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## THE ROCK ART OF RUSSIAN LAPPLAND

### *Abstract*

Manifestations of rock art were discovered in the central Kola Peninsula in 1973 and 1988, and in the Rybatchy (Fisher) Peninsula in 1985 and 1986. All these rock pictures are situated in Russian Lapland, within the zone of the arctic rock art tradition, which is thought to have lasted c.8000 years in northern Fennoscandia. The development history of the local cultures suggests that the ultimate roots of these manifestations should be sought in West European Palaeolithic cave paintings. Local development has been influenced by interaction of ideas, themes and stylistic traditions with the so-called agrarian rock art zone. Furthermore, the possibility of an eastern "injection", most probably around 3000 years ago, cannot be excluded.

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### *Introduction*

As some of the most important sources of material and spiritual ancient culture may be cited the monuments of primitive art, objects of art creative power, and objects of applied or magico-totemistic character. Since they possess varied properties and wide information spectra, each investigator seeks in them answers to many questions.

Historians and art researchers are fascinated by different manifestations of ancient art. Although presenting much greater interpretation problems than other archaeological sources, to penetrate into the nature of man's beliefs is one of the most captivating tasks confronting the researcher.

Interest in rock art has existed amongst archaeologists for a long time, and the field keeps attracting the attention of more and more scholars in different research centres. According to E.Anati's data (1984), approximately two million rock pictures have been reported from more than 20 000 separate locations in 77 countries. Fennoscandia is one of the largest regions rich in rock art. Traditions of picture representation on rocky surfaces (vertical, horizontal, sloping rocks, boulders) can be found there since the 6th millennium BC.

Two extensive zones can be distinguished on stylistic and thematic grounds: a hunter (or arctic) sphere and an agrarian sphere. The majority of specialists assume different sources for the traditions of the hunter and agrarian populations, and share the hypothesis that the first group antedates the second (Malmer 1981). Hunting themes seem more characteristic of the extreme north, but it is difficult to define any clear limits since the two population groups differ in economy and cultural nature. Figure 1 shows that they partly overlap. Several locations are known from North and West Norway, Central Sweden, Finland, Karelia and the Kola Peninsula. At present no rock art have been reported from the northern part of Sweden and Finland.

### *Sweden*

In Sweden the existence of rock art was known already in the late 17th century (Hallström 1960), and some 20 localities have been recorded since (petroglyphs, rock paintings, sometimes both). The largest is Nämforsen with c.2000 pictures. Picture size varies from a few centimetres to two metres (most often 20- 40 cm). Conven-

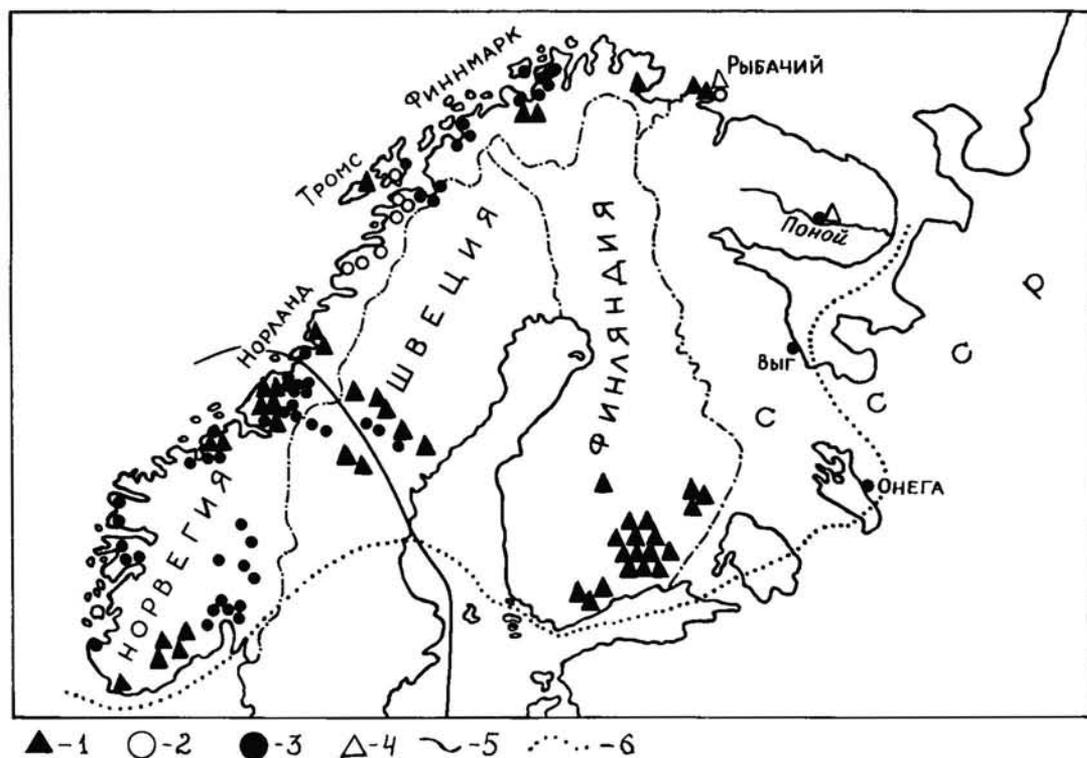


Fig. 1. The main locations of Fennoscandia's rock art (according to information by G. Hallström, E. Bakka, P. Sarvas & J.-P. Taavitsainen and T. Miettinen including additions by V. Shumkin. 1) rock paintings depicted in red ochre (pisanites); 2) ground carvings; 3) carved pictures; 4) engravings; 5) the north border of farming rock art; 6) the south of hunting rock art traditions.

tionalized representations of elks and boats predominate. Anthropomorphic figures are schematic and stereotypical. They are frontally represented with straight legs and hands down or raised. Practically all localities belonging to the agrarian cycle contain vehicles, battle scenes, circles with crosses, and spirals. The chronology of Swedish rock art is not well developed but one can place their upper limit around 1000 BC.

#### Finland

Finland's rock art is rather unique. Before 1960 only a single locality had been recorded, but more than 40 sites with rock paintings in red ochre are known today. They contain more than 400 pictures (Sarvas 1969, 1971; Sarvas and Taavitsainen 1976; Miettinen 1982). Finnish paint-

ings usually contain a small number of figures. The most common motifs are elks and anthropomorphs, often in compositional unity. Numerous boats and handprints can be found as well. There are anthropomorphs with worked out features and large heads, lowered arms, high shoulders (the so-called palm-like figures). Pictures of elks with a "life line", fish, birds, geometric patterns occur. The Finnish tradition can be dated from the 4th to the 1st millennium BC (Saarnisto 1969).

