

# Rock Art in Western Central Asia (2015-2019)

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## Introduction

The first decades of this century were marked by significant changes in the development of rock art archaeology in the countries of western Central Asia, which include the former Soviet republics – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The authors of the two previous thematic reviews, which together covered 2005–2014 (Rozwadowski & Lymer 2012; Zheleznyakov & Devlet 2016), were able to convey to Western readers some information about the studies carried out in the region, and to outline the range of problems they were familiar with, sharing their vision of the near future. However, the mosaic of historiographic sketches and scattered episodes in the above reviews, in my opinion, does not provide an integral panorama of the dynamically developing process of studying and preserving rock art in the countries of western Central Asia (= Kazakhstan and Central Asia). This poses an obstacle to understanding current trends in the archaeology of rock art in the region, so here it is necessary to give a brief description of the main achievements in previous years, before proceeding to assess the content of current research.

The first innovative project implemented at the beginning of the 21st century -- developed against the background of many other studies that continued in the region based on the traditional methodology of the Soviet science of petroglyphs -- became the UNESCO-Norwegian-Kazakhstan project “Management, conservation and presentation of the Tamgaly petroglyph site”. Over a short period, 2001-2006, a small team of specialists involved in the project (archaeologists, geologists, biologists and conservators) achieved some important practical results: 1) to continue the complex geoarchaeological study of the landscape with petroglyphs of Tamgaly (900 ha) which had been started in the 1990s; 2) to create multifunctional documentation of the monument, which formed the basis for the nomination dossier and the management plan of the monument for inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List, as well as for the establishment of the State reserve-museum “Tamgaly” in 2003; 3) to carry out a programme of urgent work for the preservation and conservation of the Tamgaly petroglyphs, which minimized the anthropogenic load on the popular tourist destination. Hence in 2004, for

the first time, rock art in Central Asia was included in the UNESCO List – “Petroglyphs within the archaeological landscape of Tamgaly” (Rogozhinskiy 2011).

This positive experience in Kazakhstan was assessed by UNESCO, and in 2003 a new project was launched from Tamgaly, which developed until 2010 as a programme of scientific cooperation of specialists from Central Asian countries for the development and implementation of a unified regional strategy for the study and preservation of rock art monuments. Initially, the common platform of scientific cooperation was the idea of creating a common database “Central Asian Rock Art Database – CARAD”, the abbreviation of which was included in the unofficial name of the UNESCO project, and began to denote the established network of regional cooperation of rock art specialists (*Pamjatniki naskal'nogo iskusstva Central'noj Azii* 2004). The main participants in the CARAD project in different years were archaeologists, conservators, geologists and biologists of Kazakhstan (A. Rogozhinskiy – regional project coordinator, L. Charlina, B. Aubekerov), Kyrgyzstan (K. Tashbaeva, B. Amanbaeva, A. Sulaimanova, C. Zholdoshev, N. Sitnikova), Tajikistan (B. Bobomulloev), Turkmenistan (E. Muradova), Uzbekistan (M. Khuzhanazarov, M. Reutova), as well as the Russian Federation (D. Cheremisin, E. Miklashevich, M. Kilunovskaya, E. Ageeva, N. Rebrikova, A. Kochanovich) and Azerbaijan (M. Faradzheva). Norwegian colleagues, Anne-Sophie Hygen (Riksantikvaren, Oslo) and Knut Helskog (Alta Museum), played an active role in the project as international advisers and consultants.

Within the framework of the CARAD project, the sub-regional offices of UNESCO in Almaty and Tashkent, as well as IICAS in Samarkand, organized field workshops, specialist meetings, and training in the technology of documenting rock art monuments and practical conservation. In the field workshops, the effectiveness of materials and conservation methods used at rock art sites was assessed, a methodology for documentation and monitoring was developed, and scientific and methodological assistance was provided to groups of national specialists and direct assistance in the preparation of basic documentation of sites (Sarmishsay, Tamgaly and Cholpon-Ata, 2003-2005; Gobustan, 2007). At the same time, field studies were carried out of monuments that are potential World

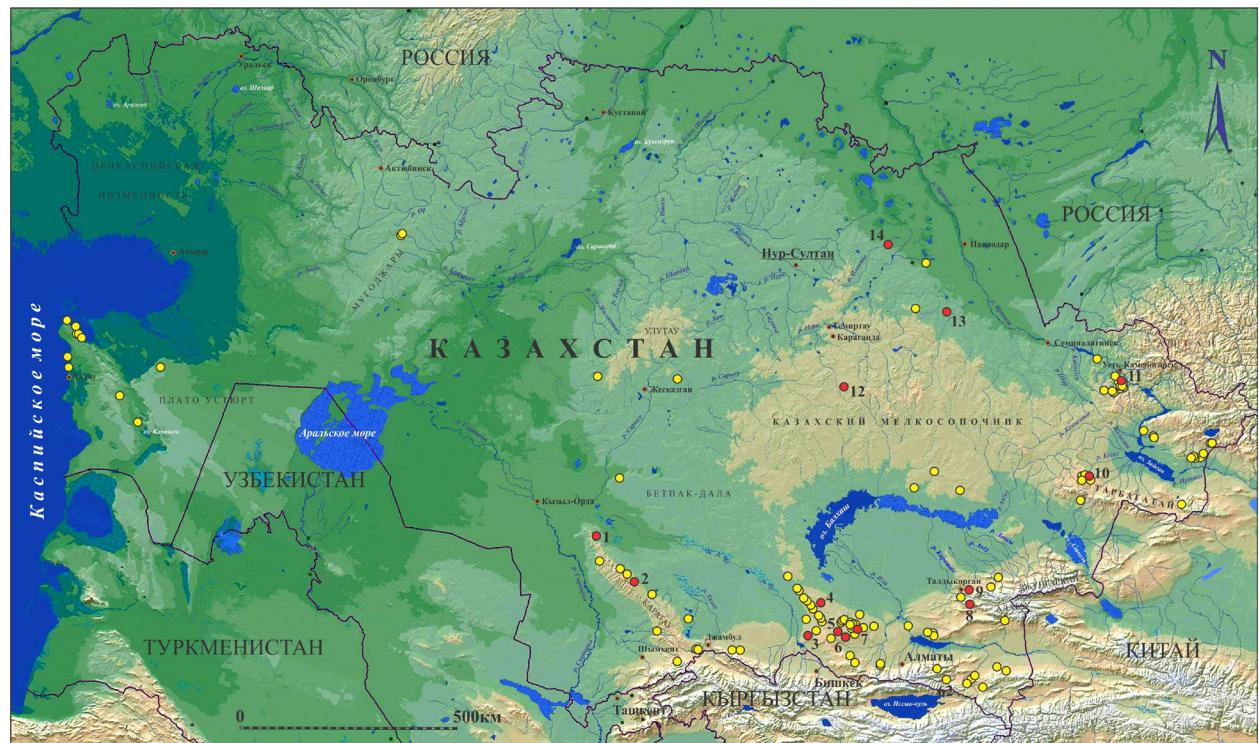


Figure 1. Map of rock art sites in Kazakhstan (prepared by the author in 2010); sites mentioned in the text: 1 – Sausykandyk, 2 – Arpaozen, 3 – Sarybulak, 4 – Akkol, 5 – Kulzhabasy, 6 – Akkainar, 7 – Tamgaly, 8 – Enbek, 9 – Yeshkiolmes, 10 – Moldazhar, 11 – Akbaur, 12 – Tesiktas, 13 – Kalmakkrylgan, 14 – Olenty.

