

Russian Demons

Introduction

A famous demon ("bes" in Russian) of the Cape Besov Nos of the Onego Lake (Fig. 1: 1) is known, probably, to everybody who is concerned about rock art of the Northern Europe. A lot of ideas were written about it and its neighboring figures: fantastic interpretations and exciting discussions about its demonic nature and meaning for the ancient people (Brusov 1937; Linevsky 1939; Laushkin 1962; Stolyar 1978; 2000; Zhulnikov 2006; and others).

A demon

We'll cross demon with classic typological method. Formally, the demon is described as follows: a full-face anthropomorphic figure, body of rectangular shape, a rectangular head on a long neck, legs bent at the knees and feet pointing outward in differ-

ent directions, arms bent at the elbows and forearms are raised up, fingers spread wide. A deep crack passes along the demon on the Besov Nos that divides the body lengthwise into two equal parts, ends in the head, to the sides of the mouth on the spot and left eye (Ravdonikas 1936: Table. 29).

Demons

Are there such images in the rock art of the Northern Europe? There are. First of all, one next to the Besov Nos in a group of rock carvings in the estuary of the Vodla River (Fig. 1: 2) is a part of the whole assemblage of the Onego petroglyphs (Poikalainen, Ernits 1998: 143-145). One in Čalmn-Varré on the Ponoj River in the center of the Kola Peninsula (Fig. 2: 2) (Shumkin 1990; 2000: 221; Gurina 2005: 27), and nine on the Lake

Kanozero in the southern part of the Kola Peninsula (Fig. 3) (Kolpakov, Shumkin 2012: 291). They differ from the Besov Nos demon so that the body and the head are not rectangular, as well the fact that every figure is clearly identified as male because a phallus is depicted. A kind of exception is the second Onego demon from Vodla. The sex of the figure is indicated by a triangle pointing upwards on the proper place of the full face body. It can be interpreted to be a phallus, as well as a vulva. Thus, both Onego demons are specific in that their sex is not obvious.

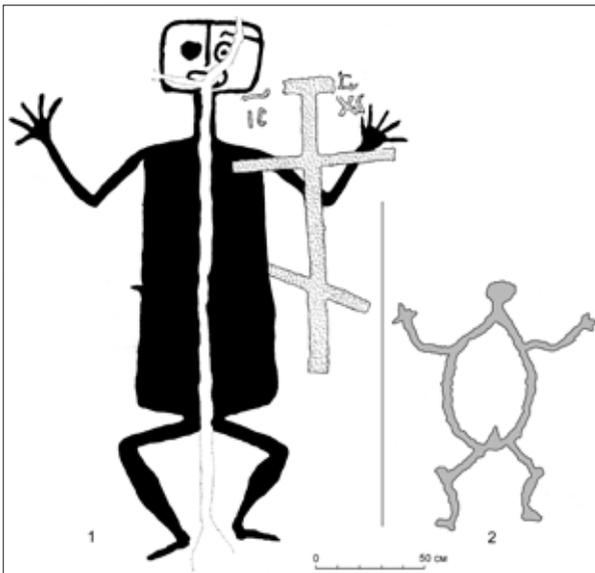


Fig. 1. Demons. 1 — Besov Nos (after Ravdonikas 1936: table 29) ; 2 — Vodla (after Poikalainen, Ernits 1998: 143-145).

