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Monumental Wooden Statues from the Ust-Voikary Fortified Settlement, Northwestern Siberia: A Multidisciplinary Analysis

This article presents the results of a comprehensive study of two unusual large wooden statues with anthropomorphic faces. They were excavated from the Ust-Voikary stratified site, in the southwestern Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug. The site dwellers were native Siberians (Ugro-Samoyeds), who lived there from the Middle Ages to the recent centuries. This is one of the few sites in the region with frozen habitation deposits. The statues are unique in terms of attribution, size, preservation, and integrity of archaeological context. They were part of dwellings, being situated in the foundations of the walls near the entrance. Their faces are modeled in bas-relief. Iconographically, they conform to the Ob Ugrian sculptural tradition. The analysis of the architectural context of the location of the statues and certain details suggests a secondary use. Initially, they might have belonged to the frame supporting the roof. The statues are made of Siberian larch (Larix sibirica Ledeb.). The dendrochronological analysis has allowed us to estimate the date when the trees were felled—the late 17th century. A retrospective analysis of data on the ritual art of the northern Khanty and Mansi suggests an interpretation of the Voikary statues in comparing them with wooden sculptures representing menkvs—forest spirits. Thus, their ritual role was mostly to protect the home.

Keywords: *Ust-Voikary fortified settlement, northwestern Siberia, northern Khanty, dendrochronology, anthropomorphic sculpture.*

Introduction

The Ust-Voikary fortified settlement appeared on the archaeological map of the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug relatively recently, after survey works in Shuryshkarsky District in 1993 (Kosinskaya, Fedorova, 1994: 58–59). In 2003–2008, the site was studied by a team from the Institute of History and Archaeology of the Ural Branch of the RAS and the Shemanovsky Museum-Exhibition Complex, under the leadership of A.G. Brusnitsyna and N.V. Fedorova (Brusnitsyna, 2003; Fedorova, 2006). The studies continued in 2012–2016 by a team from the IAET SB RAS under the leadership of A.V. Novikov (Novikov, Garkusha, 2017). In the course of works, it has been established from the dendrochronological data (Gurskaya, 2008) that the site was a settlement, which developed from the turn of the 13th–14th centuries until the 19th century.

The history of the Voikary settlement is associated with the indigenous population living in the north of the Lower Ob region. The question of the ethnic composition of the settlement inhabitants remains open. In the context

of the ethnic history of the region, the population can be tentatively described as Ugrian-Samoyed, with some presence of a Komi-Zyryanka component. Active contacts between the representatives of these ethnic communities in the Middle Ages – Modern Period resulted in the emergence of the northern group of the Khanty. One of its divisions settled in the valley of the Voikar River (Martynova, 1998: 82; 2005; Perevalova, 2004: 231–233). The site under discussion is located near the mouth of this left tributary of the Malaya Ob River.

Monumental statues: Context, description, interpretation

An unusual development during the study of the buildings was the discovery of two massive anthropomorphic sculptures. The presence of permafrost in the cultural layers of the site ensured unique preservation of the artifacts. The sizes and iconography of the statues were similar. The context of their location in the structure of the building was also the same: they were found in the foundations of the front walls. The buildings were of two types of structures: frame-and-post and ground log buildings. The presence of hearths makes it possible to interpret them as residential buildings.

Each artifact was made of a log hewn on two opposite long sides; the two remaining sides retained their natural roundness. In the Russian-language archaeological literature (probably since the publication of the study by S.A. Semenov on woodworking in the ancient Altai (1956: 206–207)), calling timber processed in this way *plakha* (‘wood slab’) has become widespread. However, it is doubtful that such a definition should be considered successful or as correctly describing this type of timber. In fact, *plakha* is a half log, split in the longitudinal direction (Pluzhnikov, 1995: 101), and this term is used by researchers of Russian wooden architecture in that sense (Zinina, 2019: 50; Popov, 2019: 166; and others). In carpentry, a log hewn on two sides is usually called “double-rounded” or a “double rounded log”, or else “a round-round log”, in Russian *polubrus* or *lafet*. In the traditional vocabulary of Russian wooden construction, the word *lezhen* could be used to designate this type of building material (Syshchikov, 2006: 218). In the future, when describing the objects under consideration, the term “double-rounded log” (*polubrus*) will be used (Mylnikov, 2008: 37).

The first artifact was made of a log with a diameter of about 20 cm (Fig. 1, *1*). Its length was 2.72 m; the width in between the hewn surfaces was 10 cm. In its archaeological context, it was oriented to the east.

