

RESULTS OF STUDYING OF MATERIALS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH

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NEW ROCK ART SITE AT THE RIVERSIDE CLIFFS IN THE OGLAKHTY MOUNTAINS (KHAKASIA)

Elena A. Miklashevich

Institute of Archaeology RAS, Moscow, Russia;

"Tomskaya Pisaniitsa" Kuzbass museum-reserve, Kemerovo, Russia;

elena-miklashevich@yandex.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3190-0311>

Abstract. The article presents the results of investigation of the rock art site discovered in 2014 on riverside rocks in the Oglakhty mountain range (Republic of Khakasia, left bank of the Yenisei River). One of the largest rock art complexes of the Minusinsk Basin is located in these mountains; the best known in archaeology are the tremendous concentrations of petroglyphs which were located on coastal cliffs before they were flooded by the reservoir of the Krasnoyarsk hydroelectric power station. Most of them are irretrievably lost, but some are still preserved and becoming relatively accessible in periods of lower water level. In the process of searching for and redocumenting the petroglyphs at the locations already known (Oglakhty I and II according to Ya. A. Sher's inventory) new decorated panels have been revealed, and not only in the flooded levels, but also on inaccessible rocks above the highest water level. This new location is situated upstream from the known ones, within the southernmost section of the riverside cliffs. Several years of regular inspections of this section from a boat at various water levels and with binoculars made it possible to find and document 24 panels, containing about 50 complete and partially preserved figures of wild animals (elk, red deer, roe deer, aurochs, arkhar, horse and others). Several stylistic groups of images are distinguished; almost all of them have analogies at known sites, which allows us to confidently attribute them as a whole to the earliest phase of Minusinsk Basin rock art which undoubtedly predates the Bronze Age, although the specific period of its existence has not yet been determined.

Key words: rock art, earliest stratum, documenting, flooded petroglyphs, Minusinsk Basin, Oglakhty

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НОВОЕ МЕСТОНАХОЖДЕНИЕ НАСКАЛЬНОГО ИСКУССТВА НА БЕРЕГОВЫХ СКАЛАХ ОГЛАХТЫ (ХАКАСИЯ)

Елена Александровна Миклашевич

Институт археологии РАН, Москва, Россия;

Кузбасский музей-заповедник «Томская Писаница», Кемерово, Россия;

elena-miklashevich@yandex.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3190-0311>

Резюме. В статье представлены результаты исследований открытого в 2014 г. местонахождения наскального искусства на береговых скалах горного массива Оглахты (Республика Хакасия, левый берег р. Енисей). В этих горах находится один из самых крупных комплексов памятников наскального искусства Минусинской котловины; наибольшую известность в науке получили петроглифы, до затопления Красноярским водохранилищем концентрировавшиеся в большом количестве на нескольких участках береговых скал. Большинство из них безвозвратно погибло, однако некоторые еще сохраняются и относительно доступны для изучения в периоды снижения уровня воды. В процессе поиска и редокументирования сохранившихся изображений известных местонахождений (Оглахты-I и II по индексации Я. А. Шера) выше по течению от них на самом южном участке береговых скал были обнаружены ранее неизвестные петроглифы, причем не только затопляемые, но и расположенные на труднодоступных скалах намного выше самого высокого уровня затопления. Несколько лет регулярных осмотров береговых скал с лодки при разных уровнях воды и с помощью бинокля позволили выявить и документировать на этом участке 24 плоскости, содержащие около 50 полных и частично сохранившихся фигур диких животных (лоси, благородные олени, косули, быки-туры, архары, лошадь и др.). Выделяется несколько стилистических групп изображений, почти все они имеют аналогии на известных памятниках, что позволяет уверенно отнести их в целом к древнейшему пласту наскального искусства Минусинской котловины (который, без сомнений, предшествует эпохе бронзы, хотя конкретный период его бытования пока точно не установлен).

Ключевые слова: наскальное искусство, документирование, древнейший пласт, затопленные петроглифы, Минусинская котловина, Оглахты

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Introduction

Along the banks of the middle course of the Yenisei River and its tributaries there were dozens of rock art sites, which over half a century ago went completely or partially under water after the construction of the Krasnoyarsk hydroelectric power station and the filling of its reservoir. Thousands of images have been destroyed and continue to perish due to destruction of the rock massif, seasonal fluctuations of the water level, ice drifts, crumbling, and so on. Even the images on the mountain slopes above the flood level are being destroyed due to ongoing bank reworking. Some rock art sites had been investigated and recorded before the flooding; thus, copies and photographs by A. V. Adrianov, Ya. A. Sher and other researchers have preserved a significant part of the now lost heritage for study. However, even

at sufficiently well recorded sites not everything has been revealed; not all the known panels have been recorded, and certainly not all of the locations have yet been found. It is also obvious that the level of documentation of that time is far from our contemporary capabilities and demands in rock art research. Therefore, at the present stage, attempts have been resumed to search for and redocument with new methods some of the surviving decorated panels within the sites that were thought to have been completely lost as a result of the flooding.

