

Alexander Zhulnikov

NEW ROCK CARVINGS FROM THE PERI NOS VI CAPE ON LAKE ONEGA

Abstract

This report is devoted to the publication of new rock carvings, discovered in 2008–2009 by the archaeological expedition of the Petrozavodsk State University, at the Peri Nos VI cape on the eastern shore of Lake Onega. 31 new images have been found on six stone plates, and a reconstruction of their initial position on the rock of the Peri Nos cape has been made. The reconstructed composition allows interpreting the meaning of the symbolic figures found among the Lake Onega rock carvings.

Keywords: rock carvings, petroglyphs, Neolithic, Eneolithic, symbolic figures

Alexander Zhulnikov, Petrozavodsk State University, 33 Lenina St., Petrozavodsk, Russia. E-mail: wigwam@karelia.ru

INTRODUCTION

The complex of petroglyphs of Lake Onega is one of the greatest centers of prehistoric art in northern Europe. The rock carvings are located on the eastern shore of the lake. They are found in a 20-kilometer long area which stretches from the lower reaches of River Vodla to Gury Islands (Fig. 1). This territory is divided into two regions: Vodla region and Besov Nos region; between them, at the distance of 13 kilometers along the coast, petroglyphs are absent (Poikalainen & Ernits 1998: 17–8).

According to the available archaeological and geological data, a majority of the Lake Onega rock carvings were created in the Neolithic and the Eneolithic, that is, 4000–2000 BC in radiocarbon years (Жульников 2006: 21–2).

The elevation of the rock carvings above the present-day level of Lake Onega is only 2.7 m; most of them are located just by the shoreline. At the time of their creation, according to paleogeographical studies, the water level was very close or identical to the present-day level.

THE RESEARCH HISTORY

Local people were aware of the rock carvings long before their official discovery, which is testified by the name that they gave to the cape and the

nearby village – Besov Nos which means ‘Demon’s Cape’. The monks of the nearby Murom monastery ‘Christianized’ the figures of Demon and swan by pecking two orthodox crosses above them. This probably happened in the 16th century.

The petroglyphs entered the scientific world in 1848 after they had been visited by Constantin Grewingk, the conservator of the mineralogical collections at the Academy of Sciences in Saint-Petersburg, and by Peter Shved, the teacher of Petrozavodsk Gymnasium, who probably visited the site the same year. The first articles on the rock carvings of the Besov Nos cape and the Peri Nos cape, along with the drawings of them, appeared several years later.

In the beginning of the 20th century, the expedition of the famous Swedish researcher of rock art, G. Hallström, worked there which resulted in the finding of 142 new figures.

In the 1930s, new rock carvings were discovered on the capes Kladovets and Gazhy Nos, and on the island of Bolshoy Gury, due to work of the geologist B.F. Zemlyakov and the archaeologist A.M. Linevsky.

In the first half of the 20th century, parts of the rocks with petroglyphs from the cape of Peri Nos III became museum exhibits. In 1927, a piece of rock which had probably been detached by the force of waves and ice was transported to the

State Museum of Karelia (Petrozavodsk) on the initiative of B.F. Zemlyakov. Later, in 1935, F.M. Morozov organized the transportation of four fragments of rock from the Peri Nos III cape to the State Hermitage (Saint-Petersburg). The biggest of them is now exhibited in the museum. Because of its double-faceted surface and the abundance of figures of symbolic character, it was given the name 'Roof of the World'. Some figures were destroyed during the detaching of this part of rock (Савватеев 1970: 398).

In the mid-1930s, the expedition of V.I. Ravdonikas investigated the Lake Onega petroglyphs. As a result, the petroglyphs of the Karetsky cape were discovered, and the number of the known figures increased to 570. Ravdonikas also prepared a publication of all of the rock carvings in this area known at that moment, except those stored in the museums (Равдоникас 1935). In the 1970s, the expedition of Yu.A. Savvateev found rock carvings in outfalls of River Vodla and Chernaya and also on the islands of Bolshoy Golets, Moduzh, and Maly Gury (Савватеев 1977; 1983). During these years some attempts were also undertaken to find petroglyphs under water close to the capes Kladovets, Besov Nos and Peri Nos (Цуцкин 1974). The underwater areas along these capes, except for the Peri Nos VI, were found to contain some figures.