A stylized representation of a human face in bas-relief was made on one of the flat surfaces covering its entire width. The length of the area with the face was 42 cm. The protruding elements of the image, which rendered the nose and eyes, formed a T-shaped figure. The eyebrows and mouth were marked by indentations (Fig. 1, *2*). The end of the double-rounded log above the face had a rectangular notch 10.0–10.5 cm deep and 10.5–11.0 cm wide. Due to this design, the bas-relief looked like the image of a human face crowned with “horns”. At a distance of 60–61 cm from the top of the “horns”, under the face, there were two longitudinal narrow and shallow grooves 27 and 34 cm long; the distance between them was 7 cm. This was probably the method used for indicating the arms.

The reverse side of the double-rounded log was flat and did not have any images. The far end was hewn onto a wedge. A longitudinal narrow groove triangular in cross-section, about 33 cm long (Fig. 1, *3*), went up from this end on one of side surfaces. Another similar groove about 22 cm long was also located there,

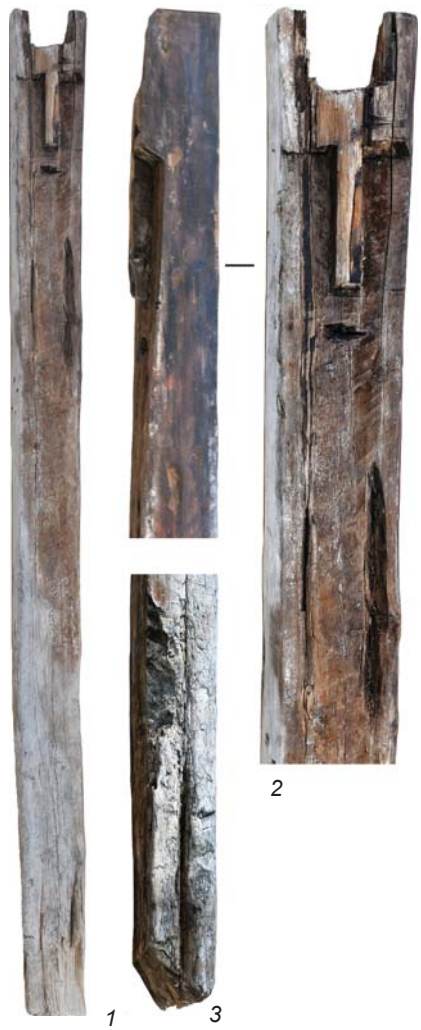

Fig. 1. Statue 1.
1 – general view; *2* – image of the face; *3* – section of the sculpture with the groove.

Fig. 2. Position of statue 1 after discovery (remains of logs from a late cribwork structure can be seen in the background).

Fig. 3. Location of the area with the face (statue 1) relative to the corridor (top view).

80 cm from the end. In the archaeological context, this surface of the object was oriented upwards. Usually, grooves of this configuration were made for attaching parts using the *zaplot* wall assembling technique (when horizontal rows of beams or planks were held together using grooves in vertically set posts). A cut went directly through the groove. This context suggests that it was produced after the groove was made. A group of four shallow, rectangular holes with sides of 1.0–1.2 cm was located 105 cm from this end on the same surface. A traced, closed wavy line was visible at a distance of about 45 cm from the holes, closer to the face. A pair of similar recesses was located across the long axis on the opposite side surface, 67 cm from the same end; the distance between them was 3.3 cm.

This double-rounded log was found in building 7/1*, which had a frame-and-post structure. The artifact was found at an angle, so originally it was placed on a narrow, untreated surface (Fig. 2). The statue was aligned with the doorway and the corridor adjacent to it from the outside (Fig. 3). With this placement, the face was turned outward.

Judging by its context, the double-rounded log was a part of a lower horizontal row of several logs placed end-to-end. The remains of vertically installed stakes were found on both sides of the row. It may be assumed that the stakes were the remains of poles used for

*Hereafter, the numbering of buildings corresponds to the one used during the works of 2012–2016.

restraining the movement of the horizontal parts of the wall, and were tightly placed on both sides of the wall. One of the ways to fasten the vertical parts together could have been relatively short wooden bars with holes (retainers) through which symmetrically located poles were passed. This method is known from buildings of the ethnographic period in northwestern Siberia, and was reconstructed from the evidence of the Nadym fortified settlement (Mitina, 2010: 41–42; Kardash, 2009: 54–55). Another possible interpretation of the presence of these poles is that they remained from posts that immobilized the building material that was laid one on top of the other (the so-called method of building walls "*v pryaslo*" (Mylnikov, 2008: 21)). Thus, in addition to its obvious ritual purpose, the double-rounded log with the representation was directly associated with the structure of the building.

