

Adiya Baimurzina

ANT 499: Capstone Seminar II

Final Capstone Draft

Capstone Adviser: Dr. Katherine Erdman

Date: April 27, 2024

The Persistence of Sun-Horse Imagery in Kazakhstan, a case study of rock art at Tamgaly Valley

Abstract

This research project examines the persistence of sun-horse imagery in Kazakhstan and chooses the Tamgaly Valley petroglyphs as the primary focus. This research tries to answer how has the sun-horse imagery in Kazakhstan changed over time and which symbolic meanings it held before and now. The research uses the concepts of animism, shamanism, Tengrism, and doxa, as well as contextual and symbolic approaches, as theoretical frameworks. The methodology is the visual analysis of scanned images taken from Rozwadowski (2001), Hermann (2011), UNESCO photographs and Tanbaly Museum photographs. This capstone project suggests that the sun-horse imagery at Tamgaly Valley portrayed the ancient spiritual symbolism, in which horned horses and ‘solar-headed’ figures had sacred meanings. The interpretation is that shamanism and Tengrism practiced at the site impacted the imagery of horned horses and ‘solar-headed’ figures. Thus, the research concludes that modern symbolism of sun-horse imagery in the country forms a national doxa, in which two elements are specifically chosen to be portrayed as historical, political and national figures.

Introduction

The horse and the sun are essential visual elements in Kazakh culture. Artists and scientists frequently depict them together, as a horse portraying nomadic spirit, while the sun –

the essence of brightness and richness. This capstone project examines the possible origins and reasons behind persisting images of horses and sun in Kazakhstan. Thus, the research suggests that the imagery of the horse and sun defines Kazakh national identity and may date back to the Bronze Age rock art (Rozwadowski, 2011).

There are interpretations that the horse and sun were primary shamanistic elements of people from these lands. This capstone project will compare the modern meanings of horse and sun imagery, such as their depictions on the national flag of Kazakhstan, with the shamanistic interpretations of the horse and sun imagery in Kazakhstani rock art. This project aims to observe the persistence of the horse-sun imagery throughout time.

This project uses contextual and symbolic approaches and concepts like animism, shamanism, Tengrism, and doxa as theoretical frameworks. The research methodology is the visual analysis of petroglyphs from Groups III and IV, which include imagery of horned horses and ‘solar-headed’ figures.

The research question of my project is as follows: *How do the symbolic meanings of horse-sun imagery in Kazakhstan change through time and contribute to the construction of national identity?*

Literature Review

The Tamgaly Valley

Tamgaly petroglyphs are located at the Tanbaly (Tamgaly) Gorge, along the Chu-Ili mountains, about 170 km northwest of Almaty (Zapovednik muzey “Taňbaly”, n.d; Nabiulina, n.d.). Tamgaly Valley was named after the river flowing through the gorge (Figures 1-2). The photographer Popov discovered it when the excavations of Tamgaly burial grounds began in 1957 (Zapovednik muzey “Taňbaly”, n.d).

Tamgaly Gorge or Tamgaly Valley is a complex of over 5000 petroglyphs and Tanbaly burials, dated about XIV-XIII centuries BC, during the period of early development of Andronovo culture at the southeastern Kazakhstan, *Semirechye* (Zapovednik muzey “Tañbaly”, n.d), the Bronze Age. The Tamgaly Valley occupies an area of approximately 3x10 km; however, most of the petroglyphs, about 2000, are concentrated at about 250x500 m (Nabiulina, n.d.). The Tamgaly petroglyphs are spread over the mountainous valley and are classified, according to period and style, into different groups (from II to VII); the size range is from 25-75 cm to 1 m (Zapovednik muzey “Tañbaly”, n.d). According to Rogozhinsky (2009), who was the first specialist leading the excavations of the Tanbaly burial, and consequently, studying the petroglyphs, claimed Tamgaly rock art to be unique in its style, technique and narrative concerning the time frame and suggested assigning them as a separate type of petroglyphs – the Tamgaly petroglyphs (Zapovednik muzey “Tañbaly”, n.d).



Figure 1. Tamgaly Valley (Google Maps)

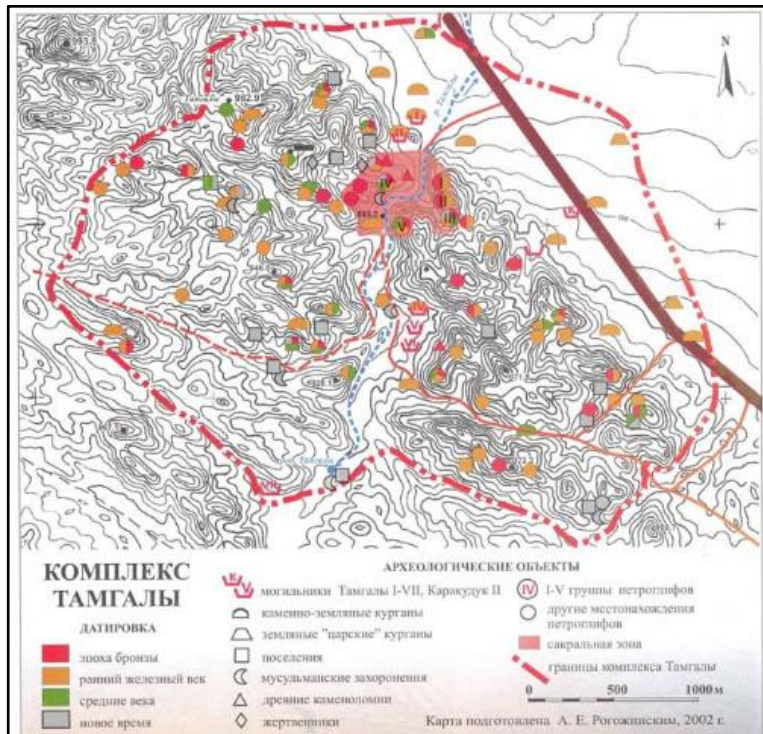


Figure 2. Tamgaly Valley (Rogozhinsky, 2009)

Tamgaly petroglyphs are engraved on the rock surfaces; as has been investigated, most face south. This has been discovered from the “central” petroglyph of the Tamgaly Valley, the so-called “Pantheon” of the Bronze Age, which belongs to group IV. The petroglyph is depicted on the most significant rock of the valley and is considered an open-air temple (Zapovednik muzey “Taňbaly”, n.d).

