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HEADSTREAM OF THE KHOVD RIVER AS THE CHEMURCHEK (QIE'MUERQIEKE) RITUAL LANDSCAPE

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Abstract. The article is devoted to the discovery in the mountains of the Mongolian Altai of the ritual landscape, which has a sacred significance for the bearers of the Chemurchek (Qiemuerqieke) cultural phenomenon (ca. 2600–1800 BCE). In this high-mountainous terrain beyond the snowy mountains, however, in the immediate vicinity of the Chemurchek people habitat, there were no graves, but ritual stone enclosures were built and rock-art complexes were created. Four small and two of “giant” ritual enclosures with hundreds pictures on stone slabs — Khar chuluut and Khulagash were excavated by the author’s expedition. Rectangular ritual stone fences with stelae, form of fantastic creatures depicted on fences and in neighbouring rock-art complexes, as well as hoard of engraved slate plaques found in Khar chuluut just like other kinds of Chemurchek sites and artifacts have close analogies in Middle-Late Neolithic Western European megalithic context, which supports the hypothesis of A.Kovalev about the origin of Chemurchek phenomenon from South France or the Western Alpine regions.

Keywords: ritual landscape, rock art, stone enclosures, Chemurchek (Qie’muerqieke), West European megalithic cultures, Xinjiang, Mongolian Altai

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БАССЕЙН ВЕРХНЕГО ТЕЧЕНИЯ РЕКИ КОБДО (ХОВД) КАК ЧЕМУРЧЕКСКИЙ РИТУАЛЬНЫЙ ЛАНДШАФТ

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Резюме. Статья посвящена открытию в горах Монгольского Алтая ритуального ландшафта, имеющего сакральное значение для носителей чемурчекского культурного феномена (ок. 2600–1800 до н.э.). В этой высокогорной местности за заснеженными горами, в непосредственной бли-

зости от мест обитания носителей чемурчекского феномена, не производились их захоронения, однако сооружались ритуальные каменные ограды и создавались комплексы наскальной живописи. Экспедицией под руководством авторов были раскопаны четыре небольшие и две «гигантские» ритуальные ограды с сотнями изображений на каменных плитах — Хар чулуут и Хулагаш. Прямоугольные ритуальные каменные ограды со стелами, изображения фантастических существ и знаков на оградах и в соседних комплексах наскальной живописи, а также клад орнаментированных сланцевых пластинок, найденный в Хар чулуут, как и другие виды чемурчекских памятников, имеют тесные аналогии в мегалитическом контексте среднего-позднего неолита Западной Европы, что подтверждает гипотезу А. Ковалева о происхождении чемурчекского феномена из Южной Франции или региона Западных Альп.

Ключевые слова: ритуальный ландшафт, петроглифы, каменные ограды, чемурчекский культурный феномен, мегалитические культуры Западной Европы, Синьцзян, Западная Монголия, Монгольский Алтай

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Introduction

To date, at least 60 burial structures have been excavated in the foothills of the Mongolian Altai, both on eastern (Mongolian) and western (Chinese) sides. which we attribute to the “Chemurchek cultural phenomenon” and date back to approximately 2600–1800 BC. (Kovalev, 2011, 2022; Kovalev, Erdenebaatar, 2009). In this article we would like to draw attention to the fact that nevertheless in spite of widespread exploration work neither our expedition, nor other teams could find any Chemurchek collective burials in classical huge stone boxes in the northern part of the region — in the area of the Khovd river sources in Bayan Ulgii aimag. However in this area we discovered ritual structures in the form of rectangular enclosures that can be associated with the Chemurchek cultural phenomenon. Also located here are famous rock art complexes, including Bronze Age carvings made by the Chemurchek people. (Fig. 1).