A log with noticeable tapering (gradual natural change in its cross-section) was used for the second artifact. Over the length of 2.42 m of the double-rounded log, the diameter of the original log went from 19 to 15 cm (Fig. 4, *1*). The anthropomorphic representation was placed at the end of the log base. In the archaeological context, it was oriented to the south.

The bas-relief image of the face was located on one of the flat surfaces across the entire width. The length of the section with the bas-relief was 26 cm. The eyes, nose, and eyebrows were shown in a highly stylized manner similar to the image of the first face. The mouth was not marked (Fig. 4, *2*).

An unhewn section 8 cm long was left on the surface opposite the image, directly at the end of the artifact. In side view, it is perceived as the back of anthropomorph's head. A small cup-shaped depression with sloping walls on both sides, corresponding to the flat surfaces, was made in the end. The height of the wall on the side of the bas-relief is 4.0–4.5 cm less than on the opposite wall (Fig. 4, *2*; Fig. 5). The opposite end was hewn onto a wedge. A longitudinal groove about 33 cm long, similar in configuration to those observed on the first statue, was made at a distance of about 80 cm on one of the untreated surfaces (see Fig. 4, *3*).

This artifact was found in the process of unearthing the lower layer in the logwork of structure 9A, built on the ruins of a frame-and-post dwelling. The artifact was laid flat, face up, in a prepared longitudinal recess directly under the wall of the logwork. The double-rounded log was located under the middle part of the wall and occupied the area under the doorway (Fig. 6). In this context, the artifact was not a structural element of the dwelling, but its direct connection with the dwelling was quite obvious. Its location suggests that the ritual aspect was the only important factor in placing the statue.

Both items were found in buildings distinguished by their large size as compared to other structures explored

Fig. 4. Statue 2.
1 – general view; *2* – image of the face; *3* – section of the sculpture with the groove.

Fig. 5. View of the end of statue 2.

Fig. 6. Location of statue 2 under the wall of the log house.

at the site. Stratigraphically, they belong to the common structural horizon of one of the later stages in the history of the settlement. A street-based layout of the settlement has been reconstructed for that stage (Shein, Garkusha, Novikov, 2017). Building 7/1 closed the line of the street, while building 9A stood in a row of buildings on one side of the street.

The surfaces of both double-rounded logs were more carefully processed than other items used in ordinary construction. For instance, all the branches were neatly cut off. Noteworthy is the design of the ends where the representations were located. In the first case, there was a relatively deep rectangular notch; in the second case, there was a concave area with rounded bottom. Thus, the presence of a recess is a common feature in the design of both ends. This solution, evoking associations with a face crowned with horns, was not typical for wooden anthropomorphic sculptures of the northern groups of the Khanty and Mansi (Ivanov, 1970: 61–62). To be fair, it should be mentioned that such an image was assigned to only one character—the Ob Old Man, who was one of the key figures in the Ob-Ugric pantheon. His description appears in the writings of the early 18th century, which mentions "small horns on his head" (Novitsky, 1941: 59). However, this description is associated with a more southern group of population living in the Middle Ob region.

Such a design is absent from the described Late Medieval anthropomorphic representations found during the excavations at the Nadym and Polui promontory fortified settlements (Kardash, 2009: 272–274; 2013: 269). These sites with a frozen cultural layer are so far virtually the only representative archaeological source of information on wooden images of the ancient population inhabiting the Lower Ob region. Moreover, according to the existing tradition of wooden sculpture among these peoples, the differences were precisely in the shape of the head. Male representations had pointed heads (imitation of a heroic helmet), while female representations had rounded heads (Gemuev, Sagalaev, 1986: 82; Baulo, 2013: 54).

The presence of such elements on the Voikary sculptures might have been due to utilitarian goals, associated with a different functional purpose of these double-rounded logs than the one observed in this context. Notches in the ends seem logical for objects that were set vertically and were a part of a set of posts supporting the covering structure. The notches would have been intended for safe fastening of the frame supporting the elements of the covering. It is possible that the sculptures were a part of the enclosure around the central room*. Consequently, the context of the statues' location that was observed during the excavations could have been secondary.