The ritualistic speculations of the Tamgaly Valley are concluded from some of the petroglyphs and the Tanbaly burials. To be more specific, the archaeological expedition led by A. G. Maximova under Kazakh SSR in 1957 discovered Tanbaly burials of the Bronze Age and Iron Age, in which archaeologists found three ritual rock altars divided by rock fences from each other (Figure 3) (Zapovednik muzey “Taňbaly”, n.d). The archaeologists believe that the rituals were performed for the deceased ancestors; one of the altars had an engraved drawing of a weapon (Zapovednik muzey “Taňbaly”, n.d).



Figure 3. Tamgaly burials (Zapovednik muzey “Taňbaly”, n.d)

Furthermore, other burials and mounds from the Tamgally Valley included material culture specific to Andronovo culture, like bronze jewellery, unornamented pottery and rocks as burial constructions with Solar-headed gods petroglyphs depicted there. In addition, some of the bones of adults and juveniles found were located in specific directions (on the left side of the body, heads directed to the west). In contrast, some bones were burned outside the burials and spread all over the burial grounds (Zapovednik muzey “Taňbaly”, n.d).

Therefore, the Tanbaly burial grounds are an analogical complex, as the Tamgaly petroglyphs of different burials are divided into groups according to the region and approximate timing. The material culture discovered the burial systems and their constructions all create a context of ritualistic behavior. In addition to that, the Tamgaly petroglyphs that are located all in the same valley also serve to prove that people living there used the land for particular purposes.

According to many scholars (Rozwadoswki 2001; Zapovednik muzey “Taňbaly”, n.d), the Tamgaly Valley is believed to be a specific place for performing rituals people choose.

Relevance of the Research

The horse and sun construct a particular narrative in being included in the National Symbols of Kazakhstan – the State flag and the State emblem. The sun on the national flag takes up all the central space and is also represented as the *shanyraq* in the National emblem.

Shanyraq is one of the essential symbolic architectural parts of a *yurt*, the Kazakh traditional house; it is a circular open roof built with wooden stripes to imitate the sun with its rays (Figure 4). The horse can be seen in the State emblem; *tulpars*, winged horses equipped with horns, take up both sides and represent the nation’s bravery. However, the question remains: why are these elements interpreted this way and used in National Symbols?



Figure 4. The view on the *shanyraq* when standing inside the *yurt* (Freepik, n.d.).

The images of the horse and sun have always had deep meanings in Kazakh culture. The domestication of horses brought many benefits to the lives of Kazakhs while also complementing the image of a warrior for Kazakh people. At the same time, the meaning of the sun often

portrays spiritual wealth. This way, horses and the sun were frequently represented or mentioned in Kazakh history and culture. This led to the perception of local culture and the construction of a national identity from these two elements.

However, this raises the question of whether people from the past used to put the same meanings to these two figures. Chronologically, this project will start from the Bronze Age, the period of the image-making tradition of people from Central Asia (Rozwadowski, 2011). In his chapter, Rozwadowski (2011) discusses visual representations of shamanism from rock art in Central Asia, particularly in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Siberia. Although his work's central theme is interpreting the visual, cultural and shamanistic elements of images of solar-headed gods, the author also draws attention to other petroglyphs. By making a sophisticated analysis of different images and figures of rock art of Tamgaly Valley, such as the 'sun-headed' petroglyphs or images that show the whole ritual scene (Figures 5-6), he states that shamanism of Central Asia might have identified with a horse due to the nature of its animal – used as a transport, the horse could help the shaman to get into the other world and perform a particular ritual (Rozwadowski, 2011). Also, Rozwadowski (2011) claims that the horse had another symbolic meaning of helping to transport the dead souls from one world and state to another, which is why it was possibly killed and buried with the dead, such as at the Bronze Age Akterek cemetery located near Tamgaly Valley, in which archaeologists found details of horse harness made of iron and bone (Mariyashev & Goryachev, 1993). Such symbolism may also be enhanced by the fact that several Bronze Age cemeteries were found near the area of the Tamgaly site.

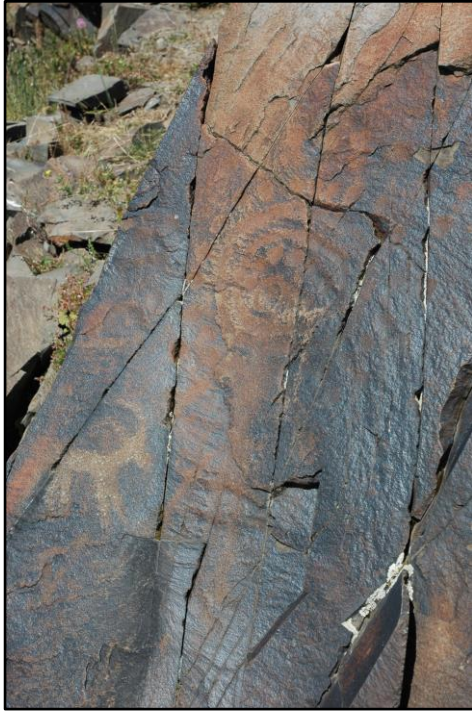


Figure 5. Petroglyphs of the Archaeological Landscape of Tanbaly. The ‘solar-headed’ god

(Oers, 2009).



Figure 6. Petroglyphs of the Archaeological Landscape of Tanbaly. The ritualistic scene

(Vincent, 2008)

Theoretical Framework

This research relies on several theoretical concepts, which are essential to introduce and later apply in my interpretations: shamanism, animism, Tengrism, personhood, agency and doxa.

First, animism is the belief that inanimate (non-human) objects and places can possess anthropomorphic qualities (Vega, 2016). In this research, animism as a theoretical concept is applied to interpret the role of horns on the Tamgay petroglyphs. I use animism to suggest the symbolic significance of drawing the horns attached to the horses and how, in this way, the horse's role in performing the shamanistic ritual is now taking on a more significant symbolic level. By applying this concept, I make the symbolic connections between the sun and the horse.

Shamanism is a system of religious practices performed by a shaman. Archaeologically, shamans are identified by particular clothing (fur/leather coats) and tools (tambourines, drums or horses); in rock art, they can be depicted as anthropomorphic figures (Britannica, 2024; Devlet, 2001). Therefore, a shamanistic ritual can include various tools, conditions and requirements for performing a ritual. First, the shaman, a person "who knows" (Britannica, 2024), must have a particular knowledge of the rituals or must be of a specific gender and age – in some communities, female shamans are more prevalent, or a shaman has to be someone wise, "with experience", meaning an old individual can become a shaman; sometimes, shamans are people who learn this practice through generations (Price, 2011). One of the instruments is the horse; in shamanism, the horse transports the deceased or the shaman himself to the other world (Price, 2011). The horse is a widespread domesticated animal; people usually use horses for transportation overall, especially the nomads; moreover, the sound the horse makes when running can also be essential (Price, 2011).

