

Čermáková, Eva

## Karagem valley. A rock art site in the Russian Altai

*Sborník prací Filozofické fakulty brněnské univerzity. M, Řada archeologická.*  
2007-2008, vol. 56-57, iss. M12-13, pp. [69]-88

ISBN 978-80-210-4894-2

ISSN 1211-6327

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/113727>

Access Date: 16. 02. 2024

Version: 20220831

Terms of use: Digital Library of the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University provides access to digitized documents strictly for personal use, unless otherwise specified.

EVA ČERMÁKOVÁ

## **KARAGEM VALLEY. A ROCK ART SITE IN THE RUSSIAN ALTAI**

In this paper I would like to present a piece of Altaic prehistory which has left its traces in the rocks of the wild landscape of the southern Siberian Mountains. The starting point will be a rock art location in the Karagem valley. Its carvings and possible meaning will be studied in detail. Next I am trying to discuss the place from a landscape perspective. This study is a result from the expedition “Altai 2003”, organized by the University of Tomáš Baťa in Zlín (Department of Palaeoecology), which took place in June and July 2003. The rock art investigation was just one of several tasks of the expedition, since the main focus was rather ecological, botanical and geological investigation of the south Altai region.

### **1. Geographical context**

Altai, the highest mountain range in Siberia, extends over the territory of four states: Russia, Mongolia, China and Kazakhstan. Its elevation reaches up to 4000 m (the highest point being Belukha at 4506 m). The mountain area can be divided into vast steppes, alpine meadows, tundra and areas with glaciers. The south-eastern regions are appropriate for year-round cattle pasturing, because of a thin snow cover (BOKOVENKO 1995). Climatic conditions are sharply continental and demanding for human survival, even today.

### **2. A brief outline of Altaic prehistory and history**

Altai seems to be a unique chronicle of the past. Several cultures and ethnic groups have engraved their specific “signature” here during the past in the form of graveyards, rock carvings, but also in the present day traditional craft and magical perception of the world. This extraordinary landscape, cruel and amazing, has also formed the people, leaving traces in their mentality, and, in my opinion, an extremely high “energetic potential” of it. Scythic culture has influenced the distant peoples in Europe (TALBOT RICE 1957, 178–196).

The very first evidence of human presence in the Altai area coincides with the Stone Age. Several rock carvings of Palaeolithic age were found for instance on the Ukok Plateau – at a location called Kalgutinskij rudnik (MOLODOV 1997, 39). During the Neolithic period, certain relations to the area surrounding Lake Baikal and the Angara River seem to have emerged, which is suggested by carvings of female elks in Altai. It became the most characteristic animal in the rock art of the region (OKLADNIKOV 1966; KŠICA 1973, 145; JACOBSON 1993, 91).

The Afanasevo Culture, the earliest copper workers in Altai, occupied the area of South Siberia between 2500–1500 B.C. It was a culture in transition from a hunting economy to a pastoral economy. Their burial customs probably established the beginnings of the South Siberian tradition of building typical stone constructions of burial chambers and mounds. The Afanasevo Culture is thought to be made up of an Europoid population. There is a large number of petroglyphs belonging to this culture known from the Chuya River valley (south-eastern part of the Republic of Altai) depicting cattle, deer or humans. They have parallels in northern and western Mongolia (JACOBSON 1993, 19).

The populations of the South Siberian Iron Age are called Early Nomads by Russian scientists. Understood under this term is also the branch of the Scytho-Siberian nomadic and semi-nomadic cultures which, in the first millennium B.C., are assumed to have controlled the vast steppe and mountainous regions between China, Persia and Greece, and in the north to the edge of the taiga (JACOBSON 1993, 5). The Early Nomadic culture of Altai is divided into the Maiemir culture (8th–7th cent. B.C. after MOLODOV 1997, 42; and 7th–6th cent. B.C. after JACOBSON 1993, 5) and the latter Pazyryk culture (6th–2nd cent. B.C. after MOLODOV 1997, 42; and 6th–1st cent. B.C. after JACOBSON 1993, 5) with the kurgans of the Ukok Plateau well-known for a plenty of organic remains and tattooed mummies conserved in permafrost (POLOSMAK 2001; RUDENKO 1951). Other related archaeological groups are the Uyük in Mongolia, the Tagar in the Minusinsk Basin (north-eastwards of Altai), the Aldy Bel' and the Saglin in Tuva (JACOBSON 1993).

Between the 1st cent. B.C. – 5th cent. A.D. the Altai area was occupied by a Hun-Sarmatic people which left there several grave complexes but also petroglyphs resembling “letters image” (locality Kalgutinskij rudnik; MOLODOV 1997, 45). A remarkable rock-art site from this period is located in Kudyrge (eastern Altai). The scene carved on a rock depicts a shamanic burial ceremony with numbers of human and supernatural beings accompanying the dead person (Hančar cited in KŠICA 1973, 146). Later, the Hun-Sarmatic population was replaced by the Tataric people (6th–11th cent.) and the Mongols (12th–14th cent.; MOLODOV 1997, 45). Today most of the population of South Altai is made up of the Kazakhs, who migrated here about 200 years ago. Other groups in the area are the Russians and the Mongoloid Altaic people.