Heritage Sites: Yeshkiolmes, Kulzhabasy and Arpaozen in Kazakhstan; Cholpon-Ata and Suuk-Dobyo in Kyrgyzstan; Sarmishsay in Uzbekistan; Soy Sobag in Tajikistan; Bezegli-dere in Turkmenistan. The general task of archaeological research was the preparation of basic documentation of sites, the identification of the main components of archaeological landscapes with petroglyphs, and the determination of their boundaries for further organization of legal protection at the national level.

The combination of the tasks of studying and preserving rock art monuments gave integrity to the scientific concept of the CARAD project; this was a progressive approach, since in all countries of the region a huge number of landscapes with petroglyphs are currently left without effective protection and management, and many valuable petroglyphs are in need of emergency conservation measures.

In general, the implementation of the CARAD project was of great importance: 1) It accumulated the positive experience of regional and foreign experts, which made it possible to develop and agree on a methodology for documenting and preserving rock art; 2) it strengthened the professional cooperation of specialists from Central Asian countries; 3) it improved the qualifications of young researchers. Another valuable effect of the

CARAD project was the experience of coordinating the efforts of national groups of specialists aimed at studying and preserving the outstanding rock art sites in the region. In the context of the disintegration of the scientific structure in connection with the collapse of the USSR, the significance of the unifying mission of UNESCO can hardly be overestimated.

It is necessary to highlight the two main practical results of the CARAD project: 1) the introduction of a new approach for this region (widely used by Western researchers) to the study of rock art sites as cultural landscapes; 2) development of the “Standard for documentation of rock art monuments in Central Asia”. The novelty of the scientific approach lies in the fact that the rock art sites were considered as archaeological (palaeocultural) landscapes, in which drawings on the rocks, along with other material evidence (sites, burial grounds, remnants of communications, etc) reflect the nature of these chronologically remote human habitations and the traditional interactions of these societies with their natural surroundings. Rock art sites are studied and preserved not as separate clusters of rock art, but as a complex of archaeological monuments with clusters of rock carvings; the physical boundaries of such complexes are at least identical to the territory containing all traces of the habitat and activity of ancient collectives associated in the landscape. The

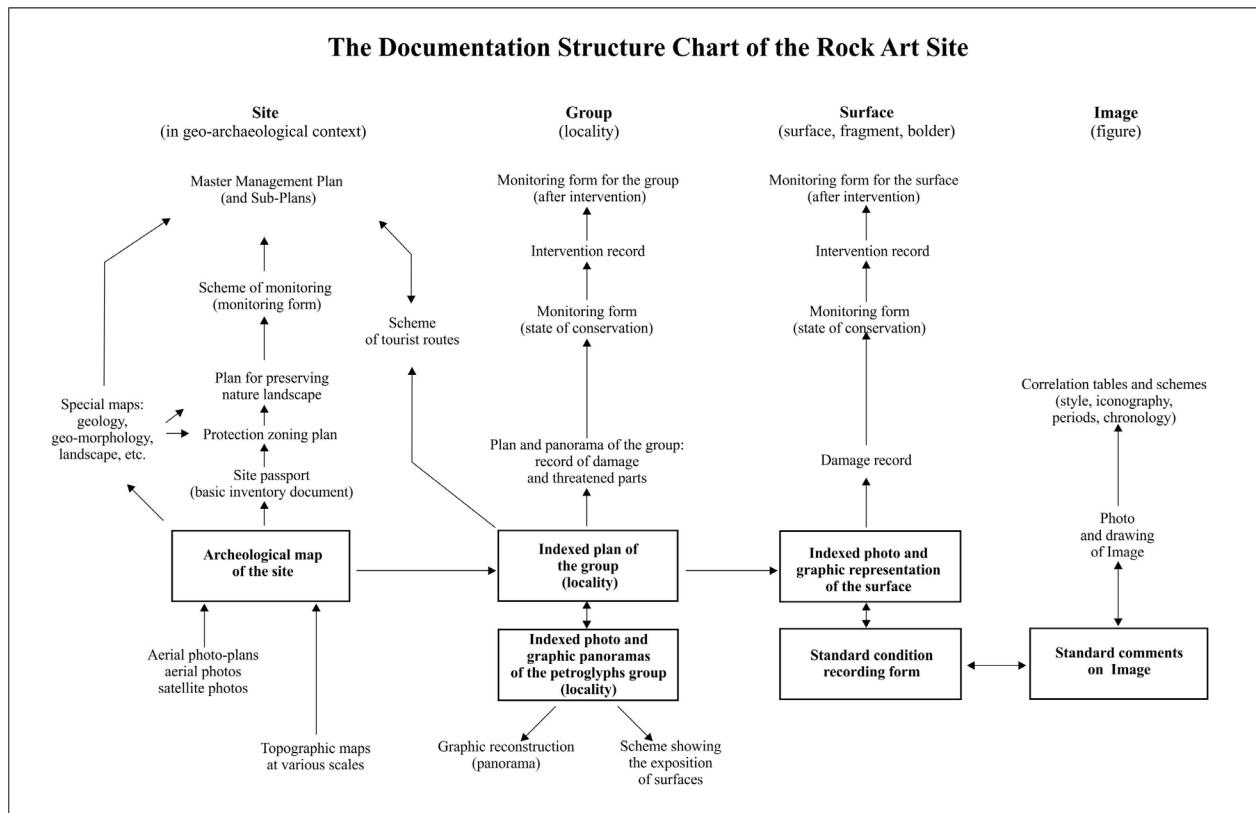


Figure 2. Chart for the “Documentation Standard” (CARAD 2004)

modern cultural context of relict landscapes is often formed by a living tradition of creating new and / or updating ancient images, reverence for their locations, etc.

It should be noted here that in the Soviet period (and to some extent now), the study of rock art was usually limited to the time frame of ancient eras and the Middle Ages, and works of art of the 18th – 19th centuries, often accompanied by epigraphy, were either an optional topic of study or completely ignored. Now, thanks to new concepts in the archaeology and ethnology of Kazakhstan and Central Asia, there has been recognition of the fact that the culture of modern peoples of the region has retained traditional rock art and epigraphic activities closely related to it, the study of which is becoming relevant today.