The expedition of the Estonian Society of Prehistoric Art has investigated petroglyphs of the Lake Onega in many years since 1982. The main result of its activity was the discovery of a large number of rock carvings on the Kochkovnavolok peninsula, on a cape which the participants of the expedition named Lebediny Nos (Swan Cape). Estonian researchers prepared a publication of all groups of rock carvings of the Vodla region (Kochkovnavolok peninsula) to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the discovery of the Lake Onega rock carvings (Poikalainen & Ernits 1998).

In 2004, over 1300 petroglyphs were known on the shores of Lake Onega (Poikalainen 2004: 42). They appear in 22 separate groups located on the extremities of rocky capes and small coastal islands (Fig. 1). Two groups (334 figures) are located on the Kochkovnavolok peninsula, in the outfall of River Vodla and on the Lebediny Nos cape. The other groups are located farther to the south, on capes Karetsky Nos, Peri Nos, Besov Nos, Kladovets Nos, and Gazhy Nos, and on the islands Moduzh, Maly and Bolshoy Gury, and a

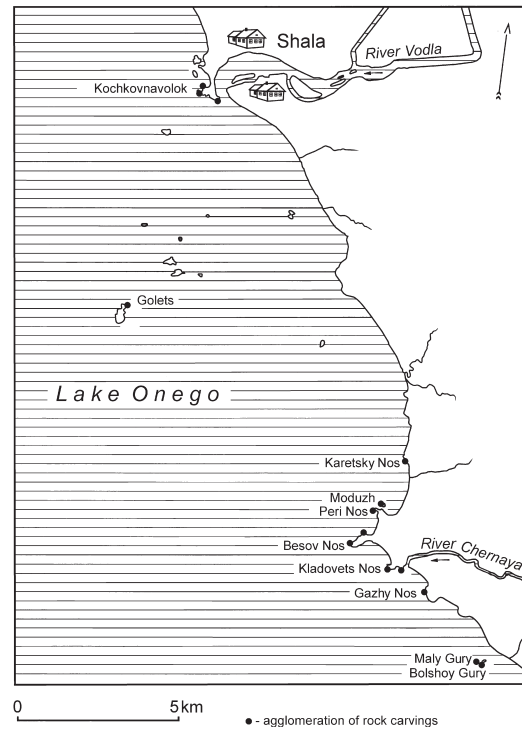


Fig.1. Map of location of the Lake Onega rock carvings. Drawing: I. Heglund.

nameless island by the outfall of River Chernaya. Several figures of waterfowls have been also found on the Bolshoy Golets island, 7 kilometers from the coast (Fig. 1).

The largest number of rock carvings, 518 figures (including those from museum exhibitions and those destroyed), were found on the Peri Nos cape which consists of seven smaller capes (Peri Nos I–VII). Rock carvings are known on six of them – Peri Nos V is the exception.

V.I. Ravdonikas found 77 figures on the cape Peri Nos VI (Равдоникас 1936: 73–82). According to V. Poikalainen, this cape contains a total of 86 figures, including the fragmented ones (Poikalainen 2004: 33). In 2004, the Estonian artist L. Jõekalda, a member of the Estonian Society of Prehistoric Art, discovered a separate stone plate with a previously unknown figure on the cape Peri Nos VI (L. Jõekalda, pers. comm.).

The problem of interpreting single figures and compositions has been discussed by V.I. Ravdonikas (1937), A.Ya. Bryusov (1937), A.M. Linevsky (1939), F.I. Ravdonikas (1978), A.D. Stolyar (1983) and A.M. Zhulnikov (2006).