The long traditions of nomadic life and cattle breeding have saved both the surface and underground prehistoric remains from disturbances by agricultural

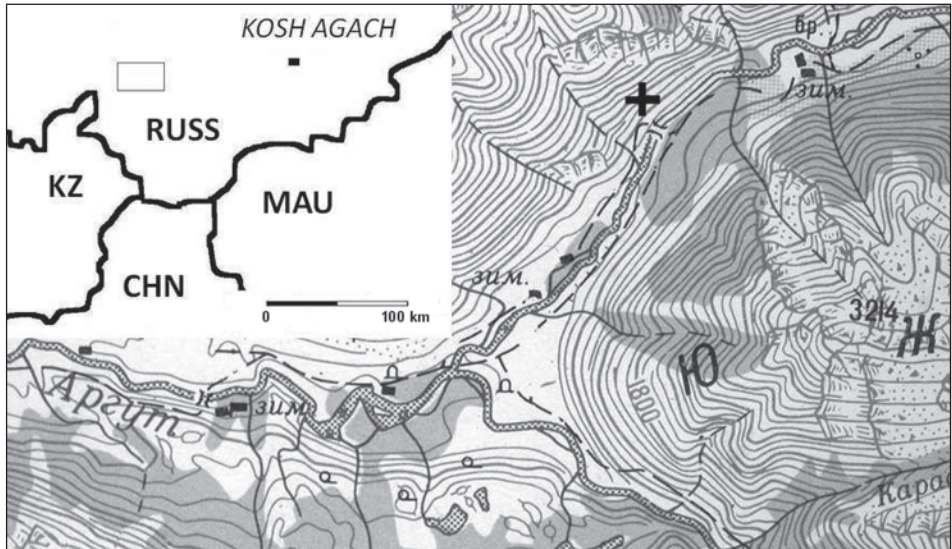


Fig. 1. Localization (with black cross) of the rock carvings site in the Karagem valley.



Fig. 2. View on the site from the south.

activities. Local people often live in the immediate proximity of old barrows without destroying or robbing them, because of “tchumo” – so-called old magic, which according to them is guarding the prehistoric graves. The above-mentioned circumstances, climatic conditions and the quite difficult access make the Altai Mountains a fascinating treasury of the past. Investigations conveyed here (especially the tombs from the Ukok Plateau) just confirm that Altai can offer knowledge of a really exceptional value.

### 3. The Locality of Karagem

The point of interest, the Karagem rock, is located in the Russian part of Altai (ca 130 km to the west of Kosh Agach), close to the western tip of the South-Chuyan ridge, approximately four kilometers upstream from the Karagem’s confluence with the Argut River. The rocky protrusion with carvings rises on the right bank, towards and above a wooden bridge (Fig. 1, 2). This part of Altai is quite desert today; the nearest village called Argut is about 20 km away westwards. Closer to the site there are just some chalets used by herdsmen during the winter season. It should also be noted, that there are several rock carving sites in the rocky landscape of the Karagem’s right bank. The profound investigation of all this area requires much effort yet. Here I would like to present one of the most



Fig. 3. The Karagem valley, view from the site (eastwards).

impressive sites of Karagem which can provide information about the main character of the carvings.

The place forms a distinct protrusion, even if it does not make any dominant point in the landscape. But when standing there, one is surprised by the wide wonderful view offered by the site (Fig. 3). The elevation of the site is 1299 meters above sea level; the east latitude is  $87^{\circ}11,453'$ , and the north one  $49^{\circ}53,340''$ . Because of the high elevation, no trees obstruct the view of the Karagem River and Mountains.

The carvings themselves are situated on the top of the protrusion that makes a small plateau of approximately 100 m<sup>2</sup>. The surface is smooth because of glacier activities, and the carvings are mostly in a horizontal position. In this area there are relatively small images (the average size is just about several centimeters) of animals, birds and rarely a man is visible. The figures often seem to be in certain interaction with each other, and they make up several relatively closed groups.

There are many good reasons why the artists had chosen this kind of rock for their carvings. Apart from the interesting position, another advantage is the stone material – chalkstone with an admixture of iron<sup>2</sup>, which gives the material a light red hue. Movement at this site is somewhat dangerous, especially in the area near the ledge, where the rock falls sharply into the valley. It seems that some carvings were intentionally made on places with high risk of injury.

### *3. 1. Images – technology, chronology and semiotics*

The carvings of Karagem had been engraved with a needle-like instrument into the stone, which is, after all, the most common method of creating rock images in the whole area of the former USSR (KŠICA 1971, 169). Most of them are worked out very finely (for example Fig. 14, 15), and they are sized on average 7 cm. Other carvings are rather crude and larger, compared to the finest ones (about 15–20 cm; Fig. 4, 13). The latter are less distinct and eroded at the more exposed positions. Considering the style and image of the carvings, we can distinguish one older group, which can be dated generally to the Bronze Age. The crude style of these figures corresponds well with carvings from Muzdy Bulak (Ukok Plateau) published by V. I. Molodov (1997, 40). Most of the figures present a younger, typical nomadic style of the Iron Age. There are several “Scythian” images of deer at the site (Fig. 5, 6) but the most common carved animal was the ibex – the mountain goat. Another special group of figures consists of a composition with birds and men. There are two such carvings: one with an archer taking aim at a bird (of prey?; Fig. 16). The other is more vague: a man (with a bow?) seems to be somehow connected with the bird (Fig. 17). These figures are rather puzzling, and with no comparable material they can be considered to be of Iron Age origin (there are rare human images in Scythian art, known also as “animal style”).

---

<sup>1</sup> For the GPS information I am grateful to Eva Fraňková.

<sup>2</sup> Information from Jiří Chlachula.

### *Deer*

Images of deer are not found as frequently as, for example, ibex images, which is undoubtedly the most widely spread animal motif in the rock art of Altai and neighbouring countries. What makes deer carvings most interesting is the variability of images and their direct connection with other kinds of nomadic art and their probably strong symbolic meaning.

We can trace back the evolution of the oldest carvings (Fig. 4), which seem to be rather static and heavy, with a big body and relatively small head with both antlers visible. The “heavy style” corresponds to the character of carvings of the Late Bronze Age, as presented by V. I. Molodov (1997, 40). Three younger images are typical uniform figures of the animal style of Scythic and related peoples. The first type of image (Fig. 9) presents a deer in position “on tiptoe”, often with a lifted hind part of the body. This image is widespread on the territory from the North Caucasus, the Aral Sea region, Altai, and Mongolia and some authors assume it has a Middle Eastern origin (CHLENOVA 1994, 508). Another image presents a deer with a strong emphasis on the animal’s elasticity, the form of the body is slim, elegant, stretched, while the legs are almost invisible. The deer muzzle has a typical “beak” image, and the antlers are long, lying on the animal’s back (Fig. 5, 6). This special kind of image is also connected with Scythic art. Both types of images often occur on so-called “deer stones” (*olenye kamni*) of Altai, Tuva and Mongolia – special stelae with carved deer, whose function is not yet entirely clear (overview of interpretations see in JACOBSON 1993). The different styles of deer carvings indicate not only chronological distance, but also a changed perception of the animal as a symbol. The older ones seem to be more realistic – it is like a common animal which occurs in the forest. The younger ones are highly stylised. They seem no more to be real animals, but rather some ideas projected onto the deer. Two other deer images (Fig. 7, 8) may be of the Scythian period, but their image seems not so characteristic.