Using a new approach, the CARAD project addressed some of the key issues in research theory and practice. Thus, for the first time, a record was made of the famous monuments of rock art in Kazakhstan and Central Asia; these data are presented on the maps of individual countries and the entire region (Figure 1), which makes it possible to operate with specific numbers, and with typological, chronological and geographical characteristics to determine the historical and cultural areas of rock art in Central Asia.

Also, for the first time, a general typology of rock art landscapes is proposed, taking into account the well-known variety of Central Asian monuments (Rogozhinskiy & Novozhenov 2018: 28–31). The new approach is reflected in the definition of the goals of documentation and in the structure of the “Standard of Documentation” (Figure 2): documentation of a rock art site is not only skillfully-made copies, photographs, 3D projections of the actual surfaces with rock paintings, since the drawings themselves are organically included as a significant component in more or less extended archaeological landscapes; documentation is a system of various forms of recording of the changing state of objects of the archaeological landscape, including its natural and cultural components, and its rock carvings. Documentation technologies may change over time, but four basic levels of the structure of the description of monuments are preserved: Site (complex) – Group (locality) – Surface – Image. The principle of a hierarchy of four levels of description is also incorporated into the CARAD database (Pamjatniki 2004: 156–68).

The final stage of the CARAD project in 2008–2010 constituted the first steps towards the preparation of the future cross-border serial nomination “Rock Art of Central Asia” on the UNESCO World Heritage List. At the same time, this was the period of the most intensive field research in the different countries of

the region, and important theoretical discussions, the results of which, unfortunately, remained unpublished or extremely poorly presented in separate review publications. The extensive materials prepared and the basic documentation of significant sites in the region were not adequately reflected at that time even in the ICOMOS thematic study, where the scientific publication of the texts in Russian, containing the characteristics of the rock art sites, was undertaken by A. E. Rogozhinskiy, and the introduction and conclusion were written by J. Clottes (*Rock Art in Central Asia* 2011).

Discussion of the concept of serial nomination revealed a wide range of unsolved problems caused by insufficient study and documentary presentation of the region's monuments, which is primarily due to the shortcomings of the methodology of Soviet petroglyphology that dominated for many decades. The lack of the necessary documentation and the limited nature of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century studies of two well-known sites – Zaraut-Kamar and Saymalytash, which are now considered as potential World Heritage sites -- were indicated in a special critical review (Rogozhinskiy 2008).

In general, the current state of the study of rock art in Central Asia made it difficult to solve the most important key issues: defining the historical, geographical and chronological framework of the cultural phenomenon; establishment of correct dating, cultural attribution and geographical areas of the identified pictorial traditions; elucidation of the historical continuity and originality of local practices related to the creation and use of rock art, etc. The results of this complex and unfinished discussion were summed up in 2010 at the meeting of regional experts, UNESCO and ICOMOS in Samarkand (Second UNESCO Sub-Regional Workshop 2010: 74–78).

### Current trends

Despite the fact that the process of preparing a cross-border serial nomination turned out to be incomplete and interrupted, the prospect of promoting the outstanding monuments of the region into World Heritage remains. It is this perspective that determines the general trend in the development of rock art archaeology in Central Asia at the present stage, although along with this there are independent areas of research.

The main factors influencing the content, scope and nature of research today are the lack of regional coordination and of the necessary financial resources to continue targeted comprehensive research and to maintain balanced cooperation of national research teams. The weakening of regional cooperation results

in the disintegration of the external and internal professional ties of national research teams, a violation of the continuity of the CARAD methodology and a return to outdated research models.

In 2018, on the initiative of IICAS and UNESCO Centre for Rapprochement of Cultures in Almaty, a round table “Petroglyphs of Central Asia: Prospects for Nominating Rock Art Objects of Central Asia to the UNESCO World Heritage List” (June 14, 2018, Almaty, Kazakhstan) was organized, the participants of which approved the “Almaty Action Plan” for further work. In particular, the plan envisages the creation of a regional Coordination Council for cross-border serial nomination with the participation of representatives of the authorized bodies of the states of the region and representatives of the scientific community from each country; the role of IICAS as the Secretariat for the serial nomination is also recognized.

A significant contribution of IICAS to the implementation of the Action Plan was:

1. The publication of materials prepared by the participants in the CARAD project that were not included in the ICOMOS thematic study (2011), as well as materials of the discussion on the concept of cross-border serial nomination (Rogozhinskiy & Novozhenov 2018).
2. By now, the connection of archaeological research with the task of preserving rock art sites, which is so important for the countries of the region, has actually been lost. Outstanding landscapes with petroglyphs at Yeshkiolmes, Kulzhabasy, Arpaozen, Sauyskandyk (Kazakhstan), Sarmishsay (Uzbekistan) and Soi Sabag (Tajikistan) remain without effective management, although almost all were included in the national UNESCO Tentative Lists, and scientific and technical documentation for preparing some of them for state protection date back to 2004–2006. Unfortunately, only in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are there qualified specialists with experience in the conservation of rock carvings.
3. Judging by the scientific publications accounted for in 2015–2019, the most intensive studies of rock art were carried out in Kazakhstan and further, in descending order, in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan; unfortunately, there is no information on Turkmenistan. In total, more than 50 scientific articles and at least 10 books have been published, including two photo albums with a large number of illustrations and a minimum of texts. Most of the scientific monographs are published in Russian, but they also contain full translations or a detailed summary in English and the national languages of the region.

It is important to note that books and articles are predominantly devoted to the study of recently discovered rock art sites, or highlight the results of new studies of already well-known monuments (Tashbaeva 2019), but at the same time they contain a qualitatively updated and expanded documentation of them. One such example is the book by M. M. Huzhanazarov on Sarmishsai, which reflects, although not fully, the results of Uzbek-Norwegian cooperation in 2002-2006 on the study of the archaeological landscape, documentation and conservation of petroglyphs on the platform of the "Documentation Standard" CARAD (Huzhanazarov 2018). A very valuable exception is the monograph by V. A. Ranov (1924-2006) "Runners on the Rocks", prepared for publication after the author's death by his colleagues at the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan (Ranov 2016). This is the first monograph on the rock art of Tajikistan, which includes research by Ranov in the Pamirs in 1958, 1972 and 2001.

The study of rock art in Kazakhstan was carried out mainly by local specialists within the framework of existing state programmes, while in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan joint research on international projects by local archaeologists and foreign colleagues played a significant role: for example, the work in Uzbekistan of a research group led by A. Augustinova (Czech Republic) in the south of the country (Augustinová & Stančo 2016),

as well as that of O. A. Kashchey (Russian Federation) in Western Tien Shan (Kashchey & Nedashkovsky 2018; Kashchey 2019). The independent researcher L. Hermann (Belgium) successfully continued the search for, and documentation of, new or previously little-known monuments in the north of Kyrgyzstan (Hermann 2018, 2019). Many new sites with petroglyphs and rock carvings in the Nurata mountains have been examined by the Uzbek archaeologist A. N. Kholmatov, who summarized the data on this region in his doctoral study (Kholmatov 2019). All these studies are not related to one another, and differ in methodology and scope, but they add significantly to the data bank on rock art in the region.