#### Karelia

The petroglyphs from Karelia (Lake Oneshskoye and the White Sea) are widely known in our country and abroad thanks to a number of publications (Linevsky 1939; Ravdonikas 1936,

1939; Savvateev 1978, 1983; Formozov 1969). These sites contain an abundance of representations with a vivid narrative character that makes them the most valuable source of material life of ancient populations. The representations are characterized by their originality, but there are certain affinities with the art of the western region, specially to Sweden and West Norway. The earliest Karelian petroglyphs can be dated to the third millennium BC, but the majority of them fall within the first half of the second millennium BC.

### Norway

Northern and western Norway are particularly rich in rock pictures (basically petroglyphs) with more than 70 sites. Both single pictures or groups of over 60 figures are common. The existence of petroglyphs in this territory has been known since the mid-18th century (Hallström 1938; Simonsen 1974; Malmer 1981).

The discovery of an exceptionally rich (c.3000 pictures) rock art centre in Alta Fjord made sensation in 1973 (Simonsen 1974; Helskog 1985). Norwegian scholars consider these rock art manifestations to be extremely important as they differ in plan and date, and occur at various elevations (8-26 m a.s.l.). Furthermore, there are presumably contemporaneous settlement sites near by. All this makes the "Alta Fjord" rock art complex a source of chronological and stylistical control for all Scandinavian pictures. Although the work has not been fully completed, according to the preliminary data (Simonsen 1974; Savvateev 1985) five major types of pictures have been identified in Fennoscandia: (1) With contours polished with a special instrument; (2) with pecked contours 1-2 cm wide; (3) with contours slightly widened by chisel to 2-4 cm; (4) pecking over the whole silhouette to the width of 0.2-0.5 cm; (5) red ochre paintings.

The most common representations are elks, deer, bears, sea mammals (seals, whales, dolphins), fish, birds, prey animals and snakes. Anthropomorphs are usually executed frontally. Boats, skis, geometrical figures such as rhombs, quadrangles and zig-zags are often portrayed. There are also representations of "life lines". Elements borrowed from the agrarian zone (wheels, circles) occur sometimes. The Alta Fjord pictures can be dated from the late fifth to the end first millennium BC (Helskog 1985).

### Russian Lapland

In 1973, the year of the discovery of the Alta Fjord carvings, a team of Leningrad Branch of the Institute of Archaeology (LOIA) of the USSR Academy of Science made exploratory work in the area of the mid-Ponoi river of the Kola Peninsula (Fig. 2-7), and discovered a group of petroglyphs --the first known from this region (Gurina 1974; Shumkin 1974; Gurina 1980; Shumkin 1987, 1989). Over 100 figures are carved on the flat surfaces of ten boulders situated on the right river bank (Fig. 4) in the vicinity of the Ivanovka village ("Chalmn-Varrae" in Saam).

Two different periods of picture activity can be detected on technical and stylistic grounds. The first, represented on boulders 1,2 and 7, can be characterized by a more realistic and simple reflection of the animal image. It was carved out deeply and in a continuous manner (Fig. 5). A side view of deer with a pair of legs is shown. Two anthropomorphs are also present, one with a three-horned head gear. An attempt is made to show a primitive compositional bundle of separate pictures (particularly anthropomorph and zoomorph) by connecting them with a continuous pecked line. The closest analogies to these early carvings may be found among the Onezhskoye petroglyphs (Pieri Noss), which on the basis of archaeological and geological data may be dated to the final Neolithic in the late third millennium BC.

Later pictures (boulders 3-6, 8-10) present more complicated and much more schematized samples (Fig. 6-7). Certain differences can be observed. The later carvings are shallower and display deer with four legs and anthropomorphs characterized by special features. Some may be mythological heroes of a primitive "pantheon". Compositional connection between separate figures is difficult. On the whole this course related to the earlier metal epoch (1st-2nd millennia BC) is more original. Some parallels with Finland's rock paintings and Norway's petroglyphs can be observed, and a certain influence from the neighbouring agrarian rock art cannot be excluded.

The discovery of the Ponoi (Chalmn-Varrae) petroglyph group places the Kola Peninsula within the northern hunter rock art tradition.

In 1985, a North Sea LOIA team discovered a new group of rock pictures on the Rybatchy (Fisher) Peninsula in northwestern Russian Lapland (Shumkin 1987, 1989). The site lies on the right bank of the Pyaivyve river, some 1.5 km be-