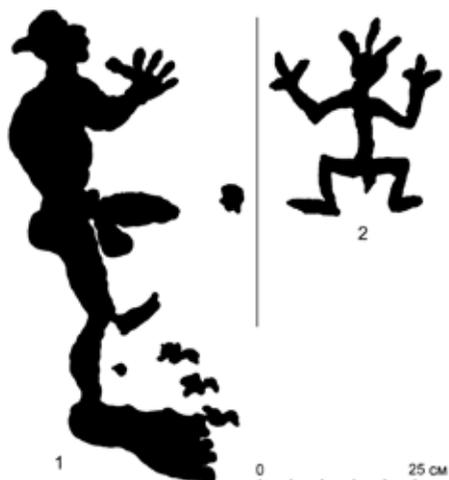
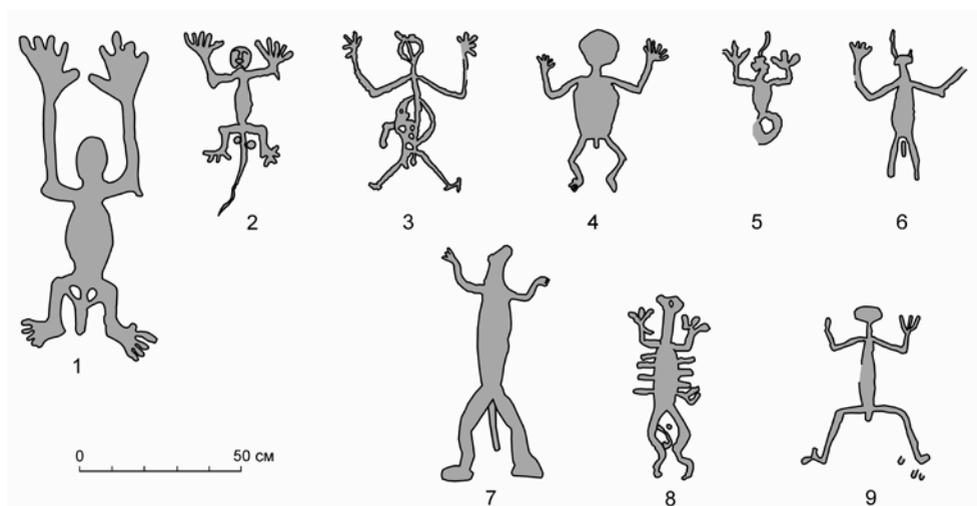


Fig. 2. Demons. 1 — Besovy Sledki (after Ravdonikas 1938: table 30); 2 — Čalmn-Varrè (after Shumkin 2000: 221).

To assign the figures of a “demon” to a specific type, I do not include figures with arms raised, but no fingers, and figures depicted with any objects in the arms. There are no demons on other rock art sites of the northern Fennoscandia. Some similar images are present only on the rock art sites of the southwestern Sweden (Brastad), relating to the world of farming economy of the Bronze Age.

Fig. 3. Demons. Kanozero (after Kolpakov, Shumkin 2012: 291).



Of course, there is no avoiding mention of another famous demon of Besovi Sledki (Demon Footprints) on the Vyg River, near Belomorsk (Fig. 2: 1) (Ravdonikas 1938 Table. 30; Savateev 1970: 31). The name was given by A.M.Linevsky for “association with the well-known Besov Nos” (Linevsky 1939: 136). That is to say, “the demon in profile” – anthropomorph in view from the right side, with a huge (relatively to the body size) foot with fingers and a hand with a huge brush with fingers. Such figure does not occur anywhere else. It should be noted that all anthropomorphs of Vyg are depicted in profile, except for five figures. “The demon in profile” seems quite logical in this context. A footprints, similar in form to the foot of this demon (4 to 6), are always included in the composition with this demon. These footprints are 1.3 meters behind his back (to the south), among other figures.

Demons and others

It is surprising that before the Metal Age “demons” are available only on the rock art sites on the territory of modern Russia. Demons appear in Scandinavia in the Bronze Age only. Until recently, the discussion was exposed to only two demons from Besov Nos (Onego Lake) and Besovi Sledki

(Vyg River). Now, after the discovery of the Kanozero petroglyphs it is possible to discuss a dozen similar figures at least. The main thing is that we find them in a different connection with the adjacent figures. It is a quite another situation in comparison with the White Sea and Onego demons, which are included in the composition with other figures depending from the fancy of researcher.

On Kanozero 6 of 9 demons engaged in compositions related to the same type – “a demon with a woman” – in which a larger anthropomorph with emphasized manhood (except for one figure) is as if seizing or has already seized a less one with designated female signs (Fig. 4) [Kolpakov, Shumkin 2012: 316]. One of the demons is as it grows out of a huge miracle fin fish. Another anthropomorph is close to these six ones by the type of the composition: it is not all right with his fingers and it holds some objects in his arms, but at the same time his body is rectangular in shape (Fig. 5: 1).

