

ENEOLITHIC ANTHROPOMORPHIC PICTURES FROM THE KONDA AND MÁLAYA SOSVA RIVERS

Anthropomorphic pictures on ceramics belonging to the ancient cultures of Western Siberia are not a frequent phenomenon. This explains a certain interest in such materials for researchers, as they may be the key to understanding the spiritual life of these ancient communities.

The scientific material available from the Konda and Málaya Sosva rivers in north-west Siberia is of great interest not only for its iconographic peculiarities, for side by side with other pictures, both anthropomorphic and zoomorphic, they form several independent and at the same time closely connected topics¹. I share the opinion of those researchers who emphasize the mythological character of the primitive consciousness and regard these topics as mythological narratives in graphic form². The most interpretative part of the research, however, is limited by the possibilities offered by the sources themselves and cannot extend as far as the subjects represented. It is accepted that some conclusions may arouse objections, and consequently the author will be very grateful for constructive criticism.

The survey of the sources should be started with the material revealed by research near the Volvoncha I settlement (Konda). Here three anthropomorphic pictures have been found, one located on the outer zone of a pot (Table 1) and the others on the inside surface of a second pot. They are viewed full-face and are made by imprints of a comb imprint pattern in a contour-plane manner employing the X-ray or skeleton style.

The figure of one man has a rhombic head without any detailing of features (Table 2;1), the latter being stylized as a single vertical line located in the centre of the head. The parabolic body is filled up with "ribs" going down the "spinal column". The shoulders are straight and broad. The preserved left forearm is raised and slightly bent at the elbow, and three fingers are indicated on the hand. The legs are disproportionately short relative to the body and are bent, with the toes spread. Muscles are shown jutting out on the shins. Some intrinsic tension is achieved in this picture, which may seem static at first sight, by the peculiar arrangement of the extremities and the emphasis on the strength of the legs.

The two other figures lack their heads and the upper parts of their bodies, and only fragments of their extremities have been preserved (Table 2;4-5). The dissimilarities manifest themselves in the configuration of the bodies (mainly trapeziform rather than parabolic), in the contour picture of the hips and in the forearm in one case. At the same time these two are not mutually identical. They differ in the manner of reproduction of the "spinal column" and in the form of the hips.