This means that acoustics matter in shamanism; the sound of drums playing, the tambourine, or even the sound of horses running can be of particular importance and condition for performing the shamanistic ritual (Price, 2011).

Tengrism is an ancient religion practiced in Central Asia, in which Tengri is the supreme Sky God (Dosmurzinov, 2023). In Tengrism, a pre-Islamic ritual practice among Kazakh people, the supreme god was the Tängir, also ‘the Sky’ (Dosmurzinov, 2023). Tängir was a god of the sky, the god of the “upper world”; Kazakh people, in Tengrism, believed the world was constructed of three layers – the upper, the middle and the underworld (Dosmurzinov, 2023). Kazakhs used to worship the Sky god; therefore, as Tängir did not have any specific, definite human features, the sky became animated. Tängir was the sky; people believed it, trusted their lives upon it and respected its presence in their lives. This way, animism is a critical factor of shamanism and Tengrism.

Furthermore, agency and personhood are significant terms when talking about rock art and petroglyphs as artifacts, as well as archaeological records left by people who used the Tamgaly landscape. Gillespie (2001) introduces the concept of personhood as not something that comes as a human property but as a status established in being in a collectivity. Gillespie (2001) studies personhood through agency and mainly observes how the identity of the Maya people was shaped by the houses they built. Same connections and analogies could be made in the case of Tamgaly petroglyphs – discussing the context of Tamgaly petroglyphs would help to see the agency and personhood of people who made the rock engravings and how it reflected their lifestyle and beliefs. So, drawing on the definitions and interpretations of Gillespie (2001) on personhood and agency, this research observes the intentionality of Tamgaly petroglyphs, the horned horses, as a way of studying the agency of the site. Including social status, personhood,

and agency would bring more insights into understanding the idea behind the horned horses, the sun and the whole ritual scene portrayed at the rock site.

The concept of doxa is crucial in this research's later parts and applications. Doxa means unquestioned truths or beliefs that society takes for granted (Bourdieu, 1977). According to Silliman (2001), doxa can be a mundane activity, but doxic practices can also be intentional activities that share specific motivations or life histories. For this research, I believe sun-horse imagery in today's Kazakh society is an intentional doxic practice.

The theoretical framework of this project relies on two approaches: the symbolic approach and the contextual approach.

The contextual approach allows me to view, study, and interpret Tamgaly petroglyphs through various combined factors. These factors will enable me to envision the Tamgaly complex as a site for a particular use. The Tamgaly burials, the Tamgaly petroglyphs, and the landscape of this complex create a specific context, and through this, I interpret the symbolic connection between the sun and the horse.

Arsenault and Zawadzka (2014) explore Algonquian-speaking people from Canada and their spiritual systems of belief through rock art, using contextual procedures. Specifically, they observe how the landscape's acoustic and visual aspects and natural formations create a particular context that places specific meanings on certain rituals and their representations in cave art. This approach helps understand the experience performed and practiced through specific time, place and culture conditions. Similarly, the chronological and spatial context should be considered when speaking of rock art at Kazakhstani sites or Asian shamanism depicted in this rock art. Thus, interpreting rock art images in the context of the cultural changes

happening during a particular time and space, the Bronze Age and the Kazakh lands, could provide a deeper analysis for the research.

The symbolic approach (Figure 7) is used to theorize the ancient symbolism of sun-horse imagery at the Tamgaly site and the modern symbolism of sun-horse imagery that constructs the national identity. Using the symbolic approach, I interpret the ancient and contemporary symbolism and conclude that ancient sun-horse imagery was about spiritual elements and that modern sun-horse imagery reflects the national doxa.

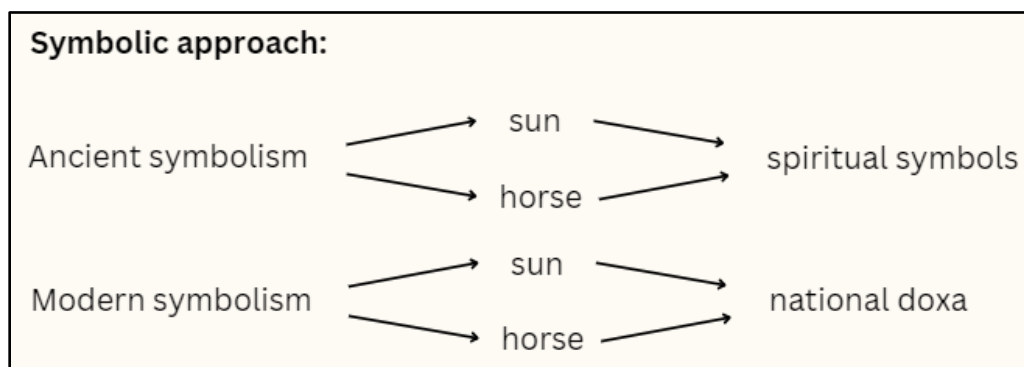


Figure 7. Symbolic approach applied in this research

Rozwadowski (2014) uses the phenomenological model to explain how studying shamanism in different cultures and regions requires ethical considerations. According to the author, shamanism in Central Asia was characterized by cultural decisions and thoughts; it was considered more as a religious and ideological system (Rozwadowski, 2014). Furthermore, the author also draws specific attention to certain aspects of Asian shamanism – focusing more on connecting with the other world rather than getting into a trance. Such differences are essential to identify and consider since this research aims to study only the Kazakh culture and history. The phenomenological approach and theoretical framework also allow us to analyze Asian shamanism by comparing and identifying its distinctions from other types and cultures.

Methodology

The research design is based on the visual analysis and interpretations of the images, particularly rock art. There is no district division on the types of images. This research focuses on petroglyphs that would represent and connect the sun-horse imagery. That is why the chosen sampling for the data collection is particularly images of horned horses and ‘solar-headed’ figures. These specific pictures are from Group III and IV petroglyphs, located almost at the center of the Tamgaly Valley, where the Tamgaly River also flows (Figures 1-2, 8-9). Due to anatomical differences, as Hermann (2011) pays attention to different phallic features, the visual comparisons between the animals and the context, horned horses are distinct from deers and bulls, while ‘solar-headed’ gods carry connections to the sun.