4. Modern researchers of rock art in the region use different scientific approaches. On the one hand, some national specialists continue to adhere to the paradigm of Soviet petroglyphology in their works, and this leaves an imprint on all stages of archaeological research: selective documentation of rock art outside the archaeological environment and landscape; semantic interpretation based on ancient mythologies and local ethnography of selected series of drawings, the dating and cultural affiliation of which are often poorly substantiated (Holmatov 2018; Shvets 2018; Zheleznyakov 2019). On the other hand, the publications of some foreign archaeologists demonstrate similarities with the methodology of the CARAD project (Figure 3),

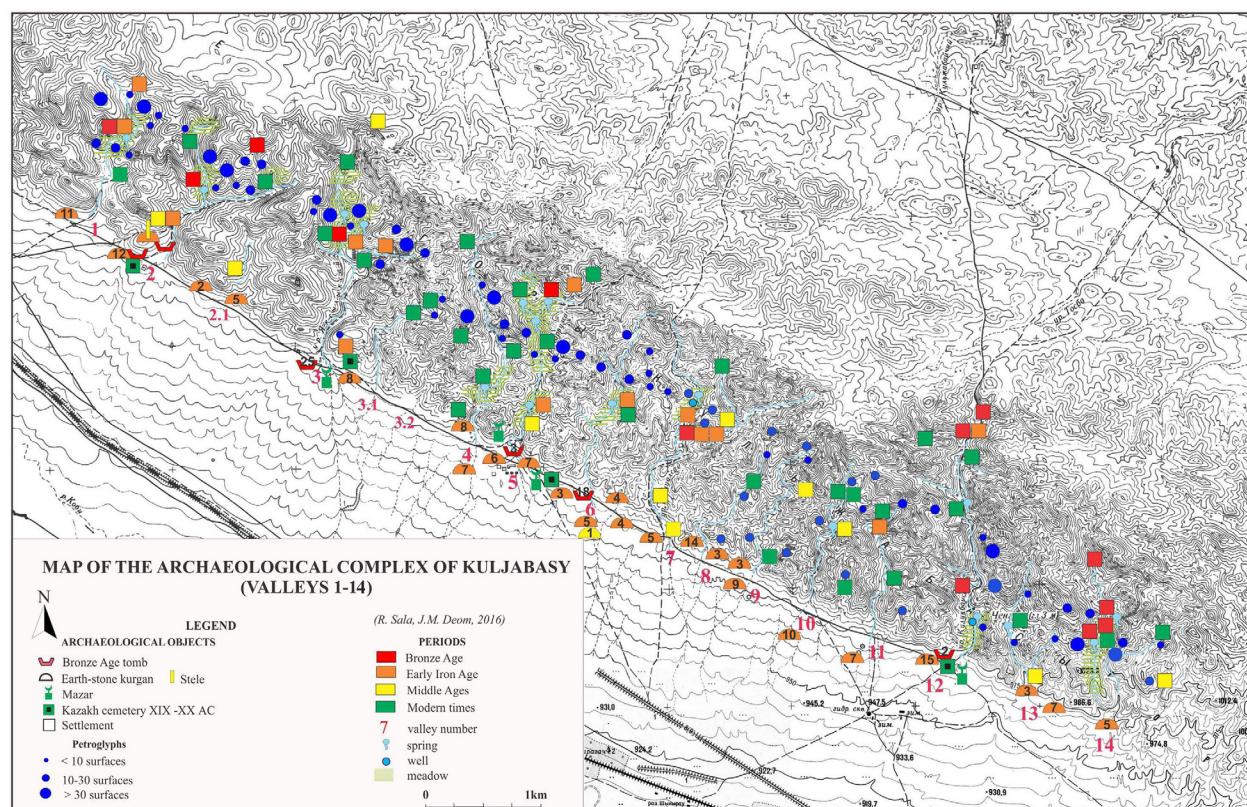


Figure 3. Map of the archaeological landscape of Kulzhabasy (after Sala & Deom 2016).

and the documentary production of such studies does not require decoding (Augustinová 2018; Sala & Deom 2019). Unfortunately, sometimes the definitions of dates and analogies that are too remote in space and time, yet are used for attribution of the studied petroglyphs, raise doubts or look random, betraying the authors' poor acquaintance with literary sources and the main monuments of Central Asia.

Some types of basic documentation recommended by the CARAD Standard (a map of the archaeological landscape, a topographic plan and an indexed panorama of a local accumulation of petroglyphs) are increasingly found in publications by archaeologists from Central Asia (Ranov 2016: figs. 15, 16; Samashev 2018: 55–54). However, such documentation is little used by researchers for a detailed analysis of the locations of petroglyphs, as demonstrated earlier in the example of some monuments in Kazakhstan (*Pamjatniki* 2004: 45–92), but such a possibility remains. Analytical studies of individual monuments deserve attention, in which the authors use the methods of the geoarchaeological study of landscapes with rock art, and a spatial analysis of petroglyphs in the archaeological landscape is given; unfortunately, such publications are rare (Sala & Deom 2016; Augustinová 2018).

5. A special category of modern publications on rock art is made up of photo albums prepared on the basis of the results of short-term scientific projects: they do not contain a detailed description and analysis of sites, but they do present a large number of photographs of petroglyphs and landscapes, master-plans of complexes and plans of individual clusters of petroglyphs, etc. In this list, first place belongs to a photo album of the petroglyphs of the archaeological landscape of Saimalytash in the Fergana Range – the largest Alpine monument of rock art in Kazakhstan and Central Asia. The publication is the result of work in 2016 within a project of the Ministry of Culture, Information and Tourism of Kyrgyzstan by a small group of Kyrgyz researchers led by archaeologist A. T. Sulaimanova. The album contains about 300 beautiful photographs of petroglyphs, picturesque landscapes, aerial photographs and detailed topographic plans of the two main concentrations – Saymalytash I (5486 rocks with images were recorded) and Saymalytash II (300 rocks), as well as a brief summary of the history of the study of the site and a general description of rock carvings. Note that this is the most complete edition of Saimalytash petroglyphs after more than a century of studying the site (Sulajmanova, Zholdoshov & Dujshanalieva 2016).

Another similar publication is dedicated to the petroglyphs of the Kulzhabasy complex, located near Tamgaly and considered one of the largest monuments of rock art in Kazakhstan. The compilers of the album

tried to better represent the diversity of the pictorial complex, including in the publication a large series of previously unpublished petroglyphs, but a considerable part of the photographs, unfortunately, turned out to be of low quality (Saduakasuly, Zheleznyakov & Hermann 2017).