There are many theories regarding the deer in archaic nomadic and Scythic belief. According to several Russian authors, the deer motif is brought from Near Eastern cultures and subsequently transformed to a totemic animal, from which Scythian people have derived their origin (N. L. Chlenova cited in JACOBSON 1993, 32). Others have associated the deer with a solar cult, like other animals with horns, antlers or wings (BARKOVA 1985). The deer has been replaced with time by the horse – a typical “solar animal” in the Bronze Age. This process could be illustrated by some finds of special antlered and also horned crowns, which Early Nomads put on their horses’ heads. An original concept of a “deer goddess” of ancient Siberia is suggested by E. Jacobson (1993). She traces back the evolution of the old Neolithic Animal Mother, which first had the form of the female elk, but was later transformed into the deer image.

In my opinion, the theory about the Neolithic origin of this symbol may be acceptable. It is just questionable if the Early Nomads in their time really had seen in the deer image the female goddess or if the meaning of the symbol has

been changed during time. I suppose this process is highly possible. In general, the male principle is obviously dominant in nomadic societies, and the female principle in agricultural societies (BERMAN 2000, 150, 175) but, on the other hand, the highest deity of the Scythians was, according to Herodotus, the Goddess – Tabiti.

According to my observations, the deer in the Altai is connected with force and potency today. It is believed that deer antlers are a source of a special kind of energy and people who have a maral (Altai Wapiti) herd and do business with antlers, belong to the very rich in this region. The antlers of maral make an important part of various medicines and elixirs, and also traditional Altaic alcohol. Some products used in the household (e.g. spindle) are still made from antlers. The woodcarvings and paintings of deer are further a very common decoration of houses of present-day Altaic inhabitants.

### *Horses*

The images of horses from Karagem have a special position from several points of view. There is for example just one group of them. No other horse figures are found here. Whereas carvings of goats or deer are scattered on the whole area of the rock surface, the only “herd” of horses is carved on the western periphery of the plateau (Fig. 10). Horses have an unnaturally bristled mane and look quite excited. All of them are perceptibly “reconstructed” by a later (recent) “artist”. The selected original image has been newly emphasized by carving. Horses are also the only domesticated animals imaged at this site, although they lack any typical “attributes” (saddle, harness...). On the other hand, the strange images of their tails could suggest that they may have been hitched. Evidence of this type of decoration can be found in the burials of Pazyryk and in ceramographic material (ROLLE 1980, 116, 80).

It has already been mentioned that in the Early Nomads’ “world of ideas” the horse stands close to the deer and both have had a relation to the Sun. Herodotus refers to Massagetae (Scythian tribe), their worship of the Sun and the sacrifice of horses to it (JACOBSON 1993, 34). Even from ethnographic material from the 20th century we know about the particularly important position of the horse in the religion of the South Siberian peoples, especially among the Altaic folk. Several ceremonies involving horses being sacrificed to the spirits are described by V. Diószegi (1998, 270–278). Within all cases he mentions that we can distinguish the following main features: light-coloured horses are often preferred, their hide and head are hung on posts or trees after the sacrifice, the head oriented eastwards. Analogous sacrifice of white reindeer is known from the Samoyeds. In this way they ask the Sun for help (for sick people etc.).

It is a pity that the author did not mention whether or not the sacrificed animal could be of both sexes. Among the present-day Altai inhabitants there is a sharp distinction between stallions and mares. Mares are never used for riding. It should be seen as comical and not very dignifying from their point of view. The



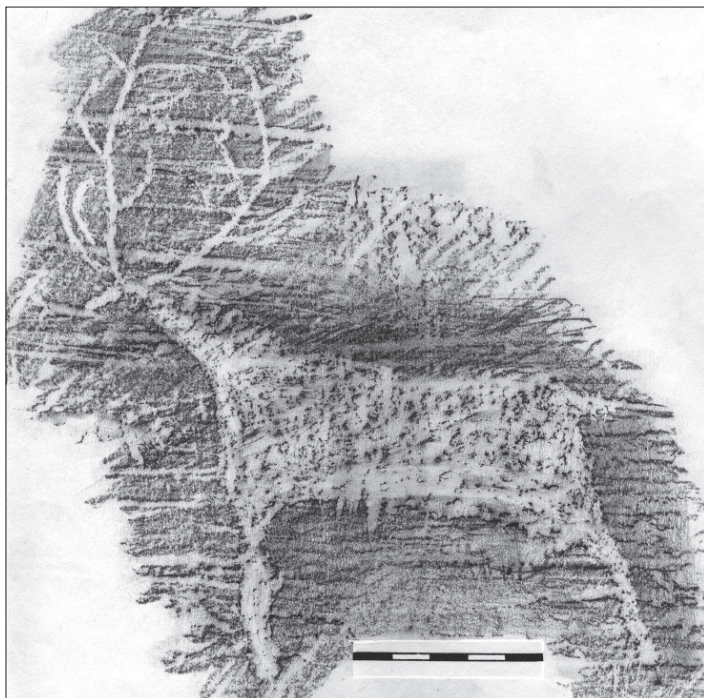


Fig. 4. Deer image of an older style.