The photographs and scanned pictures are taken from articles by Rozwadowski (2001) and Hermann (2011), as well as photographs from UNESCO and the official website of the Tanbaly Museum,

The limitation and risk in this case is to avoid the authors’ interpretations of the images. This research project aims to include original interpretations and perspectives on the images.

The Tamgaly petroglyphs are from the Bronze Age (Rozwadowski 2001; Hermann 2001). However, it has to be noted that dating in archaeology is always an issue – it is hard to date petroglyphs, and scholars cannot always be precise in their calculations. Therefore, the petroglyphs at Tamgaly, particularly from Group III and IV, can not necessarily be from the Bronze Age. Strict assumptions might lead to interpretations that are not accurate and reliable enough. This is why it is crucial to notice how the dating of the Tamgaly petroglyphs can be relative.

Findings

The petroglyphs at Tamgaly Valley are divided into five groups according to their location and what images are more frequent there. Figure 8 shows how various images of animals and ‘solar-headed’ figures were divided into groups (Rogozhinsky, 2009). Moreover, Figure 9 shows how the groups of petroglyphs are spread over the whole Tamgaly Valley (Rogozhinsky, 2009).

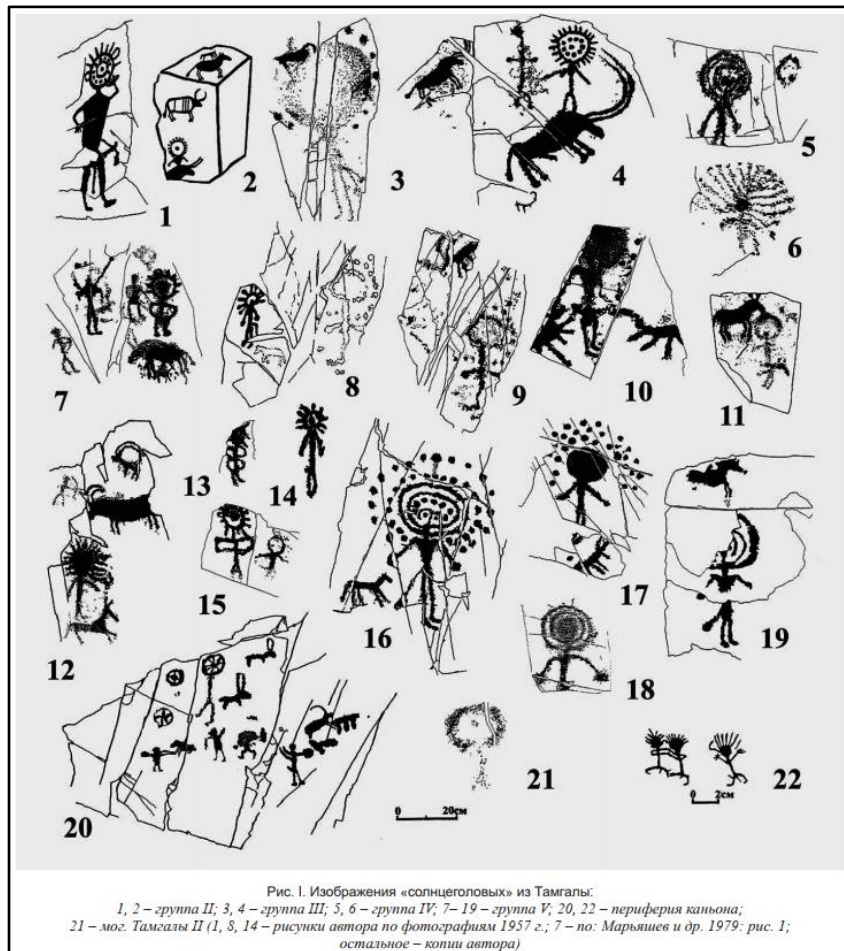


Figure 8. Tamgaly petroglyphs – image variation (Rogozhinsky, 2009)

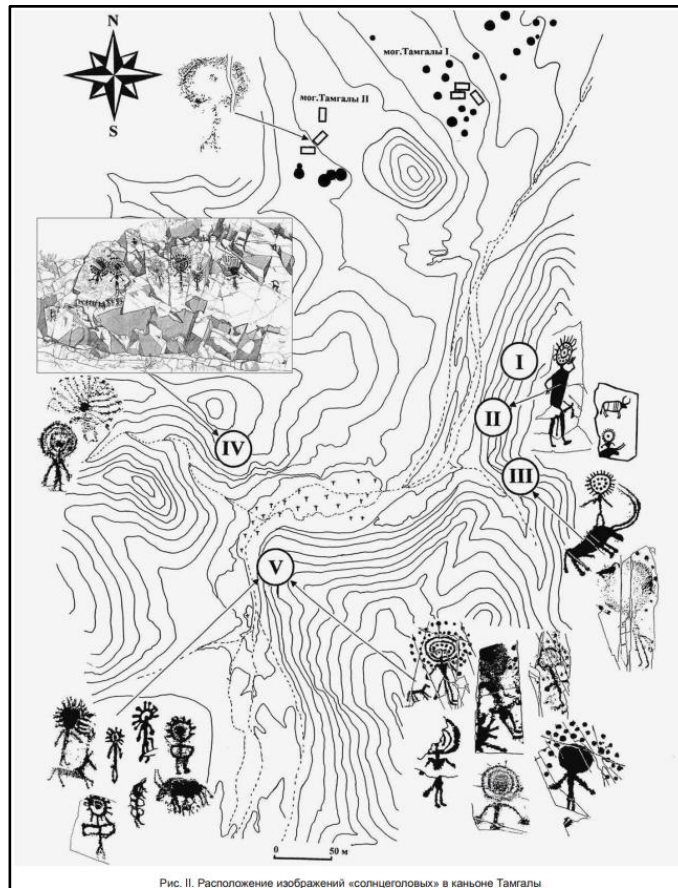



Figure 9. The geographical spread of Tamgaly petroglyphs (Rogozhinsky, 2009)

For the visual analysis, I chose five scans of the petroglyphs available online. I made a mini-catalogue with descriptions of the figures (Table 1). There, the group to which the petroglyphs belong, the scan, the description, and the sources are included.

