SOĞANLI P1: A BRIEF REPORT ON RECENTLY DISCOVERED PETROGLYPHS IN CAPPADOCIA, THEIR PRELIMINARY DATING AND ATTRIBUTION

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents preliminary results of investigation of a rock art site revealed by the authors during an expedition to Cappadocia in 2017. In this article, we provide general information about the revealed rock art site, a selective description of some petroglyphs, and proposals for their dating and attribution. The obtained results may be helpful for a comprehensive understanding of other rock art sites in Turkey. A detailed study is ongoing and may attract a panel of experts in various fields to describe all the petroglyphs and to establish their precise attribution.

Keywords: tamgas, petroglyphs, Turks, Cappadocia, Soğanlı valley, Turkic migrations, Anatolia, Asia Minor, Central Asia, archaeology, history

Introduction

Over the past hundred years, Cappadocia has attracted the attention of outstanding archaeologists and art historians who have generally focused on the Roman and Byzantine periods. According to Robert Ousterhout, more than seven hundred churches have been found in the region, and many of them still preserve amazing wall paintings and frescoes related to the highly developed Byzantine tradition (Ousterhout 2005, 7; Ousterhout 2017, 9 – 13, 23 – 24)[1]. Despite the poor state of preservation of some Christian churches and chapels, their comprehensive study allows scientists to reconstruct the history of Christian communities from Late Antiquity until the beginning of the 20th c. At the same time, rock art sites with quite primitive depictions often dropped out of sight of researchers. This gap requires more attention from scientists since any objects of historical heritage in Cappadocia, regardless of their cultural affiliation, artistic value, or dating, can add to understanding of the region's history.

A massive volcanic plateau between Nevşehir and Kayseri was formed at the end of the

[1] An intensive introduction to the subject can be found in Ousterhout 2005, 7 – 22 and Ousterhout 2017, xxi – xxiii, 1 – 20.



Fig. 1. Soğanlı valley. A general view (February 2017; Photo: D. Shevchenko)
Обр. 1. Долината Соганлъ. Общ изглед (февруари 2017; Снимка: Д. Шевченко)

Miocene. Due to a severe continental climate and temperature fluctuations—hot, dry summers and cold winters—water erosion has become one of the most important terraforming processes in the region. As a result, a valley 25 kilometers long and several hundred meters deep eventually was cut through the region's massive volcanic deposits (fig. 1). The erosion process, with varying degrees of intensity, began in the Late Pliocene and continues until the present day. Both water erosion and temperature fluctuations have been causing intensive rock mass destruction, so the presence of relatively well-preserved rock art is now a unique known case for the Soğanlı valley. We do not exclude the possibility, however, that more rock art sites will be discovered there in the future.

Site Soğanlı P1

In early 2017, inhabitants of Soğanlı village informed us about the presence of rock art in Soğanlı valley and emphasized that these images looked very odd, primitive, and poorly executed. We visited the place in February 2017 and confirmed this information. The rock art seems to be unique to Cappadocia. According to local archaeologists, up to 90 sites with rock paintings and petroglyphs were found in Turkey, but none were found in Cappadocia until this time (fig. 2; Dönmez, Aslan 2019; Eker 2023). We refer to the discovered site as "The rock art site Soğanlı P1", or *Soğanlı P1* for short[2].

The rock art site is located in the area 38°20′17.5-21.5″N 34°59′10.5-30.0″E, around 250 m north and around 400 m northwest of the center of Soğanlı village. The site includes three rock panels with clearly distinguishable images, some of which are well-preserved (fig. 3). Petroglyphs

[2] In case any other rock art sites are discovered in the Soğanlı valley, a numbering system *Soğanlı Pn* (where *n* is the index of the site) will simplify reference to the different sites.



Fig. 2. Localization of the rock art sites in Turkey after Dönmez, Aslan 2019 (Map: A. Beliakov):1. Baltalıin and İnkaya caves (Kızıltepe, Mardin); 2. Aizanoi (Çavdarhisar, Kütahya); 3. Latmos rock paintings (Beşparmak mountains, Muğla); 4. Tavabaşı cave (Seydikemer, Muğla); 5. Kumbucağı (Kemer, Antalya); 6. Akyapı cave (Gülnar, Mersin); 7. Salihler village (Güdül, Ankara); 8. Esatlı village (Mesudiye, Ordu); 9. Dilli valley (Kemaliye, Erzincan); 10. Atatürk barrage (Kahta, Adıyaman); 11. Cunni cave (Erzurum); 12. Şenkaya rock paintings (Erzurum); 13. Başköy rock paintings (Çıldır, Ardahan); 14. Doyumlu rock paintings (Kars); 15. Borluk valley (Kars); 16. Çamuşlu rock paintings (Kars); 17. Kızların cave (Van); 18. Pagan village rock paintings (Yeşilalıç, Van); 19. Tirşin plateau (Van); 20. Gevaruk plateau (Hakkâri); 21. Deraser (Arık) cave (Batman); 22. Keçe cave (Elbistan, Kahramanmaraş)

Обр. 2. Местоположение на обектите със скално изкуство от Турция по Dönmez, Aslan 2019 (Карта: А. Беляков): 1. Пещерите Балталъин и Инкая (Къзълтепе, Мардин); 2. Айзаной (Чавдархисар, Кютахя); 3. Скални рисунки край Латмос (планините Бешпармак, Мугла); 4. Пещерата Тавабашъ (Сейдикемер, Мугла); 5. Кумбуджагъ (Кемер, Анталия); 6. Пещерата Акяпъ (Гюлнар, Мерсин); 7. Село Салихлер (Гюдюл, Анкара); 8. Село Есатлъ (Месудийе, Орду); 9. Долината Дили (Кемалийе, Ерзинджан); 10. Баражът Аатюрк (Кахта, Адъяман); 11. Пещерата Джуни (Ерзурум); 12. Скални рисунки край Шенкая (Ерзурум); 13. Скални рисунки край Башкьой (Чълдър, Ардахан); 14. Скални рисунки край Доюмлу (Карс); 15. Долината Борлук (Карс); 16. Скални рисунки край Чамушлу (Карс); 17. Пещерата Къзларън (Ван); 18. Скални рисунки край с. Паган (Йешилалъч, Ван); 19. Платото Тиршин (Ван); 20. Платото Геварук (Хакяръ); 21. Пещерата Дерасер/Арък (Батман); 22. Пещерата Кече (Елбистан, Кахраманмараш)



Fig. 3. Aerial view of the rock art site Soğanlı P1
Обр. 3. Поглед от въздуха към скалния обект Соганлъ P1

are arranged along an ancient route that leads to Roman and Byzantine shelters and rock-cut churches. Nowadays this route corresponds with a pathway that local shepherds use. In the Roman and Byzantine periods, there was apparently a pathway connecting the main road of the valley to settlements located higher up the slope.

Petroglyphs are spread over a small area along the shepherd's path and distributed on three rock panels:

Rock panel I, located at 38°20′21.1″N 34°59′29.7″E;

Rock panel II, located at 38°20′20.8″N 34°59′27.8″E, about 50 m to the West from panel I;

Rock panel III, located at 38°20′17.8″N 34°59′10.9″E, a little bit separately, about 400 m to the West-Southwest from panel II.

The rock surfaces of the panels are weathered and have a reddish-brown color. They are characterized by numerous small holes and indentations, which are the result of natural erosion. The texture of the rock is rough and uneven, with visible cracks and crevices running across its surface. The surface of the weathering crust was subjected to instrumental processing while the petroglyphs were drawn, which uncovered the underlying brighter layer. All images were created using hammering or engraving techniques. The tinted color of the engravings varies from dark brown to light brown, which indicates different periods of their creation.

Petroglyphs

In the present article, we provide description of petroglyphs from rock panels I and III as well as selected petroglyphs from rock panel II. We limit ourselves to a subset of petroglyphs from panel II that are important for attributing and dating the whole complex Soğanlı P1.

