

PREHISTORIC ROCK PICTURES IN CHUKOTKA

N. N. DIKOV

In the years 1956 to 1957 prehistoric rock pictures were discovered in the Pegtymiel river valley in Chukotka (Fig. 1). In 1968 we continued our search and investigation of these rock carvings.

Many new pictures were found in original sites on the rocks of the right bank of the Pegtymiel river in the vicinity of the Kaykuul brook. Again pictures of reindeer hunted in water repeated themselves many times, again unfolded to our eyes pictures of hunting marine animals. And again looked upon us from the rocks mysterious people resembling toadstools. One composition alternated with another. Many were quite unexpected. For example, the picture of a woman — toadstool clothed in a typical Chukotkan-Eskimo leather suit "kerker". And within a stone's throw of this place, close to the edge of a gorge, we discovered and excavated two late neolithic sites. In the middle of the gorge we discovered and investigated a cave with a cultural layer and drawings on its walls.

The results of investigations in the vicinity of the Kaykuul brook were so much interesting that we decided to extend our investigation to the entire valley of the Pegtymiel river and, therefore, we flew it over by helicopter. Our hopes were not disappointed. About seven miles down the Pegtymiel river and 33 miles from the Polar Sea we discovered new finding-places of rock pictures situated most northerly in the whole of Asia. On an isolated rock on the right bank of the river we found the remains of another late neolithic hunting site and here under a rock shelter was discovered a grandiose multfigurative composition of silhouettes of hunters (one running on skis, another one sitting in a kayak), dogs, reindeer, and dog and reindeer tracks. The subject of this composition is the hunt of reindeer in spring on skis on icy snow and in autumn from a kayak on water. This rock carving, which we discovered anew, creates a strong impression. It rises vertically to a height of over 80 feet and probably was the place from where the hunters watched the migration of herds of wild reindeer and where they were lying when waiting for them. From the overhanging rock unfolds a wonderful view of the river meandering down below and the low-lying opposite bank...

To Magadan we returned with rich finds: a lot of fragments and copies of pictures and numerous photos of them. Now began the challenging and time-consuming, but highly interesting work of their systematics and interpretation. In the end a classification system was worked out and a certain sequence of the principal scenes established.

The simple realistic representation of reindeer was found to be the oldest. Then followed a series of hunting scenes, each of which had been carved into rock at a time and forms a complex of several elements: reindeer, kayak, a man sitting in it, two-arm oars, and hurling weapons. The development of this composition is subject to strict logic and expresses the ever-increasing role of the two-arm oar in hunting magic. In the last stage this oar replaces the hunter and the boat and symbolizes the fact that it warrants the kayak's high speed and thus comprehensibly the success of the hunt as well.

All these new materials permitted us to render dating of the rock pictures and their ethnic appurtenance more precise.

For the most part they refer to a period when in Chukotka no reindeer were yet reared, but when the hunting of wild reindeer and marine animals was already known. A large part of the contour drawings falls into the Old Bearing Sea period, i.e. from the end of the first millennium B.C. to the close of the first half of the first millennium A.D. and probably belongs to the ancestors of the Eskimos. It, however, appears that the most realistic pictures of the individual reindeer are probably still older, that they were carved not only in the first millennium B.C., but perhaps already towards the close of the second millennium B.C. Later drawings are probably the work of the first breeders of reindeer beyond the arctic circle of Chukotka — the ancestors of the Chukchees.

These realistically depicted scenes from the Pegtymiel river valley furnished plenty of new and most valuable information on the past of Chukotka beyond the arctic circle.

It cannot be denied that in Chukotka in the long bygone past, at the turning point of the first millennium B.C., the hunting of wild reindeer in spring on skis on icy snow with dogs and in autumn on water was one of the main economic activities. For the first time and reliably we now know how and with the aid of what boats and weapons this hunt was performed.

For killing reindeer driven into the water, large boats with a greater number of oarsmen were usually employed. Sometimes the reindeer were killed right from these boats, but the latter's main mission consisted in not permitting the reindeer to swim away down with the current of the river.

A particularly important and major role in the hunting of reindeer was played by small fast boats with two-arm oars. To go by their presentation on the rocks of the Pegtymiel river valley those are, for the most part, real perfectly watertight kayaks covered on all sides with leather and featuring a hole for the oarsman. They appear in two different types: with a high sharp bow — as with the Cariboo Eskimos, or with an altogether narrow, but pointed stern and bow — as with the Greenland Eskimos. There also exist mixed types featuring a pointed bow and a round stern, near to the Chukotka-Eskimo less perfect forms of kayaks.