Figure	Group	Image	Description	Reference
10	III		Horned horse, a rider, human beings with weapons	Hermann, 2011





11	III		Horned horse, a rider, and a shaman	Hermann, 2011; Rozwadowski, 2001
12	III		Horned horse, a rider with a weapon	Hermann, 2011; Rozwadowski, 2001
13	III		A bull, a 'solar-headed' figure as a rider, a human being	Hermann, 2011; Rozwadowski, 2001; UNESCO
14	IV		A cult scene: animals, human beings as dancers, two 'solar-headed' figures; four other 'solar-headed' figure	Hermann, 2011; Rozwadowski, 2001; UNESCO

Table 1. Mini-catalogue

Horned horses

Eleven depicted representations of an animal can be considered a horse with horns at the Tamgaly rock art site (Hermann, 2011) (Figures 10-12). Although bulls are also represented at Tamgaly (Figure 13), archaeologists specify that horned horses refer to horses and not bulls due to some anatomical differences drawn by past humans. In particular, Hermann (2011) states that some features identify these animals as horses: “the tail, the ears, the position of the penis and sometimes the position of the reins”. Why would horns be added to the horse if deer and bull (animals that naturally come with horns) are also present at the Tamgaly site?

Tamgaly paintings are highly associated with cult scenes, specifically shamanism. Rozwadowski (2001) sophisticatedly analyzed the art on Tamgaly rocks, indicating several associations with shamanistic practices. The physical appearance of the depicted humans suggests they are shamans; in addition to that, Rozwadowski (2001) makes an ethnographic analogy between Siberian rock art and shamans depicted in petroglyphs. Another shamanic reference would be the ‘Sun-head’ figures, which Rozwadowski (2001) interprets as high spiritual and central figures (Figures 5, 14). Although I find this assumption debatable, since Rozwadowski (2001) does not provide some theoretical basis, such an interpretation still enhances the “nature” of the Tamgaly site. This leads us to the last reference – the “cult” scene at Tamgaly (Figure 14). Rozwadowski (2001) makes a detailed interpretation of this scene. I brought these references up to contextualize the shamanistic practices within the site.

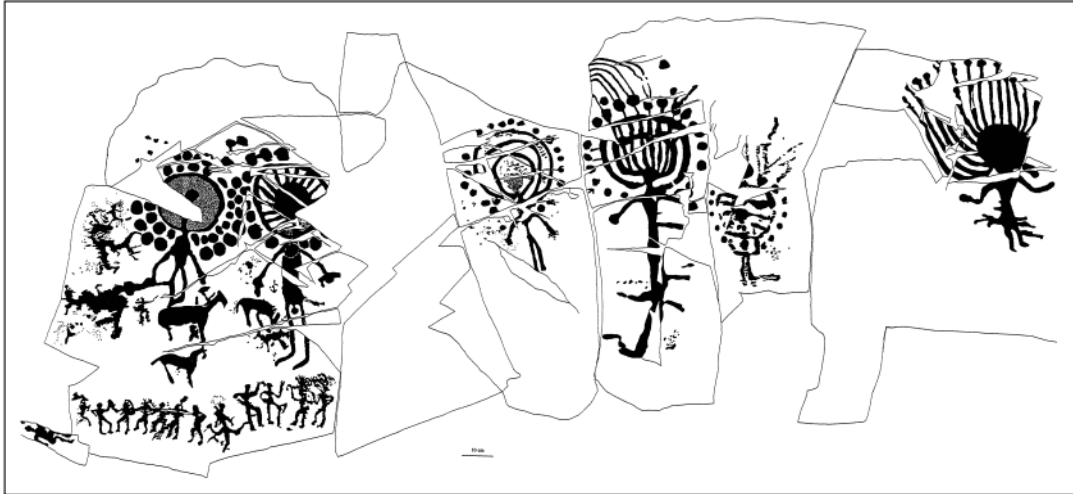


Figure 14. Cult scene at Tamgaly site (Rozwadowski, 2001)

Thus, further interpretation of horned horses can be constructed this way: Hermann (2011) suggests the reason for adding horns to horses is that the horns may be a ritualistic piece, while horses are also the easiest to ride (compared with bulls and deers). Indeed, in Figures 10-12, we see that people are riding the horned horse. In addition to that, my interpretation suggests that the circular horns resemble the sun. In the context of sun-headed figures, such interpretations can emphasize the role of the sun and horse in shamanism and strengthen their connection.

Discussion

Ancient symbolism

One of the essential instruments of a Tengrist shaman was the tambourine (Rozwadowski, 2014). The tambourine's functional role was to protect the shaman when entering the "other" and not be noticed by the spirits. Moreover, the shaman used a tambourine to perform rituals for acoustic purposes since singing and using drums to make certain rhythmic sounds was crucial in shamanism. In my opinion, another functional role of the tambourine was to complete the unique figure and personality of the shaman – to be recognized and respected by other people and to hold a particular reputation as a specialist.

In addition to that, the tambourine holds a symbolic significance. According to Rozwadowski (2014), the tambourine was a metaphorical equivalent to a horse, transporting the shaman into the world of spirits. However, the problem is that the tambourine is rarely represented on the Bronze Age petroglyphs. The authors suggest that the reason for that is either the tool was somehow prohibited or shamanism represented on the petroglyphs was another form of a religious practice that held another symbolic significance too (Rozwadowski, 2014).

In any case, there is a resemblance between the symbolism of a horse and the tambourine. As the tambourine played the role of camouflage for the shaman in the world of the spirits, other instruments, like the coat and the headdress, were used for the same purposes. It is believed that a shaman's headdress sometimes also has horns attached to it to imitate the head of an animal, while at Tamgaly petroglyphs, we see how a shaman rides a horned horse (Rozwadowski, 2014). I suggest that these rock images probably portray the process of a shaman entering the deceased's world. Since the Tamgaly petroglyphs have no tambourine and a headdress that would particularly identify the man as a shaman, the horse with horns plays this role. Perhaps people portrayed how the horse is used in the disguise of a shaman.

Now, the question arises—how significant are the horns? As mentioned in the section on findings, archaeologists specifically distinguish the horse on Tamgaly petroglyphs from bulls and deer (Hermann, 2011). This research project suggests that people intentionally added the horns to a horse to make a symbolic connection with the sun.

Since previous discussion points implied the shamanistic nature and practice prevalent in the Tamgaly rock art, the same could be done with the horns. The horns on the petroglyphs (Figures 10-12) are unnaturally elongated and become rounded starting from the middle. The

horns could represent the sun, as they are also rounded in nature. The sun also plays a crucial role in shamanism, Tengrism, and the culture of ancient Kazakhs.