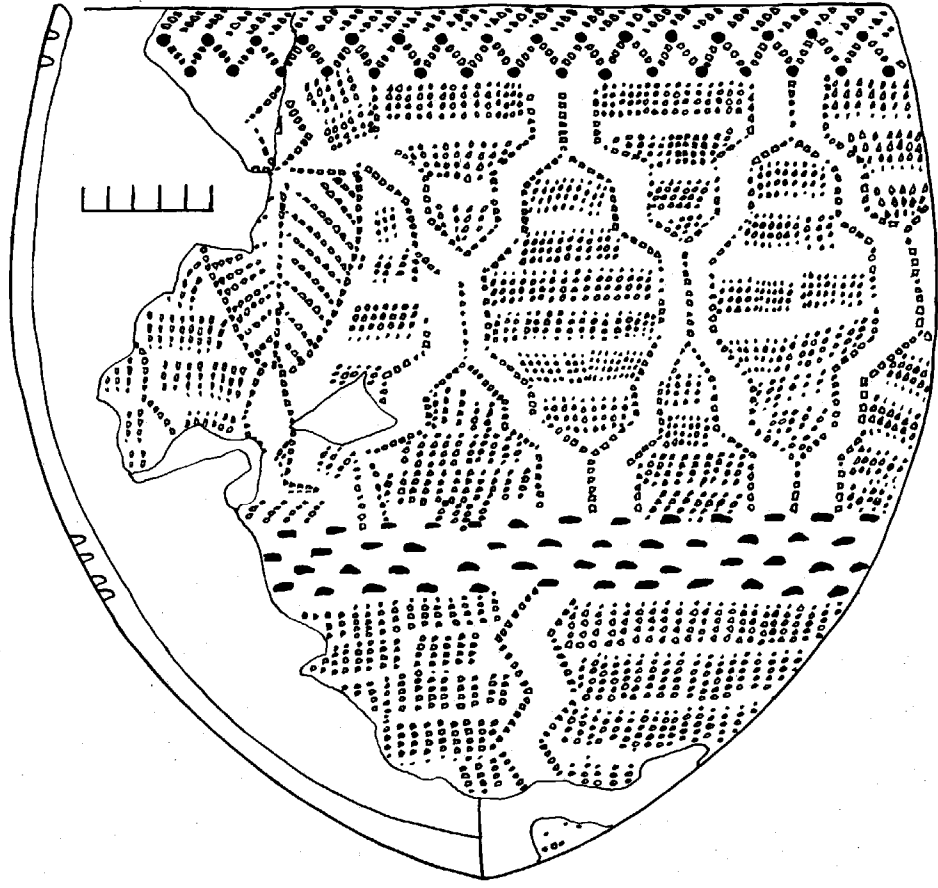


Table 1. The Volvoncha I settlement. The vessel with an anthropomorphic figure.

The fourth anthropomorphic picture has been exposed near the Stary Khangokurt II settlement (Málaya Sosva). It is located on the outer surface of a vessel and differs from those mentioned above only in details. Certain dissimilarities manifest themselves in a three-cornered shape of the head, the features, the unnaturally long neck and the reversed order of the "ribs" (Table 2;2). The left arm is dropped smoothly alongside the body and the forearm is emphasized. In total, all the pictures are made in the same style and form a group with a "collective individuality". In other words the individual features are fixed and the manner or style of the rendering is similar.

To prove that dissimilarities in the reproduction of some pictures are apt to demonstrate a plurality of anthropomorphic representations (which is true at least for the material discovered near the Volvoncha I settlement), it is necessary to turn to another finding which is still underestimated, namely the famous Shigir idol