The exceptional prominence given to the two-arm oar in some compositions and the extraordinary emphasis laid on its role played in the hunt are an altogether new discovery. Also in this we must see local sources of the cult of oars, be they of one-arm "baidarka" type as we know it from the ethnography of the Chukchees and the Asian Eskimos.

We now can assume that in the reindeer hunt a kind of reversible harpoon was probably used as we discovered in 1959 in a grave of a prehistoric reindeer hunter at the Ust Belaya river in the inland of Chukotka. In the overwhelming majority of rock pictures there is no weapon with which the hunter killed the reindeer depicted by a straight line, but by a curved line in the form of a continuous arch. In this way no spear or lance with its straight wood, but primarily the leather sling or rope of a harpoon that has penetrated into the animal's body can be depicted.

It has been found that in prehistory marine hunting was known. Formerly we only assumed the existence of marine hunting. The oldest scenes of hunting whales and other marine animals show the use of large boats with high sharp bows and a great number of oarsmen that resemble the boats carved on Karelian rocks. As we have already mentioned, we come across pictures of such boats many a time also in the scenes of reindeer hunting on water. In the remaining scenes of marine hunting we can see everywhere already other, much later types of boats. We can easily recognize in them typical Chukchee-Eskimo multiseat leather baidarka-like boats.

In one composition depicting these multiseat boats a picture very similar to one of the mysterious typical Old Bearing Sea object — a so-called "winged object" — is carried. For the first time we can see it now in the working situation: at the end of the wooden shaft as a special head of the reversible harpoon thrust into a whale-like animal. Thus this object is no more mysterious and the archaeologists will have to say farewell to many hypotheses about its meaning and primarily to the assumption that it might

have served as sort of a closure or clip on the bow of the baidarka-boat or kayak.

There are plenty of such pictures from which all possible information has not yet been drawn and that are promising for further investigation. I am quoting some of them: e.g. the picture of a man holding one hand over the head of some animal.

This, too, is a carving reminding of a musk-ox, or a bison, a picture that might also interest a paleozoologist.

And, in the end, there are anthropomorphic figures covered with mysterious mushrooms resembling silhouettes. Those are mushrooms and not, as we might have assumed at first sight, a head-dress or head-decoration. They are not always carved on the heads of human figures, but more frequently over them or instead of them; they thus are no typical head-dress or head-cover, though they may be directly connected with the head. These strange mushrooms have a special meaning and are associated with the human figure only symbolically. If we have a look into the key of mushrooms, we can see that no general mushroom is concerned, but in all probability a toadstool with its characteristically broadening stalk down below and a round, still young cap, or already with a developed flat cap.

It is nothing wondrous to meet in the Antarctic with such a picture. The red toadstool, as well as many other mushrooms with caps, as generally known, grows there and multiplies. Although the toadstool beyond the arctic circle in Chukotka on the Polar Sea is found only sporadically, its meaning was known even in recent times in the function of an intoxicating narcotic, as we know from the ethnography of this region. The principle and the method of associating mushrooms and human figures in one picture is not altogether without analogy. Such human figures similar to sacred mushrooms — hallucinators "teonanakatl" — we can find among the stone sculptures of the Mayas of the preclassical and classical periods. This conforms to the generally known anthropomorphization of animals and plants in a certain developmental stage of the most varied cultures. We also know, for example, worshipped half-animal or half-plant anthropomorphic sculptures from excavations of the Karmir-Blur fortified site of the Urart period and many others already earlier studied in the relevant literature, based on similar psychological ideas.

One of the most important pictures is the carving of a dancing naked woman with two scythes or earrings and a very large toadstool over her head. Perhaps it is a picture

of the Mother Earth goddess, whose cult was so widespread among the reindeer hunters beyond the arctic circle.

Anyhow, all dancing figures of people-toadstools prove the very deep roots of Shamanism in the Far Northeast of Siberia. It is well known that drunken men are often regarded by primitive peoples as fortune-tellers. When eating the toadstool man is hallucinating even for several days. The state of shamanic ecstasy is usually reached by growing mournful singing and exhausting drum beating. Here it is necessary to add that the presentation of this indispensable shamanic attribute drum or rattle can be observed in the hands of some dancing figures, which is further proof of the assumed antiquity of Shamanism in Chukotka.