In the central and northern parts of the Krasnoyarsk reservoir the water level remains high even during the periods of discharge; some sites are now 20–40 metres and more under the water, so they are inaccessible for research. But in the southern part (from the mouth of the Abakan river and downstream) the water level sometimes drops so low that the riverside cliffs become exposed and one can see those petroglyphs which are still preserved. However, the destructive processes are proceeding and each year fewer and fewer petroglyphs emerge from the water.

The greatest concentrations of rock art were (and still are) on the rocks of the Oglakhty mountain massif (left bank of the Yenisei) and the Tepsei mountain (at the confluence of the Tuba river and the Yenisei), located opposite each other. These complexes have a rich history of study and have been published in monographs (Sher et al., 1994; Blednova et al., 1995). There are also many other publications, as well as photographs and collections of copies in various museums and archives, thanks to which modern researchers can get a fairly good idea of the sites, including their localization and their importance for cultural and chronological attribution and interpretation of South Siberian rock art. However, it is difficult to obtain from the old materials those deeper layers of information (details, technique, superimpositions, context, etc.) that we are now able to obtain thanks to usage of modern technologies in documenting rock art. Thus, steady monitoring and new investigations in the areas of the flooded sites in search of extant original sources of information are extremely important. This work is being carried out quite successfully and brings important results: at both Oglakhty and Tepsei many known panels were found (at which important details for interpretation were clarified or new images revealed), and some entirely new panels were discovered among the known ones. Moreover, in the Oglakhty a new site has been discovered. The purpose of this article is to show how that was done and to introduce some materials of its research into scholarly circulation.

Oglakhty: Rock Art Sites on Riverside Cliffs

One of the largest rock art complexes in the Minusinsk Basin is located in the Oglakhty mountainous massif on the left bank of the Yenisei River (now Krasnoyarsk reservoir) 40 km north of Abakan in the Republic of Khakassia (Fig. 1.-1, 2). The area has not yet been surveyed completely, but at the moment we know up to 20 concentrations of rock art, both on the riverside cliffs and at a considerable distance from the river (Fig. 1.-3).

The best known sites, fairly well represented in the scholarly literature, are the locations of petroglyphs on the rocks along the banks in the southern part of the Oglakhty mountain range (Fig. 1.-4). As these are the most accessible, being scattered in dense concentrations on the lower outcrops of the riverside cliffs, they have attracted the attention of travellers and researchers since the 18th century. The most ambitious and fruitful work on their documentation was undertaken by A. V. Adrianov in 1907 and Ya. A. Sher in the 1960s, the latter in connection with the forthcoming flooding. Adrianov regarded all the visible petroglyphs (about 450 images) as one site and indexed it according to his system as XLI (Adrianov, 1908, p. 37–39). Sher divided

the same area into two sites — Oglakhty I (121 panels, about 700 images) and Oglakhty II (14 panels, 37 images) (Sher et al., 1994). The former is now flooded almost completely and most of the petroglyphs are lost, while the latter, being situated high above the flood level, is preserved completely but difficult to access.