Materials and Methods

Discovery of small ritual enclosures. In 2003–2004, in the region of the Upper Khovd basin Russian-Mongolian expedition under the leadership of A.A. Kovalev, D. Erdenebaatar and Ch. Munkhbayar discovered five rectangular stone enclosures mainly with stelae at the eastern side (Fig. 1; 2.-1–4). These enclosures, up to 12 m long and up to 7 m wide, are very similar to the “Keermuqi” type of the Chemurchek barrows (registered only in Chinese Altay Prefecture) looking like rectangular stone enclosures with menhirs on eastern side and stone burial chambers (boxes) inside (Kovalev, Erdenebaatar, 2009, p. 155–160; 2014; Kovalev, 2015, 2022). In 2004 we excavated four such structures, the fifth discovered in 2004 enclosure with a stele (later named as Takhilgat uzuur-5, No. 31) was excavated by Ja. Bemmann and Ts. Turbat (see below).

To our surprise, there were not any stone boxes inside these enclosures (Fig. 2.-1–4). Moreover, initially they had not served as burials (Kovalev, Erdenebaatar, 2014). Initially at least in three of four excavated structures in the centre of enclosed area was dug a pit

filled with soil and charcoal. According to ^{14}C dating of charcoals, all pits were filled about 2700–2600 BC (Kovalev, Erdenebatar, 2014, p. 227–230). Thereafter enclosures stood empty, without any stone or soil covering inside. Some years later in the centers of the enclosed areas burial pits were placed and the space within the enclosure was covered with stones to make one platform. Results of excavation of Khar Khoshuu / Kara Tumsik enclosure central part of which was completely destroyed by robbery also confirm long-term use of such enclosures (Fig. 2.-3). We found out that originally a trapeziform enclosure of massive vertical stone slabs about $3 \times 4,5$ m in size on the plan had been built there to the east of it a trapeziform elaborate stele painted on both sides in red ochre were erected (Fig. 2.-4). Then another trapeziform enclosure was built around the first enclosure, 5×10 m in size, with two stone stelae at the eastern side. The eastern wall of the original enclosure was dismantled. At the next stage, the space inside the greater enclosure was covered with stone blocks to create a platform with a flat surface. Thus, the enclosures should be considered as ritual constructions that had been used during decades. Secondary burials were made in second third of the 3rd millennium BCE (see Kovalev, 2022, p. 772).

Recently the fifth such enclosure which we found in Tsagaan-Gol River (Takhilgat uzuur-5, No. 31) was excavated by a German-Mongolian team under the leadership of Ja. Bemmann and Ts. Turbat (Turbat, 2016a, b). Published photos show that the archaeologists failed to trace primary and secondary pits. In the center of the mound, below the ancient horizon level they found a human skull with a mandible, but without cervical vertebrae, fragments of a vessel, and a skeleton of a dog or a wolf in situ on top of the skull. Judging by the photo (Turbat, 2016b, p. 29), the remains are not lying on the virgin soil but on the filling of another pit that had not been detected and not excavated by the excavators (sic!) (see reconstruction in Kovalev, 2025a, p. 32, fig. 5). Comparison with our excavation results suggests that it was rather a ritual construction, than a burial site, and originally there had been a ritual pit filled with stones and earth too.

“Giant” ritual enclosures. However, in 2014–2015, in the southern part of the Upper Khovd basin, around the Dayan nur lake, we found three rectangular enclosures of a much greater size (Fig. 1). The walls of these “giant” enclosures had originally been decorated with multiple carvings. Firstly, one of these enclosures (Khulagash) was found in 1909 by a prominent Finnish scholar J.G. Granö (Granö, 1912, p. 32, Taf. XIV.-2).

In 2015, we were the first to excavate one such site — the Khar Chuluut enclosure on the Godon gol river (Kovalev, Munkhbayar, 2015) (Fig. 3.-1). Excavations were fully completed in 2019. The main part of the enclosure (35×25 m), oriented by the long axis to the west-east, was built of vertical stone slabs. To the east it was adjoined by a similar rectangle laid out of cobblestones. Along the central axis of this pavement central rectangle and elongated stone portals made from builders were built.