NEW ROCK CARVINGS FOUND IN 2008–2009

New petroglyphs on the cape Peri Nos VI were discovered by the author in the summer of 2008. A stone plate appeared under the roots of a fallen tree, and 19 well-preserved figures had been carved on its lower facet. The following thorough inspection of the cape conducted in 2008 and 2009 by the expedition of the Petrozavodsk State University resulted in the discovery and investigation of five more plates with rock carvings, including the plate found by L. Jõekalda. It has been established that all the plates have been detached from the rock by the force of waves and ice, and dragged on the top of a rocky cliff by drifting ice. The broken-off pieces were previously considered lost, but the new discovery made it possible to reconstruct the composition of carvings on the rocks of this cape almost completely.

The rock carvings of Peri Nos VI are situated at the height of 1.55 m above the water level of Lake Onega, on the area of 8 x 13 m, and at the distance of 8 m from the waterline. The area with carvings is a rocky platform gently sloping towards the lake. The very end of the cape is split

by two big crevices with a fractured surface; the depth of the crevices is up to 50 cm, width 1.7 m, and length 2–5 m (Fig. 2). The stone plates with petroglyphs originate from these cracks.

Stone Plate 1 was found at the height of 2.5 m above the water level, at the distance of 12.5 m from the central part of the compositions of petroglyphs on the extremity of the cape, and 12 meters to the west of its original position. The size is 101 x 192 cm, whereas the thickness varies from 5 to 31 cm. A vaguely visible ridge can be seen on its flat surface. A quartz vein crosses the plate almost parallel to the ridge. The plate contains 19 silhouette figures (Figs. 3–4), 15 of which are fully preserved, two slightly damaged (numbers 7 and 19 below), and two fragmented (11, 13). A specific polish above the pecking, which is characteristic to the figures located close to the water nowadays, is absent. It is likely, therefore, that Plate 1 was dragged out of its original location on the extremity of the cape already several thousand years ago. The plate contains three anthropomorphic figures, 12 symbolic images, including three 'holes' and one fragmented figure, one picture of a boat, three vague figures of which one is fragmented.



Fig. 2. Rock carvings on the extremity of the Peri Nos VI cape. Photo by the author.

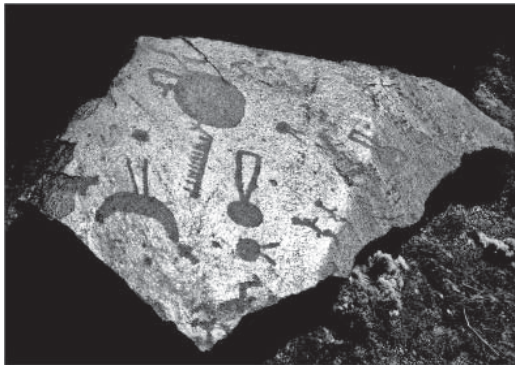


Fig. 3. Stone Plate 1. Photo by the author.

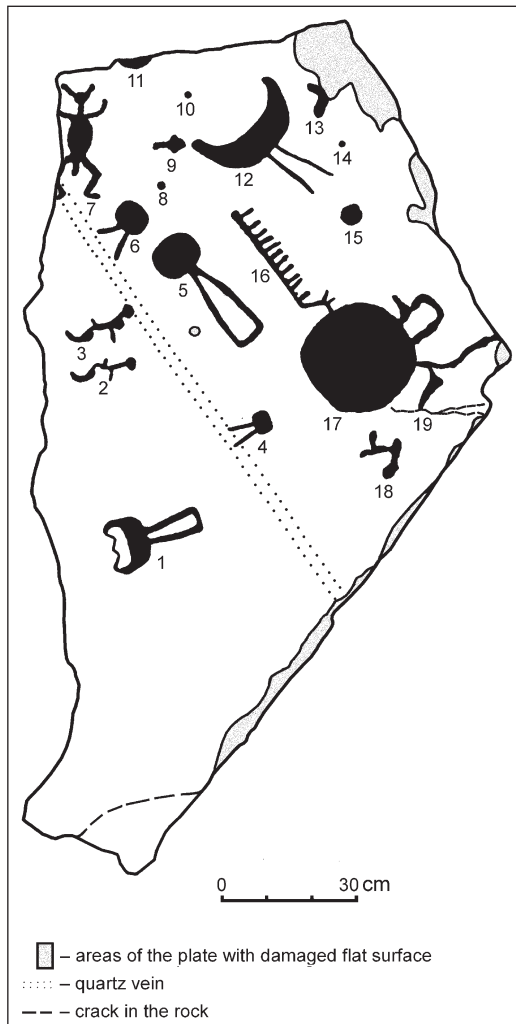


Fig. 4. Stone Plate 1. Drawing by the author.