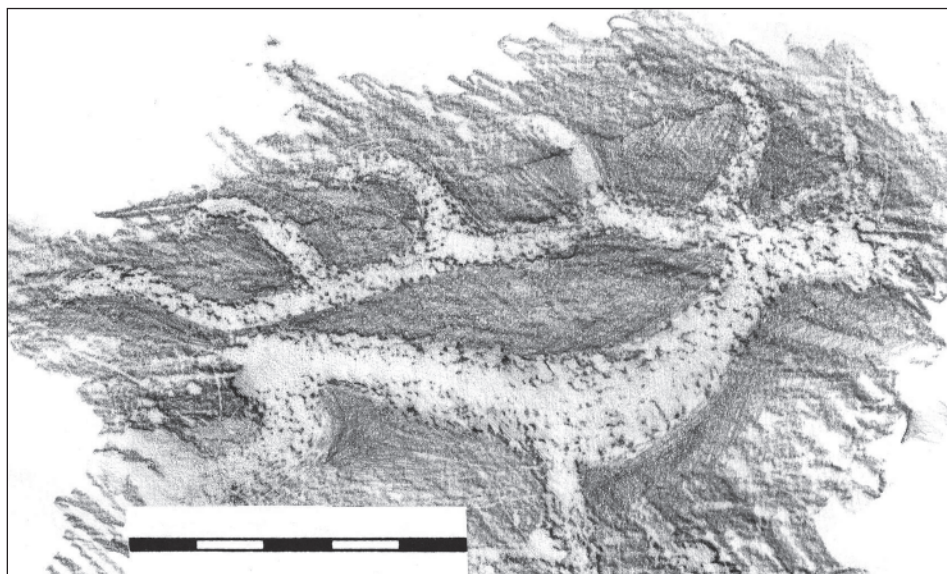


Fig. 5. Deer image of Scythian style.

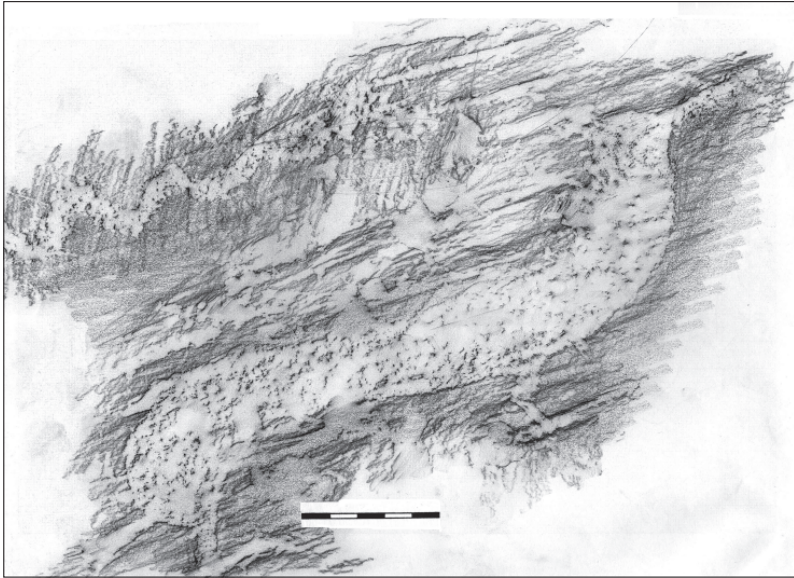


Fig. 6. Deer image of Scythian style.

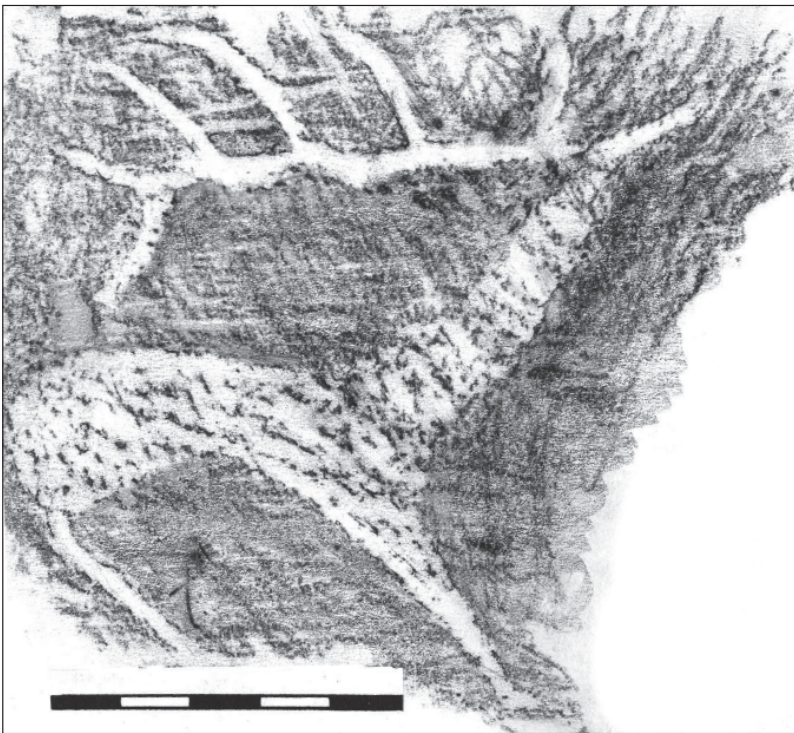


Fig. 7. Deer image of Scythian style (?).

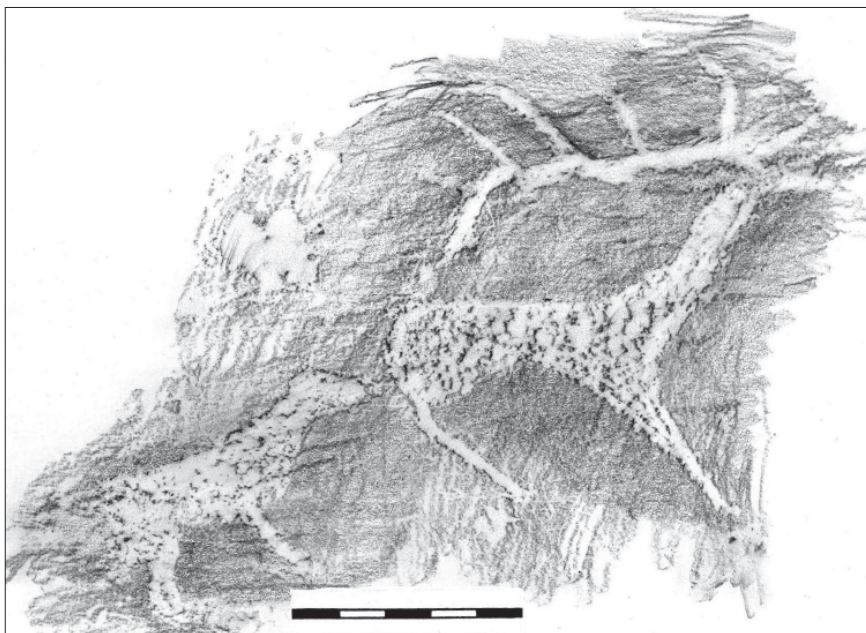


Fig. 8. Deer image of Scythian style (?).