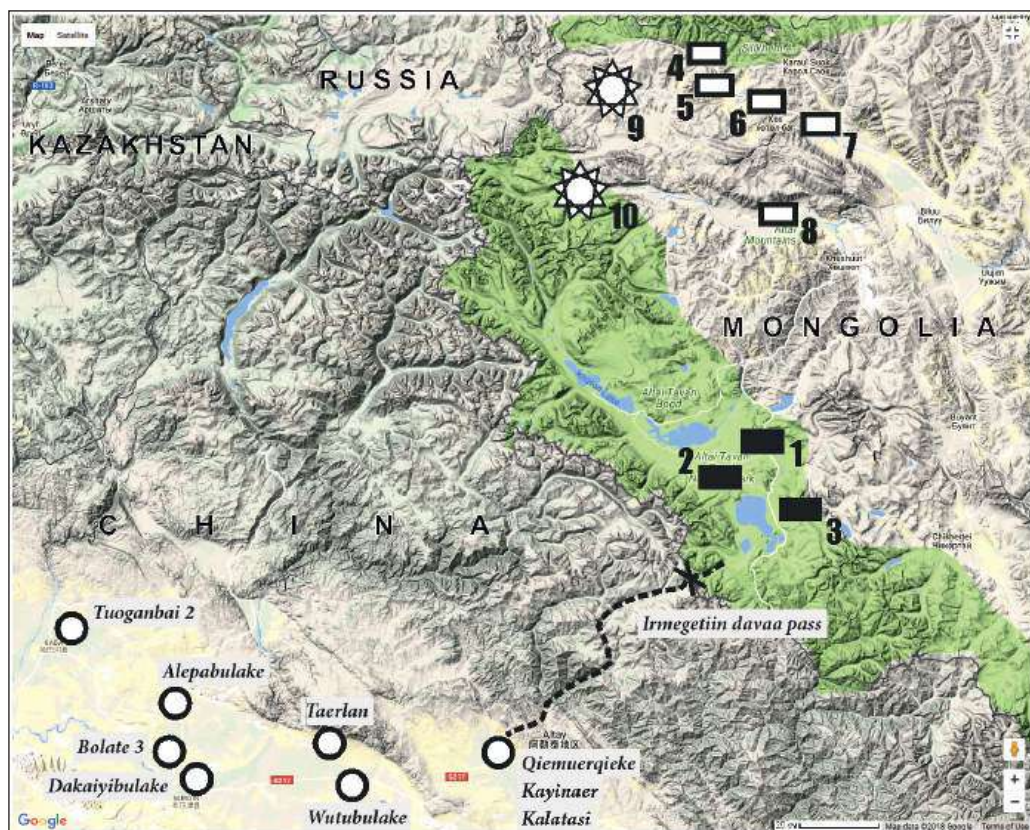


Fig. 1. Distribution of ritual and burial sites of Chemurchek cultural phenomenon in northern part of Mongolian Altai. Black rectangles — giant ritual enclosures with pictured façades (1 — Khar chuluut; 2 — Chuluut bulag (Tasty bulak); 3 — Hulagash); white rectangles — small ritual enclosures (4 — Khul uul; 5 — Khuurai gov'; 6 — Khundii gov'; 7 — Khar khoshuu; 8 — Takhilgat uzuur); white stars — main rock art complexes (9 — Tsagaan salaа, Baga oigor, Ikh oigor; 10 — Shiveet khairkhan); white circles — main burial places

Рис. 1. Распространение ритуальных и погребальных памятников, относящихся к чемурчекскому культурному феномену, в северной части Монгольского Алтая. Черные прямоугольники — «гигантские» ритуальные ограды с изображениями (1 — Хар чулуут; 2 — Чулуут булаг (Тасты булак); 3 — Хулагаш); белые прямоугольники — «малые» ритуальные ограды (4 — Хул уул; 5 — Хуурай говь; 6 — Хундий говь; 7 — Хар хошуу; 8 — Тажилгат удзуур); белые звездочки — основные галереи наскальных изображений (9 — Цагаан салаа, Бага ойгор, Их ойгор; 10 — Шивээт хайрхан); белые кружки — основные погребальные комплексы

