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RODS WITH ELK HEADS: SYMBOL IN RITUAL CONTEXT

The paper considers a particular type of rods, namely, the carved rods with protuberances in the form of an elk's head. These items and their rock art depictions – dating from the Mesolithic to Early Metal Age – are analysed in terms of their morphology, location area, chronology and finding context. Such rods were sacred items with a multiple of symbolic meanings, evidently used in rites by mature or old men. They could have been connected with the notions of fertility and symbolized the cold season of the year, associated with mature (or old) age. Rod depictions on petroglyphs obviously represented magic items connected with the notion of reproduction and symbolizing the Universe.

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Introduction

Rods with sculptural elk/reindeer heads and their analogues in rock art are important elements for reconstructing the North Eurasian prehistoric inhabitants' social structure and mythology in the period from the Mesolithic to Early Metal Age. The extremely long period of their existence – from the VII millennium to the second half of the II millennium cal BC for rods and from the VI millennium to the III millennium cal BC for rock art images – and the huge territory of their spread (northern Europe and beyond the Urals) obviously provide some evidence of the common world outlook of many archaeological cultures in the Eurasian forest zone (Stolyar 1983; Studzitskaya 1997).

Both categories were studied earlier, but require a more careful examination. Carved items are markedly different in shape and size, and this is why a more detailed morphological analysis should be carried out. Also all fragmented items, not mentioned in the earlier studies should be examined. The morphology and finding context having been studied, some conclusions can be made about the functional and symbolic role of these rods. As for the rock art images, the most informative are those scenes with the rods, where they are used in certain actions.

Their multiple symbolic meaning is confirmed by rod images with not only elk heads but also those of reindeer. Such scenes should be carefully examined in order to reveal the functions of the carved rods, which existed in reality.

Carved rods with elk/reindeer heads

Most items are made of antler, though some are of elk bone. Most rods from the Oleniy Ostrov burial ground (the Barents seashore) and the one from the Mayak II site are made of reindeer antler and portray reindeers (Gurina 1997; Murashkin & Shumkin 2008). Several wooden and stone items with elk heads are known, but they are not rods.

Stone elk heads (4 items) have holes for putting them on rods and their only spread in south Finland and Karelia seems to be a local tradition (Nordman 1937, 40 ff.; Studzitskaya 1966, 30; Carpelan 1977; Huure 2003, 241) (Fig. 1).

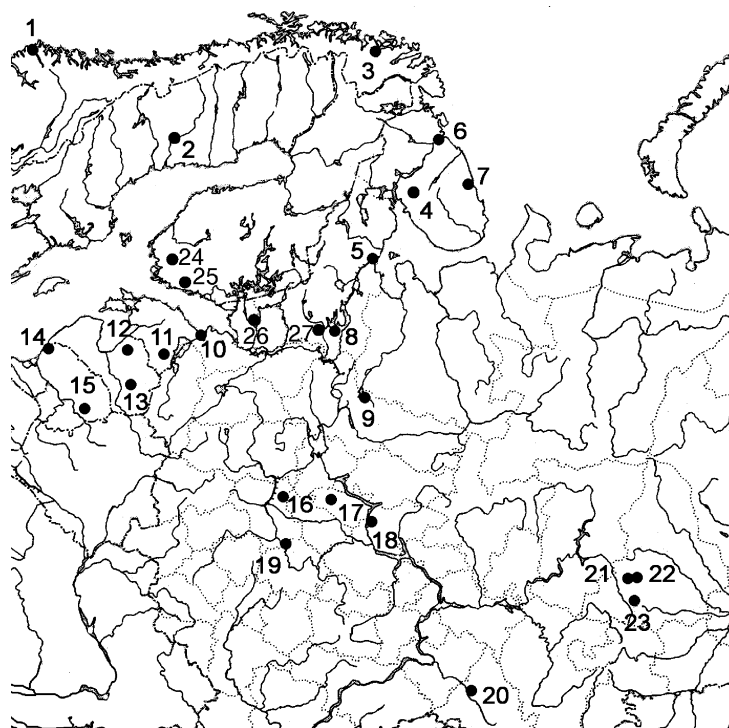


Fig. 1. Finds of rods with elk/reindeer heads: petrogliths (1–5), of bone (6–23), of stone (24–27). 1 Vingen, 2 Nämforsen, 3 Alta, 4 Kanozero, 5 Zalavruga, 6 Oleniy Ostrov burial ground, 7 Mayak II, 8 Southern Oleniy Ostrov burial ground, 9 Modlona, 10 Riigiküla III at Narva, 11 Villa, 12 Zvejnieki burial ground, 13 the Malmuta river estuary, 14 Šventoji 3 and 4, 15 Kretuonas I, 16 Zamostje 2, 17 Sakhtysh I, 18 Volodary, 19 Chornaya Gora, 20 river Tok burial, 21 Annin Ostrov, 22 Shigir peatbog, 23 Kalmatskiy Brod, 24 Huittinen, 25 Esbo, 26 Pyhäjärvi, 27 Petrozavodsk.