6. A distinctive feature of the Kazakh school of archaeology of rock art, associated with the name of its founder Professor A. N. Mar'jashev (1933–2018), is a comprehensive study of localities and remains, involving archaeological excavations of monuments combined with petroglyphs in the landscape (Mar'jashev, Gorjachev & Potapov 2017). Continuing this tradition, in recent years, various researchers have carried out excavations of burial grounds of the Bronze Age and other ancient periods at several important rock art sites: in Sauyskandyk (South Kazakhstan), Moldazhar (East Kazakhstan) and Akkainar in Semirechye. The materials from the excavations in Sauyskandyk were included in monographs devoted to the petroglyphs of these large complexes (Samashev, Murgabaev & Eleuov 2014: 279–99), but the results of excavations of the Andronovo and Begazy-Dandybai cultures burial-ground in Moldazhar (Samashev 2018) and the Akkainar valley have not been published.

The experience of complex archaeological research in Tamgaly convinces us that the most effective approach to solving the issues of dating and the cultural attribution of petroglyphs is excavation of sites near rocks with petroglyphs: here it is more often possible to find stones with petroglyphs in the stratigraphic sequence in the context of representative artifacts and necessary materials for dating (bones, charcoal) (Rogozhinskiy 2011: 167–76). So, in 2019, a large series of rock paintings was discovered in the Sarybulak valley (**Figure 4**), which have analogies with the decoration of painted ceramics of ancient agricultural cultures such as Anau (Turkmenistan) and the settlement of Sarazm in Tajikistan (Rogozhinskiy 2020). During the excavation of ancient sites located next to the rock art, examples of painted ceramics were found, tentatively dated to the Late Eneolithic – Early Bronze Age.

In general, along with other methods of cultural identification and dating of rock art (stylistic, iconographic analogies, images of weapons, clothes, etc), systematic research and excavation of sites near petroglyphs is considered today as a promising direction in the archaeology of rock art in Central Asia.

7. Another area that has been actively developing in recent years in the mainstream of the archaeology of rock art in Central Asia is the systematic study of rock carvings of identity signs (tamga-petroglyphs) and epigraphy, which opens up great prospects for dating

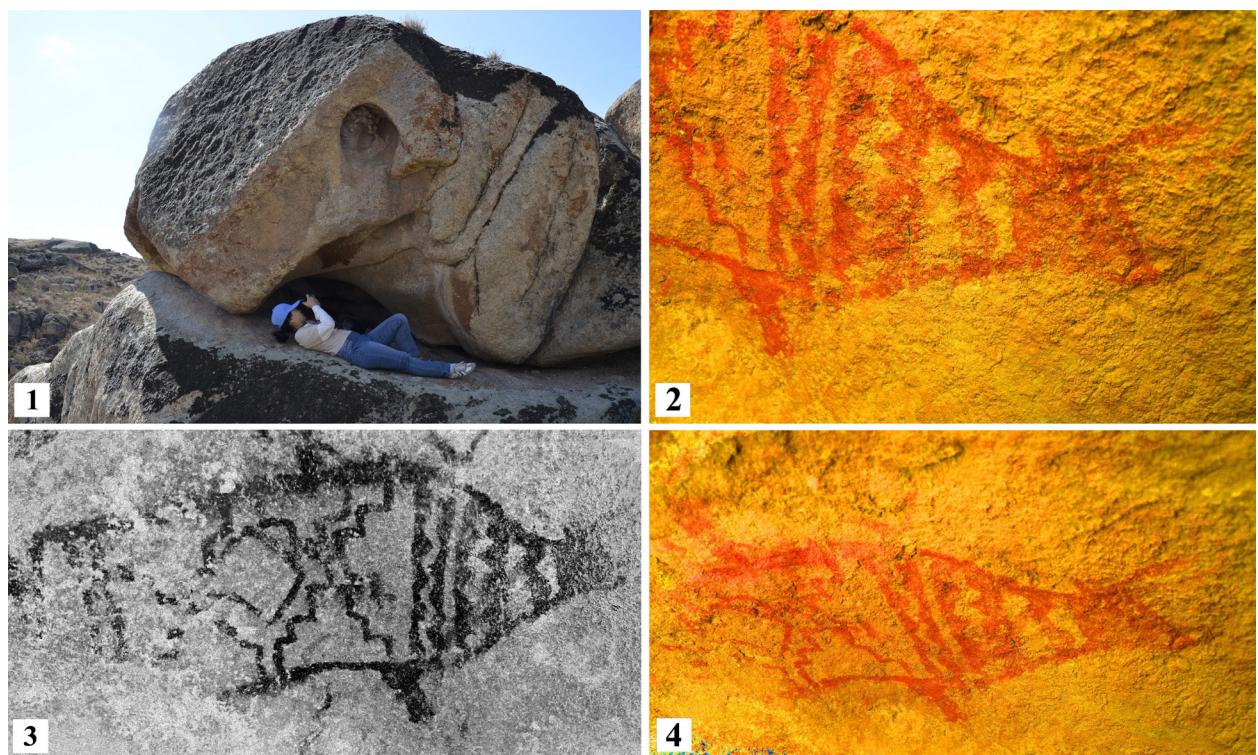


Figure 4. Sarybulak valley, cave of Shatyrtas 14, paintings; Late Eneolithic, 2019 (after Rogozhinskiy 2020).

and determining the ethno-cultural attribution of the accompanying series of petroglyphs (Figure 5). The active use of symbolic images as markers of collective and individual identity is recorded from narrative, archaeological and ethnographic sources from the Late Bronze Age to the modern age inclusive. This practice existed in the cultures of many or most of the pastoral / nomadic and sedentary tribes and peoples of Iranian and Turkic-Mongolian origin, and remains in rudimentary form at present. Single tamga-like drawings, found together with figurative images on rocks, were occasionally recorded by archaeologists earlier, but a systematic search and study began recently.

The most active study of tamga petroglyphs is developing in Kazakhstan: whereas ten years ago the number of known signs did not exceed 20 (Samashev, Bazylkhan & Samashev 2010), today the data bank includes more than 1000 tamga rock carvings of the ancient periods and the Middle Ages. The archaeological study of tamga petroglyphs is based on the ethnographic study of this cultural tradition with the involvement of archival sources of the 18th – 19th centuries. A search algorithm, a technique for documenting and analyzing tamga-petroglyphs is being developed, in which the mapping of similar types of signs plays an important role in determining the areas of settlement or migration of different groups of nomads. Correlation of these new archaeological data with western and

eastern written sources (including the accompanying tamga-petroglyphs epigraphy – ancient Türkic runic, Mongolian, Chagataid, etc) makes it possible to solve the problems of dating, the ethnocultural attribution of the monuments themselves (tamga), and synchronous series of figurative rock carvings (Drevnosti Zhetysu 2016: 161–74; Rogozhinskiy & Tishin 2018). In general, this new direction of research increases the information-value and significance of rock art as an important source of history and culture of the ancient, medieval and modern peoples of Central Asia.