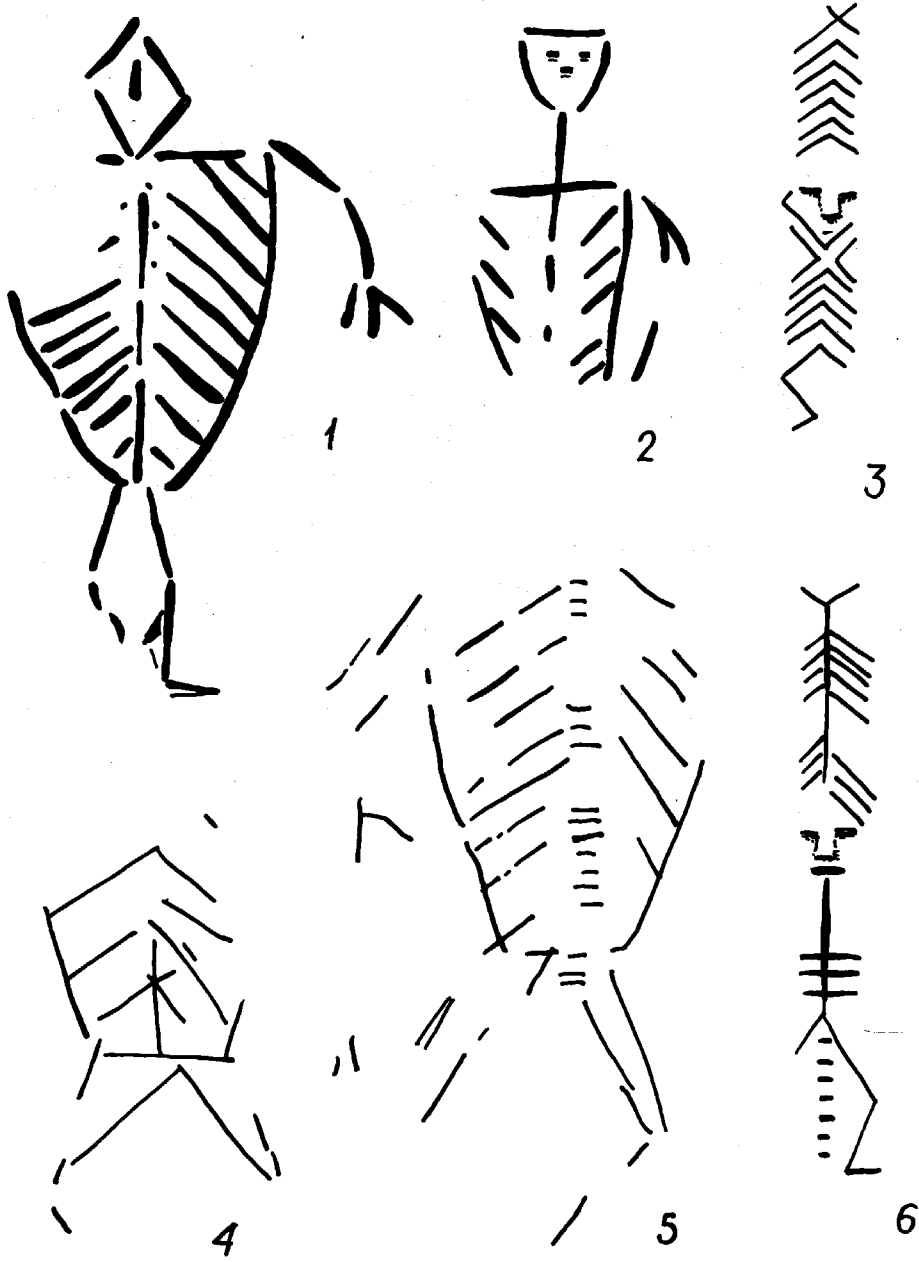


Table 2. The anthropomorphic figures on vessels (1-2, 4-5)
 1, 4, 5 - Volvoncha I,
 2 - Stary Khangokurt II
 and the Shigir idol (3, 6)

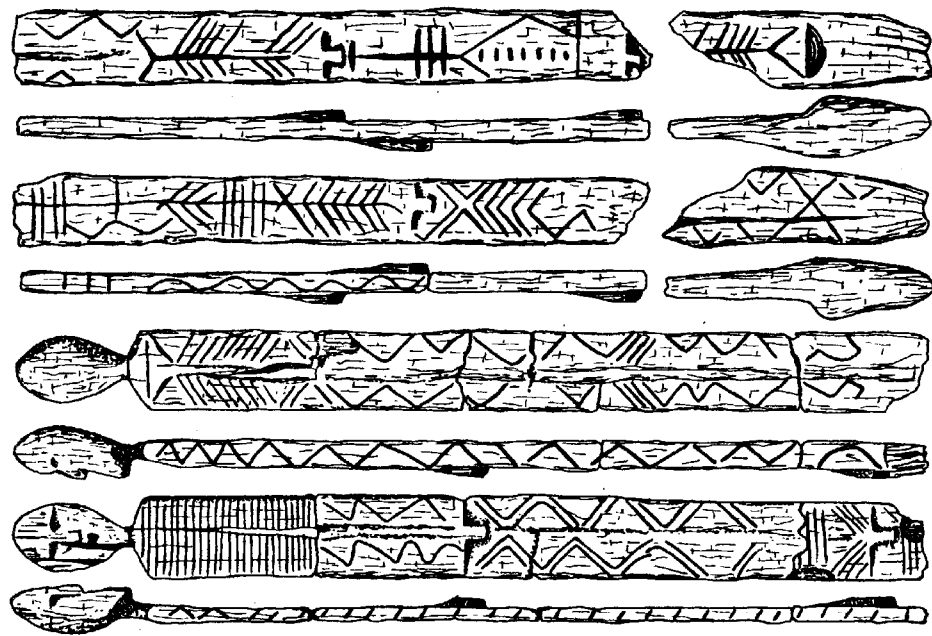


Table 3. The Shigir idol. Reconstruction by V.Y. Tolmachev.

discovered on peat bog of the same name in the Urals (Table 3). A group of anthropomorphic figures (not only masks) having a full likeness with the pictures on the ceramics were found after careful study of their manner of reproduction. This especially concerns the two Shigir pictures located on the front and back surfaces approximately at the same level from the basis. They have sharpened crowns, deepened eye-sockets, jutting out noses, skeletons and bent knees (Table 2;3,6). The sharp chin and "fir-shaped" filling of the body are emphasized in the left-hand picture, while the figure on the reverse side of the idol has no chin but a wide, slightly open mouth on the lower part of its face (Table 2;3). Three pairs of ribs are located perpendicularly, and there are oval dots between the legs. The broad shoulders, the contour outline of the hips and the forearms characteristic of the anthropomorphic figures from the Volvoncha I settlement demonstrate the strength of the individuals, presumably male. Our attention is also drawn in this connection to another manner of rendering on the back of the Shigir idol, which can be interpreted as female due to the dots between the legs (Table 2;6). Incidentally, an analogous method of marking the sex of figures is characteristic of the palaeolithic pictures in the Ignariiev cave in the Southern Urals³.