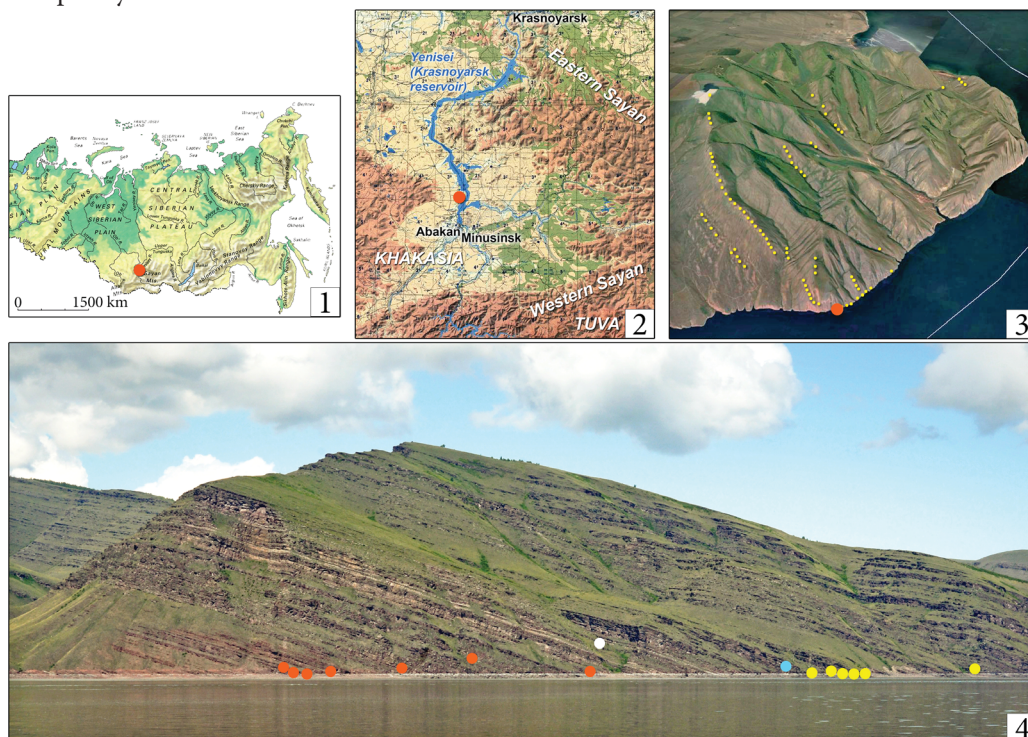


Fig. 1. Oglakhty mountain massif: 1, 2 — location on the map of Russia and that of the Minusinsk Basin; 3 — rock art sites (marked by yellow dots) on GoogleEarth satellite image, the red dot indicates the position of the new site; 4 — panoramic photo of the riverside cliffs in the southern part of the massif, view from the southeast; red dots indicate the localisation of the groups of surfaces within the new site, white dot — Bugaev Log; blue dot — Oglakhty-II (according to Ya. Sher), yellow dots — Oglakhty-I (according to Ya. Sher)

Рис. 1. Горный массив Оглахты: 1, 2 — расположение на карте России и Минусинской котловины; 3 — памятники наскального искусства (обозначены желтыми точками) на спутниковом снимке GoogleEarth, красной точкой обозначено новое местонахождение; 4 — фотопанорама береговых скал в южной части массива, вид с юго-востока; красными точками обозначено расположение групп плоскостей нового местонахождения, белой — Бугаев Лог; голубой — Оглахты-II (по Я.А. Шеру), желтыми — Оглахты-I (по Я.А. Шеру)

When the reservoir was filled up, in the late 1970s N. V. Leontiev and B. N. Pyatkin independently discovered another rock art site (Bugaev Log), also located on the bank, in a shallow ravine above the flood level. It contains 12 panels with about 40 images and is situated to the south (upstream) of the locations documented by Adrianov and Sher. Later we indexed it as Oglakhty VII (Sovetova, Miklashevich, 1999, p. 50; Miklashevich, 2015a, p. 66, 70) to continue the system of Ya. A. Sher.

In addition, it has recently come to light that the Apkashev rock art site discovered by N. L. Chlenova in 1958, from which she published only several images (Chlenova, 1981, p. 86, 87) and no information about its location, also belongs to the complex of sites on the riverside rocks of the Oglakhty, and is located downstream (to the north) of Oglakhty I and II. This site is completely flooded but is sometimes exposed when the water level drops to a minimum. This is quite a significant concentration: more than 30 panels and at least a hundred images.

All in all, according to the results of previous investigations, one can count a total of about 170–180 decorated panels with more than 700 images at the riverside sites. The petroglyphs belong to various periods, but the overwhelming majority date to the earliest stages in the rock art of the Minusinsk Basin — to the so-called Minusinsk and Angara traditions or styles (Podolsky, 1973, p. 270–272; Sher, 1980, p. 190–193) and their variations. These are amazing for their artistically skilful figures of aurochs, wild horses, deer, elks, arkhars, bears and wild boars, and also images of fish, anthropomorphs and boats. The dating of this stratum is unclear and debatable, although there is no doubt that the figures belong to a period earlier than the Bronze Age. Ya. A. Sher did not even rule out “their Upper Palaeolithic age” (Sher, 1980, p. 193). In order to solve this acute problem it is necessary both to document the published imagery more thoroughly (when possible) and to search for new sources. In the course of our search for and redocumentation of the surviving panels at the known sites (Oglakhty I and II, according to Ya. A. Sher’s inventory) in recent years, they have not only been localized and photographed, but new images and panels have also been discovered, and, beyond all expectations, a previously unknown site was discovered in 2014, located upstream of the known sites, in the southernmost section of the riverside cliffs (Fig. 1.-4). Initially, it was given another ordinal index of Oglakhty IX (Miklashevich, 2015a, p. 68–71; Miklashevich et al., 2015), but as further surveys of the entire mountain range have revealed new sites and clarification of the boundaries of the known ones, we have changed the indexing system as a whole. This new site is now designated as “Oglakhty Bereg I” (Bereg in Russian means bank, shore, coast).

Methods of Searching and Documenting

The search for and documenting of the flooded petroglyphs on the riverside cliffs in the southern part of the Krasnoyarsk reservoir are possible in the course of surveying the exposed rocks from an inflatable boat during the water’s recession, usually in early May. At the lowest level it is even possible to survey from the exposed shoreline. The revealed decorated panels are then cleared of the muddy sediment or scree, following which they are photographed according to an established algorithm (Miklashevich, Bove, 2017). In 2014, one of the purposes of our work was to survey the condition of the riverside cliffs of Oglakhty. The field survey was timed to take place in early May when the water level in the reservoir is usually quite low. However, that year the expected drop in water level did not occur in May. The water was a few metres below its highest point, but those images that would normally be above the water level in spring were still flooded. Nevertheless, we decided to inspect the cliffs from a boat, hoping to see those petroglyphs which, before the flooding, were located on inaccessible upper panels and had been copied using ladders and ropes. As this method worked well at the site investigated by Ya. A. Sher (Oglakhty-I), we decided to expand the search area and as a result, after multiple inspections, we found unknown petroglyphs within a more southern section.