This assumption also fully applies to the statue from building 9A. It could have been extracted when dismantling a frame-and-post dwelling found under the logwork. Such a possibility is supported by the tradition of tiered development of buildings in this area. Such a tradition is distinguished by continuity in the boundaries

*Frame-and-post dwellings of large size have been reconstructed as two-partite structures consisting of a central enclosed room and a corridor located along the perimeter. Previously, such a layout was established for a part of the buildings in the Nadym and Polui promontory fortified settlements (Kardash, 2009: 56–57; 2013: 107–108).

of new buildings and by some common basic principles of organizing the internal space. For example, entrance openings and hearths were made in the same places at different levels. Importantly, this principle was also used in changing the structure of the dwelling. A single context for the location of the Voikary sculptures is in line with the continuity in the house-building tradition and the associated ritual activities.

The next argument in favor of the suggested secondary use of the sculptures is presence of grooves on their sides, which were typical for attaching the aligning elements in the *zaplot* wall-making technique. The cut passing through the groove in the first statue makes it impossible to securely fix the double-rounded log in a vertical position exclusively in the *zaplot* technique. This could have been achieved only if the statue was previously dug into the ground, and the groove was at least at the level of the layer in which the statue was placed. The presence of grooves on only one side of the artifacts suggests that they were not a part of the closed contour of a frame structure. It is logical to assume that the sculptures were initially longer. These arguments are certainly indirect, but their totality gives grounds for the hypothesis of the secondary use of the statues.

It may be added that regardless of this assumption, the discovered statues were stationary, were an integral part of the dwellings, and were not moved during seasonal migrations. The stationary position of the sculptures, combined with their monumentality, makes it possible to consider them as one of the variants of "public idols" (Ivanov, 1970: 17), which were revered by large groups of the population.

According to the archaeological evidence, we know of two more monumental images with faces made in the manner similar to the Voikary statues (T-shaped line of superciliary ridges and straight nose). Both sculptures come from the Nadym fortified settlement, from the layers dated to the 17th–first third of the 18th century. Only parts of the objects have become available for research. Judging by the described images, double-rounded logs were the basis for making the Nadym sculptures (Kardash, 2009: 275).

A fragment of the head part of one statue was discovered by a local historian G.M. Dmitriev-Sadovnikov, when he visited the Nadym site in 1916, in one of the largest of the depressions that he saw. Judging by his description, the object was located in the uppermost part of the filling, possibly almost on the surface (Dmitriev-Sadovnikov, 1918: 42). "The shaitan carved in the middle of a split log" had longitudinal grooves on the sides, similar to those that are used to hold horizontal parts in the *zaplot* technique. Based on this feature, O.V. Kardash suggested that the statue could have been a part of the building frame (2009: 56, 275). At the same time, the top of the head part did not have a depression.

Another sculpture was represented by its lower part. The face on this object was made at the base of the statue. Such a placement suggested that it was a fragment of a so-called many-faced sculpture. The statue was set among the posts of the fence that marked the area of one of the residential quarters (Ibid.: 189–190). Thus, another context for placing monumental sculptural images on the territory of settlements has been identified.

Dendrochronological studies

The Voikary artifacts had an excellent degree of preservation and natural surfaces with minimal mechanical damage. This made it possible to use the method of dendrochronology for identifying the time of felling the trees*. Samples for measurements were taken in the form of cores using a manual drill along two radii of the tree trunk.

The species of timber was established from the distinctive features of its anatomical structure. The double-rounded log was obtained from the trunks of the Siberian larch (*Larix sibirica* Ledeb.). Its features, present in the transverse section, included a distinct boundary between annual layers, a pronounced five- to six-angle structure of the early tracheids, and a fairly sharp transition from early wood to late wood (Benkova, Schweingruber, 2004: 72, 73, 77).

The width of the annual rings was measured using a LINTAB-6 semi-automatic unit (with an accuracy of 0.01 mm) connected to a computer with the TSAP specialized software for dendrochronological studies (TSAP-Win Professional version) (Rinn, 2013). Dating of the measured growth series with the width of the annual rings was carried out according to the standard method using a combination of graphical cross-dating and cross-correlation analysis with the TSAP-Win Professional software. The data obtained were verified using the COFECHA software, which is widely applied to assessing the results of cross-dating and quality of dendroscales (Holmes, 1983). For establishing the synchronization degree of the measurement series, the following standard statistical coefficients used in the TSAP software were employed: Gleichläufigkeit (Glk) (Multilingual Glossary…, 1995: 162–163) (corresponds to the synchronicity coefficient (Cx) (Kolchin, Chernykh, 1977: 22)), TV (Student's t-test), TVBP (t-value according to Baillie and Pilcher (1973)), and cross-date index (CDI).