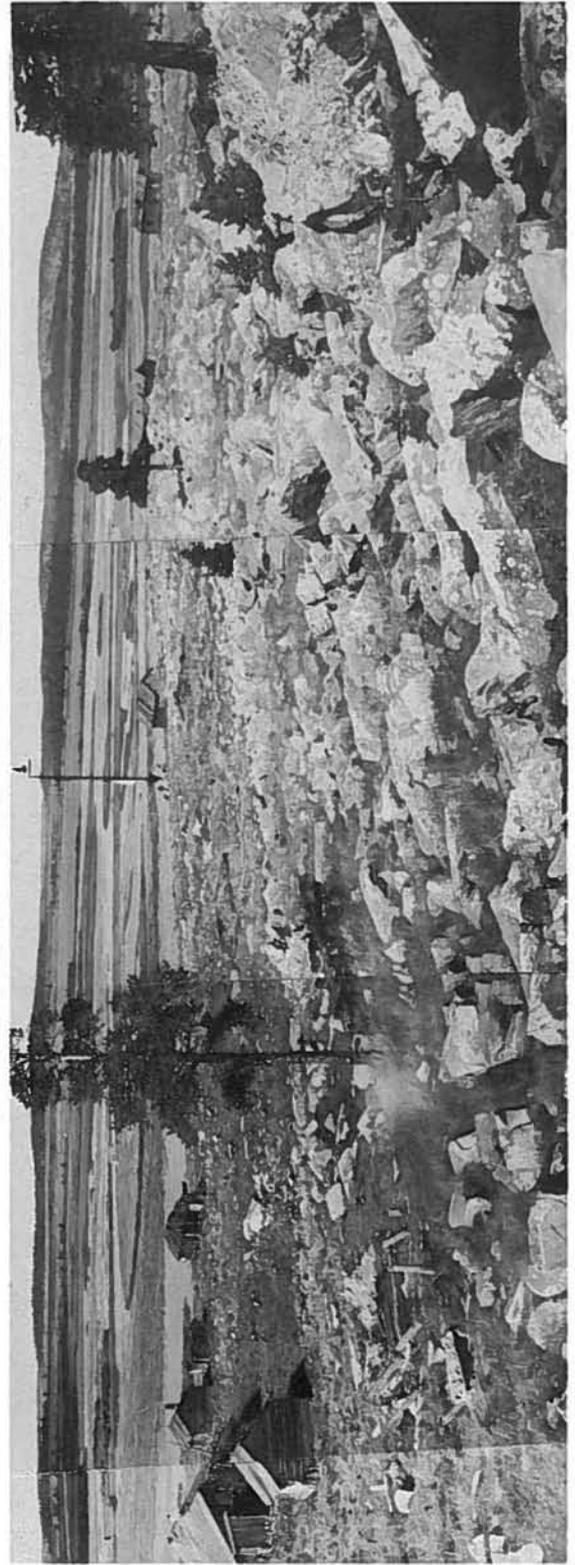
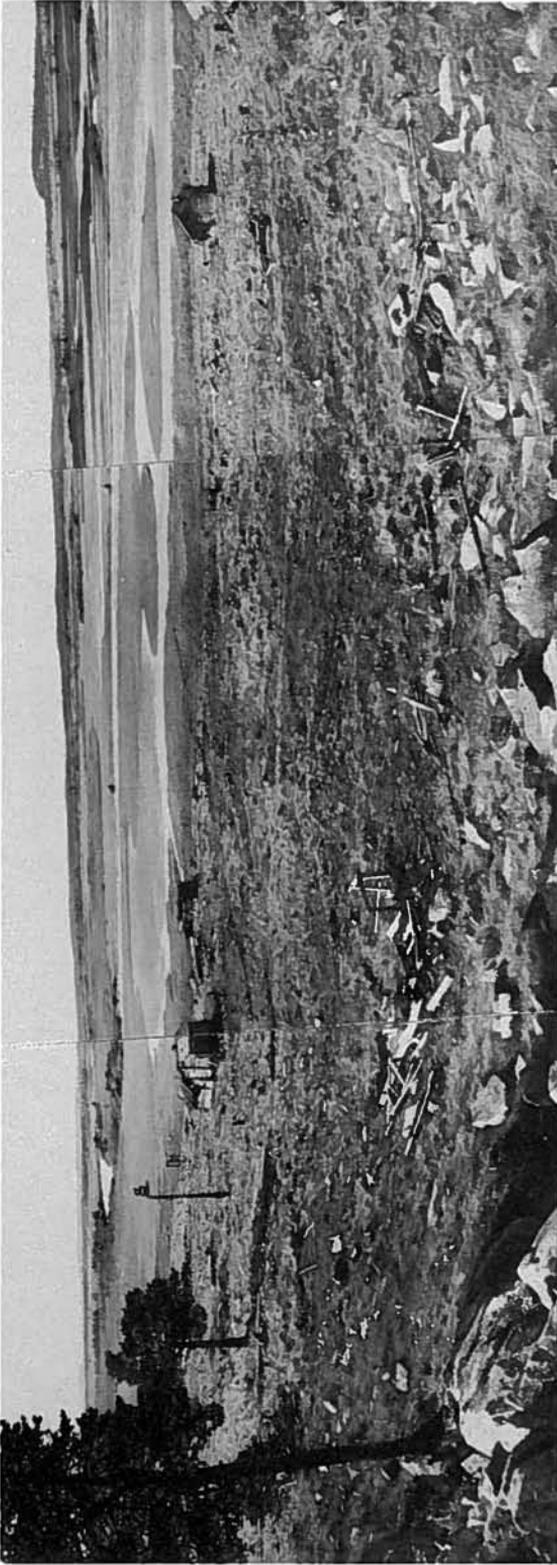


Fig. 2. View of Ponoj river valley near the former village Ivanovka showing the location of the Saami stone and stone 1.

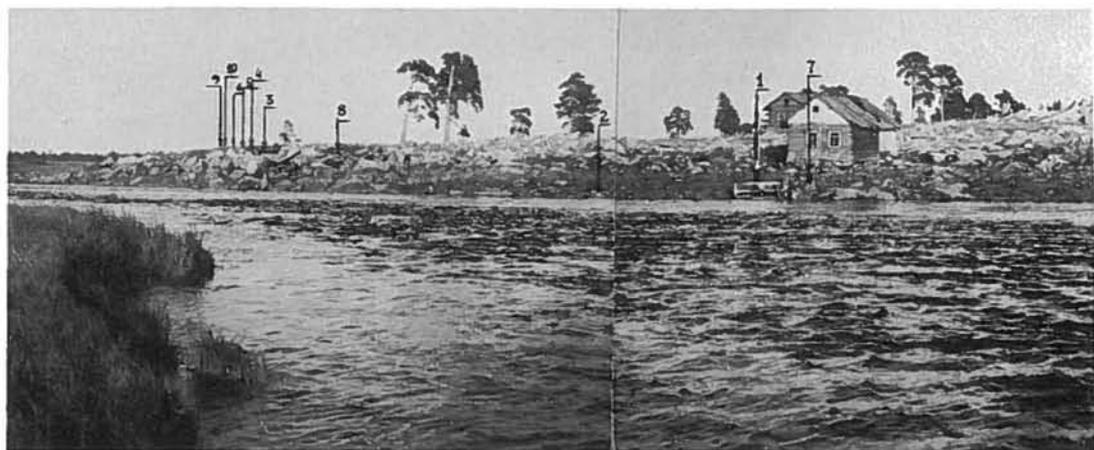


Fig. 3. The right bank of the Ponoj (called Chalmn Varrae in Saami). The location of stones rock carvings (1-10) is marked.

fore its discharge into the Barentz Sea. Here, on plumb protruding rock blocks, protected by shallow rock shelters (Fig. 8) etchings and red ochre paintings have been preserved (Fig. 9-12). They consist of complex geometric patterns and elks. The majority of these pictures occurs on the same line. The technical and stylistic monotony of the painted figures suggest that the complex was created at the same time.

Etched pictures (Fig. 12) are imitations of paintings and may belong to a later period. Since with the exception of one all the etchings have been done with a metal object, probably a knife, they cannot be earlier than the first millennium BC, from the Saam period.