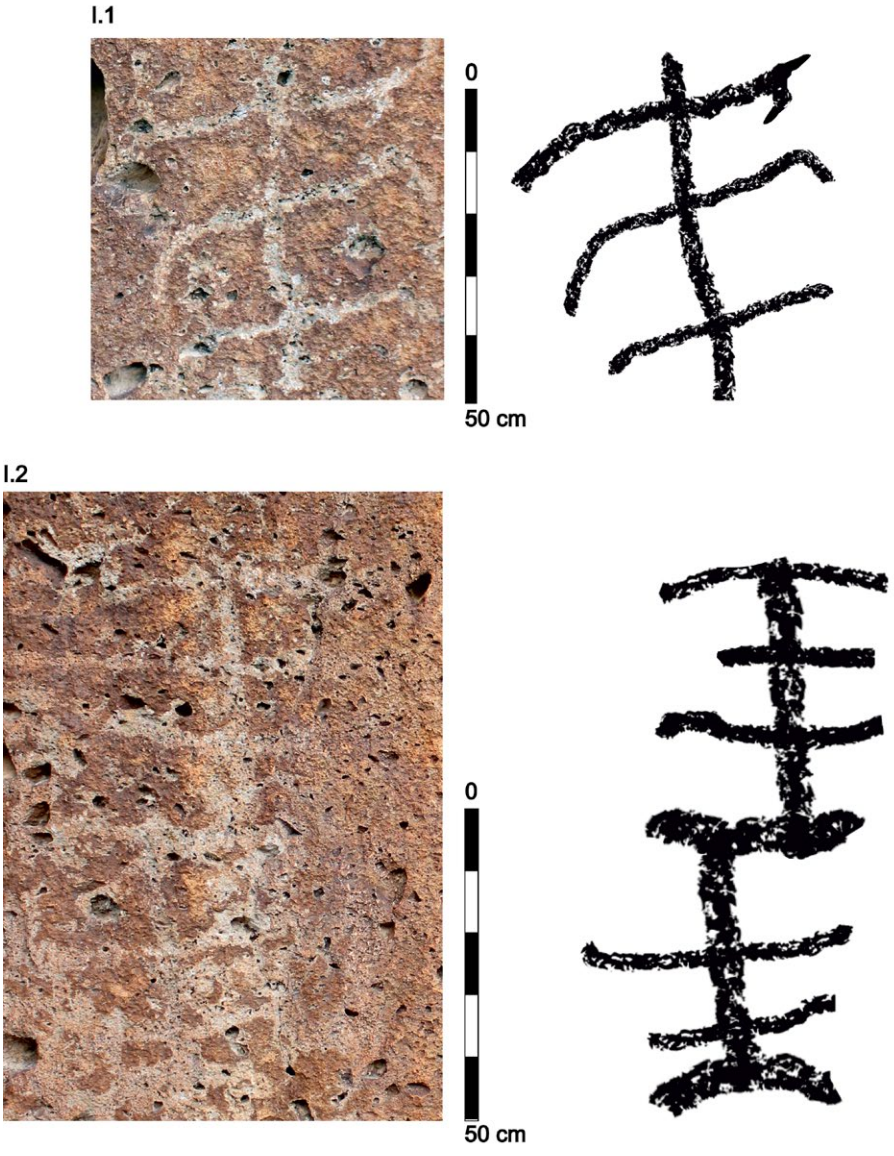

Fig. 4. Rock panel I, petroglyphs I.1 and I.2 (Photos and drawings: D. Shevchenko)
Обр. 4. Скален панел I, петроглифи I.1 и I.2 (Снимки и рисунки: Д. Шевченко)

Rock panel I

Rock panel I (fig. 4) is less informative and has two layers of images. The first layer is almost invisible. The second layer is represented by two distinguishable petroglyphs. The first petroglyph I.1[3] consists of a vertical line 60 cm tall and three horizontal lines that cross the vertical one. The middle line is curved down to the left and right, and the upper line is depicted with a tiny hook to the right (fig. 4: I.1). The second petroglyph I.2 is preserved much worse compared to the previous one. It is a double sign consisting of two vertical lines (45 cm long each) and seven parallel lines crossing them. Lower and upper parallel lines are slightly curved downward (fig. 4: I.2).

[3] We refer to the petroglyphs in the *X.m* format, where ***X*** is a Roman numeral, indicating the rock panel, and ***m*** is an Arabic numeral that indicates a particular petroglyph or groups of petroglyphs. Petroglyphs numbering is specific to the panel (i.e., each panel has its own petroglyphs numbering).

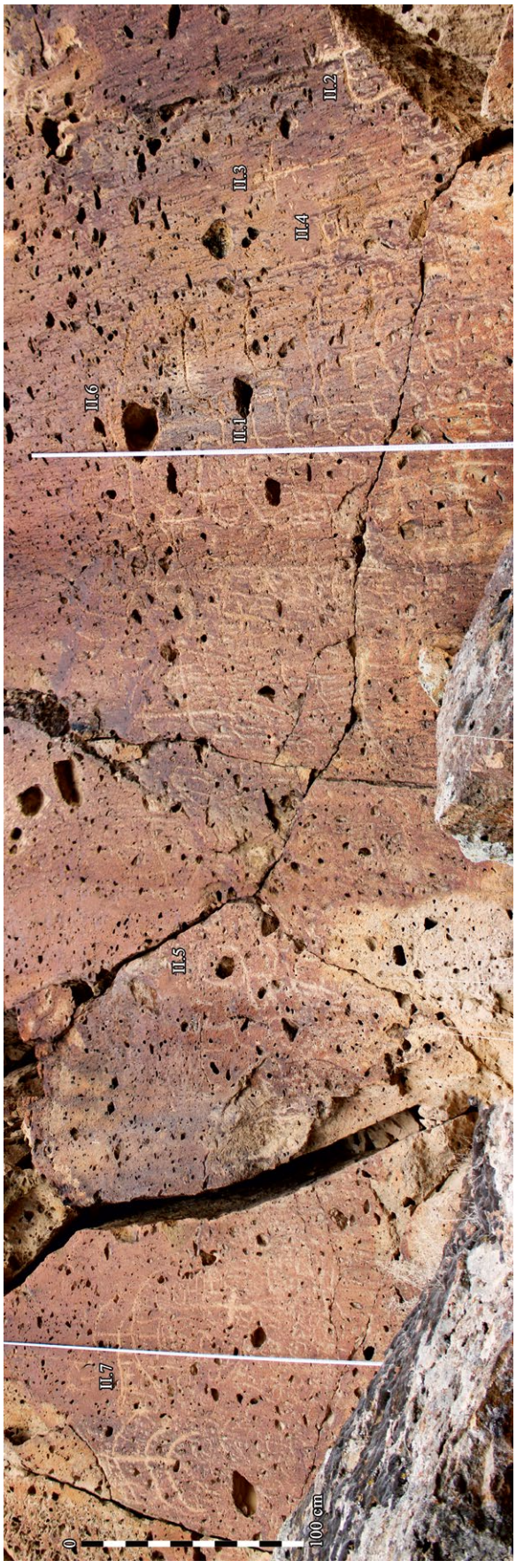

Fig. 5. Rock panel II, a general view and the core petroglyphs location on the panel (Photo: D. Shevchenko)

Обр. 5. Скален панел II, общ поглед и местоположение на основното ядро от петроглифите върху панела (Снимка: Д. Шевченко)