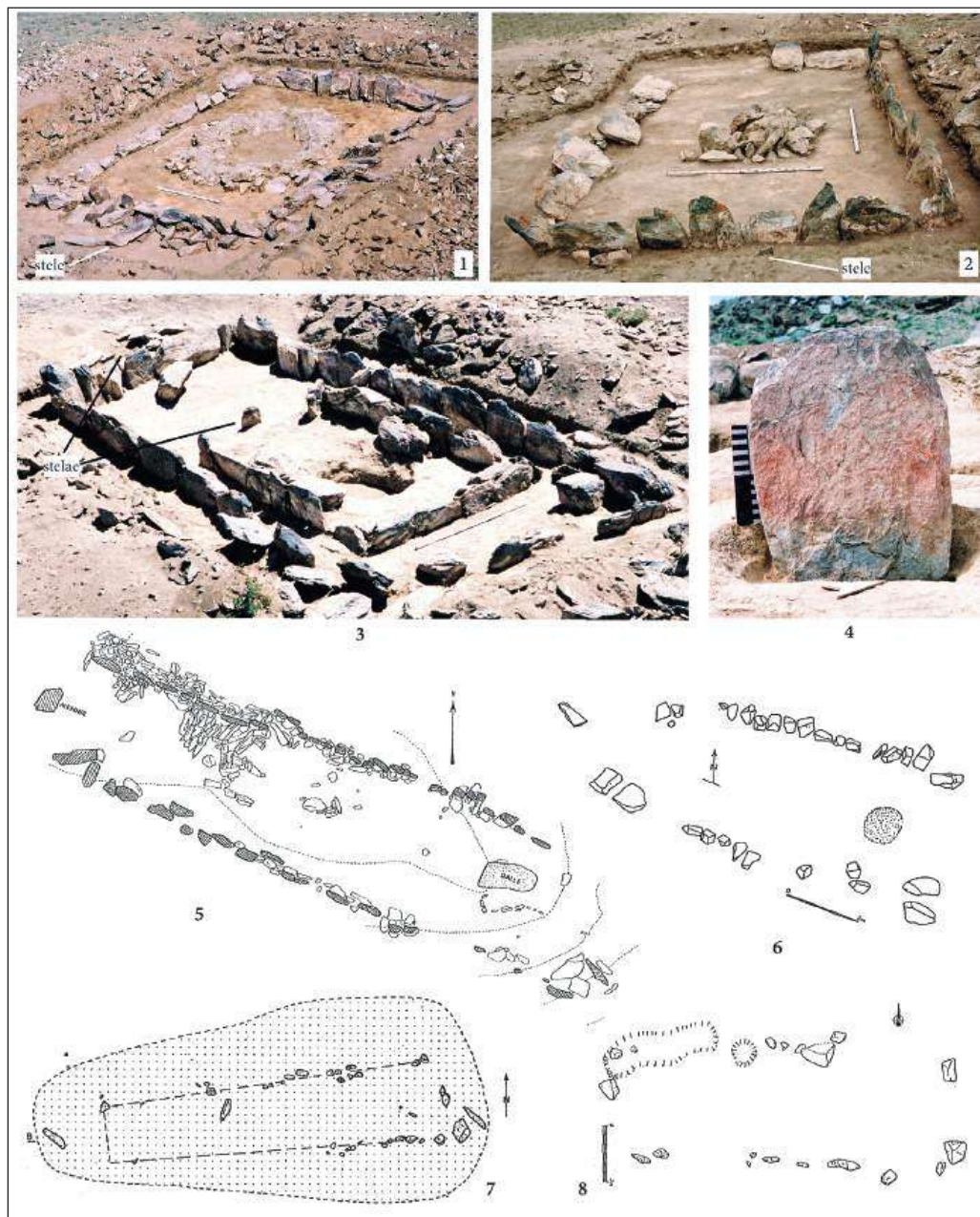


Fig. 2. Ritual megalithic enclosures of Mongolian Altai and Western France: 1 — Khul uul; 2 — Khundii gov'; 3 — Khar khoshuu; 4 — Khar khoshuu trapezoidal stele with ochra painting; 5 — La Croix Saint-Pierre; 6 — Notre Dame de Lorette; 7 — La Croix Madame; 8 — La Gaudiniais (5–8 by Briard et al., 1995)

Рис. 2. Ритуальные мегалитические ограды Монгольского Алтая и Западной Франции: 1 — Хул уул; 2 — Хундий говь; 3 — Хар хошуу; 4 — трапецевидная стела, окрашенная красной охрой, в ограде Хар хошуу; 5 — La Croix Saint-Pierre; 6 — Notre Dame de Lorette; 7 — La Croix Madame; 8 — La Gaudiniais (5–8 по Briard et al., 1995)