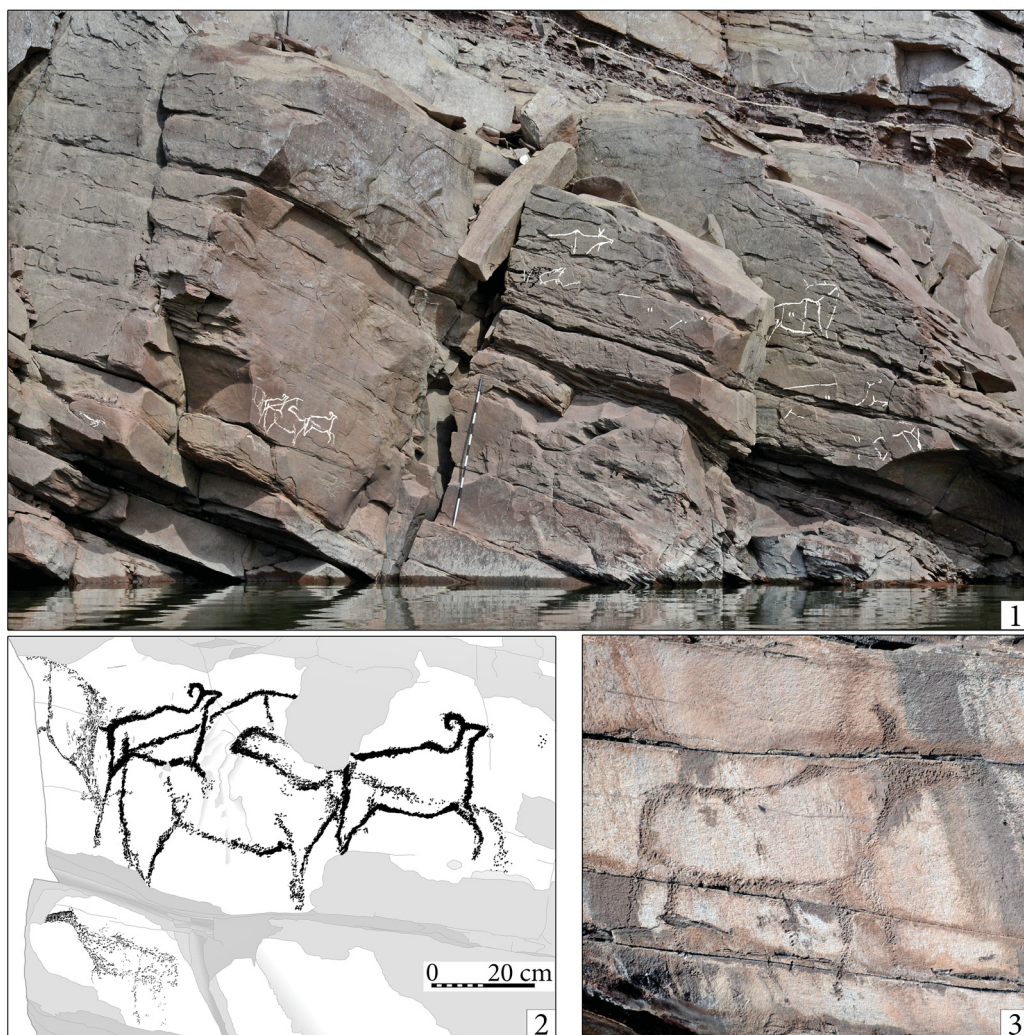


Fig. 2. 1 – One of the sections of the new site during the spring water recession in the reservoir, the localisation of surfaces 4–8 is shown by inverted tracings overlapping; 2 – surface 5, tracing; 3 – surface 1, photo

Рис. 2. 1 – один из участков нового местонахождения в период весеннего спада воды в водохранилище, расположение плоскостей 4–8 показано наложением прорисовок; 2 – прорисовка плоскости 5; 3 – фотография плоскости 1

On the rocks which had been under water for a long time, covered with a whitish muddy coating, with cracks and numerous detachments of rocky crust, it was extremely difficult to see the remains of large contoured figures. It was possible to spot them in oblique sunlight and to make them visible by removing the muddy coating with water and brushes. At first a compact group of four panels was revealed in this way (Fig. 2.-1, 2; 3). In May they were 1-2 m above the water. Having compared the position of the known panels according to ar-

chive photographs by A. V. Adrianov and Ya. A. Sher with those visible above water at that time, we found that the new panels must have been high on steep cliffs before the flooding, about 8-10 m above the shoreline. This explains why they had not previously been noticed by the researchers. It is possible that at that time these rocks were also obscured by trees growing on the bank. In the period when these images were created, they could have been accessed from the underlying cornices of the rock massif, but over the millennia, major geological changes had taken place and the lower rock blocks had been destroyed.