Three of them are made in a very stylized manner and only one item has highly detailed features of an elk. Judging by the hole-making technology, they are dated back to the Late Mesolithic or Neolithic. All of them are stray finds and will not be discussed here.

Carved items have the angle between the head and the rod from 90 to 120 (rarely to 150) degrees. All items are made extremely carefully – all of them are burnished and polished. Their lengths range from 10 to 47 cm. A total of 48 pieces can be divided into two groups according to their size (Fig. 1).

Group I – small rods: from 10 to 25.3 cm – consists of 12 pieces from Mayak II, Oleniy Ostrov burial ground (7 pieces), Southern Oleniy Ostrov burial ground on Onega Lake, Zvejnieki burial ground, Šventoji IV, Modlona (Gurina 1953; 1956; 1997; Oshibkina 1978; Zagorskis 1987; Rimantienė 1996; Murashkin & Shumkin 2008).

Group II – big rods: from 40 to 49 cm – includes 16 pieces from the Southern Oleniy Ostrov burial ground (2 pieces), Riigiküla III, Villa (Fig. 2: 1–2), the Malmuta river estuary, Sventoji III (2 pieces), Kretuonas I, Sakhtysh I, Zamostye II, Chornaya Gora, the Tok river burial, Shigir peat bog (2 pieces),



Fig. 2. Rods with elk heads from Riigiküla III (1) and Villa (2).

Kalmatskiy Brod, Annin Ostrov (Éding 1940; Gurina 1956; Tsvetkova 1969; Loze 1970; Bogdanov 1992; Oshibkina et al. 1992; Rimantienė 2005; Lozovskij 2009).

The minimum and maximum lengths of the items were measured using unbroken rods, but there were also numerous fragments. All the fragments were compared with the whole rods, and their lengths were estimated approximately. According to these lengths, they are included in group II – big rods. The piece from the Volodary site could not be thus classified, because it had no handle, with a deep hole located at the bottom of the elk head probably for fastening it to a handle (Tsvetkova 1973) (Fig. 3: 5).

A significant part of the pieces being fragments, it is difficult to make accurate and well-founded decisions about their morphological features. Each item is unique, with its own kit of details, an elk's image elements and ornamentation techniques. This uniqueness does not allow us to classify the pieces accurately, for example, by the form of their eyes, ears or ornamentation details. We can only express our opinion on certain features.

Seven items with reindeer heads found in burials (Oleniy Ostrov burial ground, 2nd half of the II millennium cal BC) are the most extraordinary elements of the whole collection, which were probably produced and used during a very short time period, and perhaps were made by members of the same group of people (Murashkin & Shumkin 2008). Of these seven rods, there are no fully identical objects, they all differ in details. The only common features are reindeer head silhouettes, the angle between the head and the handle, and the rectangular cross section of the handles (Fig. 3: 3–4).

The elk heads usually have a lot of details, which differ in their number and set. The pieces from the Urals region are very similar in the manner of depicting eyes, noses, mouths and under-mandible hollows (Éding 1940; Bogdanov 1992) (Fig. 3: 2, 8). Two similar techniques of eye depiction are characteristic of two pieces from the Southern Oleniy Ostrov burials (pit-holes made in a protuberance (Fig. 3: 1) and for another two pieces from the Middle Oka River (Chornaya Gora, Volodary (Fig. 3: 5), just pit-holes) (Gurina 1956; Tsvetkova 1969; 1973). The so-called earring exists only in the eastern Baltic items – from Villa (Fig. 2), Šventoji III (Fig. 3: 7), Kretuonas I (Loze 1970; Rimantienė 2005; an oral report by A. Girininkas). The under-mandible hollow could be depicted in two different ways: with narrow carved lines (eastern Baltic – Šventoji III (Fig. 3: 7)), the Malmuta river estuary and with wide carved lines (Urals region – river Tok burial, Shigir peat bog (2 pieces) (Fig. 3: 2, 8) (Loze 1970). In our opinion, all other features, such as the presence/absence of eyes, ear forms, head proportions, ornamentation, are not closely related to a certain region.