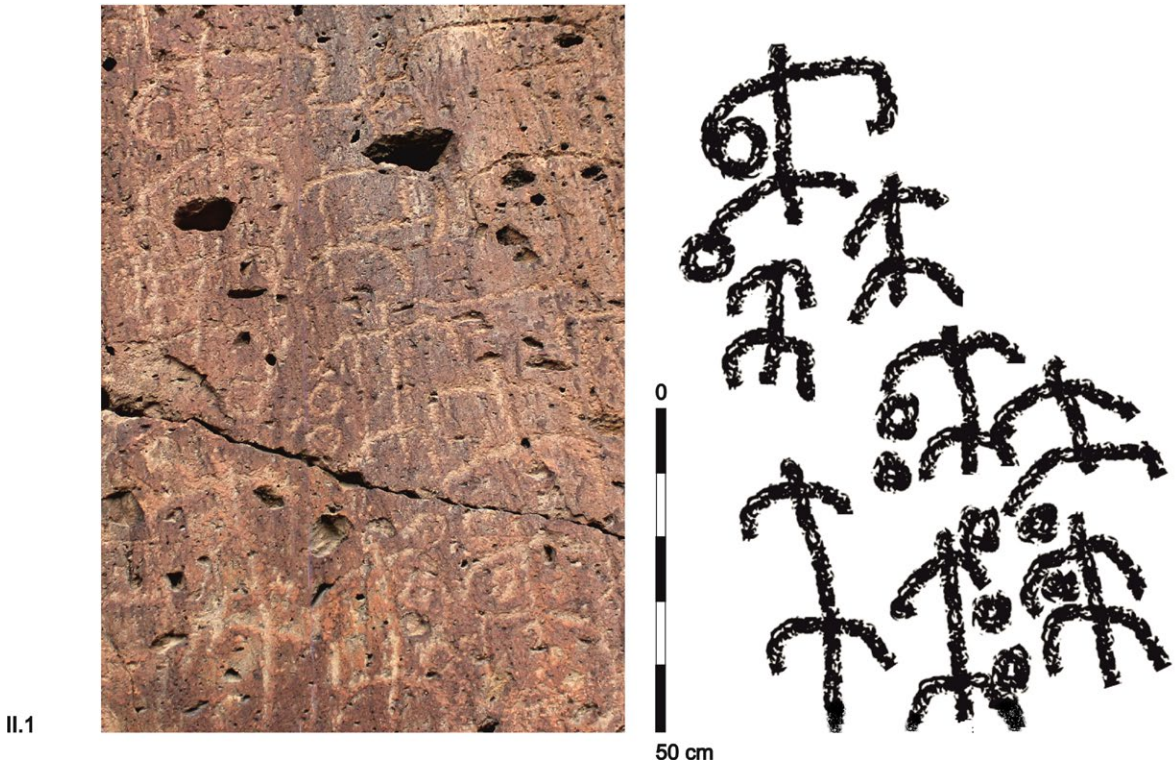

Fig. 6. Rock panel II, group of petroglyphs II.1 (Photo and drawing: D. Shevchenko)
Обр. 6. Скален панел II, петроглифна група II.1 (Снимка и рисунка: Д. Шевченко)

Rock panel II

Rock panel II contains a large number of various non-figurative images as well as two figurative scenes with an image of an animal and a fantastic creature (fig. 5). The panel is divided into two parts by a vertical crack. In total, more than one hundred petroglyphs in varying degrees of preservation were discovered there, and some deserve particular attention.

The first layer of rock art is the worst preserved. All images are badly damaged as a result of water erosion and are almost unrecognizable. Taking into account some poorly visible remnants, however, such as vertical and horizontal lines with and without hooks, it can be concluded that these images are reminiscent of petroglyphs of the first layer of panel I and are probably synchronous with them.

The second layer is preserved much better and includes multiple abstract signs and two figurative scenes. The majority of the second layer consists of non-figurative engravings, which might be very important for the further attribution of this rock art site. The group of petroglyphs II.1 is particularly visible and vaguely resembles quasi-anthropomorphic figures without heads (fig. 6)[4]. Glyphs are executed in a very primitive and schematic artistic style and usually consist of three lines: a vertical line crossed with hooked-shaped lines that curve down. Several "figures" are depicted with small circles. Along with these images, we can also mention the following petroglyphs: petroglyph II.2 (fig. 7: II.2), a considerable part of which is missing due to a crack that destroyed the lower part

[4] Although these figures may look anthropomorphic, we assume they are actually not, as they have no heads, and what could be taken as legs are depicted strangely (to say the least).

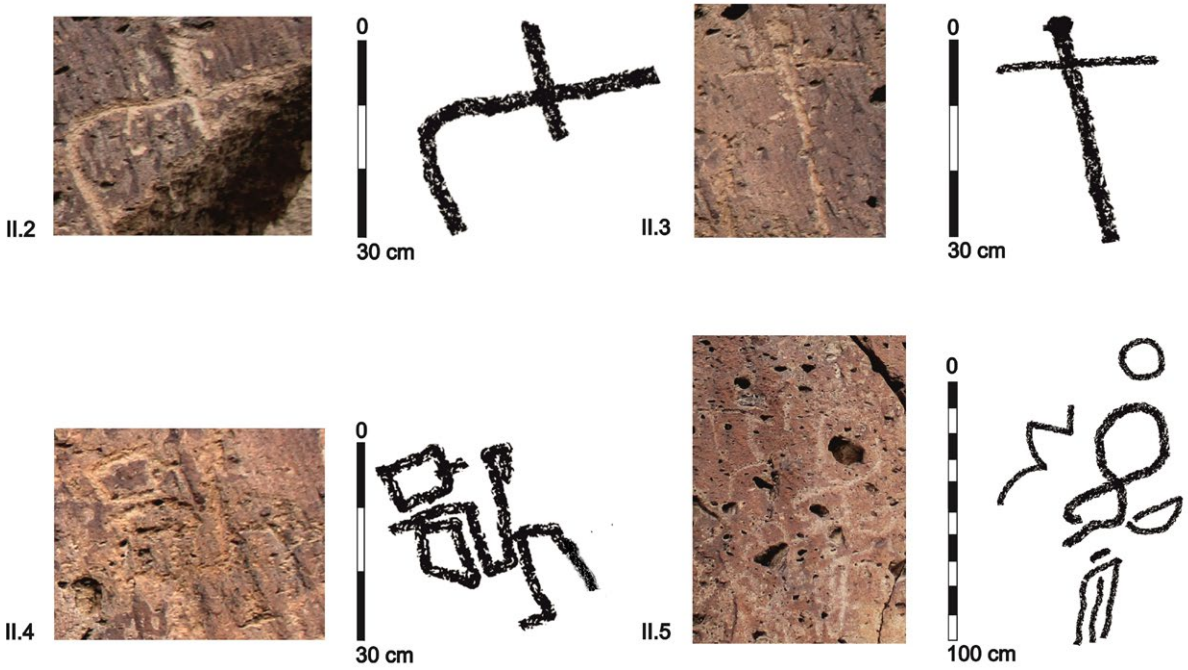

Fig. 7. Rock panel II, petroglyphs II.2 – 5 (Photos and drawings: D. Shevchenko)
Обр. 7. Скален панел II, петроглифи II.2 – 5 (Снимки и рисунки: Д. Шевченко)

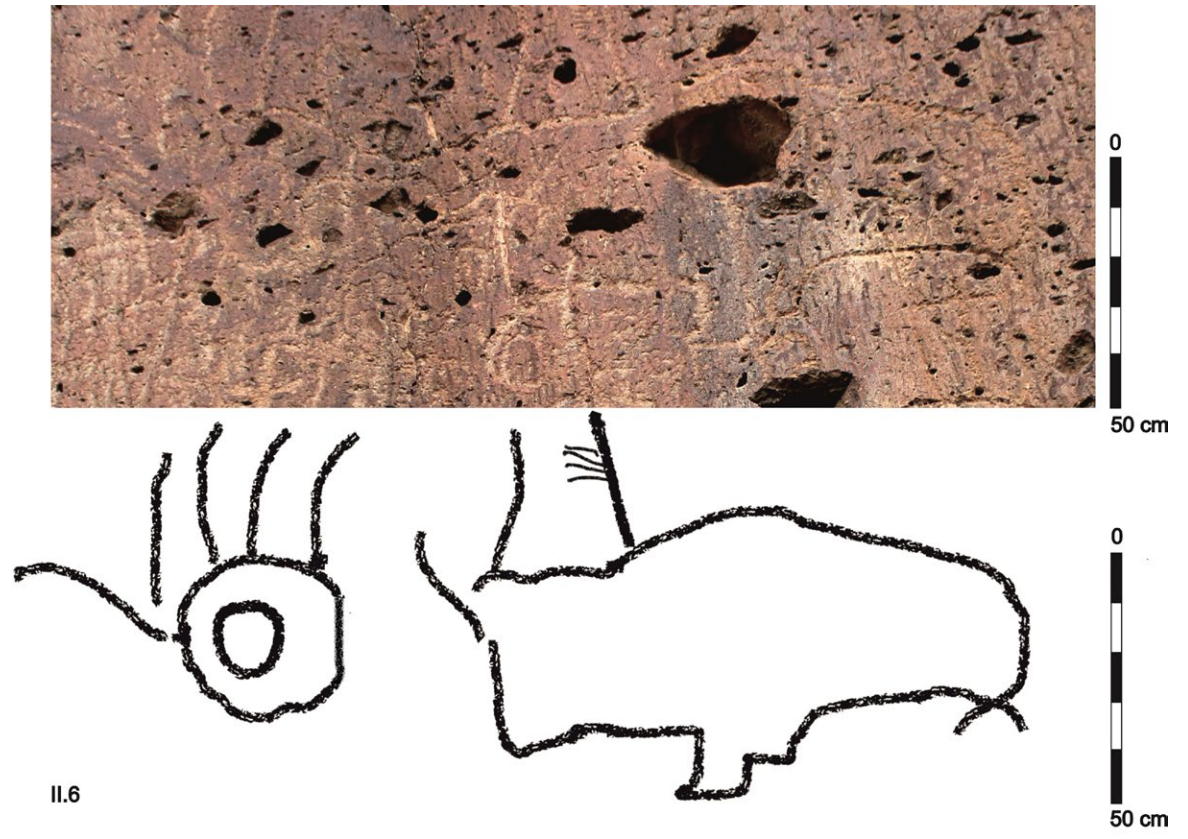

Fig. 8. Rock panel II, scene II.6 (Photo and drawing: D. Shevchenko)
Обр. 8. Скален панел II, сцена II.6 (Снимка и рисунка: Д. Шевченко)



Fig. 9. Rock panel II, scene II.7 (Photo and drawing: D. Shevchenko)
Обр. 9. Скален панел II, сцена II.7 (Снимка и рисунка: Д. Шевченко)

of the rock; a cross-like petroglyph II.3 (fig. 7: II.3), a complex geometric drawing of petroglyph II.4 (fig. 7: II.4), and an 8-shaped sign with a circle and several "abstract" lines of petroglyph II.5 (fig. 7: II.5).