The main results of a purposeful study in Kazakhstan of tamga-petroglyphs from different historical periods are presented in a series of articles (Rogozhinskiy & Yatsenko 2015; Rogozhinskiy & Cheremisin 2019; Rogozhinskiy 2019a). The first major generalization of archaeological sources on the signs of identity (tamga / nishan) of the ancient periods and the early Middle Ages from the western part of Central Asia was recently presented in a monograph prepared by a team of researchers from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan under the leadership of Professor S. A. Yatsenko (*Tamgas of Pre-Islamic Central Asia* 2019).

#### New discoveries and new research

As mentioned above, archaeological searches of varying intensity continue almost throughout the western part of Central Asia, and every year there are new

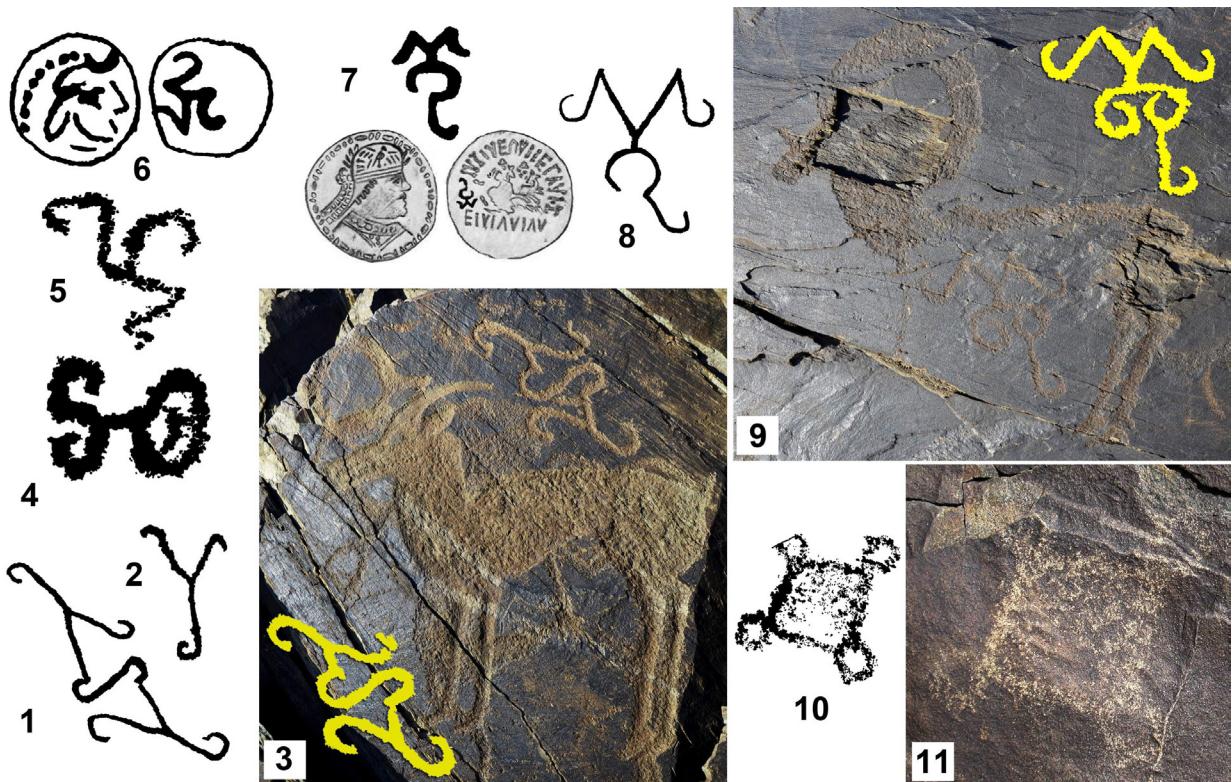


Figure 5. Tamga-petroglyphs from the Akkol valley (3, 9) and its analogies (after Rogozhinskiy 2019a).

discoveries of large and small rock art sites. Similarly, the in-depth study of already-known monuments does not stop, so even a cursory review of new discoveries and research is difficult here. We will limit ourselves to a few examples of both that seem to reflect progress in the study of the phenomenon of rock art in the region as a potential World Heritage.

#### *Rock painting*

For many years, finds of rock paintings in caves and rock shelters were rare in Kazakhstan and Central Asia, and the small number of surviving monuments of this type was regarded as a regional feature. However, in recent years, the number of new discoveries of rock art in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan has increased dramatically, and this gives rise to thinking about the imperfection of the search methods or the insufficient intensity of such research in previous years.

In 2019, three new caves with paintings were discovered in the Eastern Pamirs by archaeologist B. S. Bobomulloev in the upper reaches of the river Murghab, at an altitude of 3560 to 3950 m above sea level. One of them is located near the Shakty cave, known since 1958, and was named Shakty II; images of vertical lines and arrow-shaped figures are made with red ochre; stone flakes were found in front of the cave's entrance. The murals in the other two caves also have

geometric outlines and are done in a similar manner with red paint (Bobomulloev 2019). Archaeologists from Tajikistan are planning to continue researching the rock art sites in this most mountainous region.

A large cluster of rock art sites (about 40), including some with paintings, have been identified in recent years in the Nurata mountains, separating the Kyzyl Kum desert and the valley of the river Zeravshan in its middle reaches (Uzbekistan). Some sites were discovered here in the second half of the 20th century, but an active study of the area is now being developed (Kholmatov 2019). One of the most interesting sites is the Kyzkurgan cave in the Beklarsay valley: on the cave's walls and ceiling there are various geometrical figures and ornamental motifs, anthropomorphic and one zoomorphic figure, made with paint in red, orange and black; the age of the ancient paintings has not been established (Kholmatov 2018). On the cave wall, as well as in some other points of the Beklarsay gorge, near the ancient petroglyphs, there are also Arabic prayer inscriptions (*Ibid.*).

In Kazakhstan in 2018–2019 rock paintings were found in two sub-regions – in the Semirechye and the left-bank Irtysh region. At least five rock shelters with red paintings were found in the Kalmakrylgan mountains, about 160 km south of Pavlodar. In the shelters, symbolic images are present in the form of

zigzags, rectangles, clusters of dots, and less often zoomorphic and anthropomorphic figures. Near the paintings, sites and burial grounds of the Bronze Age were found, which have not yet been investigated. In Southeastern Kazakhstan (Semirechye), in the foothills of the Dzhungarsky (Zhetyssusky) Alatau, the Enbek rock shelter was investigated (Merc & Antonov, 2019). Here, the images made in red paint are more varied: a horizontal zigzag line, three concentric circles connected by a line, two circles, a “point-like” sign, and possibly a carriage on two wheels with spokes. According to researchers, the rock art of the Enbek shelter have analogies with the murals of the Akbaur cave (Eastern Kazakhstan), in ornamental motifs on stone sculptures and on the walls of burials of the Chemurchek culture (Mongolia) and date back to the Early Bronze Age, late 3rd – early 2nd millennium BC.