Fig. 9. Deer image of Scythian style.

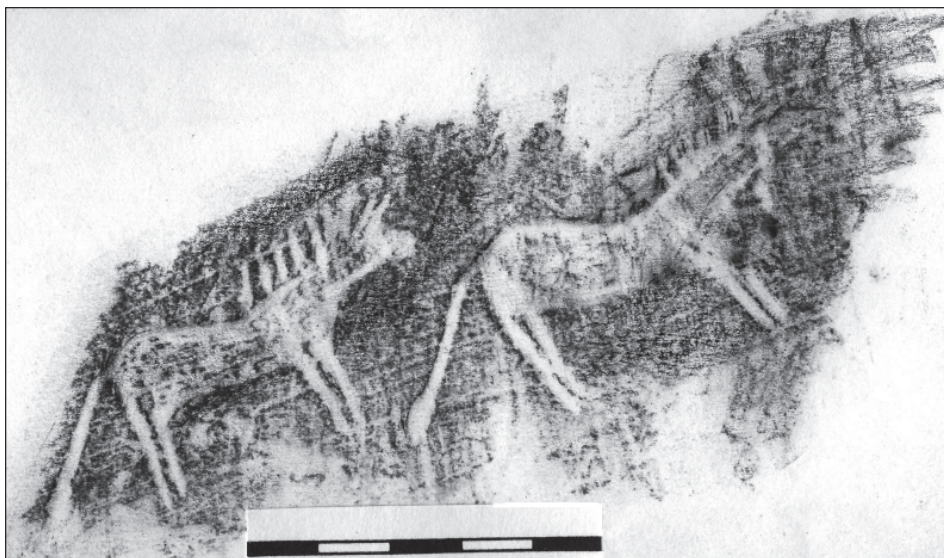


Fig. 10. Horses.

mares live rather half-wild and are just milked for preparing kumis – a special alcoholic drink. It is possible that such perception of horses is a remnant of an old religious belief. Just the male animals should represent the Sun deity on the Earth, the manifestation of a male principle.

### *Archers and birds*

There are only two images of humans at the Karagem site, but always in connection with a bird. The first carving embodies a man targeting a bird-of-prey with a bow, probably a falcon<sup>33</sup> (Fig. 16). The second one presents another man who seems to hold something (bow?) in his hand, and is standing close to the bird. In fact, their bodies merge together. Next to this composition there is a vague carving of another man (?) and bird (Fig. 17).

Birds-of-prey were a common and popular motif in Early Nomad and Scythian art. How strong the symbol had been is well illustrated by its long tradition. After the Scythian collapse, Sarmatians assumed some traces of their style, and influenced the rise of the polychrome style of the Goths and consequently the animal style of the Germanic North (ROSTOVTZEFF 1922, 181–222; TALBOT RICE 1957, 178–196). In these medieval styles we can thus trace up the Scythian style, but the symbols are quite different, just the bird-of-prey “survived” the long journey through time.

But what was actually the meaning of this symbol? In the shamanistic tradition, birds and birds-of-prey are believed to have a certain connection with the “upper world”.

<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to Marián Novotný for the identification.

Feathers of eagles were used for decorating shamans' head-dresses (DIÓSZEGY 1998, 160), the drum of the shaman serves as a "bird" (mostly an eagle) and helps the shaman reach the dwelling place of the higher deities. Birds in this context can be perceived as a medium between man and the "upper world". The man trying to shoot them maybe expresses an effort to reach contact with "heaven".

The bow and arrow, the traditional weapon of Middle-Asian Nomads, also has a magic power in shamanic belief. A. N. Glukhov describes a habit of divination by a bow among the Altaians and Buryats:

(...) When divining the shaman holds it (bow) in his right hand, grasping the middle of the string with his thumb and forefinger so as to balance the two ends of the bow; guessing (i.e. enumerating the probabilities) what they want to know, he is waiting; following his words, the bow must move on the string as on an axis; this is a result of the invisible power of the spirit whom the shaman is questioning... (A. N. Glukhov cited in DIÓSZEGY 1998, 279).

Without any more material of comparison it is difficult to better understand these symbolic interactions between man and bird carved on the rock, but the observations presented illustrate the relation between a seemingly mundane equipment, animals and the life-world of these peoples.

### *Ibex – mountain goat*

There is a certain relation between the Early Nomadic art and antlered or horned animals. The mountain goats represent the most common motif of the Karagem site, and, I would say, also generally in the rock art of southern Siberia (Fig. 11–15, 18). The connection with the solar cult impressed a unique carving of a goat with horns that make two sun-like circles (Fig. 11). According to alternative interpretations, such carved "solar creatures" may be just records of specific entoptic phenomena caused by using hallucinogens (ROZWADOWSKI 2004, 65–72). Thus, the question of solar symbols still remains rather enigmatic. In the material culture of Early Nomads goats are much less common. A bronze helmet with an ibex on the top is known from Minusinsk, and also several wooden carvings of ibex, for example, from Pazyryk (TALBOT RICE 1957, fig. 58, 40). We lack any mythological evidence concerning this animal.

For the present-day Altai inhabitants, the ibex is a popular game. One member of our expedition received horns of the mountain goat as a precious present from the Kazakhs.