The figurative scenes are represented by the remarkable composition II.6 and scene II.7. The composition II.6 consists of two images located in the upper part of panel II (fig. 8). There is a clearly distinguishable image of a horned animal with a massive body, short front legs, a big head, and protruding withers. The hind legs are absent; they are either not preserved or were not drawn at all. The animal is depicted in a linear, stylized, and static form. The image looks very schematic, but we can tentatively assume that it might be a bull. One detail attracts our attention here: an animal is depicted with an arrow or spear stuck into its neck. This detail could be an allusion to a hunt scene. The second image of composition II.6 is the sun engraved to the left of the animal's head. The sun is drawn as two circles with rays radiating in different directions. For some unclear reasons, an ancient artist created these images using mixed techniques. The back of the animal's body and the upper part of the image of the sun are created using the hammering technique, while the head, horns, chest, front legs, and lower part of the sun image were engraved.

The second figurative scene II.2 is engraved on the same rock panel to the left of the crack. It depicts a creature with four paws, a long tail, which is an extension of its body, and a head with an open mouth (fig. 9). A small circle is depicted to the left of the head and close to the open mouth, and the whole composition looks like a beast is trying to devour it. Another possible



Fig. 10. Rock panel III, a general view and the core petroglyphs location on the panel (Photo: D. Shevchenko)
Обр. 10. Скален панел III, общ поглед и местоположение на основното ядро от петроглифите върху панела (Снимка: Д. Шевченко)

interpretation of this scene is as a horned animal that either holds the sun between its horns or stands in front of the sun.

Rock panel III

Rock panel III (fig. 10) has only one layer of images, and all of them are non-figurative. The state of rock mass destruction is the same as in the previous two cases. The surface of the rock panel is damaged by water erosion, and some images are almost invisible. The central part of the block is preserved much better, and almost all petroglyphs are clearly distinguishable.

The first group of petroglyphs III.1 (fig. 11) is located in the top right corner of panel III, to the left of the crack that limits the whole panel III. All three petroglyphs are very similar to each other.

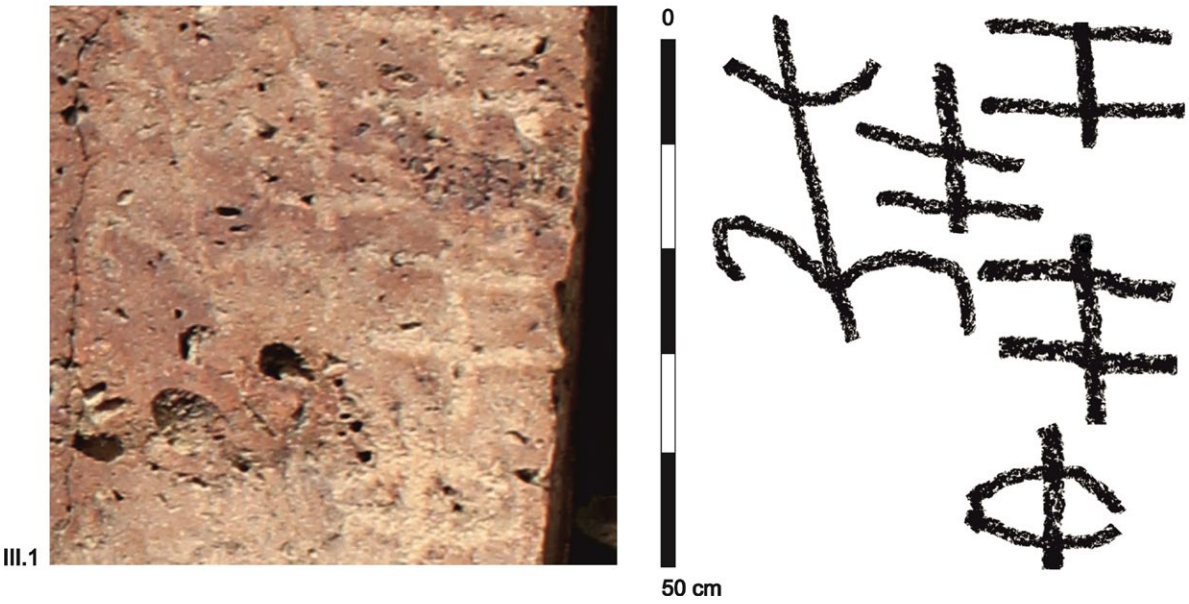

Fig. 11. Rock panel III, group of petroglyphs III.1 (Photo and drawing: D. Shevchenko)
Обр. 11. Скален панел III, петроглифна група III.1 (Снимка и рисунка: Д. Шевченко)

They consist of two parallel lines crossing a vertical one. One sign looks like an oval but with a small gap between the two lines forming it. A vertical line divides this so-called oval into two parts. The biggest glyph in this group consists of one vertical line that crosses two curved lines: the upper line is curved up and a lower line is curved down.

The central group of petroglyphs III.2 consists of eleven distinguishable images (fig. 12). Five of the petroglyphs III.2 are very similar: two, three, or four horizontal lines cross a vertical one. The remaining six images have a similar configuration but with some differences: three glyphs are depicted with upper lines curved up, two signs are made with upper lines curved down, and one more sign consists of three lines and looks like the zodiac sign Pisces rotated about 90 degrees (we of course assume no connection with the Pisces sign).

Approach to the attribution

Attributing and interpreting a rock art site is one of the most difficult problems in theoretical archaeology. The main complication is that all rock art interpreters, since they belong to the modern world and are therefore culturally separated from paleoartists, can only base interpretations on their own cognition and perception (Bednarik 2014, 65). Despite an inability to fully understand the essence of all petroglyphs at Soğanlı P1, however, we assume that we can provide a sufficiently grounded attribution of non-figurative signs I.1 – 2, II.1 – 5, and III.1 – 2 and explore the semantics of figurative scenes II.6 and II.7.

The first impression one may have when looking at Soğanlı P1 is that the petroglyphs are very primitive and must be from prehistoric times. However, what does "prehistoric" mean in this context? Primitive techniques tell us about the stage of the development of the artists' society or about their lifestyle, but they cannot be used to assume any absolute dating without information about the artists themselves. For example, many petroglyphs in Central Asia, Siberia, Africa, and both Americas are dated to the time of Antiquity or even the Middle Ages. Therefore, even though

