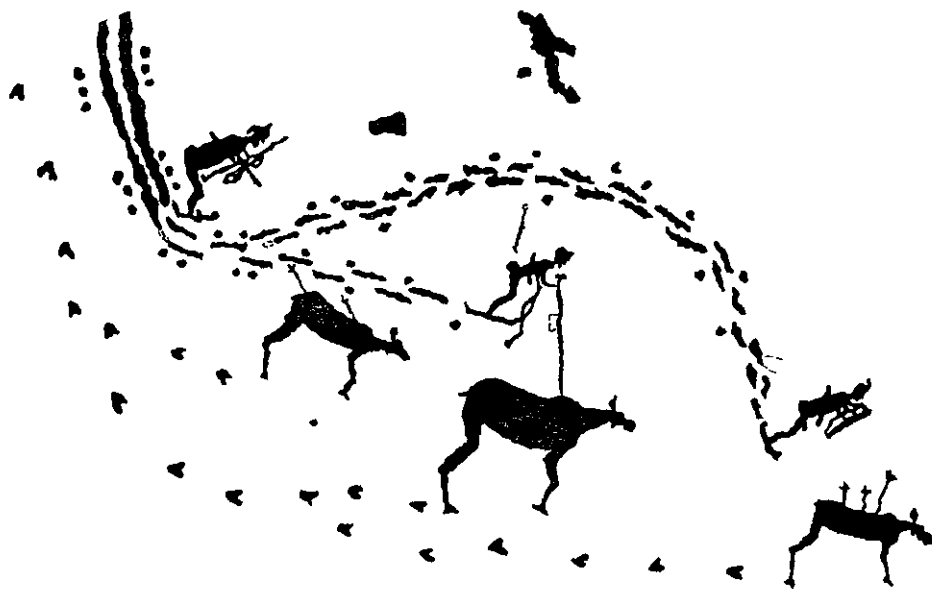
Zalavruga was perceived somewhat differently by A.M. Linevsky, who included three huge animals and 6 large boats blocking their way, as an independent composition; he interpreted it as an autumn hunt for elks crossing the river. He took two lateral rows of reindeer, approaching each other from two sides, for another multi-figure scene (contemporary to the former and at first possibly related to it) showing magical forces driving the reindeer together in winter.

Small compositions below and above the boats were added later. A.M. Linevsky distinguished in the lateral cluster two or three related narrations of pictographic nature showing winter hunting and the unsuccessful attacking of forest inhabitants — «skiers» — by alien «navigators».

Thus, although certain differences are present in interpreting the carvings, both investigators are unanimous in distinguishing two sections in Staraya Zalavruga — the central one connected with the magical hunting and the later (peripheral) one, of mythological or even pictographic nature. Indeed, both themes — hunting and «war» — are fairly distinct here. Being memorial «pictures», do they reproduce actual events or myths and legends? The mythological approach seems more promising to us. In deciphering the petroglyphs from Staraya Zalavruga an account should be taken, of new comprehensive figurative material.

Novaya Zalavruga (Zalavruga II). The discovery of this site has been briefly dealt with earlier. It is not enough to reveal the pictures. They must be copied and this is no easy task. Some new copying techniques have been proposed, in particular carbon frottages, a principle like that employed by children in transferring coins onto paper. These copies possess «an effect of presence» conveying the texture of the rock's surface. They enable the outlines of figures and their microtopography to be reproduced more accurately. Yet photographs (naturally, without tinturing pictures) remain the principal document for us. In the course of photographing there arose a need to lighten them using mirrors to increase the contrast of the carvings. A searchlight has also been employed to illuminate the petroglyphs at night. All of these methods and techniques used together have helped to reproduce rather accurately; the new figurative material proved to be most diverse and expressive.

Boats (usually with crews) are the most widespread themes. They account for



Figg. 23-24

Novaya Zalavruga. Tracing and photograph of winter elk hunting.