Figure 1 is a symbolic image which has the shape of a crescent; a protuberance looking like a loop is attached to its convex side. The 'horns' of the crescent are bound by a zigzag line. The size is 12.3 x 21.3 cm.

Figures 2–3 are quite similar anthropomorphic images and form a composition. The composition resembles dancing or procession. Both characters are shown in profile. A head, a body, an arm, and a leg are well discernible. The protuberance in the middle part of the body is most likely a phallus. One of the figures has a rounded protuberance stemming from its back(?). The size of the figures is 5.4 x 14.5 cm and 7.6 x 15.7 cm. This composition of two anthropomorphic figures engaged in dancing or procession is unique on Lake Onega.

Figure 4 is a symbolic image of an oval shape with two rays stemming from it. The size is 5.2 x 10.4 cm.

Figure 5 is symbolic figure of an oval shape with a loop-like protuberance stemming from it. The size is 10.6 x 30.0 cm.

Figure 6 is a symbolic figure of an oval shape with two rays stemming from it. The size is 7.5 x 13.5 cm.

Figure 7 is anthropomorphic figure with a phallus, raised-up arms, and a head with two protuberances (horns?). The figure is shown full-face. One of the raised arms is only partially preserved. The end of one leg is also damaged. The size is 11 x 27.2 cm. This type of image is the first one of its kind among the Onega Lake rock carvings.

Figure 8 is a 'hole' 1.8 cm in diameter.

Figure 9 is vaguely made. It is most likely a symbolic figure with one ray stemming from it. The size is 4.4 x 7.4 cm.

Figure 10 is a 'hole' 1.7 cm in diameter.

Figure 11 is only partially preserved. It is a symbolic image; the preserved fragment looks like a part of an oval or a circle.

Figure 12 is symbolic image of a crescent shape, with two rays stemming from its convex side. The size is 23.8 x 29.3 cm.

Figure 13 is only partially preserved. The size is 4 x 5.1 cm.

Figure 14 is a 'hole' 1.3 cm in diameter.

Figure 15 is a fuzzy circle with a diameter of 4.7 cm.

Figure 16 is a boat with 12 'passengers' shown as poles/lines. The body of the boat is shown as a line. Its prow has an elk-head shape which is rested against the symbolic figure 17 (see below). The size of the boat is 7.0 x 30.8 cm.

Figure 17 is symbolic image of an oval shape, with a loop-like protuberance. The loop is pecked partly above another figure, which is now visible only as a protuberance stemming out from the rim of the loop. The size is 23.5 x 32.1 cm.

Figure 18 is an indeterminate image (boat?). The size is 9.4 x 10.8 cm.

Figure 19 is an indeterminate image which possibly consists of two separate figures. One edge is covered by the symbolic figure 17. The other edge is connected to the edge of the plate. Quite likely, it is a fragment, and the other fragment is lost. The size is 10.9 x 22.6 cm.

Stone Plate 2 was found in a crevice in the northern part of the cape, almost at the present-day water level, 8 meters to the north-west of its original location. The size is 66 x 121 cm and the thickness varies from 6 to 30 cm (in the central part).

Five figures have been identified on its surface (Figs. 5–6). Unlike those on Plate 1, these figures are very smoothed over by natural polish. The artefactual character of three figures on Plate 2 can be established without doubt (numbers 1–3 below), whereas two figures, a line and a fuzzy ‘hole’, may be natural of origin.

Figure 1 is a symbolic image of an oval shape with two rays of different length stemming from it. The size is 11.1 x 12.8 cm.

Figure 2 is symbolic image of a crescent shape, with two rays stemming from its convex side. The ‘horns’ of the crescent are bound by a zigzag line. The size is 13.4 x 17.8 cm.