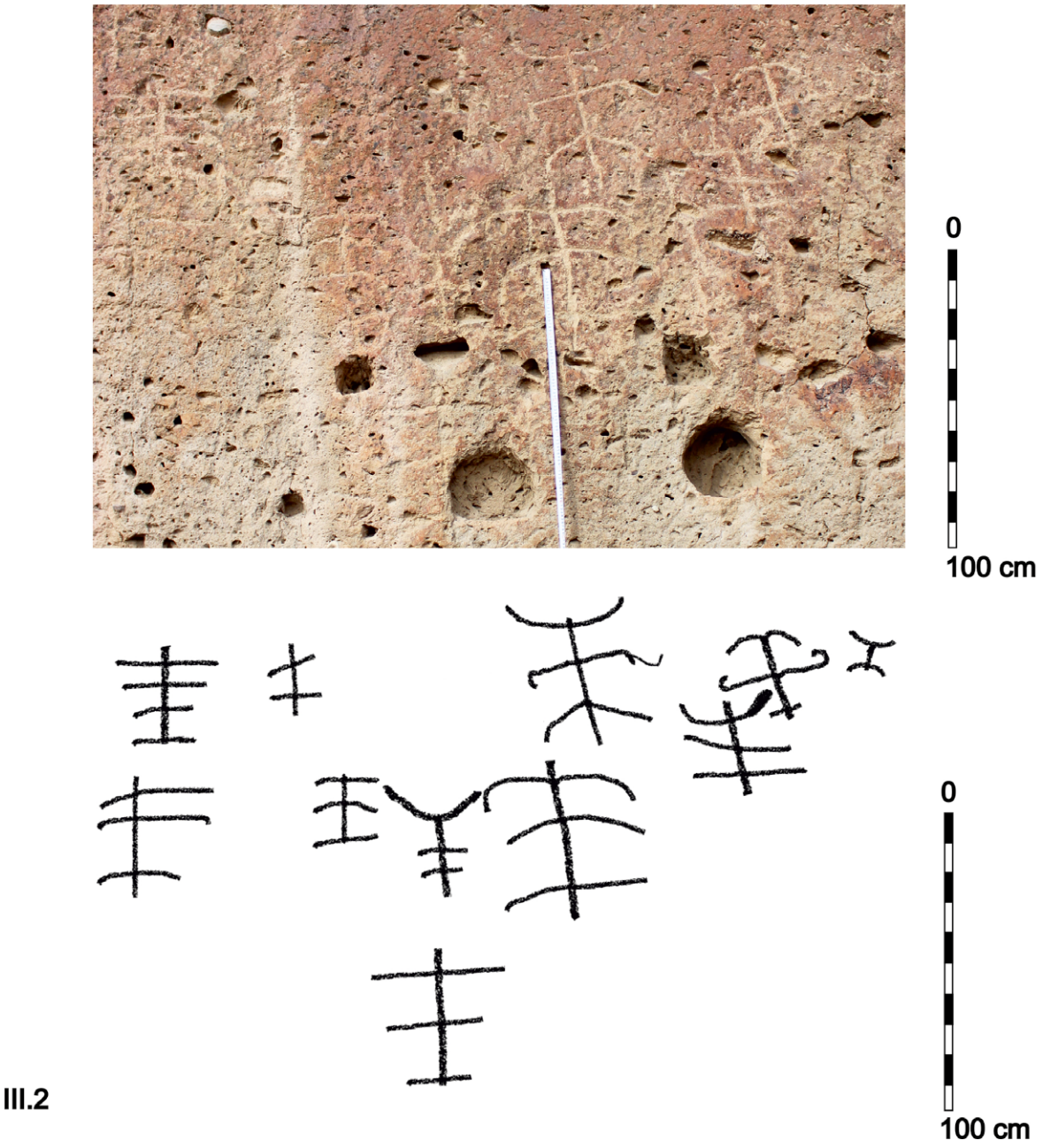

Fig. 12. Rock panel III, group of petroglyphs III.2 (Photo and drawing: D. Shevchenko)
Обр. 12. Скален панел III, петроглифна група III.2 (Снимка и рисунка: Д. Шевченко)

we accept the *relative (cultural) attribution ("dating")* of the art as *primitive* based on its form and technical aspects, we must avoid any assumptions about *the absolute dating* of the petroglyphs without sufficient arguments.

Preliminary dating

What can be the preliminary absolute dating of Soğanlı P1? We believe that it must date to post-prehistoric times, i.e., Antiquity or the Middle Ages, based on analysis of the petroglyphs' essence as well as the possible age of their drawing:

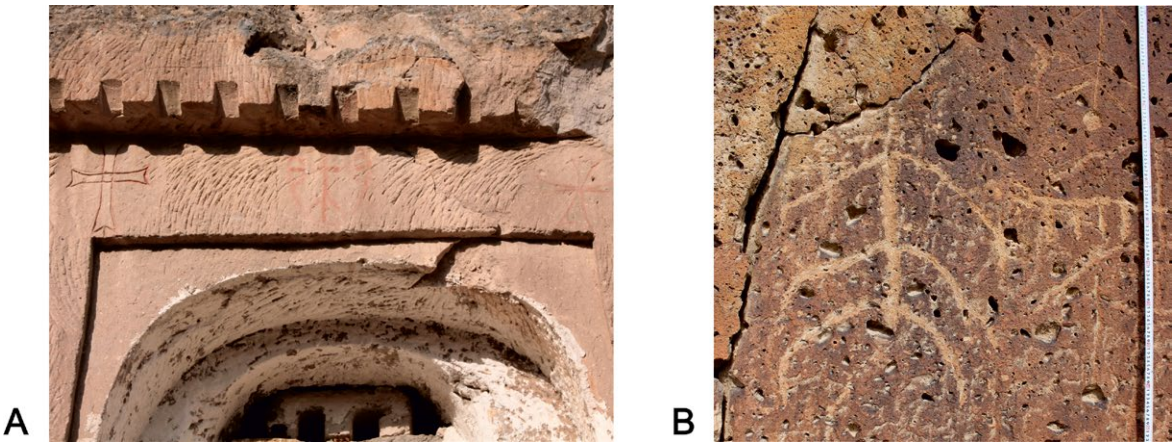

Fig. 13. Comparison of the light wear and colors of petroglyphs and Christian art: a. A detail of the crypt near Soğanlı P1; b. A detail of petroglyphs from rock panel II (Photo: D. Shevchenko)

Обр. 13. Сравнение между цветовете и избледняването им в резултат от излагането на светлина при петроглифите и християнското изкуство: a. Детайл от криптата близо до Соганлъ P1; b. Детайл от петроглифите от скален панел II (Снимка: Д. Шевченко)

1) The signs in each group are very similar to each other, but in almost all cases they are slightly different. In panel I, both signs are a vertical line crossed with several horizontal ones. In panel III, they follow the graphical pattern of panel I but also extend that pattern, adding curved elements to the top and middle lines. The same basic figure is essentially repeated in panel II, but different numbers of circles are added to the ends of the horizontal curved lines. These patterns match the usual graphical structure of *tamgas*—the attribution, property, and identification signs used at various times in many cultures and known in different cultures as *tamgas*, *marks*, *nishans*, etc.[5] At the same time, the functions of tamgas were much wider—they were also used as boundary markers, or as markers of different sacred places such as steles, funerary enclosures, tombstones, and temples (Rogozhinsky, Cheremisin 2019, 48).

Based on the above, we assume that the signs I.1 – 2, II.1 – 5, and III.1 – 2 are tamgas. The possible attribution of these tamgas will be discussed below. Here, though, we must note that by their essence, tamgas cannot be dated to prehistoric times, as all known tamgas have ethnical attributions that effectively date them no earlier than the 1st millennium BC[6].

2) As was mentioned above, panels I – III are located along an ancient route that leads to Roman and Byzantine constructions (shelters and rock-cut churches). If this is not a coincidence (which is highly improbable), it is another argument in favor of an antique or medieval attribution for the petroglyphs, when this road existed and was functional.

3) There is a crypt located about 400 m to the West-Northwest of Soğanlı P1 that was probably a Roman construction that was later adapted into a Christian crypt (fig. 13). While

[5] In private communication, Luc Hermann (ref. Hermann 2011; Hermann, Zheleznyakov 2023) also identified petroglyphs III.1 – 2 and some petroglyphs from panel II, which are very close in shape to petroglyphs II.1 – 5, as tamgas. Alexey Rogozhinsky (ref. Rogozhinsky, Cheremisin 2019), also in private communication, expressed the opinion that petroglyphs III.1 – 2 are tamgas and that petroglyphs from Soğanlı must not be older than Antiquity or even the Middle Ages. Finally, Prof. Sergey Yatsenko (ref. Яценко 2001) expressed the opinion that petroglyphs I.1 – 2 and III.1 – 2 are tamgas, but he interprets petroglyphs II.1 as figurative images and not tamgas). Here we would like to express our gratitude to Luc Hermann, Alexey Rogozhinsky, and Sergey Yatsenko for their help.