Calendar dating of individual growth series employed a generalized (non-indexed) chronology built on larch samples from the settlement buildings, selected in the course of works in 2012–2016. At this stage, the length

*The dating was conducted by Y.N. Garkusha at the IAET SB RAS.

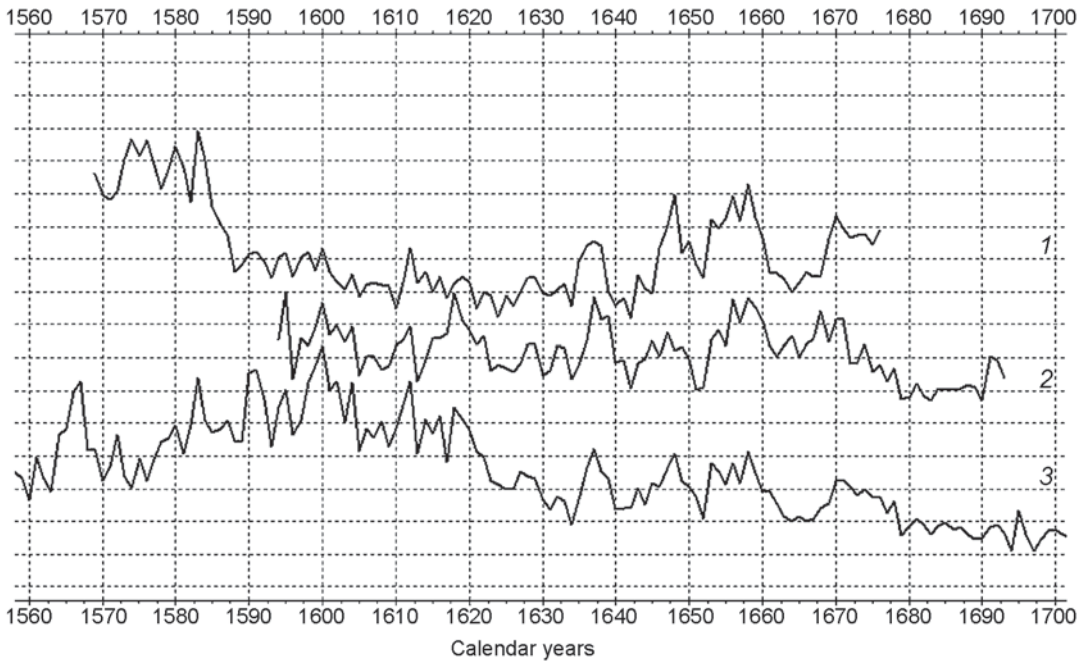

Fig. 7. Cross-dating of samples from statues 1 (*1*) and 2 (*2*), with the generalized calendar Voikary chronology (*3*).

of the chronology was 446 years*. In the absence of a publicly available long-term chronology for living trees from the area of the site location, a long-term absolute chronology "Yamal" for the Siberian larch from the International Tree-Ring Data Bank (ITRDB) was used for calendar referencing of the Voikary dendroscale. It was built on the basis of wood samples originating from the southern part of the Yamal Peninsula, and covered the period from 774 BC to 2005 (Briffa et al., 2013). Previously, this chronology has been already used by M.A. Gurskaya as an additional tool for dating the wood from a fortified settlement located in the northern part of the taiga zone (2006).

According to the results of cross-dating using the "Yamal" chronology, the boundaries of the Voikary dendroscale were established as 1302–1747. The degree of synchronization is characterized by statistically significant values: Glk – 69 %; TV – 11.6; TVBP – 14.7, and CDI – 100. Checking the quality of dating in the COFECHA software confirmed the reliability of the results: the correlation coefficient was 0.55.

Individual chronologies for each item were obtained by averaging the measurement data of the width of annual rings according to the radius. The length of the series was 108 years for the first statue and 100 years for the second statue. There was no pith on the cores obtained.

The experience of dendrochronological studies shows that it is better to work with transverse cuts. One may choose the most convenient radius for measurements, and it is easier to identify dropped-down rings and the last annual (subcrustal) ring. Cores significantly limit these possibilities due to their small width (4–6 mm). Nevertheless, the endings of the rows of annual rings measured in different directions in each item fell on the same year. This makes it possible to reasonably assume that the last measured rings were subcrustal. They were fully formed; therefore, the time of tree felling was at the end of the growing season.