### *3. 2. Karagem site in the landscape*

Until now I have discussed the rock carvings from Karagem mainly from mythological and ethnological points of view. I have tried to trace up what do the depicted animals and men express and what kind of traditions they have certain connections with. In this chapter I would like to study the topic from a landscape perspective.



Fig. 11. Goat with “solar” horns.

It would be appropriate to discuss here particularly how the carvings are scattered in the landscape and set them into a context with the surroundings, to obtain a more holistic view of them. However, such questions are not yet possible to be entirely resolved, because, as already mentioned, it would demand much more terrain examination than I was able to do within the restricted time I had. Despite it, some basic observations can perhaps illuminate certain relations between the site of Karagem and its surroundings.

The carvings actually have a very particular position. They are situated over a place where a bridge has been standing today. If we investigate the terrain, we realize that no other place along the wide river would be appropriate for a bridge construction. It seems that the path going over is the only used trail since the human presence in this area. The carvings are not visible from the path, because of their horizontal localization and their being about 20 meters above the path. People who want to see them, must climb up the rocky slope, and should also know where they actually are. It seems that these carvings were not created for being shown, but rather for “just being there” – this also corresponds well with their relatively small size. All this seems to me as a kind of magic, maybe in the sense “nobody needs to know about it, the main thing is that it works”. The char-

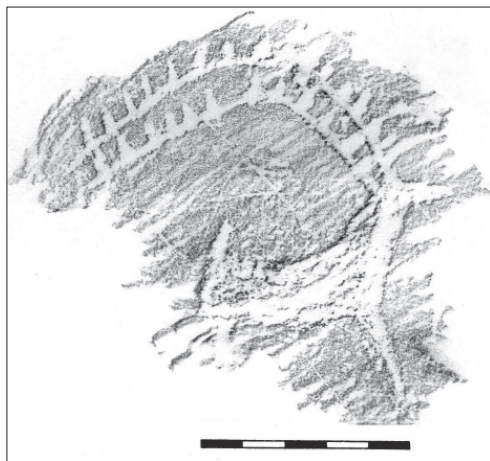


Fig. 12. Goat image.

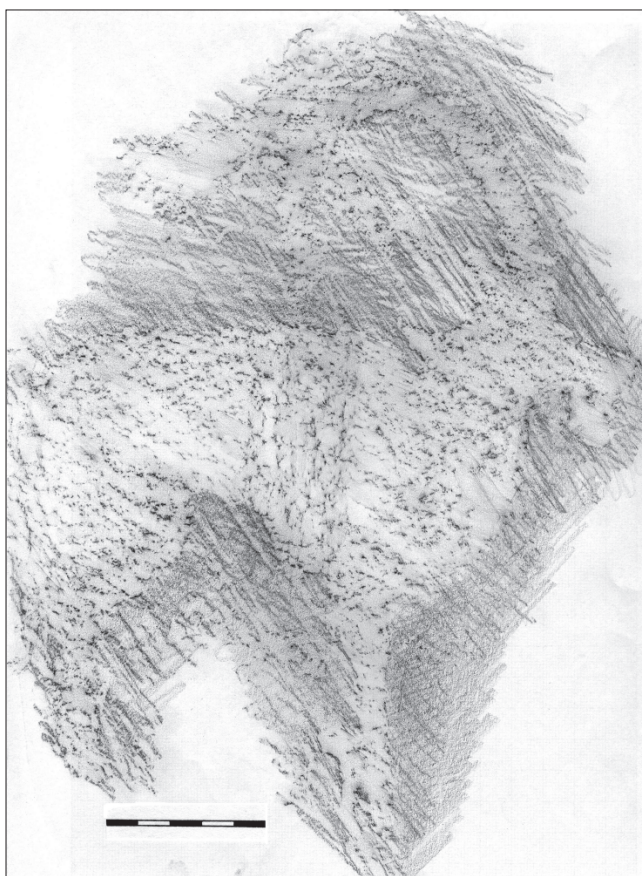


Fig. 13. Goat image.

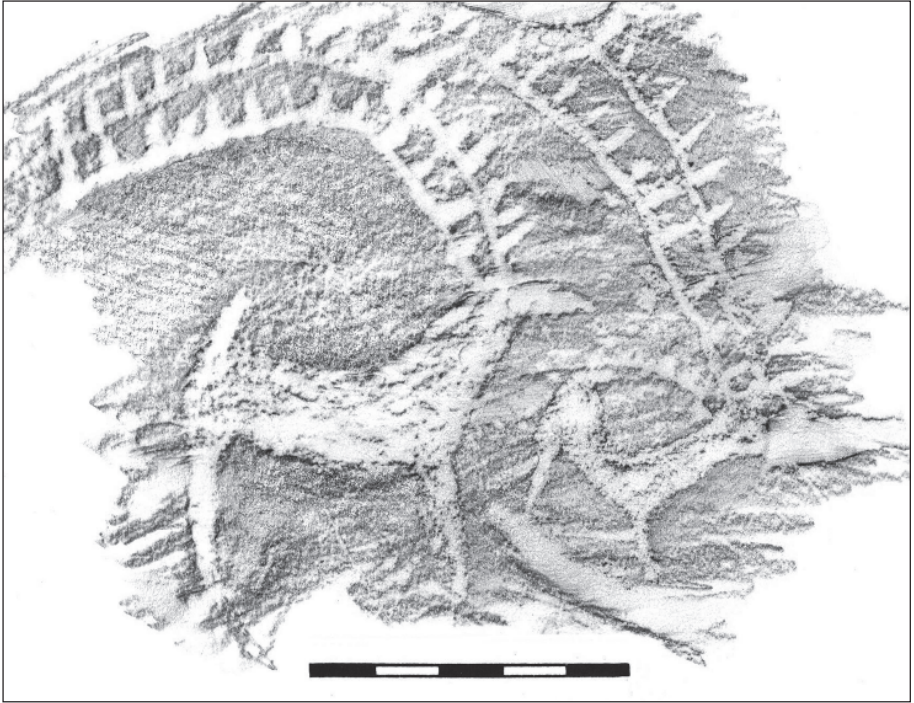


Fig. 14. Goat image.