[6] Some other considerations about dating tamgas, but leading to the same timeframe conclusions can be found in Лавров 1978, 104.

setting it up as a Christian space, part of its fronton was abraded and polished, after which crosses were engraved on the polished fragments. The color of the treated surfaces of the crypt matches that of engravings from Soğanlı P1, which means they must be close in time to each other[7]. Since the Christian art must date no earlier than the first centuries AD, this further supports the opinion that petroglyphs of Soğanlı P1 must be dated to Antiquity or the Middle Ages and not to prehistoric times.

Based on the above, we assume that the signs I.1 – 2, II.1 – 5, and III.1 – 2 are tamgas and must be dated to a historic period. This, in turn, leads us to questions concerning possible attribution of these tamgas and dating them to a particular period in Antiquity or the Middle Ages.

Attribution of petroglyphs

What can be a possible attribution of the petroglyphs I.1 – 2, II.1 – 5, and III.1 – 2? When looking for possible parallels to tamgas from Soğanlı P1, we must count on possible local changes made to the symbols before they were left on the site; therefore, we must look not only for the exact matches but also for possible prototypes for the tamgas from Soğanlı P1. The prototype of tamgas I.1 – 2 must be close to a vertical line crossed with three horizontal ones (fig. 14: I/III) while the prototype for tamgas III.1 – 2 must be either the same or a vertical line crossed with two horizontal strokes (fig. 14: III). The prototype for tamgas II.1 should be a vertical line with two crossing arcs curved down or even only one arc (fig. 14: II, *II). If we assume that tamgas within each of groups I, II, and III are related to each other (which is likely so, as each group contains a series of quite similar signs), it can be significant that groups I and III use extra strokes for graphics modifications while group II uses small circles added to the ends of strokes.

Since we are referring to Anatolia, the origin of tamgas can be Caucasian[8], Iranian, Mongolian, or Turkic. Searching briefly for possible parallels in the publications of Caucasian[9], Iranian[10], and Mongolian[11] tamgas brings no result: while we can find some parallels to the basic shapes in groups I and III, nothing was found for group II. Such a partial match, of course, cannot be accepted, as the basic shapes in groups I and III are too simple to exclude a coincidence.

The signs partly similar to the petroglyphs of Soğanlı P1 and partly identical to them are found among signs from the oases of South Kazakhstan that date broadly to the 1st – 8th c. and are partly associated with the nomadic empire of Kangju. Both the basic sign for tamgas from panel II (fig. 14: II) and its reconstructed prototype (fig. 14: *II) can be found among signs on the ceramic pots and mugs from Kultobe (Turkistan region, South Kazakhstan), which were found in the layers from the 1st – 3rd c. (fig. 14: K.33, K.35; Тамги 2019, 164, рис. 1: 6.33, 6.35). The same signs appear among "stamped" signs from the Sidak sanctuary (Turkistan region, South Kazakhstan) dated to the 5th – early 8th c. (fig. 14: S.26, S.27, S.82; Тамги 2019, 166, рис. 2: II.26 – 27, II.82). The same material from the Sidak sanctuary contains basic signs for groups I and III of the Soğanlı P1 petroglyphs (fig. 14: S.66, S.67; Тамги 2019, 166, рис. 2: II.66 – 67). Moreover, signs from the

[7] Sunlight equally affects all rock surfaces, giving them a particular tint, and this tint depends on how long a treated surface has been exposed to sunlight.

[8] The Caucasian option must be explored not only because of the geographic proximity but also because of possible Northwest Caucasian linguistic affiliation of Hattians (although there is no consensus on this). Also, the connections between Anatolian and Caucasian cultures in the 1st millennium BC are well-known.

[9] For Caucasian tamgas see Big catalogue 2000, Müseyibli 2004, Лавров 1978, Хуранов 1979, Яхтанигов 1993. The material from Azerbaijan is left outside of our scope for now, as if the parallels will be found there (for example in Gobustan or Gamigaya), this will probably point out to the later migration of the same people, and not to the origin of the tamgas in question.

[10] For Iranian tamgas (*nishans*) see Драчук 1975, Яценко 2001.

[11] For Mongolian tamgas see Вайнберг, Новгородова 1976, Сухебатор 1960.

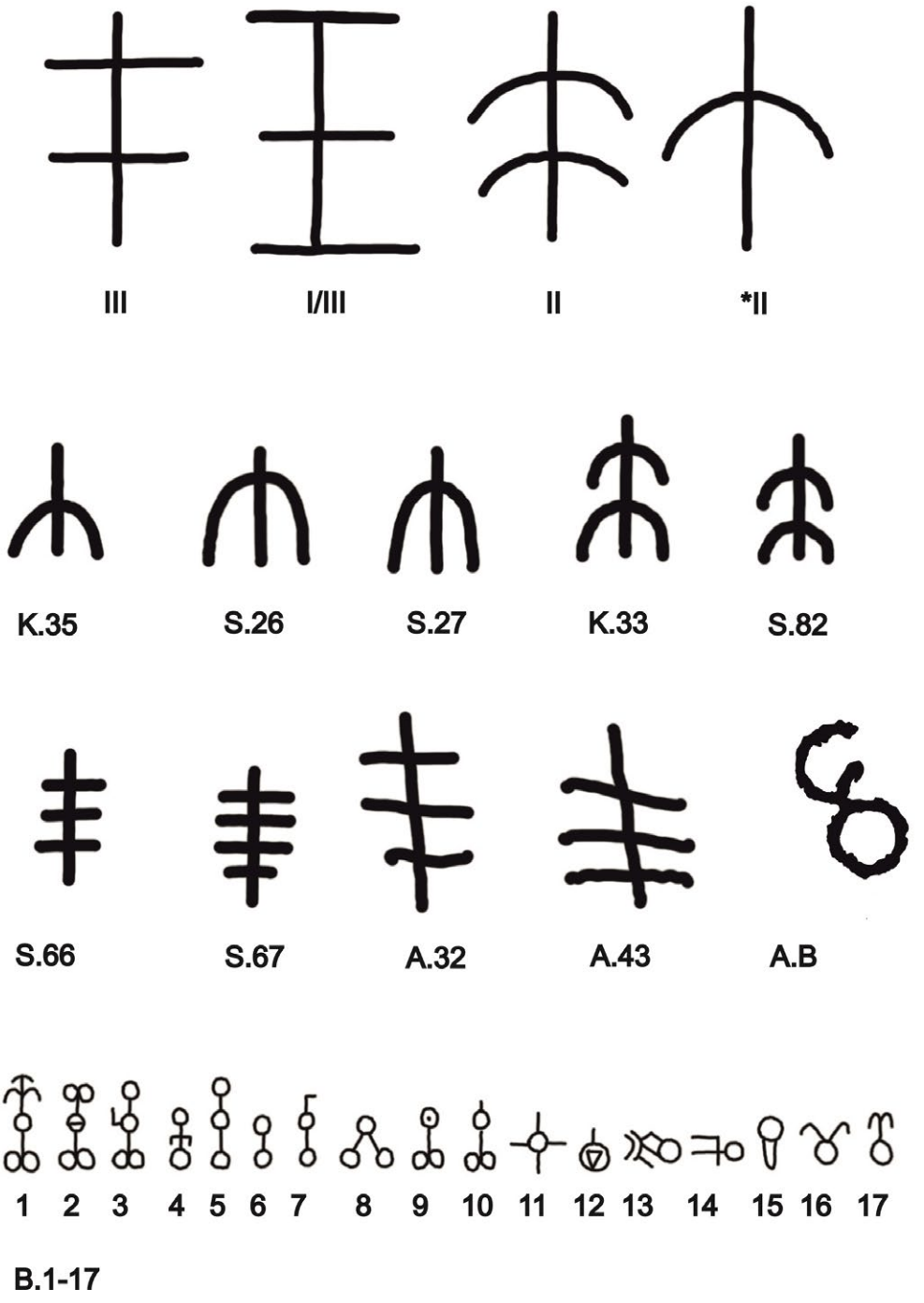

*Fig. 14. Tamgas: I/III, II, *II, III – basic signs for petroglyphs I.1 – 2, II.1, and III.1 – 2 (*II is a reconstructed shape); K.33, K.35 – tamgas from Kultobe (Turkistan region, South Kazakhstan); S.26, S.27, S.66, S.67, S.82 – tamgas from Sidak sanctuary (Turkistan region, South Kazakhstan); A.32, A.43 – tamgas from Akbaur grotto (East Kazakhstan); A.B – tamgas from Akkainar rock art site (Almaty region, South Kazakhstan; Author: D. Shevchenko); B.1 – 17 – tamgas from Beskepe (Jambyl region, South Kazakhstan; after Тамги 2019, 193, рис. 5)*

*Обр. 14. Тамги: I/III, II, *II, III – основни знаци за петроглифи I.1 – 2, II.1 и III.1 – 2 (*II е реконструиран); K.33, K.35 – тамги от Култобе (област Туркестан, Южен Казахстан); S.26, S.27, S.66, S.67, S.82 – тамги от светилището Сидак (област Туркестан, Южен Казахстан); A.32, A.43 – тамги от пещерата Акбаур (Източен Казахстан); A.B – тамги от скалния обект Акайнар (Алматинска област, Южен Казахстан; Автор: Д. Шевченко); B.1 – 17 – тамги от Бескепе (Жамбилска област, Южен Казахстан; по Тамги 2019, 193, рис. 5)*

panels at the sanctuary in Beskepe of a nearby Jambyl region (South Kazakhstan) demonstrate a graphics modification technique that is very similar to the petroglyphs of Soğanlı P1.II. Instead of adding lines and strokes, they use circles and attach them to the lines (fig. 14: B.1 – 17; Тамги 2019, 193, рис. 5: 4.1 – 22).