328 images, i.e. over one third of the total number of petroglyphs. Human figures are also unusually frequent and make a total of 183, not counting 782 oarsmen in boats. Men are commonly shown in action. They are most frequently equipped for hunting, holding bows or spears in their hands. Skiing men are often portrayed as well. The major targets of forest hunting, elks and reindeer, are shown 57 times, whereas bears and other forest beasts, 23. White whales (62) and waterfowl (71) are fairly abundant. Beasts and birds together only account for some 20 per cent of the petroglyphs. Peculiar figures which are very rare in prehistoric rock art also occur. These include tree, ski-tracks, animal and human footprints, some «topographic» signs, basket-like objects, snakes, various hunting implements together with incomprehensible pictures. Several familiar forms like circlets, ovals and lines are present, too.

A peculiarity of the newly-found rock surfaces lies in the abundance of themes. Most of the images are parts of almost 90 compositions, devoted mostly to fishing or hunting. Sometimes hostile clashes of combats are chosen as themes. There are a number of peculiar scenes concerning some clearly mythological topics. These compositions of narrative nature are uncommonly detailed. Ancient stone-carvers handled lots of figures observing reasonable proportions and scales when compiling their scenes. Firm ground (chains of footprints, ski-tracks) or a



Fig. 25
Novaya Zalavruga. Fishing scenes and other figures, on the same rock as the previous pictures.

place of action (a beast sitting on a tree) are often marked. The action is shown in process; the most decisive, culminate points being hunting, fishing or fighting scenes. The targets of hunters or fishermen — white whales, elks, reindeer,



Fig. 26
Novaya Zalavruga. Hunters with bow and spear.

bears, birds and smaller forest beasts — are always hit (either wounded or killed), as if before the spectators eyes. The main characters, men or groups of men, are practically always shown as victorious.

In Zalavruga, we most frequently deal with earthly, «realistic» images, readily recognized. The topics of the majority of scenes also seem clear. Vividly expressed in them are the peculiarities of the local public and labour practice of the ancient population of the White Sea in which cooperative fishing played an important role. Yet petroglyphs in both Novaya and Staraya Zalavruga should not be regarded as naturalistic reproductions of real fishing or hunting situations. The relationship between the pictures and every-day labour of their creators is not direct (or simply magical) but more intricate, mythological. These are not necessarily the memorial scenes showing the mode of life of the ancient population in the White Sea area but rather the expressions of notions those people had of the surrounding life and its decisive driving forces and relations, «written» in a pictorial form.

Thus we have approached the problems of the White Sea petroglyphs. In their most general form they lie in clarifying three more significant points: a) When were these carvings created? b) Who created them? c) What was the purpose of executing the carvings? What is their internal meaning? However careful the study may be, the carvings themselves cannot give us complete and convincing answers to any of the above questions. Nevertheless this does not imply that petroglyphs do not contain information pertaining to the topics discussed. On the contrary, a very thorough investigation into their origins is a quite necessary, but clearly insufficient, first step. Extra archaeological, ethnographical and geological data, observations and comparisons with petroglyphs from other ter-

ritories need to be involved. Involving additional material requires valid methodical grounds and specific, specialized work programs.

Since the discovery of the White Sea petroglyphs, the search for new localities and excavation of sites have been going on to make their dating easier. Geological and palinological studies lasted for a number of years aiming at the revelation of the principal developmental cycles of the White Sea, thereby obtaining the starting finds to date the coastal terraces where the relics are located. Determination of the absolute age using radioactive carbon C^{14} is also being employed. Even this urgent work is, however, yet far from being completed. Thus, the scientific programme of investigating the White Sea petroglyphs is inevitably becoming more complex and the fundamental solving of the above problems will be possible only in the future. Yet a great scope of analytical work, fulfilled by the efforts of a number of scientists, enable these questions to be answered at least as a matter of first approximation.

The first question arising naturally concerns the age of petroglyphs. The answer is facilitated by finding a thorough correlation between the petroglyphs and the terraces where sites are located. To this end it is necessary to compare the contemporary settlements with the petroglyphs, those preceding them or those which existed after the tradition to carve pictures ceased. This is done using the correlation between the altitude marks of relics. So far it is by means of the sites providing samples for accurate radio-carbon dating, that the age of petroglyphs can be determined.