The next step was cross-dating of individual chronologies with the Voikary dendroscale, which had a calendar reference. The best statistical indicators were obtained for the sample from the second item: Glk – 71 %; TV – 7.2; TVBP – 10.8, and CDI – 67. These correspond to the year of 1693.

The statistics obtained for the sample from the first item were generally satisfactory (Glk – 73 %; TVBP – 6.8; CDI – 25), although the TV value was very low (1.7). This data correspond to the year of 1676. The date obtained was additionally confirmed by the results of cross-dating with other dated individual chronologies from the Voikary series. The date of the sample from the first item also came to 1676 in cross-dating with a group of Voikary chronologies. The degree of synchronization was characterized by values of Glk from 70 to 75 %; TV – 6.7–15.2; TVBP – 6.2–7.2, and CDI – 22–27.

The check performed using the COFECHA software has shown that the correlation coefficient for the chronology was 0.54 for the first item and 0.73 for the second item. Therefore, the statistical indicators obtained

*The results of the dendrochronological dating of buildings are being prepared for publication.

were sufficient for reliable dating of both items. Thus, the felling date of the log used for the first statue was autumn 1676–winter 1677; that for the second statue was autumn 1693–winter 1694 (Fig. 7).

The ritual role of wooden monumental statues

According to the dendrochronology data, the functioning time of the building where the first statue was found covered the last third of the 17th century to the late first third of the 18th century. During that period, there were several instances of local repairs. After one of them, the statue became an element of the front wall. Notably, the date of the adjacent part of the wall set was the same as that of the double-rounded log with the face, while the dates of the vertical poles reinforcing the wall corresponded to the first years of the 18th century. Based on the logic of construction, it can be assumed that the statue became a part of the wall structure at that time. The observed scatter in dates is another indirect argument in favor of the hypothesis on the secondary use of the double-rounded log with the face. The dwelling with the second statue was built in the early 18th century, which is also later than the date of felling the wood for making the sculpture. Nevertheless, the connection of the item with the log building is obvious, naturally pointing to the secondary use of the statue.

The suggested changes in placement of sculptures might have resulted in transformation of their ritual function. Despite the common context of location of the statues, there were nuances that affected the visual perception of the artifacts by the inhabitants of the settlement. If in the former case, the image was most likely accessible for viewing by a person who entered the dwelling, in the latter case, the statue was completely hidden.

The first descriptive studies on the indigenous population with a pronounced ethnographic orientation appeared in the 18th century. Information about the sculptural images of "public idols" in the sources of this period is extremely scarce (Ivanov, 1970: 18). The sources do not contain reliable data on the sizes of representations and their placement in space. Nevertheless, judging by the information provided, it is more likely that those sculptures were either mobile or were placed in sanctuaries outside settlements.

Parallels to the Voikary monumental anthropomorphic figures can be suggested using sources no earlier than the 19th century. It is necessary to discuss in some detail their unusually large size, use of statues as construction elements, and the functions of idols.

The first thing worth noting is the unusually large size of the sculptures. In the ritual practice of the northern groups of the Ob Ugrians, such examples were rare. Usually, the length of wooden anthropomorphic statues varied from 60 to 170 cm (see, e.g., (Ivanov, 1970: 29–30; Gemuev, Sagalaev, 1986: 32–34, 80, 85)). An exception were the poles reaching 3 m in length, with anthropomorphic faces near the ends, laid on the ground at the Mansi sacred site of *Khalev-oyki**. The participants of the ritual when stepping over them threw a coin as a sacrificial gift. In addition, at this place, the central attribute was a post with a four-meter pole tied to it, on the top of which a birch bark "hat" was set. A circular belt denoting the neck was carved below it. A bird was depicted on the obverse side of the head rendered in this way (Gemuev, 1990: 83).

If we turn to the mythological beliefs of the Ob Ugrians, large sizes were typical of the forest spirits (*menkvs*). According to the evidence collected by A. Kannisto, these were very large ("three *sazhens*", "so tall that its head touches the sky") and strong spirits. The Mansi believed that *menkvs* lived like people, had wives and children, and slept on bear skins. They were imagined as tall spruce trees or in the guise of tall people with a pointed head, Russian-style bowl hair cut, and no facial hair. The *menkvs* were believed to have had great physical strength; when they approached, the sound of footsteps was heard from afar, trees creaked. branches broke and the wind began to howl (Kannisto, Liimola, 1958: 207, 212–218).