The “deification” of the sun has been prevalent throughout the history of Kazakh people. First, the house of a Kazakh was “inspired” by the celestial star and reflects how people associated their lives with it (Dosmurzinov, 2023). *Shanyraq*, an open rooftop of the *yurt*, is built to resemble the sun and its rays as it includes wooden sticks (*uygs*) put all together to create a symbol of togetherness (Figure 4) (Dosmurzinov, 2023). *Shanyraq* allows the sunlight to light up the *yurt*, reminding us how the sun is constantly a part of Kazakh daily life. Such construction of the *yurt* has been a tradition for generations, as it portrays cultural values and significance. Also, *shanyraq* was like a compass and a daily calendar for Kazakhs; with the sunlight and the shadows, people could identify different directions and the time of the day (Dosmurzinov, 2023). In addition, the traditional Kazakh houses correspond to the nomadic lifestyle, as the *yurt* is easy to construct and take down for constant transportation. Furthermore, the sun is present in traditional art – the round ornaments, spirals and circles symbolically refer to the sun (Kemelbekova & Bukharova, 2002). Such ornaments come from Tengrism and were passed from generation to generation, so traditional Kazakh art remains the same and is still valued. Although the form of Kazakh ornaments may look primitive, they are “readable” and represent important Tenriist philosophical values (Kemelbekova & Bukharova, 2002). The circular form is the most used because the circle is considered the most perfect form and “movement” of life (Kemelbekova & Bukharova, 2002). Representing the sun spatially and temporally implies the “endless” steppe and eternal life (Kemelbekova & Bukharova, 2002).

At Tamgaly petroglyphs, there are images of the ‘Sun-head’ figures, some anthropomorphic figures that represent the body of a human. Still, the head resembles the sun,

with rays circling it and several dots inside it (Figure 14). The solar gods participate in the cult scene at Tamgaly petroglyphs (Figure 14), which might strengthen the argument of their shamanistic nature, given the importance of the sun in shamanism. That being said, such a point is still debatable since there is no clear evidence of the figures directly referring to the Sun. Nonetheless, this again highlights the sun's role in Tamgaly petroglyphs, which are associated with the practices of shamanism and Tengrism.

This way, the sun was an essential element of Kazakh people that was observed through shamanism, Tengrism, daily practices, and art and takes this role today. Considering this, I suggest that the horns on the horse (Figures 10-12) were added to highlight the symbolism of the horse's participation in the ritual and in the drawing itself. The horns resemble the sun, adding remarkable importance to the petroglyphs.

Therefore, people could emphasize the role of the horse, too. As discussed earlier, the horse is a crucial shamanistic element, used functionally for the shaman to ride it and transport it into the world of the deceased. It is used symbolically to "hide" the shaman and make this ride safe for the shaman. That is why perhaps the horns resembling the sun were an additional element for the shamanistic ritual, adding "safety" to the ritual.

I suggest that the horse was not just an instrument during the ritual but also held more symbolic significance in obtaining the cosmological powers to serve the shaman and be worshipped by the people. By drawing the horned horses and shamans as the riders, people create the symbolic significance of Tamgaly petroglyphs, representing the horse and the rider as separate entities, but as applying animism and "reviving" the horned horses.

The meanings put into the drawings are essential when considering the agency of the site. As already discussed, this research offers interpretations of the connection between the horse and

the sun. This poses the following question: Was the process of drawing the petroglyphs, animated horses, and ritual scenes also somehow a ritual? It is difficult to identify what came first: did the place obtain the sacred and religious meaning, and then people decided to “commemorate” the place with petroglyphs or did the petroglyphs happen to be first, and did the sacredness appear later? However, the idea of social status, paralleled to the status of the shaman and agency, implies an individual’s existence within the structural community (Gillespie, 2001). According to Gillespie (2001), “status cannot exist alone but only to the overall societal pattern”. If this theoretical approach is applied to the Tamgaly petroglyphs, distinguishing the rider as a shaman proves the significance of this figure, which consequently ensures all the interpretations of the horned horses and their essential role.

It is also crucial to mention the phenomenological factor when studying the Tamgaly site. It was discovered that the engravings on the rock surfaces of the Tamgaly Vallet face the south. This means that the petroglyphs are constantly exposed to the sun. Another interesting observation is the Tamgaly River, which flows right through the center of the site and is not far away from the Group III and IV petroglyphs (Figures 1-2). The Tamgaly burials do not primarily dictate that the site was used as a residence (Zapovednik muzey “Taňbaly”, n.d; Rogozhinsky, 2009), so from this, we can conclude that the valley was used for particular purposes, perhaps to perform rituals.

Ethnographic and archaeological examples

A connection between ethnographic and archaeological comparison can be made with one of the significant archaeological findings from Trundholm Bog – the Chariot of the Sun, a “highlight of the Danish Bronze Age” (Kaul, 2018) (Figure 15). It consists of the horse figure attached to the solar disc, representing the sun, all pulled by the wheels on which they stand.

Archaeologists make divine and cosmological connections between the horse and the disc. Specifically, the disc is constructed to show the sun's travel during the day and night.

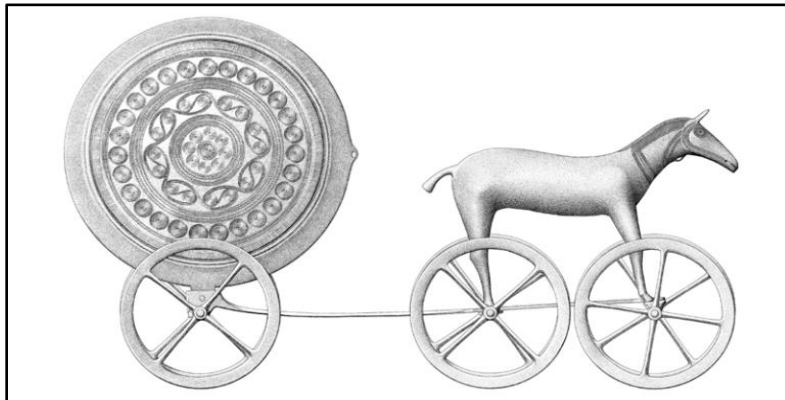


Figure 15. The Chariot of the Sun (Kaul, 2018)

In both cultural examples, we see how both horse and sun participate in some ritualistic action, with features like specific physical appearance (shamans at the Tamgaly site) and repetition patterns (day and night on the solar disc of the Chariot of the Sun).