The sum of observations, including the absolute dates according to C^{14} , leads

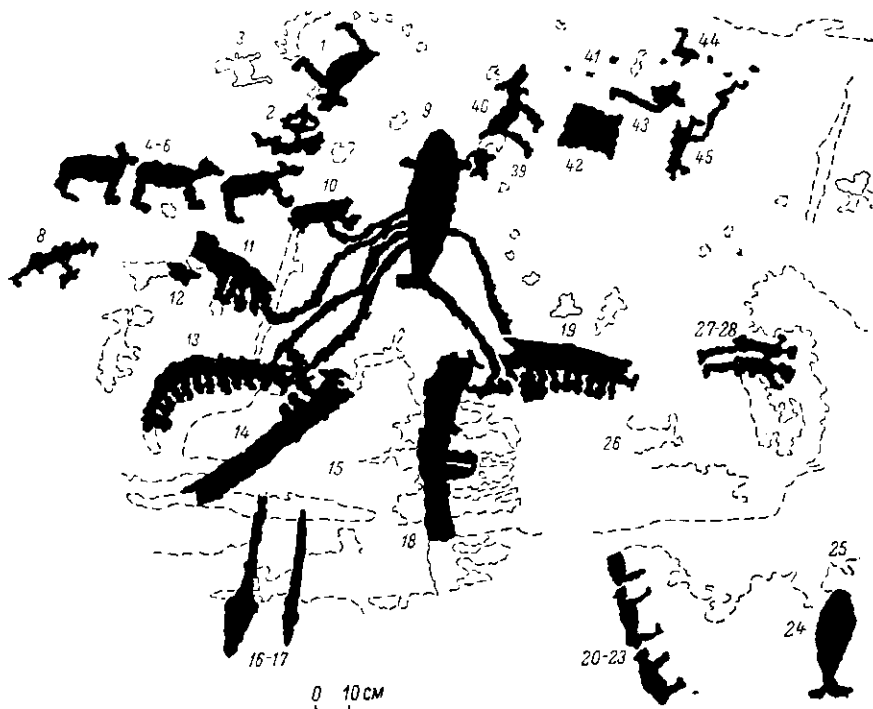


Fig. 27
Novaya Zalavruga. Whale hunting with boats and other scenes.



Fig. 28
Novaya Zalavruga. Hunters with bow and other weapons.

us to conclude that the White Sea petroglyphs were being created and functioned during a prolonged period of time. Favourable opportunities for the appearance of pictures on the rock Besovy Sledki arose as far back as the late fourth millennium B.C., i.e. during the Atlantic period. The rock was, however, being covered with pictures during the third and part of the second millennium B.C. Zalavruga recording, the concluding developmental stage of rock art in the White Sea, may have existed at the very beginning of the 2nd millennium B.C. but images were mainly carved during the early half to the middle of the 2nd millennium B.C. They were subsequently washed down to vanish forever from the field of vision of the primitive people. Late in the second millennium B.C., a large site appeared above them. According to the archaeological division into periods accepted for the European north, the first White Sea petroglyphs may be attributed to the Neolithic stage while, the concluding stage, to the Encolithic. On the whole, they cover the third and the early half of second millennium B.C., i.e. the sub-Boreal period. A great deal is to be clarified, but it may certainly be claimed that the White Sea petroglyphs will be dated between the late fourth and late second millennium B.C. A succession in the appearing of isolated groups has already been partly dealt with, but nothing has been said about the interrelation between the petroglyphs from Staraya Zalavruga and those from Novaya Zalavruga. We are inclined to view Staraya Zalavruga (Zalavruga I) as a



Fig. 29
Birth giving scene (from Linevsky).

Fig. 30
Novaya Zalavruga. Procession of human figures carrying various implements. (Opposite page).