There are several direct parallels to the use of wooden anthropomorphic figures as construction elements in dwellings. The first information belongs to Priest A. Tveritin, who in June 1868 traveled for missionary purposes to the Ostyaks and Samoyeds living along the banks of the Ob River below Obdorsk. When crossing to the left bank to the Ostyak nomad camp of Syanzy, which consisted of seven yurts, he noticed a building on an elevated hill. The priest was told that it was a pagan sanctuary. Tveritin gave a detailed description of it: "The external appearance of the sanctuary shows no difference from an ordinary yurt: the entrance to it is through a narrow open corridor… there is not a single window in the whole building, except for a hole in the top of the roof… from the entrance—right through the doors—an elevated seat for an idol was made similar to Voltaire armchairs; this place was empty at this time—there was no idol; the vault or roof (there is no ceiling) is supported by eight posts; an image of a person is carved on each of them; the place for offering sacrifices is arranged in the middle of the sanctuary; a fire is made there, and as can be seen, two cauldrons are hung. In the winter, honored idols are

*Located on the Posol channel, which flows from the right into the Northern Sosva River, not far from the village of Aneevo in Berezovsky District of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug–Yugra.

brought from different places once every three years… to this temple; the gathering of people is very great at this time; the celebration lasts for over ten days, and the deer sacrifice comprises from 40 to 50 or more animals" (Putevye zhurnaly…, 2002: 105–106).

In 1898–1899, during a trip to the Obdorsk Territory, J. Papai described the design of the walls in the "yurt of spirits": human faces were carved on each of the roof-bearing beams at a height of one meter above the ground, and colorful ribbons and copper rings were fastened around them (see (Karjalainen, 1995: 14; 1996: 68)). K.F. Karjalainen believed that these idols were made for protecting the deity whose image stood against the back wall (1995: 46).

A photograph of the image of a patron spirit in the sacred hut of the Ostyaks in Berezovsky Uyezd of the Tobolsk Governorate was taken by S.I. Rudenko in 1909–1910 (Fig. 8). The representation was carved on a massive wooden post reaching the roof or supporting a horizontal plank in a manner typical of idols with the T-shaped protruding line of eyebrows and nose. Judging by the angle of the picture, this image was most likely turned towards the entrance to the hut. A deep longitudinal groove was made on the side in the area of the idol's neck, into which the end of a transverse log was inserted. Under the groove, a second face with a beard shown by grooves was carved (Na grani mirov…, 2006: 40).

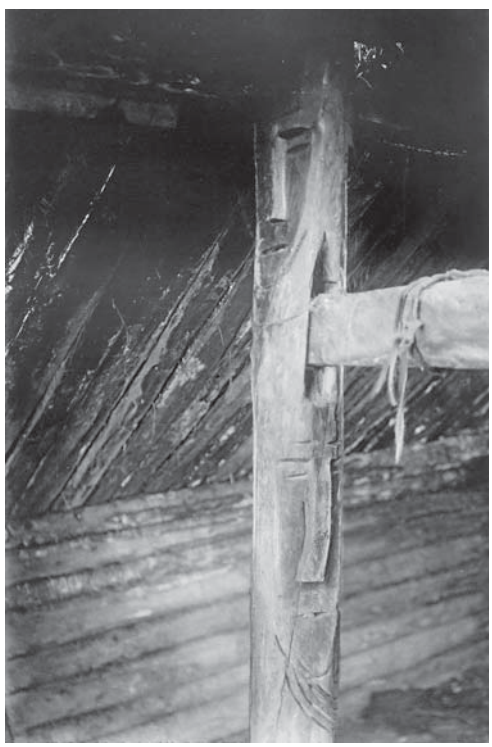

Fig. 8. Image of a patron spirit in the sacred hut of the Ostyaks from Berezovsky Uyezd of the Tobolsk Governorate (after: (Na grani mirov…, 2006: 40)).