Jacobson-Tepfer (2012) provides a study on vehicle-horse rock art depictions in Mongolian Altai during the Bronze Age – this study appears to show another horse-sun connection. The petroglyphs there show a chariot, typically with four wheels, the horse attached, and sometimes a charioteer. Jacobson-Tepfer (2012) studies how these figures were drawn and portrayed precisely. The exciting thing about these petroglyphs is that all of them were drawn as if the creator was looking at the figures from above (Figure 16). Jacobson-Tepfer (2012) suggests that this was because the riders were actually “transporting” the dead using chariots and horses as ritualistic tools; archaeological findings in Mongolia and Kazakhstan strengthen such thought, how even chariots with horses were being buried with the deceased.

In addition, I thought about how the depicter represents the sun looking at these figures from above, which is why they are drawn this way.

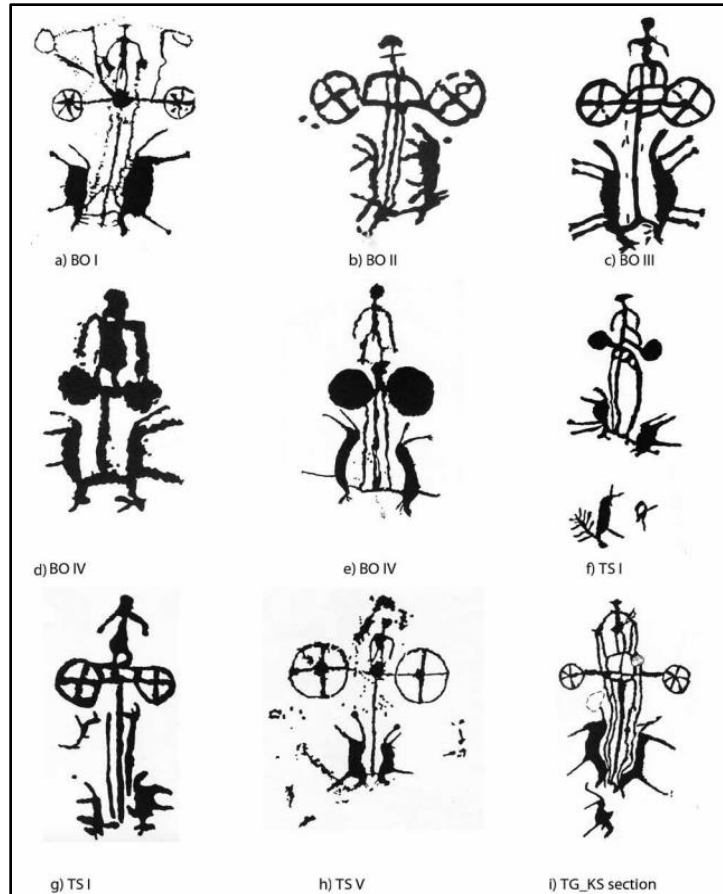


Figure 16. Mongolian Altai rock art of wheeled vehicles (Jacobson-Tepfer 2012)

The perspective of looking at the drawings from above highlights the intentionality of the people who made the art, and this highlights the agency of the site. To be more specific, the petroglyphs might be interpreted as the one who looks or the draws is equated to the sun. It is also known that Siberian shamanism was widespread in the pre-Islamic period, which is why an alternative interpretation might include the perspective of ancestors watching people from the “upper world”, in which Tängir was the supreme god and ruler.

Similarly, the Chariot of the Sun from Trundholm Bog, which is also dated to the Bronze Age, intentionally portrays the chariot cosmologically as the day calendar and divinely as the sun while also being attached to the horse that pulls the chariot and the sun (Figure 15).

Another ethnographic example of the connection between the sun and horse is the archaeological site of the Berel burials in Kazakhstan. Berel is dated to the Iron Age and is located in eastern Kazakhstan, in the Katonkaragay region. The site has about eleven burials; the archaeological excavations were led by Kazakhstani scholar Z. Sarmashev in the 1990s. What is interesting about this site is the presence of horse bones buried with the deceased in one burial. Moreover, one of the significant burial sites, Burial 69, has about sixteen horses buried with two people, female and male (Samashev et al., 2000). The horses were buried in special gear (horse equipment) made of textile, wood and gold. One such attribute is the wooden horn attached to the horse mask (Figure 17); scholars reconstructed the equipment and figured out what Berel horses looked like (Figure 18).

The Berel horses were particularly significant to these people—they were buried with them, and people made special rich clothes for them. The horns attached to the horse masks resemble the ones present at the Tamgaly petroglyphs—they also look elongated, forming the circle or the sun. This ethnographic example found in Kazakhstan requires thinking of how horses and the sun were symbolically connected across time and space.

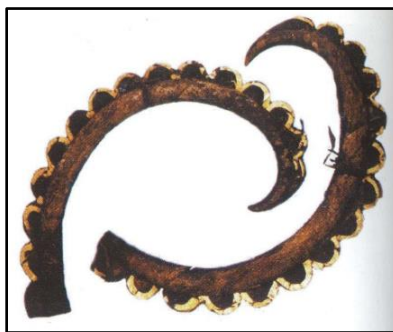


Figure 17. The wooden horns attached to the horse mask, Berel (Samashev et al., 2000)



Figure 18. The Berel horse, reconstructed (Samashev et al., 2000)

Modern symbolism

Today, the horse and the sun remain vital in Kazakh history and national identity. Certain traditions in Kazakh culture remain from pre-Islamic practices, like the shanyraq in the yurt, which performs the same role. At the same time, the horse is the national symbol of a nomadic spirit, portraying freedom and a close relationship with the landscape and nature of the Kazakh identity.

The sun, centered on the national flag and emblem, holds a special place in constructing the national symbol of the Kazakh people (Figures 19 and 20).



Figure 19. National flag (Akorda.kz, n.d.)



Figure 20. National emblem (Akorda.kz, n.d.)

It seems that current representations of sun-horse imagery do not portray spiritual symbolism, like in Tamgaly Valley, where the imagery was connected with shamanism and Tengrism. Instead, even though the sun and horse represent the historical knowledge and heritage of the Kazakh nation, this imagery has gained another significance—national and political. This change might be due to the disappearance of the shamanistic nature in the sun-horse imagery. Perhaps horned horses were the specific case that held and portrayed this spiritual symbolic message.

The modern symbolism of sun-horse imagery possesses political and national significance, and here, the concept of national doxa is applied. To be more specific, the intentional doxic practice makes the sun-horse imagery unquestioned in Kazakh society – the Kazakh nation becomes undoubtedly associated with the sun and the horse, and this is observed in how the National Flag and National Emblem (Figures 19-20) are designed.