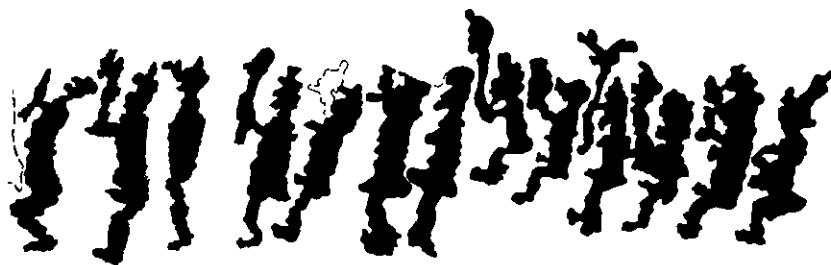
continuation of Novaya Zalavruga (Zalavruga II). Another opinion, diametrically opposite, has been expressed. Thus, A.D. Stolyar assumes that Staraya Zalavruga is more ancient than Novaya Zalavruga and that the lateral part served as a peculiar creative bridge linking it with Novaya Zalavruga. He imagines the successive development of imitative art here as the following tri-linked chain: the central site or Staraya Zalavruga, its lateral accumulation and, finally, Novaya Zalavruga. A thorough figurative analysis of all the rock surfaces from Zalavruga should prove if this is true or not.

To ascertain by whom the pictures on the White Sea rocks were left is not easier. The ethnic and cultural affiliation of the creators of petroglyphs is being elucidated owing to coordinating the petroglyphs with the surrounding sites. It looks as if images were carved by the people who possessed pit-combed, later rhombic-pit and asbestine pottery. In the listed types of pottery attributed to the population that occupied the Karelia territory during the Neolithic and Eneolithic stages, a certain genetic succession is observed in spite of substantial differences. Although the ethnic affiliation of the possessors of the various enumerated pottery is still much disputed, many investigators relate them (which is presumably justified) to the ancient proto-Finnish-Ugrian world.

Archaeological material points to the penetration of a new population within the south-western White Sea areas during the Eneolithic and Bronze age. These newcomers moved from the Kama area and used comb-marked pottery with organic impurities added to clay dough. The pottery burnt down during the baking, making the vessels porous. This may well be one of the reasons for the fading of the tradition to carve pictures. Only a deeper investigation into the old ethnic and cultural history of Karelia and contiguous regions would create a clearer ethnic affiliation regarding the creators of petroglyphs. Equally important in this respect is the comparative study of rock carvings in the forest belt of Eurasia.

The semantics of petroglyphs is, perhaps, the most complicated aspect images. It is more arduous to restore the meaning and contents of the pictures without a vivid word from those who created and worshipped them than to decipher an unknown written language.

The White Sea petroglyphs may be viewed as one of the centers of the ancient tribal cults in the Karelia territory. These cults were not exclusively related to hunting, as was previously thought, but are related to more abstract and generalized image-bearing and fantastic interpretations of the surrounding world. Carving pictures and communicating through them was presumably an inseparable constituent of the more important and innermost ceremonies, without which the well-being of tribal communes could not have been conceived. These cult ceremonies and solemnities were of calendar nature being held with a certain periodicity, mainly in the summer season, since in the winter, pictures covered with ice and snow were almost inaccessible. These might, in particular, be initiations, i.e. conferring the youths equal right with adult hunters. During the course of initiation the young men were to learn and adopt the spiritual values, social experience and moral standards accumulated by society: in a word, the main forms of vital activity which were interpreted and perpetuated in pictures. Despite the apparent «realism» of petroglyphs, they do not reflect real life but reproduce reflections of the surrounding reality in a generalized mythological, legendary form. Rock carvings fixed in the mind of people the more significant phenomena of primitive life and particularly important ideological and religious images: «deities», «ghost-masters», «cultural heroes» and ancestors. Rock art was a peculiar form of social succession, reproducing the «social program» and necessary moral standards, worked out for centuries, which were strictly observed by collective bodies of subsequent generations. That was its chief function. The purpose and nature of the present paper do not give possibilities for dwelling at length upon the current state of the problems of the White Sea petroglyphs and their utilization as a historical reference source for the study of the economy, material culture, social and spiritual life of the prehistoric societies. It is clear, however, that a great number of new rock surfaces revealed more profound historiographical analysis of all groups, improved field documentation, complete scientific publication, excavation of the sites surrounding the petroglyphs — this altogether creates favourable requisites for such investigations and arouses an increased theoretical interest in the relics themselves.