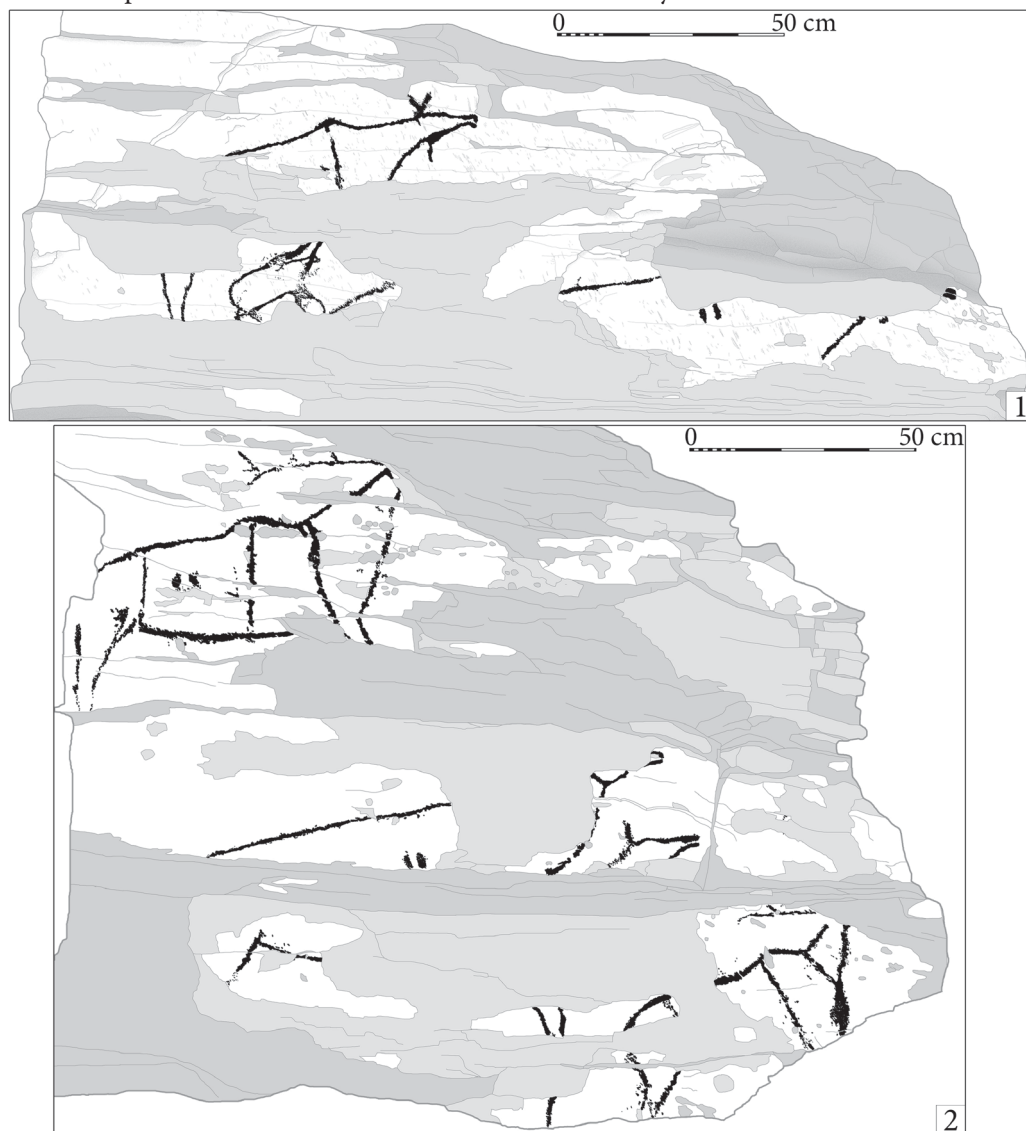


Fig. 3. Surfaces 7 (1) and 8 (2), tracings

Рис. 3. Плоскости 7 (1) и 8 (2), прорисовки

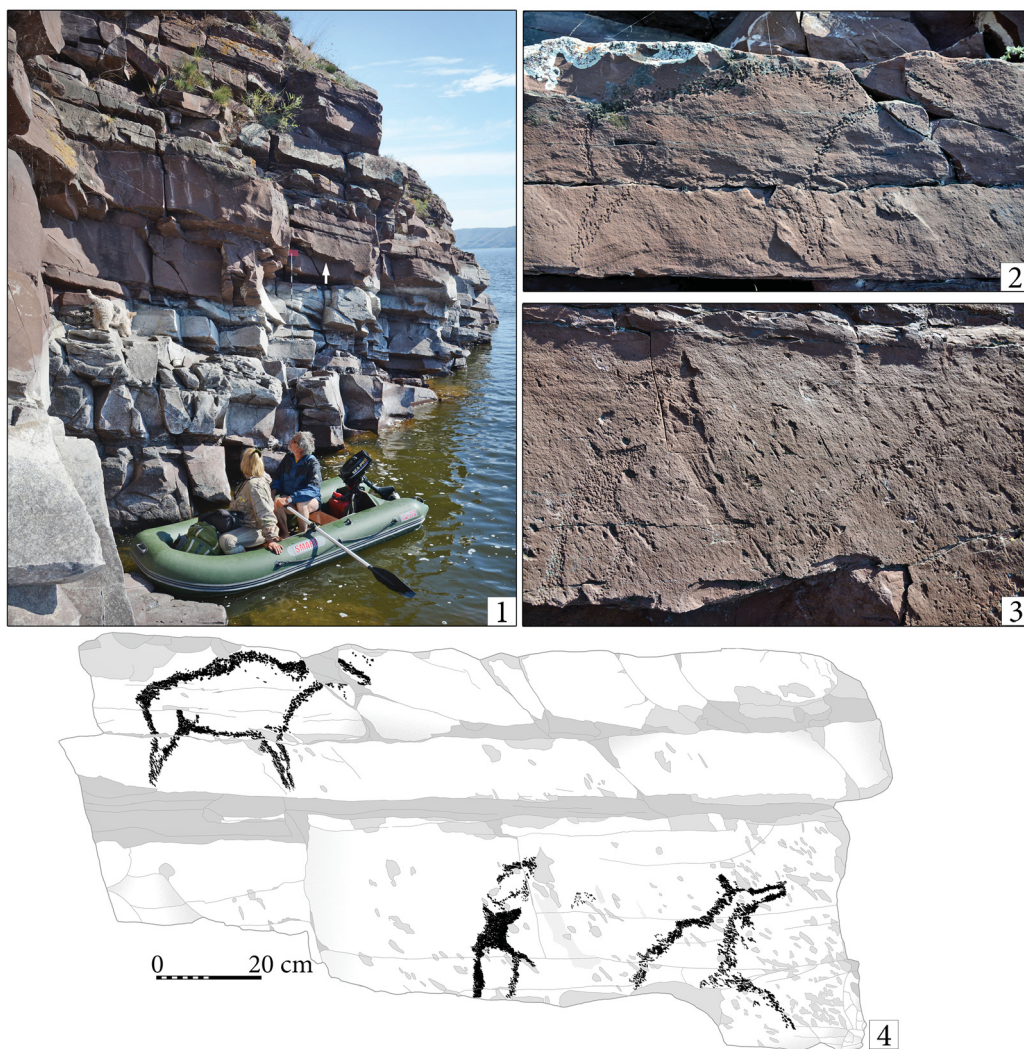


Fig. 4. 1 – survey of riverside cliffs from a boat, an arrow points to surfaces 15 and 16 located just above the highest flood level; 2–4 – surfaces 15 and 16, photos and a tracing

Рис. 4. 1 – обследование береговых скал с лодки, стрелка указывает на плоскости 15 и 16, расположенные непосредственно над самым высоким уровнем затопления; 2–4 – плоскости 15 и 16, фото и прорисовка



Fig. 5. Surface 20: 1 – tracing; 2 – photo, fragment with images of confronting arkhars

Рис. 5. Плоскость 20: 1 – прорисовка; 2 – фото, фрагмент с изображением противостоящих архаров

In July of the same year, the water level had risen by 3 m and the panels found in May had gone underwater. However, this enabled us to inspect the next higher tier of rocks from the boat and to find two panels at the very edge of the water (Fig. 4). Moreover, later, on carefully inspecting the slopes with binoculars from the highest water level, we found that rock art was also present on the tiers of rock outcrops well above the flood level. As a result the new site was supplemented with a series of other interesting panels. Some of them are on steep inaccessible rocks high above the water (Fig. 2.-3; Fig. 6.-3, 4, 6), while others are on the moun-

tainside on the higher levels of rocky outcrops, access to which is still possible but very difficult because of the destruction of the lower levels (Fig. 5; 6.-1, 2, 5). Applying the described search technique in subsequent seasons, in this southern section by 2019 we revealed 24 panels at different levels containing about 50 individual images.