The dissimilarities between the pictures of the same style on the idol and on the ceramics seem to point to a necessity to show a variety of images rather than the result of the desire of the ancient artists to depict a single image in various ways. It

may be assumed that there was some hierarchy in this, as is confirmed by the arrangement of figures on the idol.

It can be stated that the eneolithic ceramics of the Volvoncha I settlement and the Stary Khangokurt II settlement and the Shigir idol represent an entire group of characters rendered in the same manner. Taking in to account their individual features, we may assume that each character corresponds to a certain mythical hero. The chronological gap between the archaeological material and data gathered by ethnographers virtually rules out the personification of creatures.

Meanwhile the mythological groups under discussion reflect one of the initial steps in the idea of independent images. Later some transformation of such ideas probably took place in the context of intensified relations between communities caused by the increasing military factor. According to M.I. Steblin-Kamensky⁴, mythological heroes were products of fantasy and gradually gave way to ideal epic heroes having concrete prototypes. The Ob-Ugrian epos studied by S.K. Patkanov at the 19th century should be recalled in this connection⁵. The principal characters in this are hero princes, and all the plots are devoted to describing their way of life and adventures. The most interesting fact, however, is that the Ostyak's heroes possess certain qualities characteristic of the eneolithic period and demonstrate the preservation of mythological heroes in the epos. We mean here such signs as the emphasized transparency of the body, showing the beauty of body and soul epitomized by the heroes "when the bones", and likewise the strength of the joints as a symbol of the heroes' strength.

A blending of the features of mythological and epic heroes in a single image, or the imposition of later ideas on archaic ones, can be encountered in the material devoted to the fine art of the Middle Ages and may lead researchers into error. V.N. Chernetsov, for example, called the pictures on the bronze plate from Beryosov hybrids with human and ursine features⁶. More and more archaeologists are nowadays coming to regard them purely as representing heroes⁷.

Thus it can be stated that the reproduction of anthropomorphic images took place in north-western Siberia during the eneolithic period at least. The invariability of the economic structure of the hunters and fishermen in their surroundings must have promoted the preservation of their artistic traditions over thousands of years, and the spread of the above patterns in space and time can probably be explained by the existence of a great historical and cultural community east of the Urals.

References

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V.V. Evsyukov, *Mifologiya kitaiskovo neolita.* (Novosibirsk 1988) s. 32.
- ³ V. Petrin, V. Schirokov, *Die Ignatievka-Höhle (Ural) jungpaläolithisch Höhlenbilder und einige Aspekte ihrer Interpretation.* Jahrbuch Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseum. 28 Jahrgang. Mainz (1991) S. 17–31. Abb. 6.
- ⁴ M.I. Steblin-Karenskii, *Mif.* (Moscow 1976) s. 75.
- ⁵ S. Paikanov, *Die Irtysch-Ostjaken und ihre Volksposie.* (St. Petersburg 1897).
- ⁶ V.N. Chernetsov, *Nizhnee Pribye v I tsysyatssetii n.e.* // MIA. 1956. N 58. Table XXII, 2.
- ⁷ I.N. Gemuev, A.M. Sagalaev, A.I. Solovjev, *Legendy i byli taezhnovo kraya.* (Novosibirsk 1989) s. 86–89.

Tiivistelmä

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Eneoliittisen kauden antropomorfiset kuvat Konda- ja Maalaja- jokien alueelta

Kirjoittaja käsittelee ihmishahmoisten kuvien ilmenemistä keramiikassa läntisen Siperian ja erityisesti luoteis-Siperiassa sijaitsevien Konda- ja Sosva Maalaja- jokien alueilla.

Alueiden löydöillä on paitsi arkeologista esinearvoa myös suuri merkitys primitiivisen sielunelämän ja myyttisten käsitysten kuvaajana. Pitkällä aikavälillä syntynyt materiaali täydentyy myös saman alueen eläinaiheisia kuvia käsittävstä löytöaineistosta.

Elinkeinoelämän stabiili luonne menneinä aikoina vaikutti traditioiden säilymiseen muuttumattomina kulttitaiteessa. Mytologisten hahmojen ja eppisten sankarihahmojen piirteiden yhdistely viitteellisissä kuvissa saattaa olla myös erinäisissä tapauksissa harhaanjohtavaa sen ollessa luonteenomaista myös keskiajalta peräisin olevalle materiaalille.