The above-mentioned observations of “big” rods suggest that in various time periods and regions there were slightly different traditions of making antler/bone rods. It is notable that compared to the “big” rods, most of the “small” ones have far fewer similarities in their morphological features. The only exception is seven pieces from Oleniy Ostrov burial ground, mentioned above.



Fig. 3. Carved rods with elk/reindeer heads. 1 Southern Oleniy Ostrov burial ground, 2 Shigir peatbog, 3, 4 Oleniy Ostrov burial ground (burials 16-2 and 19-4), 5 Volodary, 6 Annin Ostrov, 7 Šventoji 3, 8 river Tok burial.

Rods have been found in a huge region of the northern Eurasian forest zone (Fig. 1). The “small” rods spread only in the northern and western parts of Europe. The “big” ones, however, spread over the whole central European Plain and middle Urals with the exception of northern regions.

Pieces from both groups belong to various epochs. Late Mesolithic rods were found in Karelia and the Moscow district; Neolithic – in eastern Baltic, Eneolithic – in eastern Baltic, the Vologda district, central Russia and probably middle Urals; Early Metal Age finds – in the Murmansk district.

Twelve pieces were found in burials (Oleniy Ostrov burial ground at the Barents seashore, Southern Oleniy Ostrov burial ground (Onega Lake)), Zvejnieki, river Tok burial) (Gurina 1956; Zagorskis 1987; Bogdanov 1992; Murashkin & Shumkin 2008). Eleven of them were located in the burials of mature or old men, and only one – № 16-2 from Oleniy Ostrov – in the burial of a sixty-year-old woman (Fig. 3: 3). Only one rod was usually placed in a grave, but once there were three – in burial № 19-4 from the same burial ground.

Nina Gurina, an outstanding Russian researcher, noted that the handles of two big antler rods from the Southern Oleniy Ostrov burial ground had been polished as a result of a long period of handling. The position of some rods in the graves – near and in parallel to the right elbow bone in the Onego Lake burials and near the right hand in the Oleniy Ostrov burials – also points out the direct use of these items as hand-held (Gurina 1956, 215; Kol'skaya). No doubt, rods with the elk/reindeer heads were precious objects, and used for many years.

The rest of the pieces have been found in the cultural layers of the sites, most are fragments. Maybe they had been deliberately destroyed for some particular reasons. As some researchers noted, rods with elk's heads had belonged to the persons in power – probably shamans or chiefs (Gurina 1956, 242; Stolyar 1983, 157), but in our opinion, the significance of such finds and comparatively abundant material of the Oleniy Ostrov burial ground prove that these carved rods could have been linked with any man, who reached maturity and began possessing certain rights and responsibilities, including those in the sacred sphere. It seems that if these rods had been connected only with shamans or chiefs, the number of known archaeological finds should be far closer to zero, than to forty.

In earlier studies, all sculptural rod heads were assumed to depict a female species, because they had no antlers (Oshibkina et al. 1992). Another point of view was proposed by Gurina, who assumed that they depicted a male species in winter time (Gurina 1956, 215). This interpretation seems more correct, because the rod fragments from the Annin Ostrov site have antler stubs (Fig. 3: 6). As to the rods with reindeer heads from the Barents Sea, four of them have antlers and three – do not (Fig. 3: 3–4). Both male elks and reindeers drop their antlers in wintertime, more or less at the same time. Thus, the presence of reindeer antlers is still hard to explain. Probably, the rods with reindeer heads made in the northernmost areas in the Early Metal Age, demonstrate the decline of the tradition.

The images of rods with elk heads exist in most large north European rock art monuments, numbering no less than 1000 depicted figures in each (Fig. 1). There are more than thirty rods in Alta, more than twenty in Vingen and Nämforsen (Norway), four in Kanozero (Murmansk district), and two in Zalavruga (Karelia).

The earliest rod depictions with elk heads (Vingen) are dated to the Late Mesolithic. The latest belong to the final Neolithic or Eneolithic (Zalavruga). In the Bronze Age they were missing.