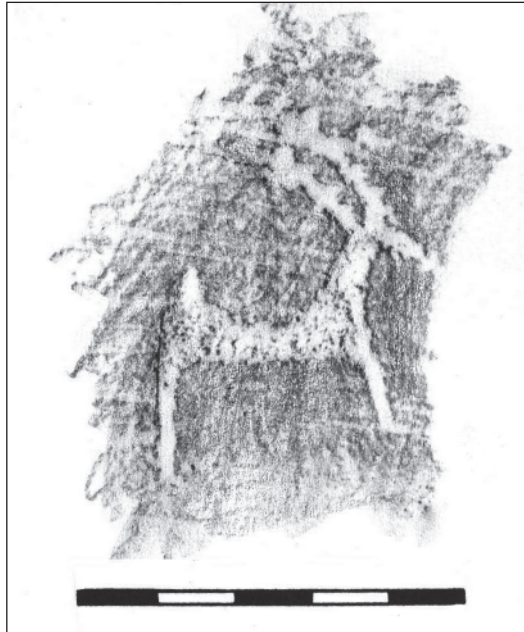


Fig. 15. Goat image.



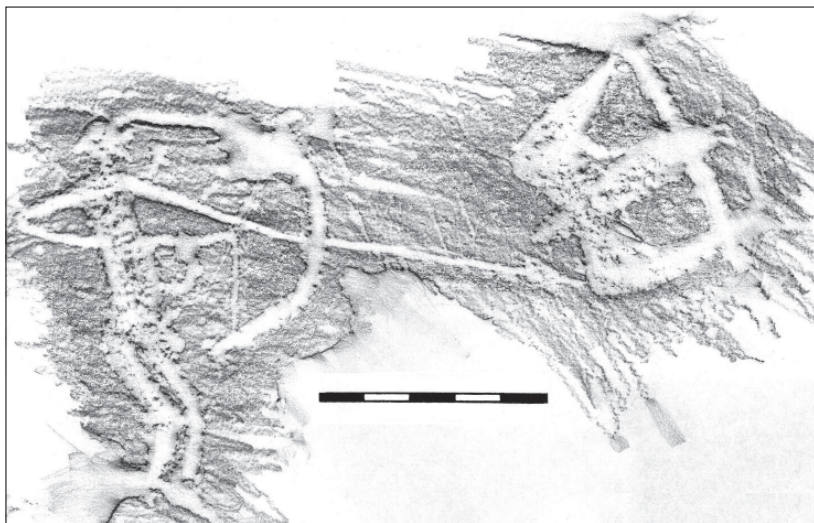


Fig. 16. Archer and bird-of-pray.



Fig. 17. Archer and bird-of-pray (?).



Fig. 18. Group of goats.

acter of the magic (if we call it like this) could be maybe explained as a protection against evil and danger on the road. This is still of great importance among the present-day Altai inhabitants. Offering places (obviously only a stack of stones with inserted branches), scattered in the landscape in the most dangerous parts of ways, are still used. For the “Gods of Altai” (using words of our attendant), vodka is offered and several hairs of horse mane, or a piece of textile bound on a branch. I think it is not impossible that carvings from the Karagem valley could have had such a protective function, especially if we consider their proximity to the trail (in detail see ČERMÁKOVÁ 2006).

Another fact worth to be mentioned here, is the possible connection with a funeral area not too far from the Karagem rocks. Approximately 7 km westwards from the described site in the steppe between the Argut River and Mountains, there is an extensive burial place, consisting of hundreds of mounds of various stone constructions, shapes and sizes. I have not found any information about this place and I do not believe that research has been conveyed here. However, a stark Scythian inhabitation along the Argut River is mentioned (BOKOVENKO 1995). Different shapes of mounds and a large extent show a long tradition of funeral activities. Of course, we know nothing certain about the connections between this place and the carvings from the Karagem valley. But something can be suggested by the landscape: the traveller going along the Karagem stream towards the burial place can feel uncomfortable because of the dark narrow rocky valley. But approaching the place of confluence of Karagem with Argut, the path becomes suddenly wide and before the traveller opens an extended steppe with mounds. Is that the way for the funeral procession protected by carvings? Questions like these have to remain unresolved here. Anyway, they show the direction which further research should take.

## References

- BARKOVA, L. L. 1985: *Izobrazheniya rogatykh i krylatelykh tigrov v iskusstve drevnego Altaya*, *Arkheologicheskyy sbornik Gosudarstvennogo Ermitazha* 26, 30–44.
- BOKOVENKO, N. A. 1995: *Scythian Culture in the Altai Mountains*. In: Davis-Kimball, J. (ed.), *Nomads of the European Steppes in the early Iron Age*. Berkeley, 285–295.
- BERMAN, M. 2000: *Wandering God*. New York.
- ČERMÁKOVÁ, E. 2006: *Specifika vnímání krajiny nomádkými etniky*. In: Samec, P. – Kynický, J. (eds.), *Main results of Mongolia scientific research in the Mongolia Project 2000–2005: summaries, evaluations, and interpretations (Part II)*. Brno, 66–68.
- CHLENOVA, N. L. 1994: *On the Degree of Similarity between Material Culture Components within the “Scythian World”*. In: Genito, B. (ed.), *The Archaeology of the Steppes. Methods and Strategies*. Napoli.
- DIÓSZEGY, V. 1998: *Shamanism: selected writings of Vilmos Diószegy edited by Mihály Hoppál*. Budapest.
- JACOBSON, E. 1993: *The deer goddess of ancient Siberia*. Leiden – New York – Köln.
- KŠICA, M. 1971: *Felsbilder in der Sowjetunion*. I. (Allgemeines), *Anthropologie* IX/2–3, 169–181.
- KŠICA, M. 1973: *Felsbilder in der Sowjetunion*. IV. (Sibirien), *Anthropologie* XI/1–2, 145–187.