Close to these rock paintings, on the left bank of the Pyaivye river (Fig. 8,1a) four destroyed sites containing quartz and flint material were

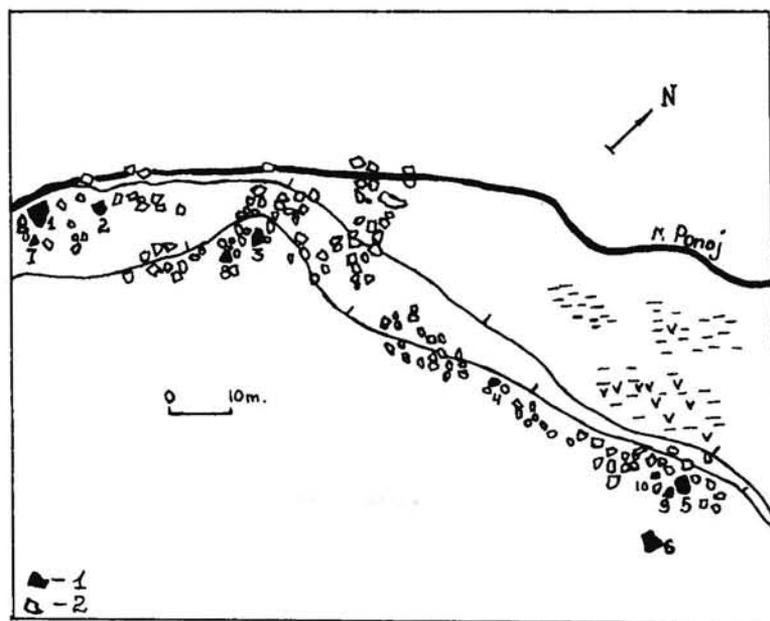


Fig. 4. Location of stones at the riversides:  
1) depicted stones;  
2) other stones.

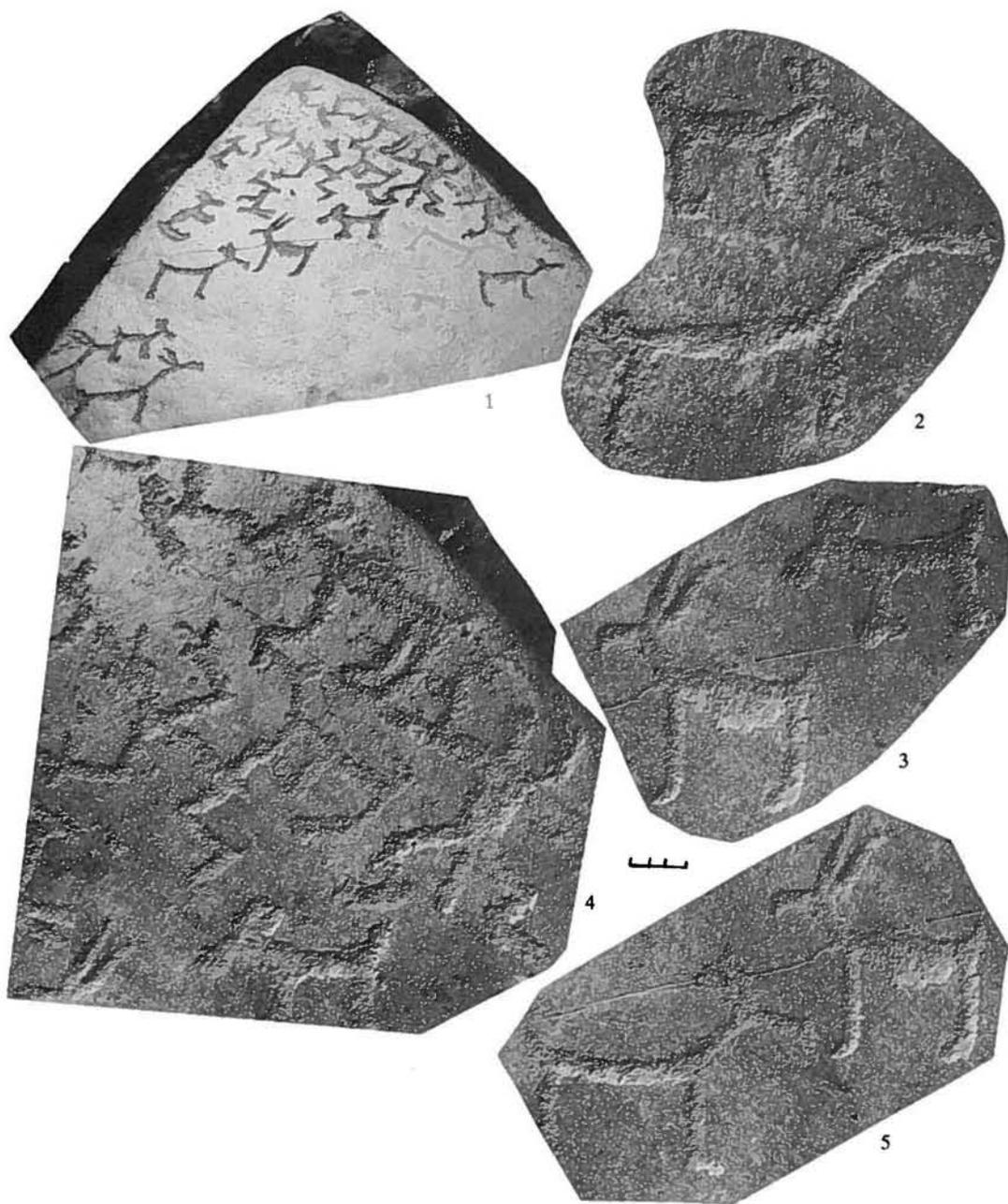


Fig. 5. Stone 1: 1) general view; 2–5) fragments of rock carvings.