The depicted rods can be divided into two groups, depending on the joints of the animals' heads with the rods. Group A depictions have a right angle between the head and the rod, group B includes the items with a rounded joint.

Group B prevails in the Alta depictions, those of group A are almost absent. In the Nämforsen depictions group A dominates. In the Vingen and Kanozero depictions of both groups are equally represented. These differences might appear not only due to certain peculiarities of a petroglyphic style, but also probably due to a regional difference in the forms of real rods with an elk head.

All depictions can be divided into three groups according to the form of the animal's head. The sickle-like heads are known only in Vingen (Hallström 1938); the real rods with an elk head of this type are not known. The second group consists of "usual" depictions of rods with an elk head. The depictions of the third group have a thickening on the nose. Such thickenings have never been observed on other elk/reindeer figures in rock art, including the heads on the boat noses. Due to the thickenings, the depictions were interpreted as axe-rods (Kolpakov 2007, 170). Such depictions are also known in Nämforsen, Kanozero and Zalavruga. In Alta and Vingen they are extremely rare. Among bone rods there are no pieces with the thickening on the nose. Nevertheless, as this motive is so widely spread in rock art, it seems that a certain real object has caused it. Probably, it was a kind of cover on the elk's nose, made of an organic material.

All rock art rod depictions have no antlers. On the other hand, many of Alta reindeer figures, which prevail in hunting scenes, do have antlers (Helskog 1988). In fact, both male and female reindeer species have antlers, although it is still not clear whether the carved rods of the Oleniy Ostrov burial ground represent reindeer males or females. Anyway, the absence of antlers on rod depictions might have a symbolic sense.

All rock art anthropomorphic images holding rods with an elk head are presumably males. It fully correlates with the location of real rods in burials. Sometimes such images have a sharpened head, untypical of other anthropomorphic images, for example, in hunting scenes. Sometimes the images with rods have extremely big phalluses (Fig. 5: 5). These particular features demonstrate not only the mythical nature of these male images, but also their special status in the range of other rock art mythical persons.

The way of locating a depicted rod near the body of a male image is of great interest for making hypotheses for the rod's symbolic meaning. It is well known that a human being, a man, was interpreted in ancient myths as a mirror of the Universe (Makovskij 1996, 386). Since the Eneolithic and Bronze Age a man was sometimes a mythological equivalent to the World Tree, Pole, Crook, etc. (Toporov 1997, 398).

In Fennoscandian rock art, the tools depicted in the hands of human beings were examined as to their location relative to the human body and compared with

the position of rods with elk heads (Fig. 4). The spear held in hand can be located in many different ways: vertically, horizontally, anted; at arm level, head level or above head level (Fig. 4: 1–5). The bow is located vertically at chest level (Fig. 4: 6–10). The ski sticks are parallel to the human body, with their lower end located near the feet (Fig. 4: 11–14). Thus, all tools were shown in the same positions which existed in reality.

The position of the depicted rods does not allow to draw a conclusion about their functional use as crooks – as some researchers do – resting on the ground. There are two variants of rod positions: when it is held horizontally above man's head (Fig. 4: 18–19) and when it is held in one hand (right?) vertically, so that the elk's head is placed not lower than the man's head and the handle end – not lower than his waist (Fig. 4: 15–17). In the pictures, human characters seem to raise their rods or wave it. Such rod positions indicate a high semiotic status of the rod with elk heads. A certain analogy can be drawn to the art objects made not so long ago, where the characters hold a scepter or a flag. Several carved rods with an elk head from burials were also located above the waist level.

Eight variants of rod depiction compositions are considered (Fig. 5). About one-third of images represent a single rod – without any obvious connections with other objects (Fig. 5: 1). Compositions of two or three rods put together are