- MOLODOV, V. I. 1997: Nekatorije itogi archeologicheskikh issledovaniy na juge Gornogo Altaja, Rossijskaja Archeologija 1, 37–49.
- OKLADNIKOV, A. P. 1966: Petroglify Angary. Moskva.
- POLOSMAN, N. 2001: Vsadniki Ukoka. Novosibirsk.
- ROLLE, R. 1980: Die Welt der Skythen. Luzern – Frankfurt am Main.
- ROSTOVTZEFF, M. I. 1922: Iranians & Greeks in South Russia. Oxford.
- ROZWADOWSKI, A. 2004: Symbols through Time. Interpreting the Rock Art of Central Asia. Poznań.
- RUDENKO, S. I. 1951: Der zweite Kurgan von Pasyryk. Berlin.
- TALBOT RICE, T. 1957: The Scythians. London.

## SKALNÍ UMĚNÍ V ÚDOLÍ ŘEKY KARAGEM V RUSKÉM ALTAJI

Jihosibiřské pohoří Altaj představuje jedinečnou kroniku minulosti. Díky extrémním klimatickým podmínkám, neexistenci zemědělství a pověrčivému strachu místních obyvatel se v této oblasti dochovalo obrovské množství prehistorických památek. Tato práce představuje malý zlomek z altajské prehistorie, lokalitu nad řekou Karagem se skalními rytinami. Příspěvek je výstupem z expedice „Altaj 2003“, zorganizované Univerzitou Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně (Ústav paleoekologie), která se uskutečnila v červnu a červenci 2003. Dokumentace skalních rytin byla jedním z mnoha záměrů expedice, jejíž hlavním cílem byl botanický, geologický a ekologický průzkum jižního Altaje.

Fenomén skalního umění je na jižní Sibiři dosti rozšířený, a to již od nejstarších dob (rytiny paleolitického stáří byly objeveny i na známém plató Ukok). Množství skalních rytin zanechala zejména kultura afanasjevská (2500–1500 př. n. l.) stojící na přechodu mezi loveckou a pasteveckou ekonomikou. Největší proslulosti dosáhly časně nomádské skupiny, mezi něž řadíme i Skýty a jim příbuzná etnika, která po sobě zanechala petroglify v typickém zvěrném stylu. V tradici skalního umění do jisté míry pokračovali i Hunové.

Zkoumaná lokalita s rytinami se nachází nad řekou Karagem, v ruském Altaji (obr. 1), blízko západního cípu jihočujského hřbetu, přibližně 130 km západně od města Koš-Agač (údaje GPS: 1299 m n. m.; 87°11,453'E; 49°53,340'N). Skalnatý výběžek s rytinami vystupuje ze svahu nad pravým břehem řeky (obr. 2), v místě, kde ji překlenuje dřevěný most. Ačkoliv lokalita sama netvoří příliš výraznou krajinnou dominantu, nabízí poměrně daleký výhled východním směrem proti toku řeky (obr. 3). Povrch skaliska je díky ledovcovým aktivitám hladký a rytiny se nacházejí v horizontální poloze, často i na místech, kde se jejich tvůrce vydával v nebezpečí pádu do údolí. Rytiny byly vytvářeny v průběhu přinejmenším několika staletí, jak naznačují různé umělecké styly. Nejlépe je to možné pozorovat na obrazech jelenů, jejichž vzezření se mění od „těžkých“ jedinců spadajících obecně do doby bronzové (obr. 4) až po elegantní pružná zvířata poukazující jednoznačně na zvěrný styl Skýtů (obr. 5, 6, 9). Vzácnější jsou obrazy koní (obr. 10), kteří představují jediná domestikovaná zvířata. Jejich místo v kultu bylo a stále je pro obyvatele Altaje klíčové. Ojedinelé jsou rovněž obrazy lidských postav. Na zkoumané lokalitě se objevily jen v omezeném počtu; vždy šlo o lukostřelce, mířící na dravé ptáky (obr. 16, 17). Jednoznačně nejpočetnější skupinu (nejen na sledované lokalitě, ale i obecně ve skalním umění jižní Sibiře) představují kozorožci, velice často znázorňovaní s rohy přehnané velikosti (obr. 12–15, 18). Určitou možností jejich sepětí se solárním kultem naznačuje exemplář s kruhovými „slunečnicemi“ rohy (obr. 11).

V krajinném kontextu má lokalita pozoruhodnou pozici. Nachází se nad místem, kde dnes vede dřevěný most přes řeku – očividně je to jediné místo, kde bylo možné konstrukci postavit. Nabízí se myšlenka, že komunikace v tak extrémním terénu musela vést tudy odjakživa. Stezka pokračuje úzkým údolím, sevřeným na jedné straně příkrými skálami a na druhé divokou řekou Karagem. Rytiny nejsou z cesty vidět, protože leží vysoko nad ní. Domnívám se, že vyryté obrazy mohly mít určitý ochranný význam pro nomády, překonávající na tomto místě řeku. Nebylo důležité, aby

rytíny „byly vidět“ (většina měří jen pouze kolem 7 cm v průměru), ale spíše aby „byly tam“. Po několikakilometrové cestě poutník dosáhne místa soutoku řeky Karagem s řekou Argut. Úzké údolí se zde náhle otevírá do široké stepi poseté mohylami. Zda tato dnešní stezka kopíruje dávná pohřební procesí, zůstane ovšem nezodpovězeno.

Obr. 1: Lokalizace skalních rytin v údolí řeky Karagem (vyznačena křížkem).

Obr. 2: Pohled na lokalitu se skalními rytinami od jihu.

Obr. 3: Údolí řeky Karagem, pohled od lokality k východu.

Obr. 4: Rytina jelena ve „starším stylu“.

Obr. 5–9: Rytiny jelenů ve „skýtském“ stylu.

Obr. 10: Koně.

Obr. 11: Kozorožec se „slunečními“ rohy.

Obr. 12–15: Rytiny kozorožců.

Obr. 16–17: Lukostřelec a dravý pták.

Obr. 18: Skupina kozorožců.

Mgr. Eva Čermáková

Černovická 6

617 00 Brno

cermakova.eva@post.cz