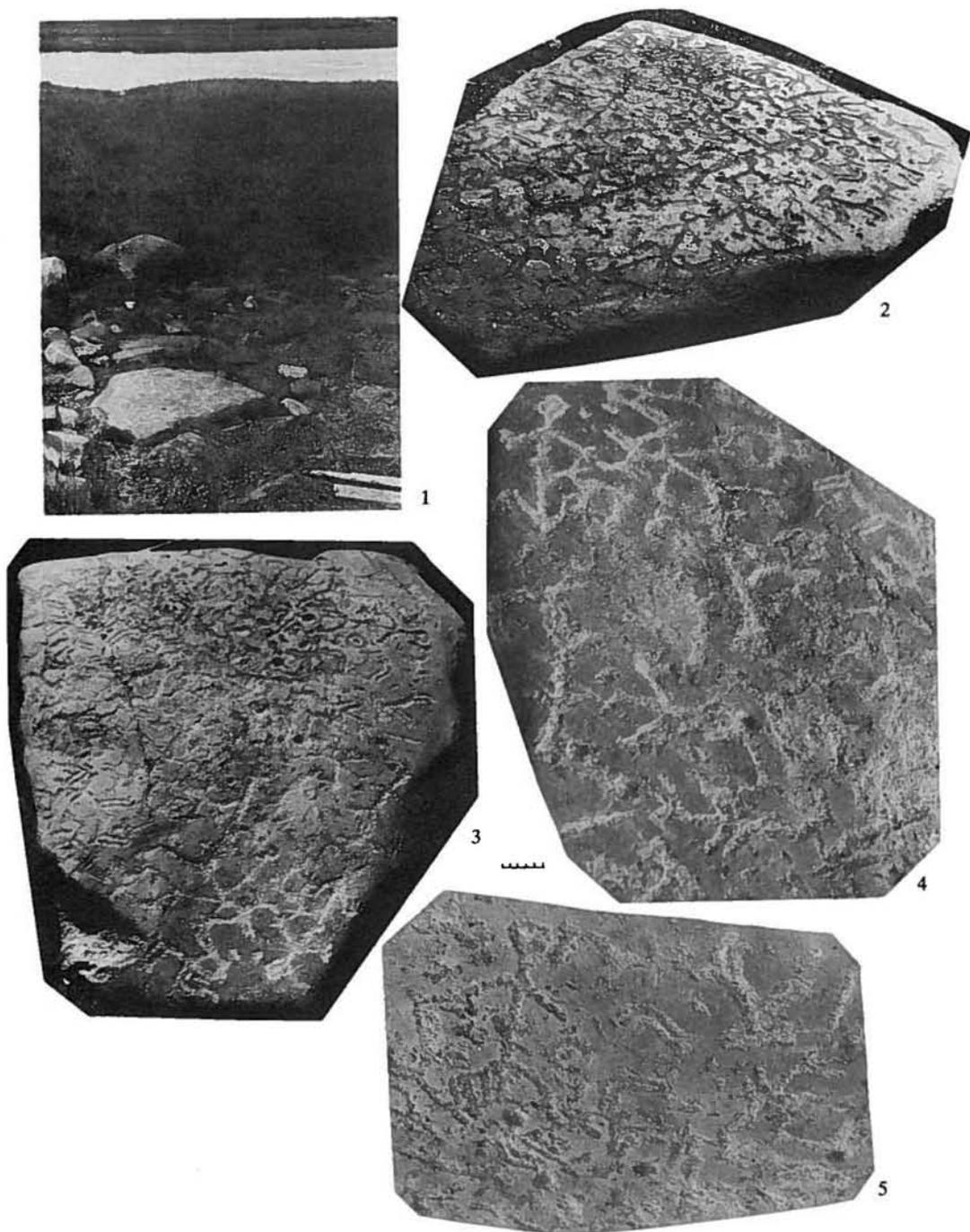


Fig. 6. Stone 5: 1) location; 2) general view; 4–5) fragments of rock carvings.

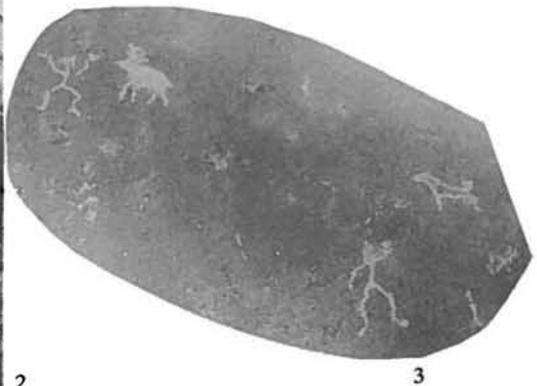
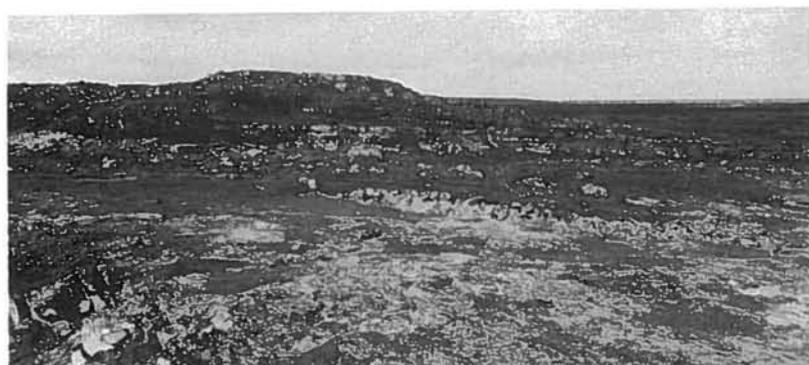
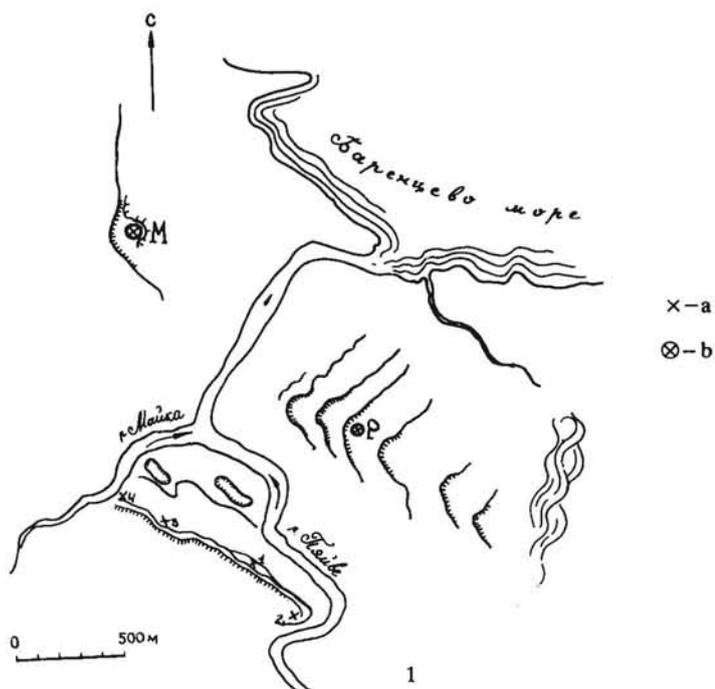


Fig. 7. Stone 3 (1), stone 6 (2) and pictures on the Saami stone (3).

discovered. Typologically they fall within the middle Mesolithic Komsa culture. Although the region has been carefully searched, no other traces of prolonged human occupation have been detected. Therefore, the possibility of these ochre paintings being made by the occupants of the Mesolithic sites cannot be excluded. The elevation of both paintings and dwelling sites (26 m a.s.l.) does not contradict such assumption. The closest analogies to the Pyaivye paintings

can be found in the rock paintings and petroglyphs of northern and western Norway (Nyelv, Forselv, and others).