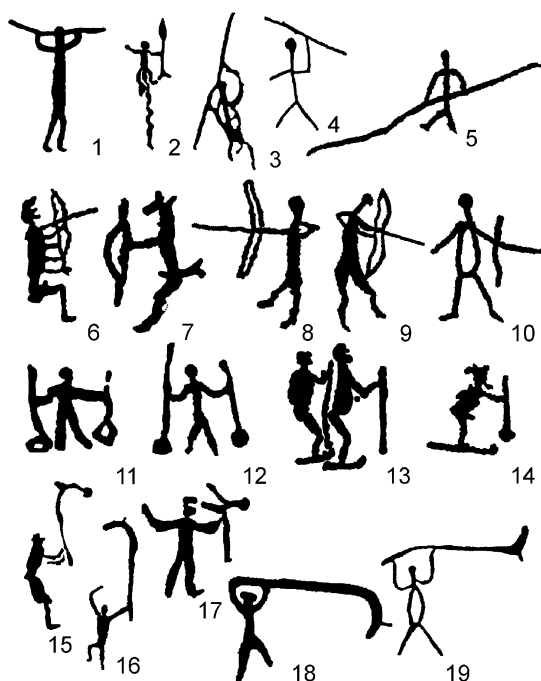


Fig. 4. The position of tools and rods with elk's heads near the human body. 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 16, 18, 19 Alta, 2, 15 Kanozero, 6, 7, 13, 14 White Sea, 11, 12, 17 Nämforsen.

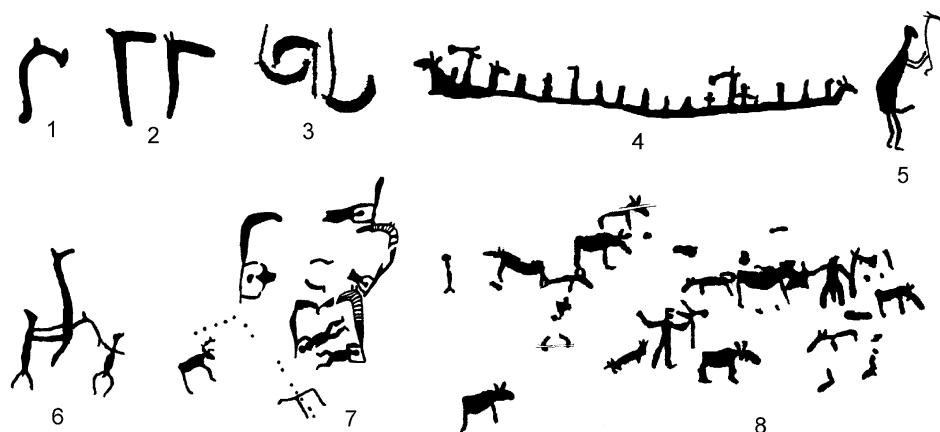


Fig. 5. Variants of rod depiction compositions. 1, 5 Kanozero (Kolpakov 2007), 2, 7 Kåfjord (Alta), 3 Vingen (Hallström 1938), 4, 8 Nämforsen (Hallström 1960), 6 Alta (Helskog 1988).

rare (Fig. 5: 2–3). The rest of images are compositions where a man is holding a rod (four variants) (Fig. 5: 5–8). Sometimes men are placed in a boat (Fig. 5: 4).

The Alta and Nämforsen Neolithic petroglyphs feature many similarities between composition variants. Less similar are composition variants of Alta and Kanozero. In Vingen human images with rods are absent, probably because of their earlier date, i.e. Mesolithic.

In various compositions, we can see that several rods with elk heads could be used simultaneously. In Alta there exists an isolated composition, where five human characters are holding rods (Fig. 5: 7). In Nämforsen there are three boats with passengers (Hallström 1960) numbered from 8 to 18, mostly depicted as small vertical poles (Fig. 5: 4). From two to four of these passengers are holding rods. Thus, there is one rod-holder against approximately four other passengers. In primitive cultures, the image of boat sometimes coincides with the “community” notion (Revunenkov 1974). Thus, in mythical situations, the presence of several rods in one comparatively small community was taken for granted by the petroglyph creators. This fact may confirm that in a real community there were also several men who possessed rods with an elk head.

A number of compositions allow us to reconstruct the nature of the rod functions carried out by mythical heroes. In Kanozero a human character directs his rod to the group including a man with an oar (or a spear?) and a woman with a child (Fig. 6: 1). The scene could probably symbolize the idea of rebirth or fertility. In another Kanozero composition, a humpbacked human character with the zoomorphic head and a big phallus holds a rod (Fig. 5: 5). That image is very similar to another famous one, called “The Belomorsky Bes”, and to many others. All of them seemed to symbolize the general idea of reproduction (Okladnikova 1995, 156; Zhul’nikov 2006, 132).



Fig. 6. The functional use of rods in petroglyphs. 1 Kanozero, 2 Kåfjord (Alta), 3, 4 Alta (Helskog 1988).

In the Alta composition there is a vertical row of reindeers beside a human character with a rod (Fig. 6: 2). In this case, the position of the reindeers is unusual; in the Alta hunting scenes reindeers are shown in a horizontal row or singly. The reindeers seem to be pouring down as from a “cornucopia”.

