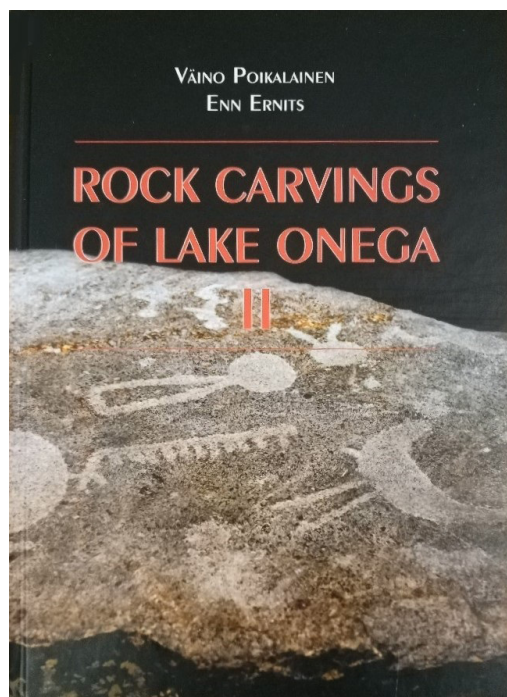


Väino Poikalainen & Enn Ernits:
*Rock Carvings of Lake Onega II. The
Besov Nos Region. Karetski and
Peri Localities.* Estonian Society of
Prehistoric Art & Teadus ja Tegu OÜ,
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3. 610 pp.

In 1998, the book *Rock Carvings of Lake Onega (I) – The Vodla Region* was published. Now, two decades later, the sequel to this publication has finally seen light. While the first volume presented the rock carvings of the Vodla region, the new book, *Rock Carvings of Lake Onega II*, presents the petroglyphs found on the well-known Capes (Ru. *Nos*) Karetski and Peri in the Besov Nos region. The authors have reported that a third volume is also in preparation. This will focus on the remaining rock art sites in the Besov Nos region.

Rock Carvings of Lake Onega II presents 845 petroglyphs altogether, of which the vast majority have been documented by the Estonian Society of Prehistoric Art. The authors, Väino Poikalainen and Enn Ernits, have had a leading role in this society throughout its existence. Most of the documentation work had already been carried out by the mid-1990s, although some of the information in the book stems from later fieldwork studies. The significant delay in the publication of the data carries a number of benefits. While scholars have been aware of the presence of rock carvings at Lake Onega since the mid-19th century at the latest, the book also includes petroglyphs that have been discovered in the region during the past two decades. For the sake of clarity, the carvings that the authors have recorded are displayed in orange, whereas the figures that have been discovered later are presented in purple. This two-colour system is a functional way of clearly separating between new and previously-known figures. A similar convention has been followed, for instance, in the recent re-documentation of the Nämforsen rock art (Larsson & Broström 2018).

Rock Carvings of Lake Onega II begins with a thorough introduction that clarifies the methodology for the technical documentation and



presentation of data in the book. The carvings are then addressed site by site in a catalogue format similar to that of the first volume, that is, with figurative tracings on the right page, and with verbal and parametric information on the corresponding figures on the left page. The data given in relation to the individual rock art figures consists of: i. coordinates, projection, and orientation; ii. complex description of the figures and their surroundings; iii. height above sea level; iv. visibility and preservation; v. previous interpretations. Together, these details are sufficient for the purposes of even the most demanding scholar and it is difficult to think of any additional information that could have been presented concerning the carvings. In summary, the authors have produced a commendable work that provides as accurate and informative data on the petroglyphs as possible. The way in which the carvings are presented in the book is exemplary and sets high standards for all future rock art publications.

Before the handling of each locality, there is a short general discussion on every site and its

carvings, including tables presenting the total number of carvings and motifs at the given site. However, the book ends abruptly and the petroglyphs are neither summarized nor in any way compared to rock carvings in other regions. This is a pity, as the authors have been meticulous in categorizing the Onega carvings into different motif groups. It would have been informative for all the motif categories to have been presented at the end of the book in a pictorial manner, as for instance in the recent book on the Kanozero petroglyphs (Kolpakov & Shumkin 2012: 290–331). The third volume on the Onega rock art will hopefully contain a summary of the carvings on the whole, which would not only provide a better overall picture of the art itself, but also make it easier to compare it with the rock art from other areas.