The search continued the following year, leading to the discovery of another rock painting site on the left bank of the Maika river. It was situated 1.5 km northwest of the Pyaivye group within a cave in a rocky bank at 23.5 m above sea level. The painting is done in red ochre (Fig. 13) in a remote corner of the cave. It presents a



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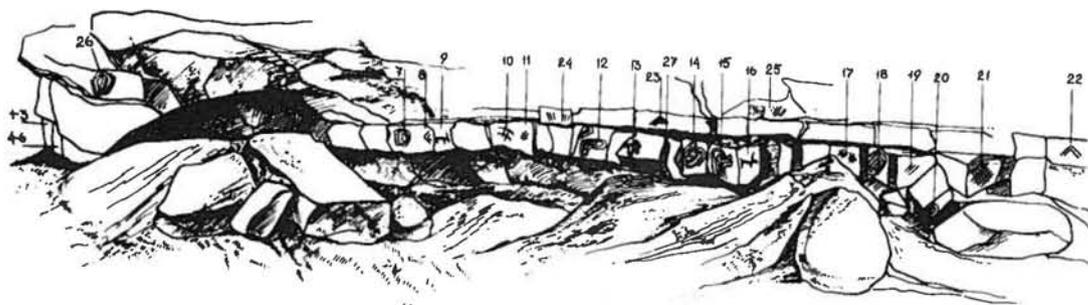
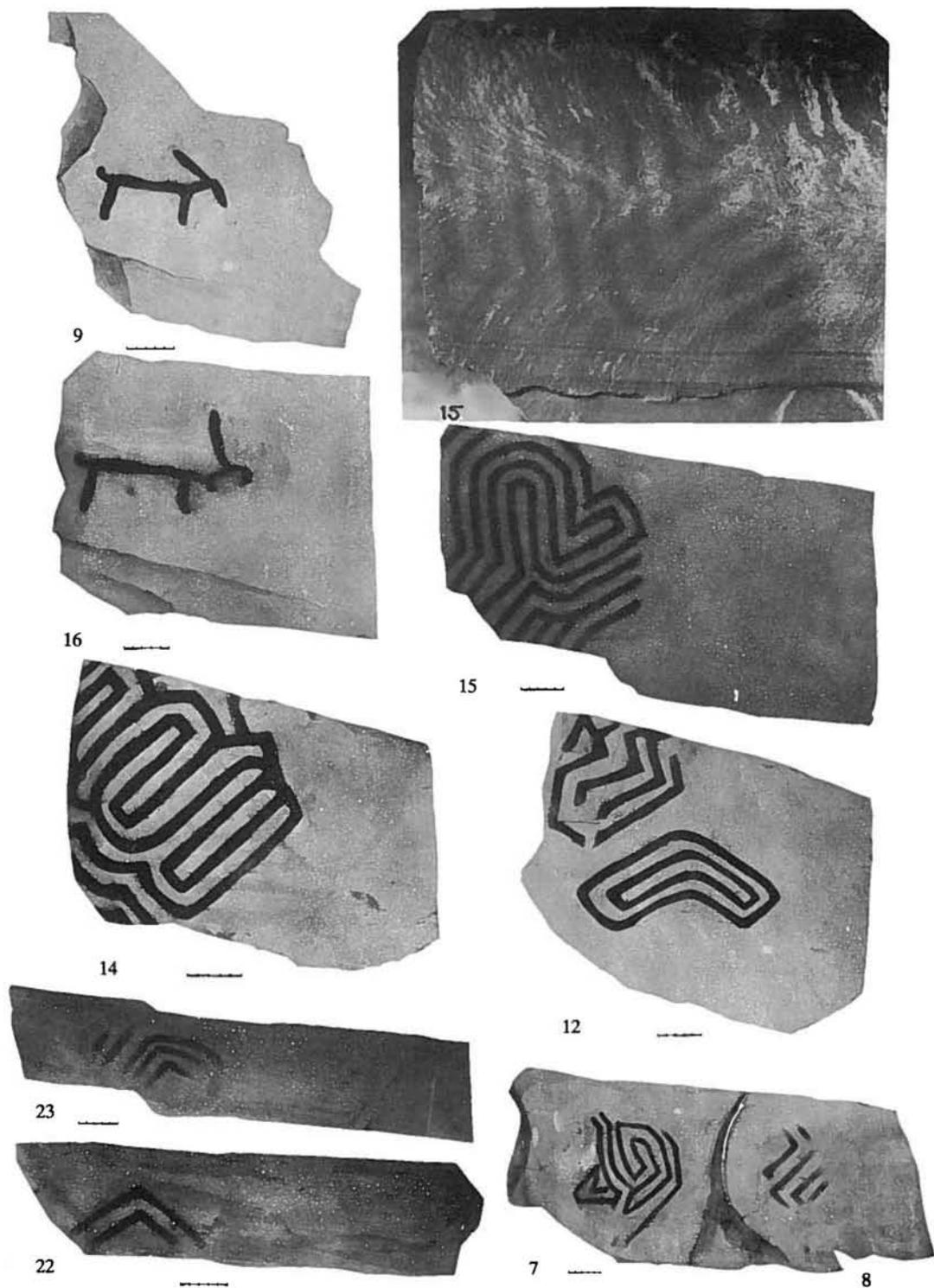


Fig. 8. The Rybachy (Fisher) peninsula: 1) location of the Pyaivye's (P) and Maika's (M) pictures; 2) view of the mountain mass with rock pictures (the river Pyaivye); 3) correlation of Pyaivye's rock pictures depicted in red ochre and engravings; a) Komsa culture sites on the left bank of the Pyaivye; b) rock carvings (P & M).