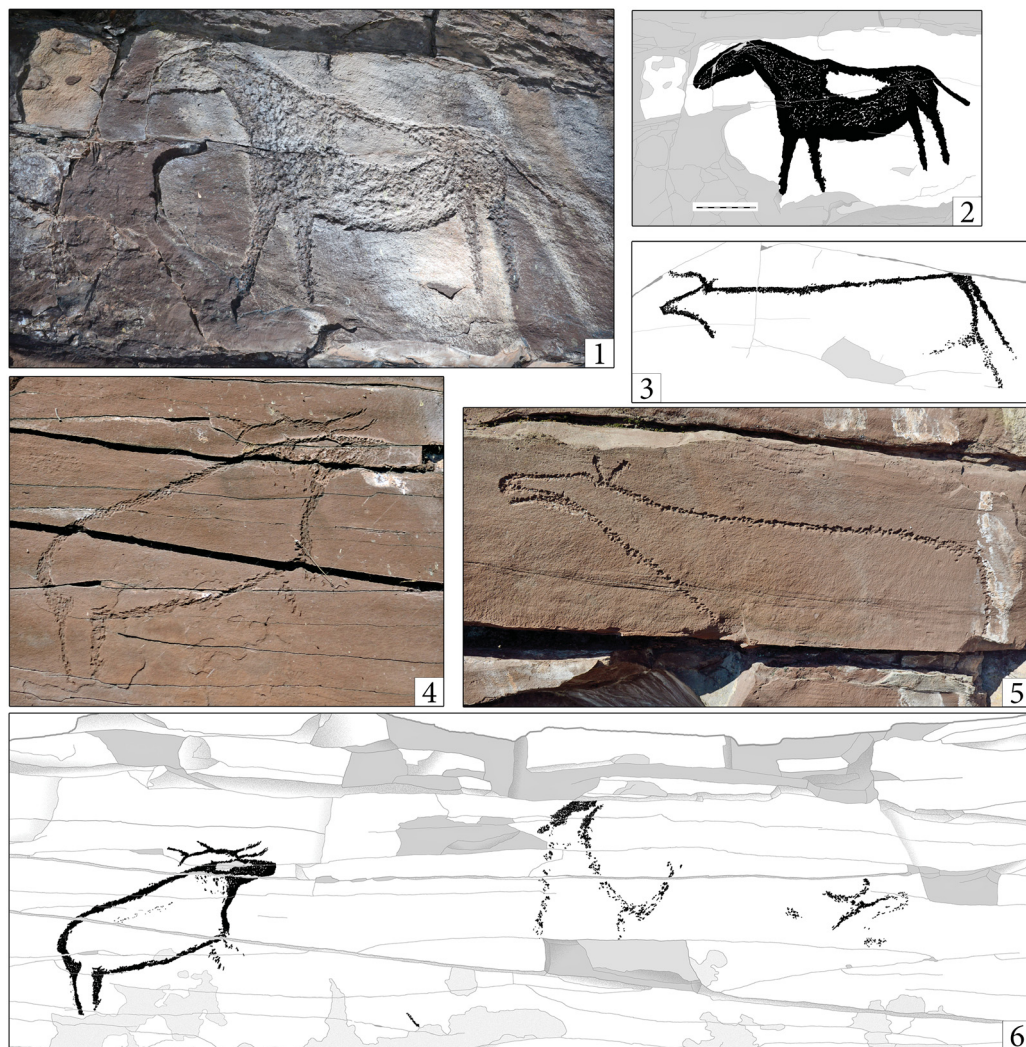


Fig. 6. 1, 2 – surface 19, photo and tracing; 3 – surface 23, tracing; 4, 6 – surface 24, photo of the image of a deer and tracing; 5 – surface 18, photo

Рис. 6. 1, 2 – плоскость 19, фото и прорисовка; 3 – плоскость 23, прорисовка; 4, 6 – плоскость 24, фото с изображением оленя и прорисовка; 5 – плоскость 18, фото

We used photography as our method of documenting the revealed decorated surfaces, but this was not an easy task. Photographing in strictly orthogonal projection was difficult or im-

possible in almost all cases. It had to be done either from a boat (drifting with the current and rocking on waves), or too close to the panel from narrow ledges, or at an angle from below, and so on. It was impossible to get close enough to the panels high on the slopes, so we photographed them from the water, from a boat, using a full matrix camera and long-focus lenses, trying to minimise perspective distortions (Miklashevich, Bove, 2017). Under such conditions it is impossible to use a scale and perspective distortions are still inevitable, but we have succeeded in capturing details of the images. There were also other problems: due to the impossibility of using artificial light, one has to wait for optimal sunlight, which for some panels lasts only a couple of hours, and this does not always coincide with other conditions of boat use; it is not always possible to clear the panels of plaque, lichen, traces of insect life, etc. (this makes the identification of image details from the photograph less accurate). Nevertheless, all the revealed panels have been photographed to the best possible quality.

The next stage in the documentation process is the creation of digital graphic multi-layered renderings (tracings). We apply the photomontage method, when a series of shots of fragments of each panel are compiled into a very high resolution photo image; then, on top of it, using the Photoshop program, the images and the rock surface in all their details and features are traced at high magnification (Fig. 2.-2; 3; 4.-4; 5.-1; 6.-2, 3, 6). The resulting tracing makes it possible to assess the state of preservation of each decorated surface, and facilitates analysis and interpretation of the imagery.

Characteristics of the Site

The new site “Oglakhty Bereg-I” is located in the southernmost section of the riverside line of the Oglakhty mountain range and contains 24 decorated surfaces revealed so far. They are located in groups over a length of 230 m, at various elevations. Thirteen of them are being periodically flooded, the others are above the flood level. The rock massif is composed of red Devonian sandstone; the images were made with a pecking technique on the vertical and sub-vertical surfaces of the rock outcrops facing south and south-east.

The state of preservation of all panels is unsatisfactory. The flooded ones, of course, have suffered the most. The petroglyphs on them have survived in fragments on the preserved pieces of rock crust, and not only has the crust become detached, but whole stone blocks have fallen off. The natural cornices above and below the panels are lost. The preserved surfaces have been damaged by rocks falling from above and probably also by ice drifts. It is noticeable that even the rock massif itself underwent significant changes: the block with panel 7, for example, moved along a vertical fracture to the river, overshadowing part of an image on panel 8, and another stone fell into the cleft from above (Fig. 2.-1). The state of those panels which are periodically flooded and exposed is very unstable, and they are under constant threat of collapse. The panels located above the water level are more stable, although they too have damage such as exfoliation of rock crust, loss of stone fragments, cracks, traces of falling stones and so on. But their main danger lies in the gradual destruction of the underlying layers of the rock massif. It is obvious that the 24 panels we discovered are only a minor part of the art that once decorated the riverside cliffs at the southern tip of the Oglakhty mountains. It seems a miracle that they have survived for several millennia in the open air, and even more so after several decades under water.