Wooden anthropomorphic statues serving as an external part of a structure—a cultic barn or hearth—are also known from scholarly literature. A good example is the sanctuary *Lepla-tit-oyki* (*Lep-tit-oyki*, *Lepla-sunt-oyki*) located on the left bank of the Lepla River, which flows into the Northern Sosva River from the right. In 1935, V.N. Chernetsov described the barns located there: they stood on two supports; the side walls were assembled into angled vertical posts with a slot*; the tops of the posts were made in the form of anthropomorphic faces. These idols were called *avi-sunt-uvry-menkv* (*avi sunt* – 'door threshold'); they served as guardians of the threshold (Istochniki…, 1987: 201). *Lep-tit-oyka* belongs to the group of Mansi patron spirits living in the upper reaches of the Lozva and Northern Sosva Rivers. He had two brothers: the older brother *Yakotil-oyka* – 'The man of the middle of the river' and the younger brother *Lussm-talakh-oyka* – 'The man from the upper reaches of the Lozva'. According to Kannisto, the brothers belonged to the category of forest spirits; *menkvs* stood on both sides of the door in front of their dwellings (Kannisto, Liimola, 1958: 218).

The forming of the upper ends of the side posts in cultic barns as *menkv* heads was also described at the sacred site of *Ner-oyka* and *Chokhryn-oyka* on Lake Turvat (Berezovsky District of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug–Yugra). There were three barns at different times there. They had *menkv* figures about 110 cm high (Fig. 9, 10), set in two rectangular grooves, which were cut in the bottom board of the roof and a small transverse log, on which the main structure was located. The representations of the *menkvs* were made of thin cedar trunks using an axe and were finished with a knife. The Mansi called them *aras-ovyl-menkv-oika* (literally, 'the *menkv*-old man of the edge of the hearth') and considered them guardians: when the patron spirits went about their business, the *menkvs* remained to guard the dwelling (Gemuev, Baulo, 1999: 6–9).

An important element in the sacred places of the Ob Ugrians was the fire place—the habitation of the *nai-otyr* fire spirits. In a number of cases, the faces of "fire guardians" were carved for them at the upper ends of stakes. According to Kannisto, on the Sosva River, it was customary to carve images of faces of the guardian spirits related to the *menkvs* and called the "mangy old woman and old man" on the posts of the fire next to the barn (Kannisto, Liimola, 1958: 226). At the sacred place of *Paul-urne-oyki*, near the village of Verkhneye Nildino, in the Berezovsky District of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug–Yugra, stakes served as supports for the wooden spit used for hanging a pot. The faces of *menkv-pyrishes* (sons of *menkvs*) with a sloping forehead,

*With high probability, this describes the *zaplot* construction technique.

Fig. 9. Wooden *menkv* figure—structural detail of a Mansi cultic barn. *Photo by A.V. Baulo, 1990.*

Fig. 10. Mansi cultic barn with *menkv* figures. *Photo by A.V. Baulo, 1990.*

straight protruding nose, eyes and mouth in the form of an oval were carved in the upper parts of the stakes (Ibid.: 107). A similar tradition is described at the sanctuaries of *Takht-kotil-aki-pyga* on the Yalbynie River (Ibid.: 105) and *Sat-menkv* near the village of Nizhneye Nildino (Fig. 11) (Baulo, 2013: 57)*.

Conclusions

Examples of monumental sculpture of the northern Khanty were obtained during the excavations at the Ust-Voikary fortified settlement. The statues were dated by the dendrochronological method from the last third to the late 17th century. This period preceded the stage of large-scale Christianization of the indigenous peoples of Western

Fig. 11. Support in the form of a *menkv* figure at the sacred site of the Mansi. *Photo by A.V. Baulo, 2010.*

*Both sanctuaries are located in the Northern Sosva basin.

Siberia, accompanied by a focused search and destruction of traditional ritual images (Perevalova, 2004: 65–66). Therefore, the discovery of these sculptures is of particular importance. The images are also unique in terms of their size, relative integrity, excellent preservation, and context indicating their position *in situ* in the structure of a stationary dwelling.

The rarity of such finds does not make it possible to judge how widespread the presence of this type of "public idol" was in settlements and in dwellings. We largely owe the fact of their discovery to the presence of permafrost in the cultural layers, which even in the north of Western Siberia occurs only at isolated archaeological sites.

On the basis of the context of the location of massive sculptures found in the Ust-Voikary settlement, their functional purpose can be suggested by analogy with the ritual role of wooden images of the forest spirits *menkvs*. To the greatest extent, it comes down to protection of the dwelling place or higher deities. We should recall that the first statue was aligned with the corridor, and its face was turned towards the outside. Therefore, this idol could have guarded the entrance to the dwelling. The second statue was aligned with the doorway, and could have served as a guardian of the threshold.

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