In addition to parallels of basic Soğanlı P1 signs with tamgas from Kultobe and Sidak, a direct parallel to the petroglyphs I.1 – 2 (fig. 4) and to some of the petroglyphs III.2 (fig. 12) can be found among the signs from the Akbaur grotto in East Kazakhstan (fig. 14: A.32, A.43; Tashbayeva et al. 2001, 155, fig. 4: 32, 43). Another remarkable parallel provides the 8-shaped sign II.5 (fig. 7: II.5), which is almost identical to the 8-shaped tamga from the Akkainar rock art site in the Almaty region of South Kazakhstan (fig. 14: A.B; Hermann, Zheleznyakov 2023, 148, fig. 6: B, D). Both the 8-shaped tamga from Akkainar and the glyph II.5 from Soğanlı are drawn with a small gap in an image contour that may indicate that both images have a common origin. Moreover, the same Akkainar site in Kazakhstan also provides a parallel to the basic image of group II.1 (Hermann, Zheleznyakov 2023, 148, fig. 6: A).

Based on the above, we attribute non-figurative petroglyphs from Soğanlı P1 as Turkic tamgas[12]. A possible connection between tamgas from Soğanlı P1 and others from South Kazakhstan seems to be credible. We tentatively accept a narrower connection between tamgas from Kultobe and Sidak in Kazakhstan and those at Soğanlı P1. Taking into account that tamgas from Kazakhstan represent an earlier stage of graphical development of tamgas from Soğanlı, we can assume that owners of tamgas from Soğanlı were among Turkic tribes that migrated in the Middle Ages from Central Asia to Anatolia (such as the Seljuks or other tribes that migrated the same time, perhaps together with the Seljuks). The gap of several centuries between the signs from Kultobe and Sidak in Kazakhstan and Soğanlı in Turkey gives us enough time both for the possible migrations from Central Asia and the development of the derivative signs found in Soğanlı, based on the basic signs from Kultobe and Sidak (or ones similar to the tamgas from South Kazakhstan)[13].

Dating of Soğanlı P1

Assuming that the tamgas of Soğanlı P1 belong either to Seljuk nomads or some tribes who migrated to Anatolia at the same time, we have to accept that the site must date to the Middle Ages. The Turkic nomads (Seljuks, Turkomans, etc.) gradually settled in the region in the 12th – 13th c.[14], and the petroglyphs from Soğanlı P1 must date to the same period, or at least not earlier.

Figurative scenes

Petroglyph II.6

As was pointed out before, we tentatively identified the biggest figurative image II.6 as an image of a bull. This image is represented in multiple ancient artistic narratives and can be found at rock art sites in huge territories: from the Franco-Cantabrian region and the Levant to Baikal Lake and Mongolia. For example, a few images of bulls were found among rock paintings of the Tirşin plateau in the province of Van in eastern Turkey (Tümer 2018, 24); an image of a human figure standing on a bull was found there as well (Dönmez, Aslan 2019, 6). These images from Tirşin plateau are dated to the Middle Bronze Age, however. The bull image from Soğanlı P1, along with the glyph of a bull with a human figure from the Tirşin plateau, has some parallels outside

[12] In our private communication, Luc Hermann shared also the opinion that the petroglyphs from Soğanlı could be Old Turkic. Once again, we would like to express our deep gratitude to him.

[13] Although we could not find any other acceptable set of parallels except ones from South Kazakhstan, we cannot exclude that such parallels may exist elsewhere.

[14] See, for example, Vryonis 1971, Beihammer 2017, etc.

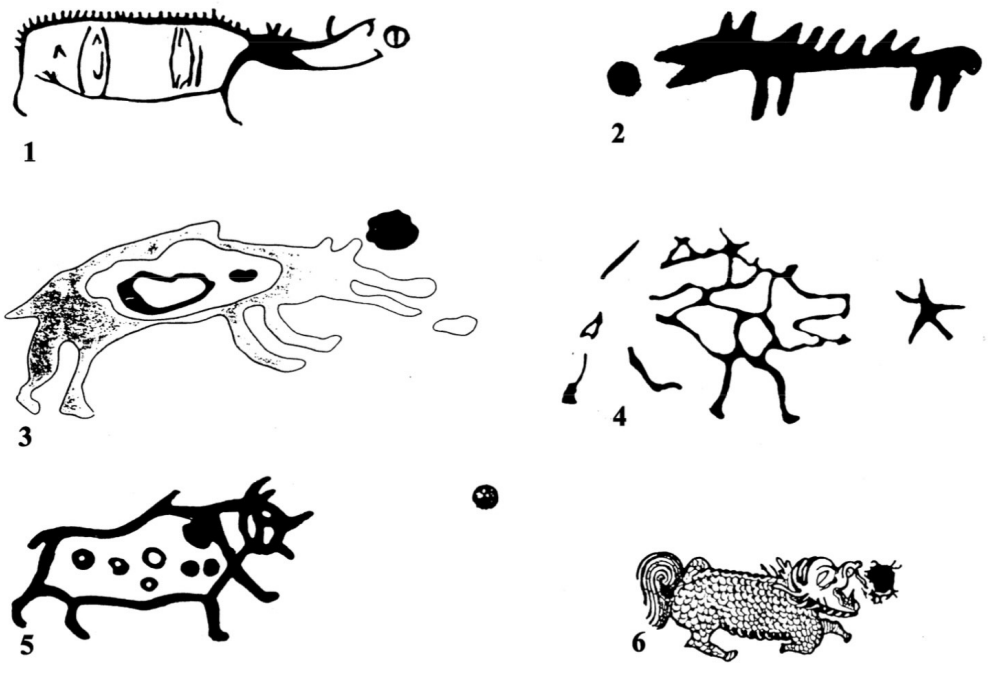

Fig. 15. Fantastic creatures devouring the sun: 1. Shishkinskaya Pisanitsa (Eastern Siberia, Russia); 2. Arbinskaya Pisanitsa (Amur region, Russia); 3. Tomskaya Pisanitsa (the Tom river, Western Siberia, Russia); 4. The Kantegir mountains (Western Sayan range, Siberia, Russia); 5. Shalobolinskaya Pisanitsa (Krasnoyarsk region, Russia); 6. The mythological beast Tan, China (after Дэвлет, Дэвлет 2011, 195, рис. 3.2)

Обр. 15. Фантастични животни, поглъщащи слънцето: 1. Шишкинска Писаница (Източен Сибир, Русия); 2. Арбинска Писаница (Амурска обл., Русия); 3. Томска Писаница (р. Том, Западен Сибир, Русия); 4. Планините Кантегир (Западносаянски планини, Сибир, Русия); 5. Шалоболинска Писаница (Красноярска обл., Русия); 6. Митологичното чудовище Тан, Китай (по Дэвлет, Дэвлет 2011, 195, рис. 3.2)

Anatolia. The rock art site Tamgaly, also in South Kazakhstan[15], provides another parallel that is important for petroglyphs from Cappadocia—among around 3000 glyphs from the Tamgaly site, several images represent bulls. These depictions are endowed with a polysemantic meaning and reflect a wide range of extremely negative to highly positive connotations. In four cases in Tamgaly, bulls are associated with sun-headed figures, and in one case a sun-headed deity is depicted standing on a bull. The association of a bull with sun-headed creatures or the sun might reflect the profound idea of the eternal antagonism between darkness and light (Hermann 2011, 35). In a case from Soğanlı P1, a bull is depicted with an arrow or spear sticking out of its neck. This element probably emphasizes and reinforces the idea of this antagonism[16].