There is a total of about 50 images on the panels, of which about half are more or less complete recognizable figures; the other half are fragments and remnants, but some of them can still be identified by their content. The repertoire and quantitative distribution of the images are: elks (11), red deer and (?) roe (9), wild sheep (arkhar?) (6), aurochs (5), goat (4), wild horse (1), bear (?) (1), fish (1), uncertain animals (7), uncertain images (3–5). As one can see, all of these are images of animals. They are rendered both in outline and silhouette; many of the figures are quite large in size (up to 50–70 cm long), most of them are very realistic, and some are even highly artistic. One of the discovered compositions is a true masterpiece of rock art (Fig. 5): two arkhars (?) facing each other are depicted with amazing skill and a profound knowledge of nature, with very accurately depicted curved horns, bent muzzle, split hooves, fur of a different colour on the belly rendered by an absence of pecking, and other details. Such realistic depictions of this animal species and this kind of composition were not previously known in the early rock art of the Minusinsk Basin, although stylistically similar images do occur. On the same panel there is also a beautiful figure of an elk with a crown of antlers, and on a nearby panel a silhouetted image of a wild horse (Fig. 6.-1) is depicted and it too has an unpecked spot on its back, probably indicating fur of another colour.

All the images at this site can be attributed to the oldest phase in the rock art of the Oglakhty and of the Minusinsk Basin in general. As was mentioned above, the cultural and chronological attribution of this phase is not yet established, except that the figures are undoubtedly earlier than the Bronze Age (images of the Bronze Age and later periods have convincing connections in the archaeological materials of the region). However, this phase is not stylistically and iconographically homogeneous, either in Oglakhty or in other rock art complexes of the Minusinsk Basin. Among them two most vivid stylistic groups have long ago been distinguished, conventionally called the “Minusinsk” and “Angara” traditions or styles (Podolskiy, 1973; Sher, 1980, p. 186–193); but actually, apart from these two groups there are many other images which bear features of either group or both, or their variations and reminiscences. What also unites all these various stylistic groups is the repertoire of images and their presence at the same sites and even on the same panels. In general, the classic “Minusinsk style” is clearly earlier than the classic “Angara style”, but it is not yet clear how they correspond to the other groups: are the other groups chronologically between “Minusinsk” and “Angara” styles? Do the stylistic differences reflect different chronological positions of various groups? Or maybe they are just various individual artistic styles from the same period? We have already proposed that, in order to solve these questions, all the groups should be studied as a whole so far, combined under the term “the earliest rock art of the Minusinsk Basin” (Miklashevich, 2015b, p. 67). So the petroglyphs of the new site in Oglakhty perfectly reflect this eclecticism of the early phase. There are images of classical “Minusinsk” style (Fig. 2.-2; 3.-1, 2; 4.-4), there are images with some features of “Angara” style (Fig. 2.-3; 5.-1 (elk, arkhars); 6.-2), and there are images with no clearly definable features of either, but with features that in images from other sites are combined with characteristic features of “Minusinsk” or “Angara” style. While not denying the chronological differences within the earliest phase, we tend to think that some stylistic features can be better explained not so much by chronology as by the individual style of the ancient artists. Thus, using the site under consideration as an example, we may assume that the wild horse on panel 18 and the confronted arkhars and antlered elk on panel 19 were

executed by the same master (compare fig. 5 and fig. 6.-1, 2). Also, it seems to us that the same (another) master executed the image of an elk on panel 17 and an aurochs on panel 22 (compare fig. 6.-3 and fig. 6.-5). Their style differs markedly from that of the previous group, but does this necessarily mean that they belong to different cultures? This is how the accumulation of such observations and their analysis can, in our opinion, help us to advance questions of the attribution of the oldest phase in the rock art of the Minusinsk Basin.

Conclusion

Thus, as a result of field investigations carried out in accordance with the seasonal water-level fluctuations in the upper reaches of the Krasnoyarsk reservoir on the Yenisei River, a new rock art site has been discovered on the riverside cliffs in the Oglakhty mountains, which was considered to have been well studied for its rock art; moreover, the rock art there was thought to be lost due to flooding. In the process of investigating the new site, a methodology was developed for revealing and documenting petroglyphs on the slopes of riverside cliffs in the zone of periodic flooding, which has also been successfully applied at other sites. The revealed imagery considerably replenished the source base for the study and analysis of the earliest phase of rock art in the Minusinsk Basin, which is important as the data for its cultural and chronological attribution are not yet sufficient.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The author declares that there are no competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE AUTHOR / ИНФОРМАЦИЯ ОБ АВТОРЕ

Elena Alexandrovna Miklashevich, Researcher, Institute of Archaeology RAS, Moscow, Russia; Senior Researcher, “Tomskaya Pisanitsa” Kuzbass Museum-Reserve, Kemerovo, Russia.

Миклашевич Елена Александровна, научный сотрудник Института археологии РАН, Москва, Россия; старший научный сотрудник Кузбасского музея-заповедника «Томская Писаница», Кемерово, Россия.

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