In another composition in Alta a human character touches his rod to a reindeer (Fig. 6: 3); it is definitely a scene of magic manipulations.

In a number of petroglyphic groups of Alta and Nämforsen, human characters with rods are depicted in hunting scenes (reindeer or elk hunt), sometimes beside hunters. Having studied these compositions, we can conclude that the symbolic meaning of rods with elk heads was deeply connected with the idea of elk and reindeer reproduction and stability or multiplication of hunting trophies.

In Alta and Zalavruga, one scene is repeated four times: two human characters with rods are standing opposite each other (Fig. 5: 6; Fig. 6: 4). Such repetition is likely to confirm that this particular plot existed in the mythology of different Fennoscandian regions. It is known that the scenes in the primitive art depicting two opposite characters reflect a very archaic mythology motive of both antagonists’ identity (Ermolenko 2005, 93). Though some variants of that composition exist in rock art, its mutual symbolic sense is a binary opposition, a binary symbolic classification. The opposition of the two identical mythical heroes is a metaphor of the ambivalent Universe, created by two deities. In most archaic north Eurasian myths those deities have zoomorphic appearances. Thus, two rods with elk heads in the hands of two characters may represent two zoomorphic deities of the Upper world, which give birth to animals and humans (Okladnikov 1950, 315).

Discussion and summary

Rods with elk heads in the forest zone of northern and eastern Europe and the Urals were basically meant for a particular social group – (mature?) and old men, who had a certain status and sacred authority (power). The use of elk/reindeer antler and bone for rod-making emphasizes the symbolic relationship between this “magic” item and the image of elk or reindeer (Zhul’nikov 2006, 177).

This image was one of the most significant for the ancient peoples of north Eurasia. It had a positive, cosmic, calendar, universal nature. In primitive societies of the Urals and Siberia it was associated with the Sun and the Ursa Major (named Elk), which were the main reference points. The widespread myth of a mysterious elk, chased by a mighty hunter (Okladnikov 1949; Karel'skoe) could be regarded not simply as a hunting myth or a myth of a well-known calendar (spring) celebration, but also as a metaphor of the passing days and the universal life cycle. The comprehension of elk as a synonym of the Universe is reflected in the identification of the Earth as the back of a fantastic elk. Ethnography sources provide tales, where the chased elk turns into a house, dogs and riches (Avrorin & Koz'minskij 1949; Lebedeva 1982; Karel'skoe).

A male elk without antlers could have been a symbol of the cold season of the year (Konakov 1990; Zhul'nikov 2006). In the zones of temperate climate, autumn and winter were universally associated with people's mature and old age. The achievement of a mature age, the transition to a new stage, the probable possession of more power and a rod with the elk head, could be correlated with the notion of elk as a radiant cosmic creature, representing the Universe by itself. It might be that rods with elk heads were used in family or personal rituals, including those asking for prosperity, fertility and game abundance.

The rod depictions in rock art were also partly connected with the reproduction magic. Probably, these images "copy" a magical tool for the Universe creation, symbolize it and maybe the tool of a zoomorphic deity. The rituals which were performed on petroglyph canvas united the whole group, the whole society. Taking into consideration the content of the compositions with rods, the function of rods in rock art and the way of their use by mythical heroes differed from that of real rods.

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Ekaterina Kashina ja Alexandr Zhulnikov

PÕDRAPEAKUJULISED SAUAD: SÜMBOL RITUAALI KONTEKSTIS

Resümee

Põdra ja põhjapõdra pea kujutised figuraalplastikas ning monumentaalkunstis on oluline uurimisobjekt nii Euraasia põhjaosa muinaselanike maailmapildi kui ka mesoliitiliste, neoliitiliste ja varase metalliaja sotsiaalsete struktuuride rekonstrueerimisel. Morfoloogia, leviku, kronoloogia ja arheoloogilise konteksti järgi võib teha järeldusi põdrapeakujuliste sauade semantikast.

Põdrapeakujulised sauad on valmistatud peamiselt põdra-/põhjapõdraluust või -sarvest (28 eksemplari). Erinevalt kivist pisiplastikast ja loomapeakujulistest kirvestest ning kirkadest on selliseid sauasid matmispaikadest korduvalt leitud, mis osutab nende esemete funktsionaalsele erinevusele. Üksteist eksemplari kahe-teistkümnest matmispaikadest leitud sauast pärineb küpses või vanemas eas meeste haudadest. Ülejäänud esemed on leitud asulakohtade kultuurkihist, kusjuures enamik neist on katkised, võimalik, et mingil põhjusel teadlikult hävitatud.