Figure 3 is a contour image of a swan. The swan’s legs are shown as small poles/lines. The size of the figure is 18.3 x 31.4 cm.

Figure 4 is a fuzzy, pecked image of round shape, 2.7 cm in diameter.

Figure 5 is a short line. The size is 1.8 x 7.6 cm.

Stone Plate 3 was found nearby Plate 2. The size is 43 x 75 cm, and the thickness varies from 12 to 20 cm. The plate has one distinct pecked image of a ‘hole’, 1.2 cm in diameter (Fig. 7).

Stone Plate 4 was discovered in 2004 by L. Jõekalda. The plate was located in a shallow gully between rocks in the northern part of the cape, 11 m to the north-west of the original location, and at the height of 1.4 m above the water level. The size is 67 x 110 cm, and the thickness varies from 23 to 30 cm. A quartz vein crosses this plate. The plate contains a contour image of an elk, the size of which is 32.3 x 44.5 cm (Fig. 8).



Fig. 5. Stone Plate 2. Drawing by the author.

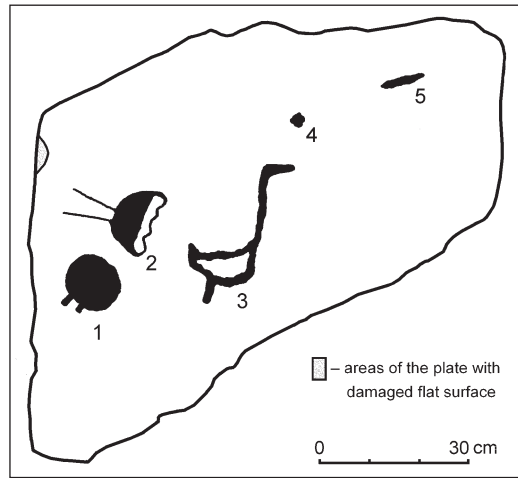


Fig. 6. Stone Plate 2. Photo by the author.

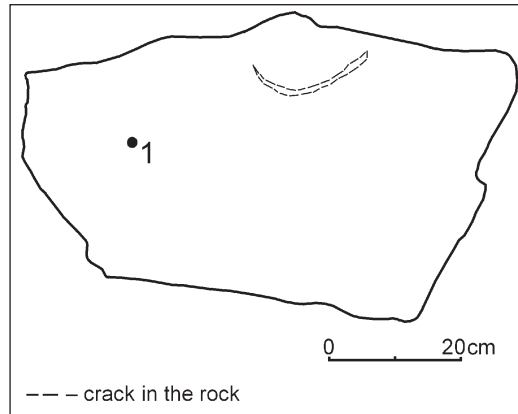


Fig. 7. Stone Plate 3. Drawing by the author.

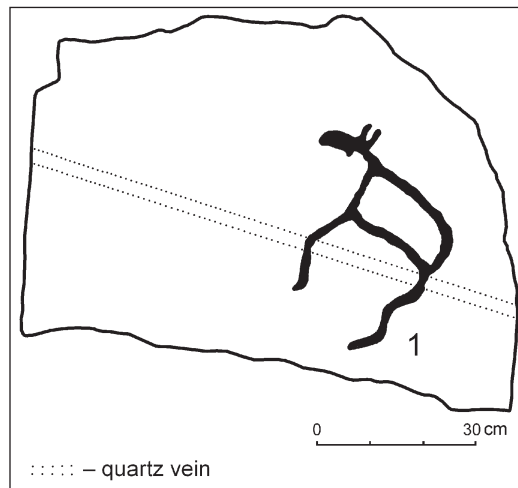


Fig. 8. Stone Plate 4. Drawing by the author.

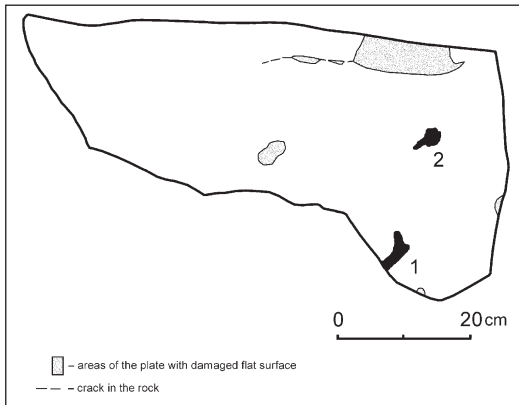


Fig. 9 Stone Plate 5. Drawing by the author.