*Fig. 9.* The Pyaivye's pisanitses; 15 photo, other pictures (the dark outlines edging the pictures conform to the plane of protruding the rocky blocks on which these pictures were made). The numbers conform to fig. 8,3.

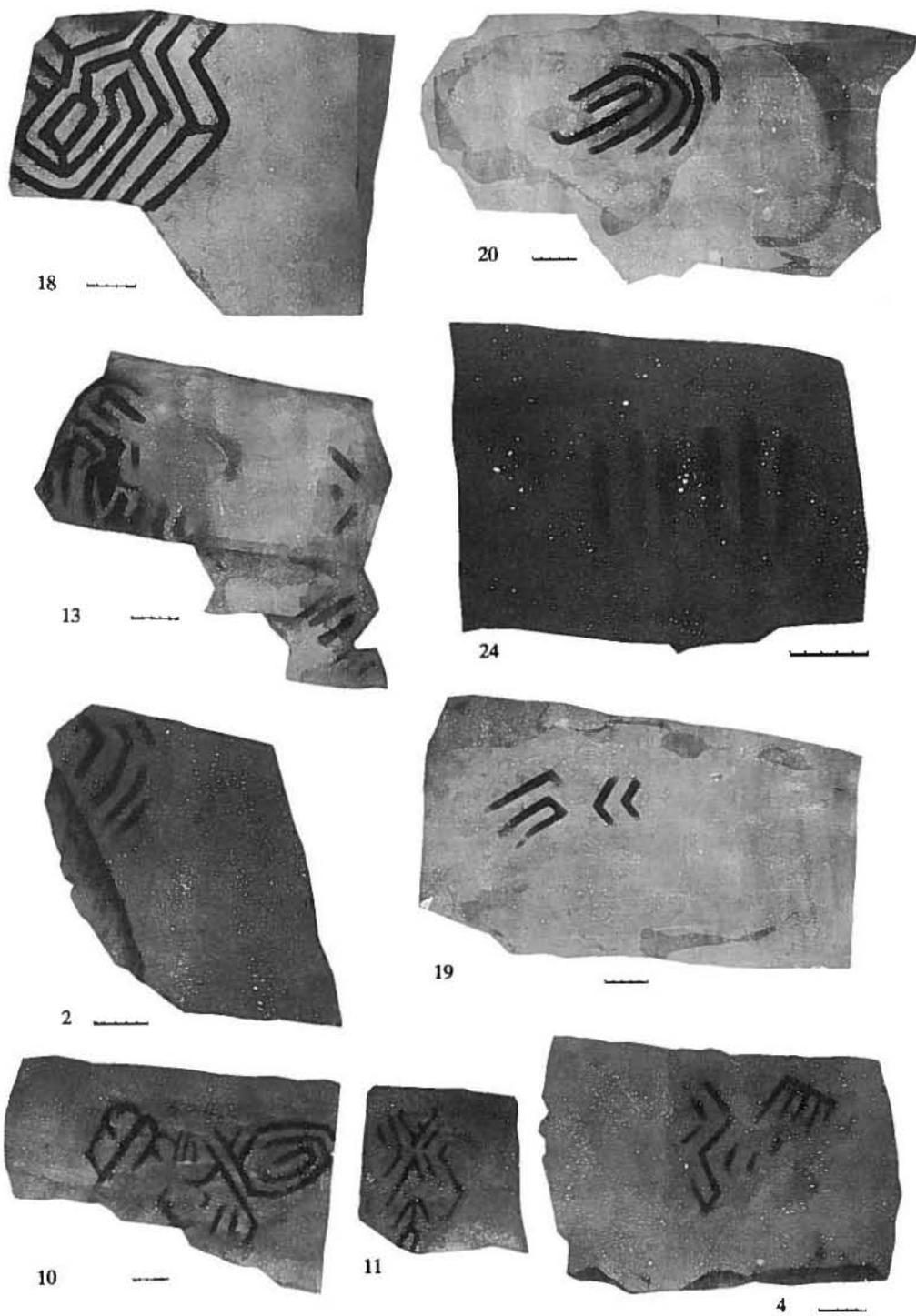


Fig. 10. The Pyaivye's pisanitses. Explanation conform to fig. 8,3.



1



3



5



6

*Fig. 11.* The Pyaivye's pisanitses. Explanation conform to fig. 8,3.

composition of three interconnected figures: two palm-like anthropomorphs and one zoomorph (a fantasy creature?). Similar pictures were met in Taipalsaari, Finland, and in cave paintings from Norway (Solsem, Gravvik). On the basis of

these affinities the above composition could be placed not earlier than 2000 BC. The discovery of the Pyaivye-Maika sites complicates and poses new questions concerning the early settlement history of the ancient Transpole territory.

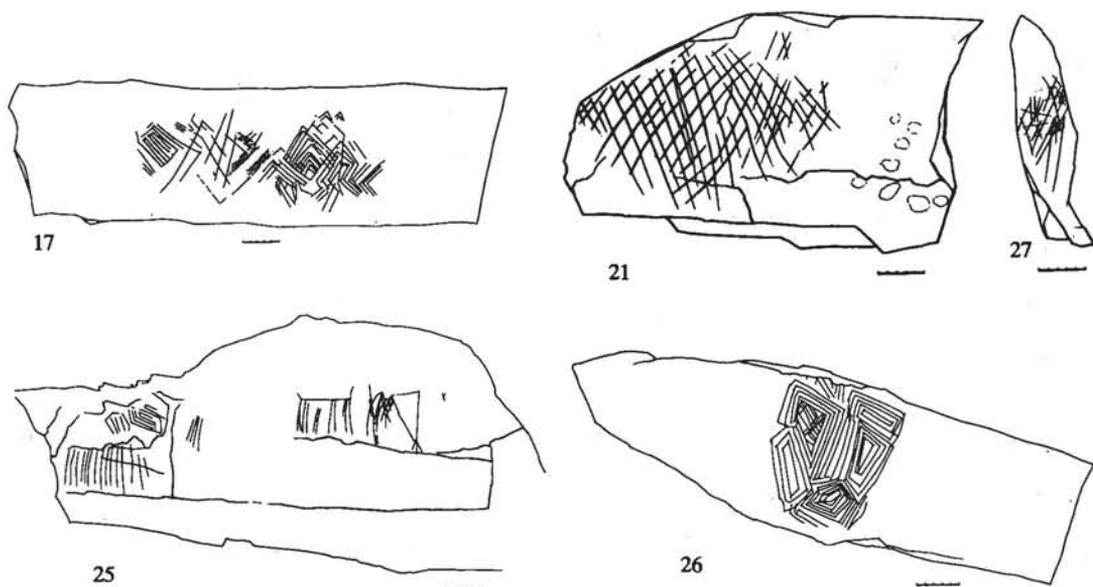


Fig. 12. The Pyaivye's engravings; 17 made over the remains of geometrical painting in red ochre.