Fig. 3. Giant ritual megalithic enclosures of Mongolian Altai: 1 — aerial view of Khar chuluut ritual enclosure after first stage of cleaning in 2015 (western part of enclosure not yet excavated); 2, 3 — collapsed fences with petroglyphs in Khulagash (2) and Khar chuluut (3); 4 — stone pavement inside Khar chuluut enclosure; 5 — traces of wooden platform inside Khulagash enclosure

Рис. 3. «Гигантские» ритуальные мегалитические ограды Монгольского Алтая: 1 — вид сверху на ограду Хар чулуут по завершении первого этапа зачистки в 2015 году (западная часть сооружения еще не раскопана); 2, 3 — завалившиеся наружу плиты ограды с петроглифами на памятниках Хулагаш (2) и Хар чулуут (3); 4 — каменная выкладка в ограде Хар чулуут; 5 — следы деревянного помоста в ограде Хулагаш

The enclosure Khulagash that we had excavated in 2018, was situated 20 km to the south-east from Khar Chuluut enclosure, it looked like a similar rectangular fence of vertical stone slabs 31×18 m in size on the plan, oriented with a longer axis along the line south-west — north-east. Like in Khar Chuluut, adjacent to the north-eastern wall of the enclosure there was another rectangle laid out with boulders, 22×18 m in size on the plan with two portals. In 2015 we found the third similar enclosure on the Chuluutyn Bulag (Tasty bulak) river, 15 km to the south-west from Khar Chuluut site. It is a gigantic rectangular fence of vertical slabs, 60×40 m on the plan, oriented in west-east direction. While examining and test excavations of the enclosure in 2015 and 2019 we found several slabs and fragments with pictures similar to others two structures.

Two 14C dates (LSC) were obtained for samples from Khar Chuluut 1: Le-11698–4350±40, 3040 (86.6%) 2890 calBC (charcoal on the horizon under the stone inside covering), Le-11700–3970±95, 2900 (95.4%) 2200 BC calBC (wood on the horizon under the stone inside covering). In the same laboratory, a 14C date Le-11822–3990±105, 2900 (95.4%) 2200 calBC was obtained for the bones of the buried person in very centre of Hulagash enclosure. For a sample of wood from the wooden platform covering the discharge from this burial pit, the date Le-11821 3990±25, 2580 (95.4%) 2460 calBCE was obtained. These dates confirm the cultural attribution of these structures and their dating according to typological parallels to the 2500–2000 BC.

Main structures of Khar chuluut and Khulagash were formed by fence of vertical stone slabs at a height of about 1 m above the ancient horizon level (Fig. 3.-2, 3). In Khar chuluut and Chuluut bulag the space inside the enclosure was covered with up to 1 m thick stone fill, probably after finishing of its use. The stelae were installed nearby of the eastern sides of the two excavated enclosures. In both excavated enclosures, within the main fences, we found stone pavements and wooden platforms (Fig. 3.-4, 5). The presence of these structures, as well as the discovery of massive stones with carvings in the middle of the fenced area in Khar Chuluut, intended for viewing from above (see below), may indicate that religious rituals were carried out within the fences. In the center of the Khulagash platform, we discovered a grave containing a stone cist with the body of an adult male without burial goods (Kovalev et al., 2020). However, the entire enclosure was clearly not built for this individual, even though the burial took place when the site was in use.

Carvings on stones and their relation to ritual structures. Open space in centre of the Khar chuluut enclosure initially served for observation of layd out massive flat stones with complicated “mythical” scenes and compositions included various anthropomorphous figures (Fig. 4), pictures of footsteps, animals, four-wheel cart, signs etc. The conclusion that these stones were laid out on the surface of the earth with the carvings facing upwards, like an installation, is made not only on the basis of their location. The flattened stones on which the carvings were made were irregular in shape, but were much thicker than the slabs from which the fence was built. Their shape does not correspond at all to the shape of the fence slabs. However compositions carved on these stones were limited by their natural contours. On slab KHCH 112–114, such a composition was carved within its boundaries; later, this slab split, and on the reverse side of its fragment — slab KHCH 112 — a sex scene was carved (Kovalev, Munkhbayar, 2015, figs. 46, 47); The complex composition of six anthropomorphous figures