Petroglyph II.7

Figurative scene II.7 can be interpreted in two possible ways. First, it could be a horned animal standing in front of the sun or holding the sun between its horns; in this case, the image II.7 is similar to II.6 described above. The petroglyph II.7 could also be an image of a fantastic creature swallowing the sun. This mythological narrative is shared by many ancient cultures in

[15] Tamgaly was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2004.

[16] We are aware of the possible interpretation of the whole scene II.6 as a hunting scene, but we assume it is less probable because of the sun, which is drawn in front of the bull, and the absence of hunters.

Eurasia and has many parallels in rock art paintings in Siberia, Central Asia, and the Far East. This artistic composition illustrates an archaic myth about the eternal cosmic chase, where a sinister and insatiable beast pursues and devours the sun and the sun falls into the underground realm. However, every time the vanquished sun returns to the joy of people, and the cosmic cycle of the eternal fighting between darkness and light and life and death repeats. Very similar scenes consisting of images of beasts and the sun are documented at many rock art sites, such as Tomskaya Pisanitsa, Shalobolinskaya Pisanitsa, Kantegir, and Shishkino in Siberia (fig. 15; Дэвлет, Дэвлет 2011, 195, рис. 3.2). Typologically similar compositions were revealed at the Sulaiman-Too rock art site in Kyrgyzstan; here solar signs are depicted along with snakes (dragons?) with open mouths (Tashbayeva et al. 2001, 63, fig. 96). We can assume that, despite some artistic and stylistic features and differences, all these scenes reflect the same general idea.

Remnants of this archaic narrative seem to be very stable and represented even in traditional Chinese culture (cf. Грумм-Гржимайло 1926, 200). Also, the same archaic notions can be found in the medieval Christian art of the Caucasus: the eastern façade of the Tatev church in Armenia is decorated with relief images of snakes and allegorical images of the sun and the moon. Each of the luminaries is flanked by two snakes with open mouths, and this scene likely reflects the same idea of the cyclical nature of time (Mikayelyan 2021, 236). It can be supposed that two figurative scenes from Soğanlı valley are endowed with a common mythological narrative. The visualization of the idea of the eternal cosmic struggle and balance between darkness and light was one of the first attempts at the allegorical comprehension of the Universe. Based on the same color tint, technique, and positioning of images, we assume that both figurative scenes were executed by the same artists who created the petroglyphs II.1 – 5 as well as the other petroglyphs of panel II.

Possible interpretation

What can be a possible interpretation of the site Soğanlı P1 and the distribution of tamgas among panels I – III? It is important to note that the tamgas of Soğanlı P1 are grouped by graphical similarity: all quasi-anthropomorphic tamgas are grouped on panel II and all tamgas of groups I, III.1, and III.2 demonstrate an obvious graphical similarity within each group. We assume this means that each group of tamgas—I, II.1, III—represents different communities. On the other side, panel I, panel II, and panel III are clearly separated from each other, and panel I is, in our opinion, older than panels II and III. If we treat multiple tamgas as a kind of public agreement or declaration of property, we can tentatively assume that panel I reflects an earlier declaration of possession of the territory, which was later divided between bearers of tamgas II.1 on one side and bearers of tamgas III.1 – 2 on another. In this case, the bearers of tamgas could be either tribes, tribe subdivisions, or nomadic families[17], and the border between their territories could lie between panels II and III.

During the 12th – 13th c. the turbulence in the Soğanlı region was extremely high, as it was a theater of struggles between Seljuks and Danishmendids[18]. Granting frontier lands to tribes or smaller subdivisions in exchange of protection services was a common practice of that time for both Seljukids and Danishmendids[19]. Therefore, we can tentatively assume that the tamgas from Soğanlı P1 could have served for marking a border between such tribes or families protecting the

[17] Sergey Yatsenko thought that these tamgas could have belonged to the local peasant families. We cannot completely reject this idea, but we think it is less probable since we know of no other sites with tamgas nearby (if it was a peasant practice, we would expect to find it in other villages as well). Again, we would like to express our deep gratitude to Prof. Yatsenko for his priceless help.

[18] Vryonis 1971, 155; Еремеев 1971, 79.

[19] Еремеев 1971, 79; Гордлевский 1941, 22, 38. For Danishmendids, actively involving Turkic tribes from Iran and Central Asia see Гордлевский 1941, 27.

frontier lands. This is just a possible interpretation of the tamgas of Soğanlı P1 that requires further elaboration, possibly after a detailed study of the site and especially all the petroglyphs of panel II.

Conclusions

Currently, the rock art site Soğanlı P1 is the only rock art site known in this valley. It consists of three rock panels that bear petroglyphs, the majority of which are tamgas. We connect these tamgas with the Turkic culture and attribute them to Turkic nomads, which dates the whole site Soğanlı P1 to the period of the 12th – 13th c. or later. Dating of the site to that period, however, needs to be verified using natural science dating methods such as traceological examination, micro-erosion, and micro-stratification analysis of patina.

We assume more petroglyphs and wall paintings connected to the Turkic culture will be found in Cappadocia, and we hope to attract local Turkish officials as well as fellow archaeologists as we continue our research.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Deniz Onaç, his father Veysel Onaç, and all their family (Turkey, Soğanlı village). The Onaç family told us about the petroglyphs and showed us the way to them. This research would not have been possible without their curiosity and hospitality.

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СОГАНЛЪ P1: КРАТЪК ДОКЛАД ЗА НАСКОРО ОТКРИТИ ПЕТРОГЛИФИ В КАПАДОКИЯ, ПРЕДВАРИТЕЛНОТО ИМ ДАТИРАНЕ И ОПРЕДЕЛЯНЕ

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РЕЗЮМЕ

Статията представя предварителните резултати от проучването на скален обект Соганлъ P1, открит в долината Соганлъ по време на експедиция в Кападокия през 2017 г., в която участват авторите на настоящата статия. Това изглежда е първият обект със скално изкуство, който е известен от Кападокия.

Обектът се състои от три скални панела, върху които има петроглифи – няколко фигурални сцени и около сто геометрични форми. Въз основа на геометричните характеристики на знаците и тяхното групиране ние ги идентифицираме като тамги. Търсенето на паралели сред петроглифи и тамги от Кавказ, Иран и Монголия не даде резултат – въпреки че са на лице отделни паралели, не е възможно да се установи стабилна връзка с тамгите от Соганлъ P1. Тамгите и от трите панела от Соганлъ P1 намират паралели сред знаците от обектите Култобе (I – III в.) и Сидак (V – VIII в.), разположени в района на Туркестан в Южен Казахстан. Освен това като паралели за сложните геометрични знаци от Соганлъ P1 могат да се посочат знаците от пещерата Акбаур (Източен Казахстан) и Акайнар (Алматинска област, Южен Казахстан). Паралелите на фигуралните изображения са по-малко информативни и могат да бъдат открити както в Южен Казахстан, така и в Киргизстан и на някои други места.

Предварително определяме тамгите и целия обект Соганлъ P1 като дело на тюркските племена (или по-малки подразделения), които идват в Анатолия от Централна Азия през XI – XIII в., и датираме обекта в периода XII – XIII в. или по-късно. През този период районът става арена в борбата за надмощие между селджуки и данишменди и обстановката е несигурна. Предоставянето на гранични земи на различни племена в замяна на защита е била обичайна практика както на селджуките, така и на данишмендите, следователно ние предварително предполагаме, че тамгите от Соганлъ P1 биха могли да служат за маркиране на граница между такива племена или по-малки подразделения.

Отчитайки уникалния статут на обекта (първият обект със скално изкуство в Кападокия и вероятно първият известен обект на тамги–петроглифи в Турция), смятаме, че по-сложните изследвания на обекта, включително методи за естествено датиране (като трасеологични изследвания, микроерозионни анализи и др.), могат да допринесат за по-доброто му разбиране.

Авторите подготвят пълното описание на Соганлъ P1, както и подробен анализ на неговите тамги и техния възможен принос за разбирането на пътищата на миграция на тюркските номади през XI – XIII в.

Ключови думи: тамги, петроглифи, тюрки, Кападокия, долината Соганлъ, тюркска миграция, Анатолия, Мала Азия, Централна Азия, археология, история