Next in line is the elaboration of problems such as the origin and concluding stage of rock art in the White Sea, the specific course of its evolution, the absolute age, semantics and social functions of carvings, their comparison with relics from other areas and clarification of their relation to other forms of art, the reflection in the pictures of a phasic rise in the thinking of man and of his mode of life and, finally, the objective historical role of rock art. Altogether this and other problems constitute a long-term program of studying the White Sea petroglyphs, their rank and role in the development of rock art in Northern Europe.

Riassunto: Le incisioni rupestri note nella regione vicino al Mar Bianco, sono oggi più di mille, distribuite in varie località. Nella zona si conoscono una cinquantina di insediamenti dal Neolitico all'età del Ferro, che in alcuni casi forniscono elementi di datazione per le incisioni. Le figure, incise a martellina, sono per lo più di 20-50 cm., ma ne esistono alcune molto piccole e altre a grandezza naturale. La maggior parte sono viste di profilo, solo alcune figure di barche e animali sono viste dall'alto. I soggetti rappresentati sono molto vari: scene di caccia, pesca, lotta, scene mitologiche, orme di animali e di sci, piante, animali, barche. Mentre nelle fasi più antiche le figure sono isolate, con l'andar del tempo le scene si fanno sempre più complesse.

Fasi di istoriazione diverse sono attestate da differenze di patina, di tecnica e di stile. Sembra che la roccia venisse incisa prima nelle zone centrali e più lisce, e in seguito si aggiungessero figure fino a coprire tutta la parte utile. In generale, il ciclo rupestre del Mar Bianco va dal Neolitico (IV millennio a.C.) all'Eneolitico (II millennio a.C.).

L'autore descrive alcune località (Besovy Sledki, l'isola di Yerpin Pudas, Zalavruga) e presenta un tentativo di interpretazione delle figure, oltre all'esposizione dei criteri che guidano la ricerca.

Ritiene che alcune scene rappresentino narrazioni mitiche probabilmente a fine iniziatico. Poiché d'inverno la regione è coperta di neve, le incisioni e i riti ad esse collegati devono essere frutto di una frequentazione stagionale.

Résumé: Les gravures rupestres connues dans la région autour de la Mer Blanche, sont aujourd'hui plus d'un millier, regroupées dans différents sites. Dans la même zone on connaît une cinquantaine de sites, du Néolithique à l'âge du Fer, dont quelques uns fournissent des données pour la datation des gravures. Les figures sont piquetées; elles varient entre 20 et 50 cm. en hauteur pour la plupart, mais il y en a aussi de minuscules et d'autres en grandeur nature. Elles sont tracées de profil, sauf quelques figures de bateaux et d'animaux qui sont vus d'en haut. Les sujets représentés sont nombreux: scènes de chasse, de pêche, de lutte, scènes mythologiques, empreintes d'animaux et de skis, plantes, animaux, bateaux. Dans les périodes les plus anciennes les figures sont isolées, tandis que plus tard les scènes se font de plus en plus complexes. Différentes phases de gravure sont attestées par des différences de patine, de technique, et de style. Il semblerait que la roche était gravée d'abord dans les zones centrales et plus lisses, par la suite d'autres figures étaient ajoutées de façon à remplir la partie utile de la roche même. En général, le cycle rupestre de la Mer Blanche couvre une période du Néolithique (IV millénaire a. J.-C.) à l'Énéolithique (II millénaire a. J.-C.). L'auteur décrit quelques sites (Besovy Sledki, l'île de Yerpin Pudas, Zalavruga) et expose les critères qui guident la recherche dans la région. Il présente une tentative d'interprétation des figures: à son avis il y a des scènes de narration mythique, peut-être avec un but initiatique. Puisque l'hiver la zone est couverte de neige, les gravures et les rites connexes, doivent être la manifestation d'une fréquentation saisonnière.

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