Sarvest ja luust esemed on 10 kuni 47 cm pikkused ning neile on omane 90–120° nurk varre ja selle otsas paikneva põdrapea kujutise vahel. Mõõtude järgi

võib neid jagada kahte rühma: 1) väikesed, pikkus 10–25,3 cm (12 eksemplari) ja 2) suured, pikkus 40–49 cm (16 eksemplari). Mõne luust ja sarvest saua varrel esineb poleeringut, mis osutab nende varretamisele. Morfoloogia järgi võib oletada territoriaalseid ja kronoloogilisi erijooni.

Kaljukunstis esineb pödrapeasauade kujutisi enamikus Põhja-Euraasia suuremates petroglüüfide rühmades, kokku üle 1000 figuuri: Altas enam kui 30, Vingenis ja Nämforsenis enam kui 20, Kanozeros 4 ning Zalavrugas 2 kujutist. Vanima pödrapeasaua kujutis pärineb hilismesoliitikumist (Vingen) ja noorim neoliitikumi lõpust või eneoliitikumist (Zalavrug). Põhja-Euraasia pronksiaegses kaljukunstis pödrapeasauasid ei esine.

Kõik petroglüüfidel kujutatud antropomorfsed saua valdajad olid ilmselt mehed. Kaljudel kujutatud antropomorfsed isikud viibutavad saua, hoiavad seda pea kohal või pea kõrgusel. Selline asend osutab eseme kõrgele semiootilisele staatusele. Haudades paiknevad pödrapeakujulised sauad maeti võõst kõrgemale, mis samuti on tõlgendatav eseme kõrge staatuseks.

Reas petroglüüfide kompositsioonides on kujutatud enam kui ühe saua samaaegset kasutamist. Nii on muinasnimene lubanud vähemalt müütilistes situatsioonides suhteliselt väikestes inimkogukondades kasutada üheaegselt mitut saua. Selles seoses võib oletada, et reaalses inimkollektiivis oli mitu pödrapeasaua omavat meest. Sama kinnitab kaude ka pödrapeasauade arvukus, seda vaatamata tõsiasi, et need on valmistatud kergesti hävinevast orgaanilisest materjalist. On vähe tõenäoline, et kõik sauade valdajad oleksid olnud pealikud või šamaanid. Samas on aga selge, et sauade omanikud olid küpses või vanemas eas mehed, kellel oli õigus teatud rituaalseteks tegevusteks.

Materjal, millest on pödrapeasauad valmistatud, rõhutab selgelt sidet nende maagiliste esemete ja pödra/põhja-pödra kujutiste vahel. Pödra/põhja-pödra kujutis oli aga kahtlemata Põhja-Euraasia metsavööndi elanikele tähenduslik, see oli kosmiline, kalendaarne ja oikumeeniline sümbol. Arheoloogilise konteksti ja samuti etnograafia ning mütoloogia andmete alusel oletatakse, et pödrapeasauad võisid olla kasutusel kitsamates pere- või isikliku laadi rituaalides, sealhulgas reproduktiivse jõu, edu, loomade ja kogu elava paljunemise ning jahihõõne palumiseks.

Arvestades petroglüüfpühamutes toimunud rituaalide kollektiivset iseloomu ja kompositsioone, milles on kujutatud pödrapeasauasid, võib oletada, et kaljujoonisauade funktsioon ning nende kasutamise iseloom müütiliste persoonide poolt erines mõnevõrra sellest, kuidas kasutati figuraalskulptuurseid sauasid. Sauade kujutised kaljukunstis on ennekõike loomisprotsessis kasutatud esemete replikatsioonid, maagilised esemed, kehastades endas ilmaruumi sümboolikat või isegi zoomorfset jumalikkuse substituti.

Tervikuna võib pödra või põhja-pödra pea kujuliste figuraalsete esemete olemasolu Uurali piirkonna ja Põhja- ning Ida-Euroopa asukate materiaalses kultuuris vaadelda kui tunnistust erilist staatust ja vastavalt mitmeid sakraalseid õigusi omavate vanemate meeste sotsiaalse grupi eristumisest esiajaloolistes kogukondades.