Another important discovery was made in the Kindyktas mountains, 220 km west of Almaty: in the three mountain valleys of Sarybulak, Shatyrkol and Tarlygan, about 30 rock shelters and caves with polychrome (red and black, red and white) and monochrome (red, black, light brown) paintings (Rogozhinskiy 2020). The best and most numerous groups of sites are concentrated in the Sarybulak gorge – 25 shelters and caves with paintings, which were given the common name “Shatyrtas” (“Stone tent”). The repertoire of paintings is very diverse: various symbolic figures, ornamental motifs, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic images, objects (vessels?); in the Shatyrtas 1 cave there are also images of horse riders, which indicates a relatively late age for these paintings – probably the Middle Ages. In other cases, an earlier dating for the paintings is assumed. The specific types of ornamental figures and the polychrome range of images find a correspondence in the painted ceramics of the ancient agricultural cultures of Central Asia and the Near East. Particularly impressive images adorn the ceilings of Shatyrtas caves 6 and 14: a spiral figure of a snake, a solar symbol, and a contour figure of a bull with ornamental decoration in the style of painted ceramics of the Geoxyur type of the Anau culture.

The peculiar characteristics of the Sarybulak paintings (colours, a set of complex ornamental compositions) distinguish them from all other known similar rock art sites in Kazakhstan, but find analogies in Central Asia (Siipantash shelter, Uzbekistan) and Iran (Aali 2017). It is assumed that the oldest paintings in Sarybulak were created by migrating groups from the area of ancient agricultural cultures such as the Anau and Sarazm during the Eneolithic period (Namazga II – III) and early Bronze Age (Namazga IV). This hypothesis is confirmed by the finds of hand-painted ceramics in pits at three sites (Sarybulak 1-3), located next to the rock paintings. In general, rock paintings in the Kindyktas mountains

are concentrated in the area of the largest copper deposit in Semirechye, where ancient mining is also known. The study of the complex of sites in Kindyktas continues.

New research results were obtained in 2018 at the Tesiktas cave in Central Kazakhstan, which was discovered in the middle of the last century. A detailed examination of the cave helped to reveal several more surfaces with paintings made in red, black and yellow pigments: human figures, scenes of archers hunting for a bull, symbolic signs, etc. The repertoire and style of these drawings suggest that the site dates to the Early Bronze Age (Rogozhinskiy & Novozhenov 2018: 78–79, 144).

#### ***Attribution and dating of petroglyphs***

Heuristic methods are not often used in the archaeology of Central Asian rock art, but two recent experiments in the study of Kazakhstan petroglyphs should be mentioned.

A small accumulation of petroglyphs on the Olenty River, in the steppe zone of Kazakhstan, has been repeatedly examined earlier (Mertz 2002: 21–23), but this unique rock art site has not been studied in detail. About 20 separate flat boulders with deeply cut engravings lie scattered on the slope of a high coastal terrace on the right bank of the river. Relatively late petroglyphs here are made in the Seima-Turbino style and date back to the Advanced Bronze Age. The oldest and most representative series is formed by individual petroglyphs and small compositions consisting of large anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figures deeply carved into stone. When documenting the site in 2018, A. E. Rogozhinskiy and V. A. Novozhenov found that these petroglyphs occupy surfaces of the same exposure and are compactly located on a small area (Rogozhinskiy & Novozhenov, 2018: 79, 145–46). With the help of aerial photography, it was possible to determine that the petroglyphs are clearly visible from a position at a distance of 20–30 m on the left bank of the river, where the sites of the Neolithic and Bronze Age are located. At the same time, scattered figures and scenes on different stones are visually combined into more complex semantic combinations, which can be considered as whole texts.

A similar principle of the semantic organization of the gallery of petroglyphs, the homogeneity of which is confirmed by the similarity of technique and style of execution, was established using an experiment with paper patterns on a recently discovered site in the Akkol valley (Semirechye). Accurate paper copies of the images, attached to petroglyphs by water, made it possible to reproduce visual effects when the surface of