Not only the described pictures, but also the entire Pegtymelian art is noteworthy and important, well deserving of scientific study.

This is its first discovery in the tundra of Chukotka and we may assume that its development took at least several centuries. We think that these activities of prehistoric artists have covered a long way from full realism to quite schematic scenes. Finally, graffitos, linear and quite schematic pictures began to appear on rock walls. At that time occurred a fundamental change connected with the arrival of the first reindeer breeder in the Pegtymel river valley.

REFERENCES

- DIKOV, N. N. 1967. K izučeniju kulturnovo nasledija korennovo naselenija Čukotki (petroglify na reke Pegtymel). Problemy nauki na Severo-Vostoce SSSR. *Work SV KNII SO AN SSSR, No. 31, Magadan.*
- DIKOV, N. N. 1968. Otkrytije petroglifov na Čukotke. — *Archeologičeskije otkrytija 1967 goda, Magadan.*
- DIKOV, N. N. 1969. Mestonachozhdenije petroglifov, neolitičeskije stojanki i peščera v nizovjach Pegtymeli. — *Archeologičeskije otkrytija 1968 goda, Madagan.*
- DIKOV, N. N. 1969. Problema etničeskoj prinadžežnosti pegtymelskich petroglifov. — *Materialy konferenciji „Etnogenez narodov Sibiri“, Novosibirsk.*
- OKLADNIKOV, A. P. 1969. Petroglify Sibiri i Dalnevo Vostoka kak istočnik po etničeskoj istorii Severnoj Azii (Metodologija i nekotoryje obščije vyvody). — *Proceedings of the conference „Etnogenez narodov Severnoj Azii“. Novosibirsk.*