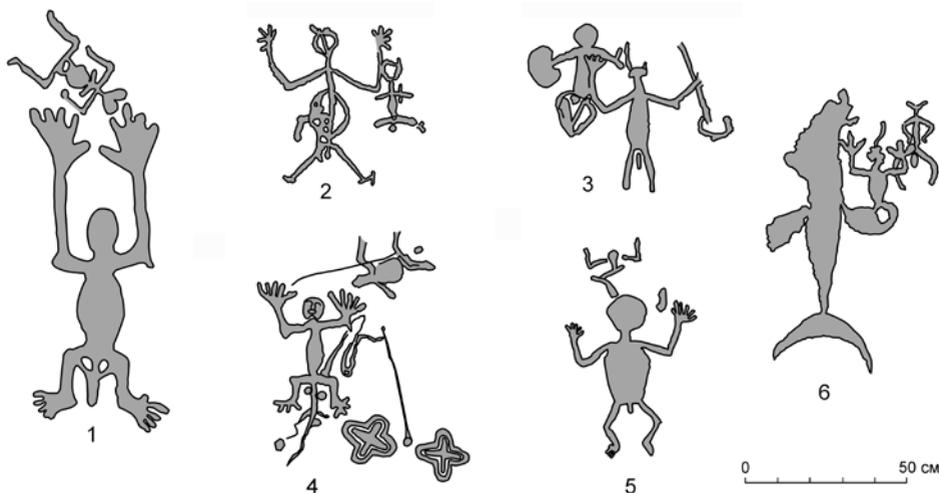
Of the remaining three figures a demon with a head like a bear, touching his left hand with the boat with crew (Fig. 5: 2). Another, “a Cyclops with a ribbed body” is leaning against the side of his left fusiform strange creature with a long tail (Fig. 5: 3). And the third, lost the right wrist, placed

above male anthropomorph with a ring in his left hand (Fig. 5: 4).

In Čalmn-Varré a demon is surrounded by animal figures, which are most likely to represent the moose, and one of them touches or slightly overlaps it [Gurina 2005: 19]. Nearby is another anthropomorph of “demon” type, but without fingers on its hands, which is connected with line to the same zoomorph (Fig. 6). So, there is one exemplar of “a demon with a moose” in Čalmn-Varré.

In general, except for the composition type “a demon with a woman”, other types of compositions with a demon are not presented more than by one example. However, we have considered the composition of the first level, in which the connections of components are virtually certain (anthropomorphic persons and objects are connected physically). But almost all of them are accompanied by other figures, connection with which can be justified only by typology. That is, if they find a combination of recurring types of figures, etc. Investigation of such “ambiguous” compositions is needed. In these compositions demons are accompanied mainly by elks, boats, ichtiomorphs, and anthropomorphs (Fig. 6-9). In addition, Onego demon is accompanied by the swans (a demon of Vodla has no adja-

Fig. 4. Composition «A demon with a woman». Kanozero (after Kolpakov, Shumkin 2012: 316).



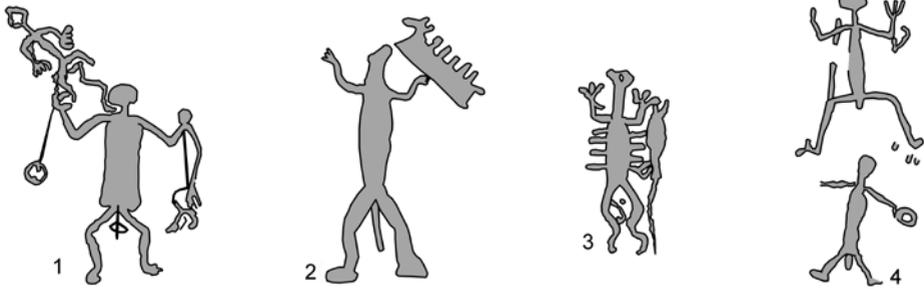


Fig. 5. Demons with different things. Kanozero. 1 — composition “A demon with a woman”, group Kamennyi 7 (after Kolpakov, Shumkin 2012: 316); 2 — demon with a boat, group Kamennyi 3 (after Kolpakov, Shumkin 2012: 138); 3 — demon and an unclear creature, group Kamennyi 7 (after Kolpakov, Shumkin 2012: 168); 4 — demon and an anthropomorph, group Elovyi 3 (after Kolpakov, Shumkin 2012: 109).

cent figures), and one of Kanozero demons has an adjacent lunar figure, the only one outside the Onego rock carvings.

At the first look, one can conclude on this basis that the demons are in meaningful association with these types of objects. But these types of figures – elk/deer, boat, ichtiomorph, and anthropomorph – constitute the main part of all figures of rock art of the northern Fennoscandia. Their proximity to the demons easily explained by the fact that they present at all the rock carvings assemblages. It is significant that on the Besov Nos the swans have majority in the group of figures nearest to the demon – swan is just the first figure in quantity on Onego. The demons are really connected with the figures of elk, boat, ichtiomorph,

and anthropomorph (and swan on the Onego), but it doesn't have any specific meaning within the rock art of the Northern Fennoscandia. In the mutual arrangement of the figures and their positions we fail to see any specific relationships with the demons.