A somewhat problematic feature of this book is its verbal description of the individual rock art figures, which according to the authors 'is based on the international terminology used in human and veterinary anatomy' (p. 5). As a similar convention has already been followed in the first volume, its use is perhaps justified in the present book also, although it makes the documentation overly complicated. In rock art research (as in archaeology at large), terms such as *zoomorphic* or *anthropomorphic* are widely used and understood by readers internationally. However, in the present book, images are described, for instance, as *corynomorphic* ('hunting club-like') or *deraiomorphic* ('necklace-like') (p. 7): terms that are not familiar to the majority of readers. A three-page glossary of what the different designations mean is provided at the beginning of the book. However, it would have been far easier to read these descriptions in plain English, rather than to constantly refer to this lexicon. For example, if the authors are of the opinion that a figure has the shape of a carcass or a spade (p. 9), why not simply call it 'carcass-like' or 'spade-like' instead of creating and using words such as *sceuomorph* and *scapanomorph*, respectively, since such nomenclature cannot make the interpretation of the figures less subjective or problematic.

A book with more than 600 pages and a weight of 2.3 kilograms is perhaps not the ideal companion to be carried around when visiting the Onega rock art *in situ*, but for readers who wish to get

acquainted with the Besov Nos petroglyphs, this large-sized format is an advantage. The tracings are meticulously made and presented in a clear scale (mostly 1:4 or 1:2), with arrow signs marking the precise orientation of each figure. The quality of the tracings is overall significantly higher than that of the other recent publication on the Onega petroglyphs (Lobanova 2015). In addition to the tracings and the detailed information concerning individual figures, *Rock Carvings of Lake Onega II* provides informative maps and photographs that illuminate the Onega rock art on a more general level.

The book's maps are presented on a variety of scales and clearly convey how the individual carvings are positioned in relation to each other. Together, the maps offer the reader a good overview of the Onega carvings and their environment both on a macro and on a micro level. The good-quality colour photographs are likewise beneficial, for one easily forgets that the rock carvings are not nearly as evident in reality as in the tracings. To be sure, many of the figures at Onega are so badly preserved that they can be discerned only under favourable light conditions. This problem of visibility is, for example, well-illustrated by the fact that at the time of Ravdonikas' (1936) publication of the Onega carvings, only 55 figures were known to exist on Karetski Cape, whereas today, the number of figures distinguished at the site (235) is more than four times larger (Poikalainen & Ernits 2019: 29).

Following the trend of rock art documentations published in recent years (e.g. Kolpakov & Shumkin 2012; Larsson & Broström 2018), *Rock Carvings of Lake Onega II* is focused solely on the documentation of the rock art. The book is best described as a catalogue, with short discussions in relation to the different rock art sites on the Karetski and Peri Capes being almost solely of a technical nature. Given the physical size of the book, it is indeed fully understandable that explanatory aspects have been left out. That said it would be desirable in future for the authors to also share their thoughts on the significance of the petroglyphs, either in their forthcoming volume or in a separate publication. As leading members of the Estonian Society of Prehistoric Art, Poikalainen and Ernits have studied the Onega carvings since the early 1980s. After four

decades of research, it would certainly be of interest to know the authors' opinions concerning the meaning of the rock art.

To sum up, *Rock Carvings of Lake Onega II* offers the reader the most comprehensive documentation available of the petroglyphs found at the Karetski and Peri Capes. Consequently, the book is unquestionably a must-have for all scholars working on the rock art of this region. For general readers, the book provides a thorough overview of the subject, even if most of the parametric details that are presented alongside the figures will only interest specialist researchers. Finally, one hopes that it will not take another two decades before the third volume on the Onega carvings is published.

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