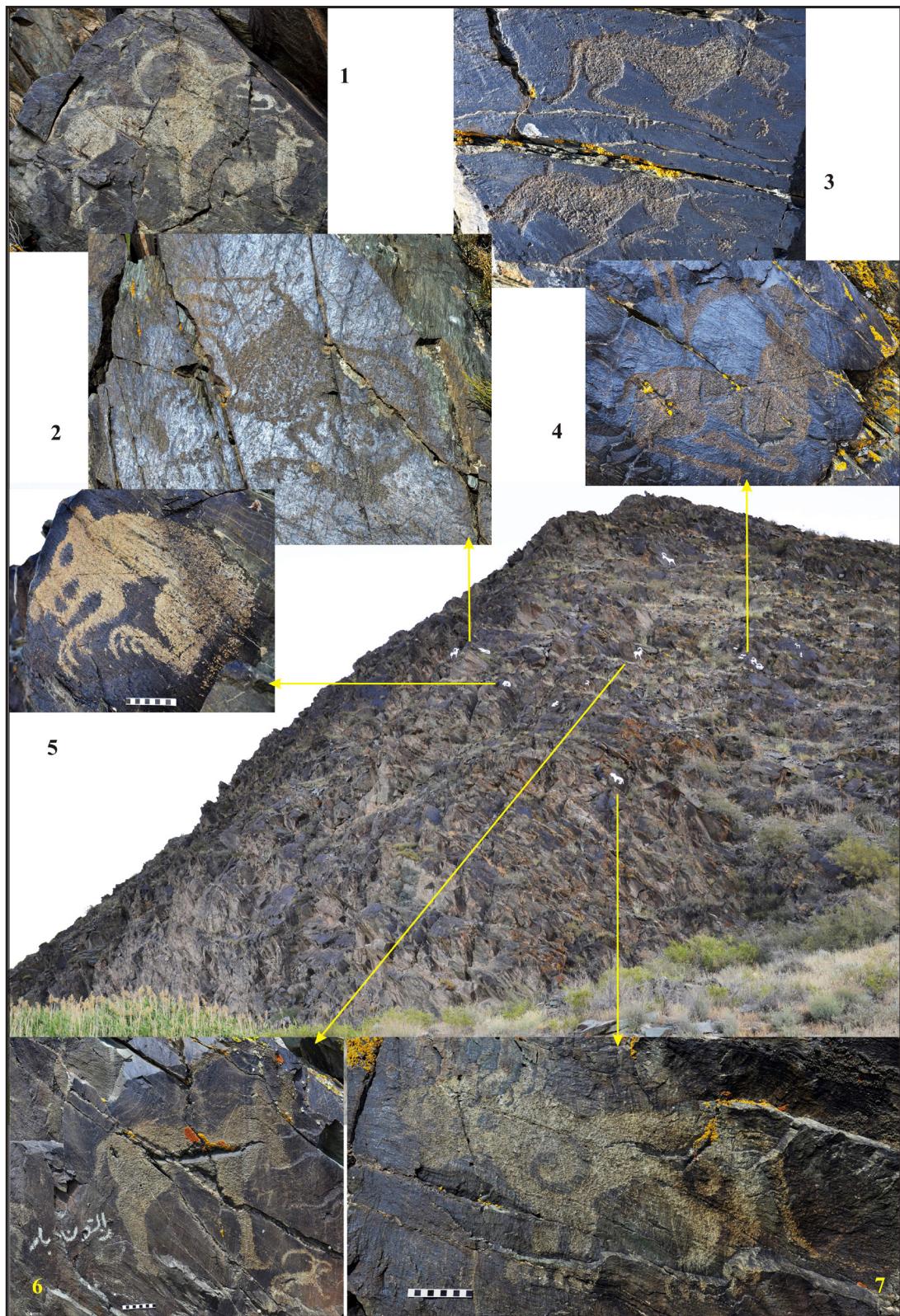


Figure 6. Akkol valley, experiment with paper copies of the images, attached to petroglyphs, 2015 (after Rogozhinsky 2016).

the drawings was not yet covered with “desert varnish” (Rogozhinsky 2016). Large figures of different animals in the “animal style” (predators -- tigers, curled panthers, bears and wolves, as well as mountain goats)

occupy different surfaces of a picturesque pyramidal rock, but visually perceived from a distance as a strictly ordered plot composition (Figure 6). By numerous analogies, first of all, with the Pazyryk culture of Altai,

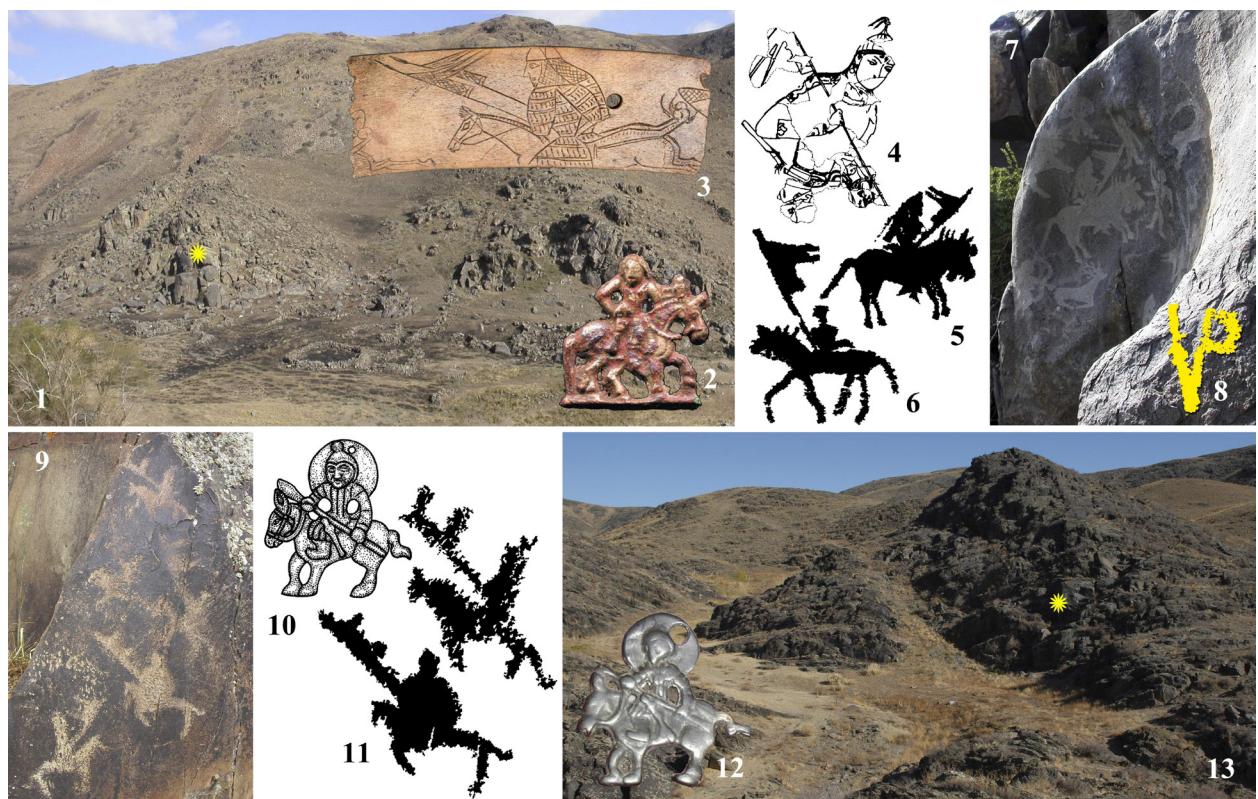


Figure 7. The medieval rock images of banners located near stationary winter sites of nomads; Chu-Ili mountains (after Rogozhinskiy 2019 b).

and art products from Tuva and Ordos, as well as taking into account information from Chinese chronicles, this series of petroglyphs at Semirechye is dated to no earlier than the 3rd century BC and no later than the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC (Rogozhinskiy & Yatsenko 2015). The unique series of petroglyphs is accompanied by images of identity signs that correspond to the tamgas of the ruling clans of Khorezm and the Kushan kingdom of late antiquity.

Recently, new materials were published on the rock images of the banners of the Turkic period found on the territory of Kazakhstan (Rogozhinskiy 2019b). In total, there are 15 known locations of petroglyphs, which present about 70 images of banners. The analysis reveals strong linkages of petroglyphs in the archaeological landscapes with the stationary winter sites of medieval nomads, as well as with the dominant mountain peaks. Three types of banner images were identified, and the dating and ethnopolitical affiliation of some series of petroglyphs were determined. The region of the greatest concentration of rock images with banners is determined to be the Chu-Ili mountains in Semirechye, as the political centre of the Western Turks, Turgeshes and Karlukhs in the Turkic period is determined. A link between such marker symbols and places that were permanent residences (horde) of the political elite of nomads in Semirechye in Turkic period is suggested (Figure 7).

Finally, a most important step in the development of the archaeology of rock art in the region is to be found in a series of new works by V. A. Novozhenov, which give a detailed description of the pictorial traditions identified today in the rock art of Kazakhstan from ancient times to the present (Novozhenov 2015; Rogozhinskiy & Novozhenov, 2018: 78–101). Further research in this direction is the next prospect for rock art research in Central Asia.

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