Prof. N. N. Dikov, USSR



View of the Pegtymiel cliff with pictures



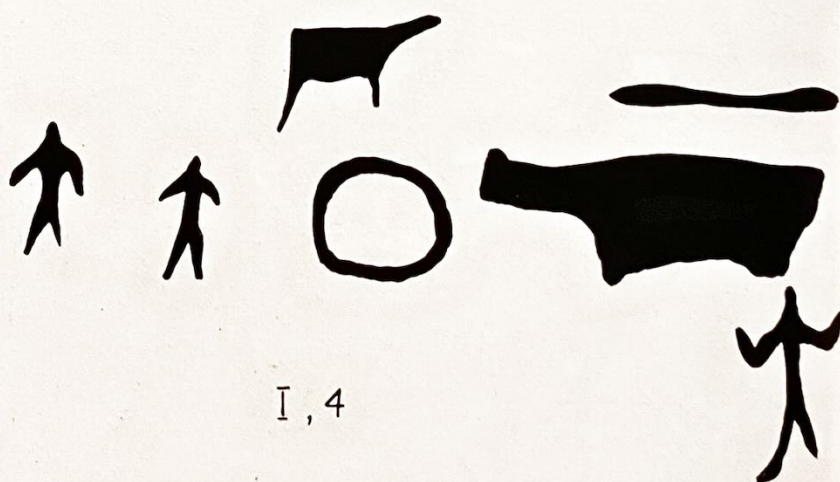
Landscape of the Pegtymiel River



Hunting of reindeer from a large boat

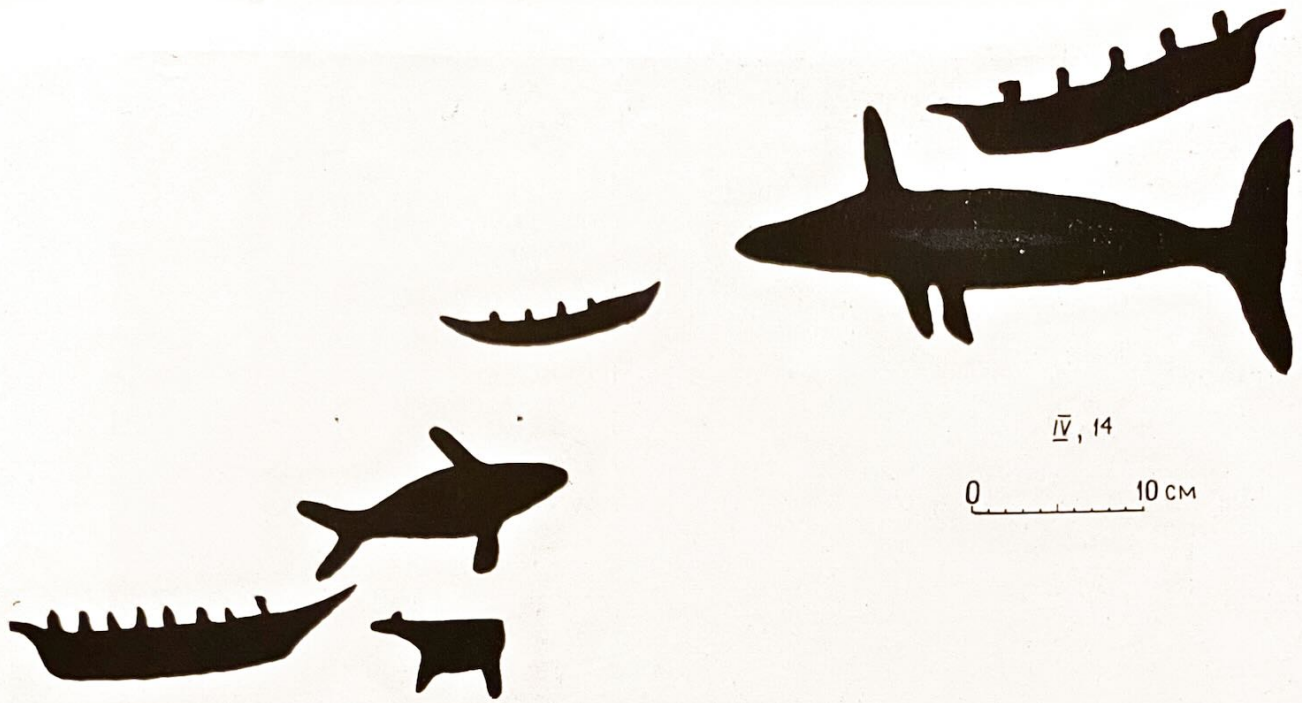


Hunting from a kayak



Composition with „winged object“ (depicted on top under a two-arm oar)

← Stone picture of sacred mushroom „teonanakatl“ (Mayas — early classical period, according to R. G. Wasson)



Hunting of marine animals



Dance of toadstools



Composition with woman-toadstool in leather clothes "kerker" (right).











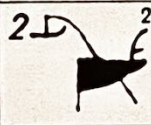



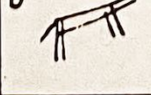
			representa- tion of the composition	style						
3	2	1	sacred rep- resentation		1	2	3	4	5	
			1  37		7	9	8	11	3	5
2			2  26			5	15	6		3
	1		3  13			3	6	3	1	3
		1	4  3				1	1	1	1
		3	5  5					3	2	
			6  6							

Table of correlations of depicted magic scenes with the style of reindeer (in the first vertical column are recorded cases showing swimming reindeer with extended hoofs similar to goose-feet)



Hunting of reindeer (hunter and boat are represented by an oar carved over the almost wiped out figure of a reindeer).



Hunting of swimming reindeer (the right reindeer has been hit by the harpoon from the kayak)



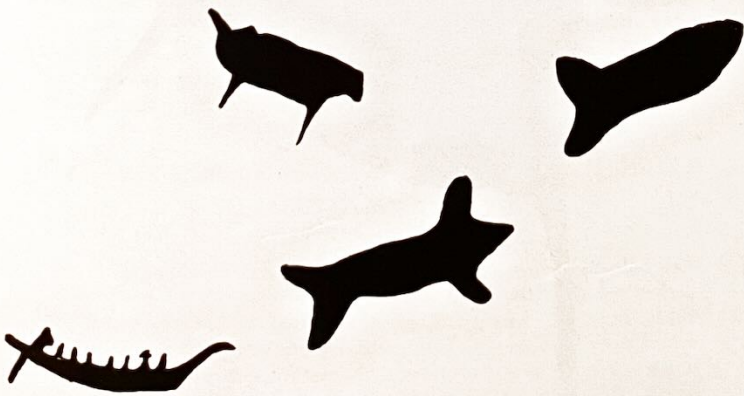
Woman-toadstool (composition detail)



Composition showing the hunting of reindeer with dogs on icy snow and hunting from the kayak



Grazing reindeer



Whaling



Whaling



Hunting of wild reindeer



Dance of toadstool (colour variation)



Realistic picture of reindeer