Some conclusions

1) The only type of composition reliably allocated to the demons is “a demon with a woman” on Kanozero, 2) However, it is found only on Kanozero and applying of a possible interpretation of the anthropomorphic figure type a “demon” of Kanozero to

Fig. 7. Demon in the midst of other figures. Besovy Sledki (after Ravdonikas 1938: table 30).



Fig. 6. Demon in the midst of other figures. Stone 1. Calmn-Varrè (drawing by the author).

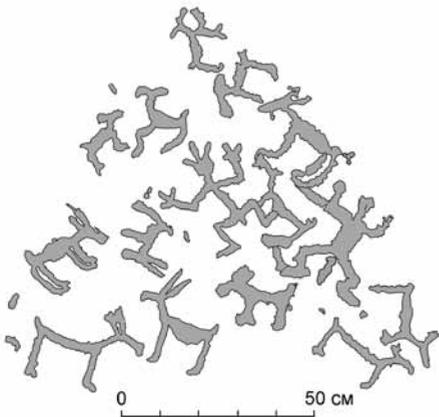




Fig. 8. Demon in the midst of other figures. Besov Nos (after Ravdonikas 1936: table 25).

other sites has little reason, 3) It is possible that the anthropomorphic figure with a set of attributes described above, which is in

Russian archeology traditionally denoted by the word "demon" ("bes"), depicts the same mythical character in different situa-

Fig. 9. Compositions with demons. Kanozero (after Kolpakov, Shumkin 2012: 37, 41, 45, 48, 50, 59, 61, 62).

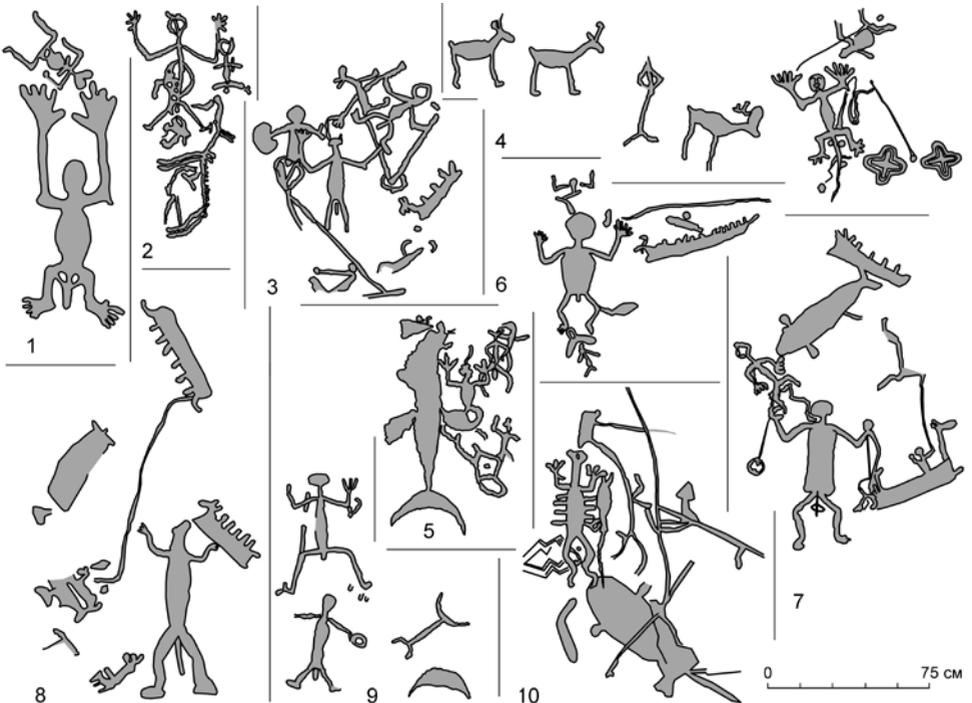




Fig. 10. Distribution map of the rock art sites with demon figurines mentioned in the text.

tions at different sites, 4) Each site of rock art in the Northern Fennoscandia demonstrates its individuality even in the use of such a specific type of image as a "demon", 5) Despite the relative unity of the rock art of the Northern Fennoscandia, demons are found only on the territory of Russia. 6) An assemblage of rock carvings on the islands of the Lake Kanozero on the Kola Peninsula is the most "demonic" and "finger-bristling".

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