Fig.10. Stone Plate 7. Photo by the author.

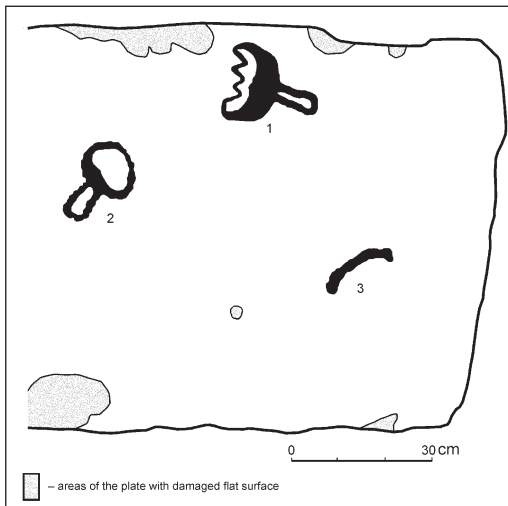


Fig.11. Fragment of Stone Plate 7. Drawing by the author.

Stone Plate 5 was located in 1.5 m to the east of Plate 4. The size is 37 x 77 cm, and the thickness varies from 5 to 22 cm. It contains two images – one is fragmented, and the other is very vague (Fig. 9).

Figure 1 on the plate 5 is fragmented, the size is 3 x 5.7 cm.

Figure 2 is a fuzzy circle with one ray stemming from it. The size is 2.6 x 5.7 cm.

Stone Plate 6 was found in a crevice in the northern part of the cape under in-washed sand, close to Plates 2 and 3. It contains no images, but one quartz vein crosses it. It is similar to the vein on Plate 4, and it is therefore very likely that this plate also originated in the extremity of the cape. The size of Plate 6 is 28 x 48 cm and its thickness up to 19 cm.

Stone Plate 7 was found 15.5 m from its original location on the extremity of the cape, at the height of 3 m above the water level. The length of the plate is 2.47 m, the width 0.72 m, and the thickness varies between 24–29 cm in the northern part and 9–20 cm in the southern part. The southern part was broken off by the moment of discovery, probably because of thermal damage caused during a forest fire. The broken-off part was split into three fragments. Plate 7 contains three figures (Figs. 10–11).

Figure 1 is symbolic image of a crescent shape with a loop-like protuberance stemming from it. The 'horns' of the crescent are bound by a zigzag line. The size is 16.6 x 19.3 cm.

Figure 2 is symbolic image of a crescent shape, with a loop-like protuberance stemming from it. The 'horns' of the crescent are bound by a zigzag line. The size is 12.5 x 18.3 cm.

Figure 3 is symbolic image which looks like a bent line. The size is 2.5 x 15.5 cm. A small oval depression with irregular rims is located close to Figure 3, but it is definitely natural of origin.

In total, 31 figures have been identified on the stone plates 1–5 and 7.

During the investigation, the aim of which was to reconstruct the original position of the plates and their relations to each other, the lightest plates 5 and 6 were temporarily placed on the proposed place of origin, and this experiment proved that the plates originated on the extremity of the cape. Furthermore, we managed to attach plates 4 and 6 to each other.