The sun-horse imagery at Tamgaly Valley held spiritual context; the horse and the sun were essential sacred symbolic elements incorporated into the lifestyles of people who used the Tamgaly landscape. Today, sun-horse imagery has changed ancient symbolism by representing the elements as national symbols: politically, nationally, and historically. For the “insiders”, the

nation and the Kazakh community now identify themselves with these symbols; for the “outsiders”, it shows how these symbols are essential to the Kazakh nation.

Conclusion

This project draws attention to the persistence of horse-sun imagery; it suggests the use of horse and sun in petroglyphs was a spiritual way of connecting two elements as the sacred elements of their daily lives. The Tamgaly rock art site serves as a case study to highlight the presence of spiritualness by practicing shamanism and Tengrism at the Tamgaly Vallet and using this landscape for this particular purpose. This project examines how ancient symbolism of sun-horse imagery has changed into modern symbolism. Horse and sun were considered spiritual and sacred elements before, and now they hold other meanings of being the doxic pratice to illustrate and depict the Kazakh national identity.

References

- Akorda.kz. (n.d.). [Photograph]. Retrieved March 14, 2024, from https://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=https%3A%2F%2Fakorda.kz%2Fassets%2Fmedia%2Fflag_mediumThumb.jpg&tbnid=YCutit6xmauLuM&vet=12ahUKEwiw0b6gtvuEAXVMMRAIHbahB8QQMygDegQIARBX..i&imgrefurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.akorda.kz%2Fen%2Fstate_symbols%2Fkazakhstan_flag&docid=ebpXxoELCwCldM&w=750&h=357&q=national%20flag&ved=2ahUKEwiw0b6gtvuEAXVMMRAIHbahB8QQMygDegQIARBX
- Akorda.kz. (n.d.). [Photograph]. Retrieved March 14, 2024, from https://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.akorda.kz%2Fassets%2Fmedia%2Fgerb.jpg&tbnid=yjSWF1SbLGsl0M&vet=12ahUKEwiZ8fantvuEAXW2GhAIHcZ4ALMQMygAegQIARBN..i&imgrefurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.akorda.kz%2Fen%2Fstate_symbols%2Fkazakhstan_emblem&docid=DCYE0ndiqmLU9M&w=3600&h=3734&q=national%20emblem%20of%20kazakhstan&ved=2ahUKEwiZ8fantvuEAXW2GhAIHcZ4ALMQMygAegQIARBN
- Arsenault, D. & Zawadzka, D. (2014). Spiritual Places: Canadian Shield Rock Art within its Sacred Landscape. *Rock Art and Sacred Landscapes*, 117–137.
- Britannica. (2024). *Shamanism*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/shamanism>
- Devlet, E. (2001). Rock art and the material culture of Siberian and Central Asian shamanism. In N. Price (Ed.), *The Archaeology of Shamanism* (pp. 43-55). Routledge.
- Dosmurzinov, R. (2023). Pre-islamic World Views of the Kazkah People: from the End of the 19th to the Beginning of the 21st Century. *Trames*, 27(77/72), 415–438.
- Freepik. (n.d.). [Photograph]. Retrieved November 19, 2023, from https://ru.freepik.com/premium-photo/shanyrak-bottom-view-from-kazakh-yurt-symbol-of-kazakhstan_40072983.htm
- Gillespie, S. (2001). Personhood, Agency, and Mortuary Ritual: A Case Study from the Ancient Maya. *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology*, 20, 73–112.
- Hermann, L. (2011). Rock Art of Tamgaly, Kazakhstan. *Adoranten*, 26–40.
- Jacobson-Tepfer, E. (2012). The Image of The Wheeled Vehicle In The Mongolian Altai: Instability And Ambiguity. *The Silk Road*, 10, 1–28.

- Kaul, F. (2018). The Chariot of the Sun and other sun horses of the Nordic Bronze Age - including some interesting anatomical details. In J. Dodd, & E. Meijer (Eds.), *Giving the Past a Future: Essays in Archaeology and Rock Art Studies in Honour of Dr. Phil h.c. Gerhard Milstreu*, 58–69. Archaeopress.
- Kemelbekova, E., & Bukharova, G. (2002). Semantics of Geometric Forms in Nomadic Culture. 152–155.
- Mariyashev A.N. & Goryachev, A.A. (1993) K voprosu tipologii i khronologii pamyatnikov epokhi bronzy Semirechya. *Rossiyskaya Arkheologiya*, 4, 5-20.
- Oers, R. V. (2009). *Petroglyphs of the Archaeological Landscape of Tanbaly* [Photograph]. UNESCO. whc.unesco.org/en/documents/115298
- Price, N. (2011). Shamanism. In T. Insoll (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Ritual & Religion* (pp. 983-1003). Oxford University Press.
- Rogozhinsky, A. (2009). Naskal'nyye Izobrazheniya "Solntsegolovykh" Iz Tamgaly v Kontekste Izobrazitel'nykh Traditsiy Bronzovogo Verka Kazakhstana I Sredney Azii. In K. Tabaldiyev, Y. Smagulov & P. Petrov (Eds.), *Materialy i issledovaniya po arkheologii Kyrgyzstana*, 4 (53–65). Bishkek: Ilim.
- Rozwadowski, A. (2014). Rock Art and Shamanism: Phenomenology, Context and Ethics. *Theory and Practice of Archaeological Research*, 2(10), 57–72.
- Rozwadowski, A. (2001). Sun Gods or Shamans? Interpreting the 'Solar-Headed' Petroglyphs of Central Asia. In: N. Price (Ed.), 2001, *Archaeology of Shamanism*, 65-86, London, New York: Routledge.
- Samashev, Z., Bazarbayeva, G., Zhumabekova, G., & Sungatay, S. (2000). *Berel*. Almaty.
- Silliman, S. (2001). Agency, practical politics and the archaeology of culture contact. *Journal of Social Archaeology*, 1(2), 190–209.
- Vega, M. (2016). Ritual practices and wrapped objects: Unpacking prehispanic Andean sacred bundles. *Journal of Material Culture* 21(2), 223–251.
- Vincent, K. H. C. (2008). *Petroglyphs of the Archaeological Landscape of Tanbaly* [Photograph]. UNESCO. whc.unesco.org/en/documents/147315

Zapovednik muzey “Taňbaly”. (n.d.). *Mogyl'nyky*. <https://tanbaly.kz/petroglyphs>

Zapovednik muzey “Taňbaly”. (n.d.). *Petroglify*. <https://tanbaly.kz/petroglyphs>