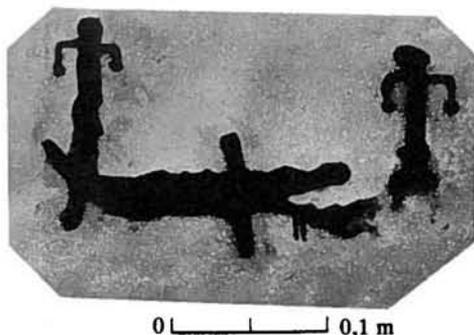


Fig. 13. The Maika's composition and the rocky grotto where it is situated.

### Discussion

Although each rock art centre is undoubtedly unique, similarity in execution technique, topographic features (always near water), and themes can be observed throughout Fennoscandian territory. Most investigators (Clark 1937; Simonsen 1958, 1974, 1978; Helskog 1985) suppose that creative impulses of the hunter traditions have spread from a single region: the western coast of Norway (Norland-Troms).

Traditionally, the earliest forms are thought to be large etched zoomorphs which subsequently undergo a process of schematization, geometrization and stylization. We accept this explanation, but bear also in mind that geometrical patterns have in some cases coexisted with and even preceded naturalistic ones. It is well known that the native rock art from Australia and South America is both realistic and schematic

(Johansen 1980). Without drawing far-reaching conclusions we can say that the final answer to this question requires further investigation.

Dating rock art is an extremely difficult task. Very often attempts are made to relate them with geomorphological data, which tend to be inconsistent and are never applicable over sufficiently large areas (Bakka 1973, 1975, 1979; Welinder 1976). G. Gjessing (1979) and Hallström (1960) proposed that the first appearance of Fennoscandian pictures would not be earlier than the 6000 BC. They detected certain traditions of the Maglemosian culture in them and even stretched the analogy to the Magdalenian cave art of western Europe. Researchers have now given up this hypothesis as doubtful, but there may be a some sense to it. Specially if we take into account that the ancient inhabitants of northern Fennoscandia were related to descendants of the Ahrensburg tradition and maybe to the Magdalenian tradition as well (Welinder 1981; Shumkin 1986, 1989a). The opinion of the Scandinavian scientists is extremely interesting. Yu. A. Savvateev (1985) has been lately of the opinion that geometric Norwegian and Finnish rock art has probably significant antiquity.

Since 2000 BC the influence of agrarian population pictures is felt in many areas (Nissen Fett and Fett 1979, Malmer 1981). This influence reaches northern Norway, Sweden, Finland, Karelia and the central Kola. Obviously it follows a reverse route: on southern pictures hunter motifs and stylistic paintings appear simultaneously. It is specially important that in rock paintings of the most ancient stratum of hunter tradition agrarian symbols are totally missing. The same can be said about the Pyaivye-Maika group and the earliest pictures in western Norway and Karelia.

Of extreme interest is the question of eastern connections in Fennoscandian rock art. The well-known hypothesis of A.P. Okladnikov and V.V. Tchernetzov stresses different aspects and speak about tradition routes of painting pictures on rock surfaces. To their mind this tradition comes from Siberia and the Urals. Not agreeing with the idea of eastern prototradition, I, together with practically all other investigators reject it. But it is necessary to stress that pictures of animals with a "life line" and some other elements characteristic of Siberia and the Urals appear over a large part of Fennoscandia (excluding Karelia and Central Kola) at the end of the second millennium BC. Certain elements also appear in material culture here around the same time, particularly in the river valleys. We

can explain these elements as the penetration of some eastern groups (Shumkin 1989a). Such coincidences contradict convergence principles and require special attention, though this does not mean an attempt to return to the Circumpolar Theory. But while rejecting and putting into scientific archive this hypothesis, we must not discard the valuable information and observations that were comprised in it.

The disappearance of a rock art tradition in many regions of Fennoscandia is dated no later than the first millennium BC. This is true for western Norway, Sweden, Finland and Karelia. But according to recent data this tradition is preserved in Saam rock art in northern Norway and the Kola Peninsula, where a 1500-year gap formerly existed (Manker 1964; Simonsen 1974, 1978; Sommerström 1985; Shumkin 1989). This hiatus has been actually filled by the discovery of carvings and paintings (Fig. 7,3) that can be dated from the beginning of our era up to the 16th or 17th century. P. Simonsen made this discovery in northern Norway, and there is a similar "Saam" stone in Ivanovka; undoubtedly the amount of such locations will increase with time.

One of the most important problems in rock art is the definition of their use. Without any speculations it is necessary to note that geometric figures did not possess any decorative character, but accomplished an essential function in ancient society. In the end, this function was directed to the increase of surviving possibilities in the hard struggle for existence.

Soviet archaeologist A.D. Stol'yar has given a comprehensive and clear definition of the origin myth and development of the creative power of primitive rock art: "Rock art reflects a means of communication, keeping and transferring information. At the same time it is a helping device in training growing-up generations. It is also an object of worship and powerful stimulus and essential means of logical perception of the world".

Recent discoveries of remarkable panels in Norway, Finland and the Kola Peninsula raise hopes of finding new aspects. As shown by already known groups, the most exciting areas for future investigations are the northwestern regions of Karelia, Kola, the Leningrad district as well as northern Sweden and Finland. Providing up research in this direction gives us new opportunities for studying a very important but hardly perceptible sphere of vital activity of ancient societies.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

- АО — Археологические открытия. Москва.
- BCSP — Bolletino del Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici. Brescia.
- FM — Finskt Museum.
- ISK — Instituttet for sammenlignende kulturforskning. Oslo-Trondheim.
- КСИА — Краткие сообщения Института археологии АН СССР. Москва-Ленинград.
- NAR — Norwegian Archaeological Review. Oslo.
- СА — Советская археология. Москва.
- SEU — Studia ethnographica Upsalensia. Lund-Uppsala.
- SM — Suomen Museo.