The other stone plates are rather heavy which made it impossible to take them back to their place of their origin on the extremity of the cape Peri Nos VI. To determine their position, we prepared flat copies (drawings) of them on transparent polyethylene. In addition to the petroglyphs, the edges of the plates and the cracks were recorded, along with the contours of the quartz

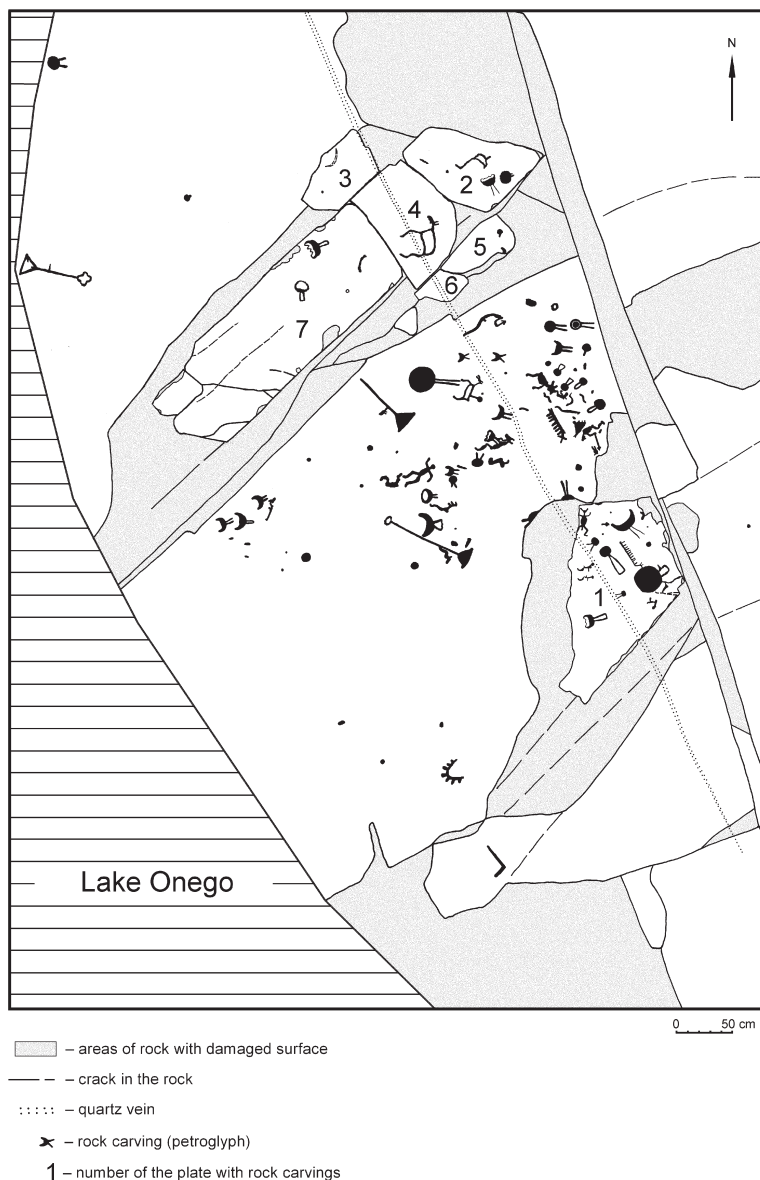


Fig. 12. Reconstruction of the initial position of Stone Plates 1–7 on the extremity of the Peri Nos VI cape. Drawing by the author.

vein which crosses the cape from the north-west to the south-east. The copies were attached to each other on the places of their proposed initial location. The thickness of the plates, the cracks and the quartz vein, and other features of the broken rocks on the extremity of the cape were also taken into account. Finally, we managed to find the original position to all of the seven plates and reconstruct their initial location (Fig. 12). Plate 1 originated in the southern crevice on the extremity of the cape, whereas other plates were positioned on the place that is now occupied by the northern crevice.

The available data allow determining the scale of the loss of rock carvings on the extremity of the cape Peri Nos VI. The analysis of the placement of the pecked figures there shows that parts of the rocks located to the north, west and east of the broken-off plates contain almost no figures (Fig. 12). Pieces of rock which have been detached from these areas are most likely not to contain any carvings. According to the available fragments of figures, several images might have been located on the parts of rock north of the original location of Plate 1 and south and south-east of the location of Plates 5 and 6.

DISCUSSION

The new investigations of the composition and placement of the figures on the Peri Nos VI cape make it possible to shed some light on the question of the function of this specific site.

The Peri Nos cape contains numerous mythological images (elk-sun, unique sign of the firmament, 'elk-like human', ritual hunting, figure of a 'shaman'), but numerous symbolic figures have no analogies among natural objects, animal world, or household things and implements. The new finds have almost doubled the number of such figures. No other rock-art centre in northern Europe has such a quantity and diversity of symbolic figures as the shores of Lake Onega. In total, there are over 150 symbolic images which mostly look like circles, half-circles or crescents. They often have two short lines, which are sometimes bent like a loop or zigzag, stemming from them. They have mainly been considered as lunar or solar signs. It is not clear, however, why there are so many variants of these signs – over 20 types.

The Peri Nos VI cape, which contains abundant symbolic figures, is located between the extremity of the Besov Nos cape, where images from the 'lower world' are present, and the Peri Nos III cape whose rock carvings are mostly related to the theme of progenitors, life-cycle of human beings, and reproduction of new generations (an erotic scene, scenes of defloration and childbirth) (Жульников 2006: 199). The orientation of the symbolic figures on the Peri Nos cape is not random, and some kind of regularity can be distinguished. There are at least three groups of such figures: the rays and loops of the first group are oriented approximately to the north-east, those of the second group to the east, and those of the third group to the south-west. Other figures do not have such non-random orientation. The excessive variability of these strange signs probably reflects the variability of the moon shapes characteristic to different phases of the moon and shows the movement of celestial bodies through the sky. This proposition is supported by the new find: the male figure with 'horns' has no analogies among the taiga fauna but resembles very much a crescent. There is also other evidence of the embodiment of celestial bodies in anthropomorphic figures on the Lake Onega.

It is widely accepted that careful astronomic observations were characteristic only for agricultural peoples, but it is nevertheless obvious that observations of moon phases and positions of other celestial bodies were of interest to the prehistoric inhabitants of Karelia as well. Those observations probably helped to determine the time for annual rituals and the time of the spawning of different species of fish in Lake Onega. For the moment, it can be concluded that the rock carvings of Peri Nos VI cape – which include mostly lunar and solar signs but also zoomorphic figures with quite similar semantics (elk and swan) – reflect ancient hunters' mythological views concerning the change of day and night, and the lunar and annual (solar) cycle.

REFERENCES

- Hallström, G. 1960. *Monumental Art of Northern Europe from the Stone Age*. Almqvist & Wiksell, Stockholm.
- Poikalainen, V. 2004. *Rock Art of Lake Onega*. Tartu.
- Poikalainen, V. & Ernits E. 1998. *Rock Carvings of Lake Onega: The Vodla Region*. Estonian Society of Prehistoric Art, Tartu.
- Брюсов, А. Я. 1937. Карельские петроглифы. *Вестник древней истории* 1: 169–94.
- Девятова, Э.И. 1988. *Природная среда и ее изменения в голоцене*. Карелия, Петрозаводск.
- Жульников, А.М. 2006. *Петроглифы Онежского озера: Образ мира и миры образов*. Карельский государственный краеведческий музей, Петрозаводск.
- Линевский, А.М. 1939. *Петроглифы Карелии*. Том 1. Каргосиздат, Петрозаводск.
- Равдоникас, В.И. 1936. *Наскальные изображения Онежского озера*. Академия наук СССР, Москва – Ленинград.
- Равдоникас, В.И. 1937. Элементы космических представлений в образах наскальных изображений. *Советская археология* 4: 11–32.
- Равдоникас, Ф.В. 1978. Лунарные знаки в наскальных изображениях Онежского озера. *У истоков творчества*. Наука, Новосибирск.
- Савватеев, Ю.А. 1977. *Залавруга. Часть 2: Стоянки*. Наука, Ленинград.
- Савватеев, Ю.А. 1983. *Наскальные рисунки Карелии*. Карелия, Карелия, Петрозаводск.
- Столяр, А.Д. «Жезль» онежских петроглифов и их материальные прототипы. *Изыскания по мезолиту и неолиту СССР*. Наука, Москва.
- Цуцкин, Е.В. Подводные исследования в районе Онежских петроглифов. *Археологические открытия 1973 года*. Наука, Москва.