on the plate KHCH 115 also takes into account the contour of the surface (Fig. 4.-1). The same can be said about the composition on the narrow triangular plate KHCH 136 (Kovalev, Munkhbayar, 2015, fig. 49). Similar massive flattened stones with irregular contours, bearing carvings that took into account the stone's contour, were found in various positions outside the enclosure. We believe such stones (such as slab KHCH 413, see Fig. 4.-2) were ejected from the center during an attempted robbery.

Most of slabs that make up the fences were decorated on the outer side with pecked and abraded pictures of fantastic headless creatures that looked like paraboles and rectangles with "antennae" and legs, of "dancing" "one-legged" anthropomorphous figures, animals including deer, bulls, horses, camel, predators, and also signs (as well as engraved rows of triangular festoons and foliate-shaped figures) (Fig. 5–10) (see Kovalev, Munkhbayar, 2015, 2021, 2022, 2023; Munkhbayar, Kovalev, 2024, 2025; Munkhbayar, Kovalev, Buyan-Orshikh, 2018; and others). Besides, in Khar chuluut 20 cm outside fence we found a hoard of anthropomorphous slate plaques (Fig. 13.-1–5).

Pictures on slabs of fences did not belong to a single frieze with a complete composition, but were separately grouped on each of the slabs. All the more so, as the enclosure had been formed of various stones: thin and massive, vertical, horizontal, subsquare, with a convex, wavy or flat top (Fig. 5.-1, 4, 5; 7.-1, 4; 9.-1; 10.-1, 2).

Parabolic or rectangular anthropomorphs (Fig. 4.-2; 5; 7.-3; 8.-4) were depicted usually in centers of slabs. From the top of these figures "antennae" with various types of the end often go up, which can be bent outward, bent inward, straight. Decoration of their bodies included rows of triangular scallops, belts, and ribbons. A slab with three parabolic figures with axe-like objects protruding from their bodies (a dagger is also depicted near the middle figure) was discovered in the Khar chuluut enclosure (Fig. 5.-6). Similar composition was found on a stone lying inside this enclosure: three axes of different types stuck out from the top of the anthropomorph's head (Fig. 6.-3). At the neighboring rock art sites of Ikh oigor and Baga oigor, drawings of similar parabolic figures with axes protruding from their sides and heads were discovered (Fig. 6.-1, 2, 4, 5) (Delkhiin öv, 2021, p. 49; Adilbek, 2025). A comparison of these images with real objects shows that most of these "axes" are Seima-Turbino type socketed axes, which were mounted on a curved stick at an angle of 100–112 degrees to the handle. This is a very strong argument in favor of the fact that socketed axes were used as weapons by the Seima-Turbino people, and these weapons arrived in the Mongolian Altai in the second half of the 3rd millennium BC. (Kovalev, Munkhbayar, 2023, p. 155, fig. 5).

Second in importance among pictures on slabs of fences, sometimes connected with mentioned headless anthropomorphs, are anthropomorphic "one-legged" figures (Fig. 4.-1; 5.-1; 7; 8.-1; 10.-4). Despite their legs were depict in profile, their bodies were depict en face with two arms. These figures are often depicted in pairs, in this case their arms are bent and directed up and down, like in a dance. Similar figures were also discovered in compositions, which may be a "recording" of myths. (Fig. 4.-1).



Fig. 4. Massive flat stones with mythical scenes (Khar chuluut): 1 — pairs of three-headed, one-headed and two-headed one-leg anthropomorphs with their heads towards the center (KHCH 117); 2 — two women in labor (one in contact to two-horned headless demon), two parabolic deities (KHCH 413). Not to scale

Рис. 4. Массивные уплощенные камни с мифическими сценами (Хар чулуут): 1 — пары трехголовых, одноголовых и двухголовых антропоморфов, направленные головами к центру (ХЧ 117); 2 — две роженицы (одна с двурогим безголовым «демоном»), два параболических «божества» (ХЧ 413).

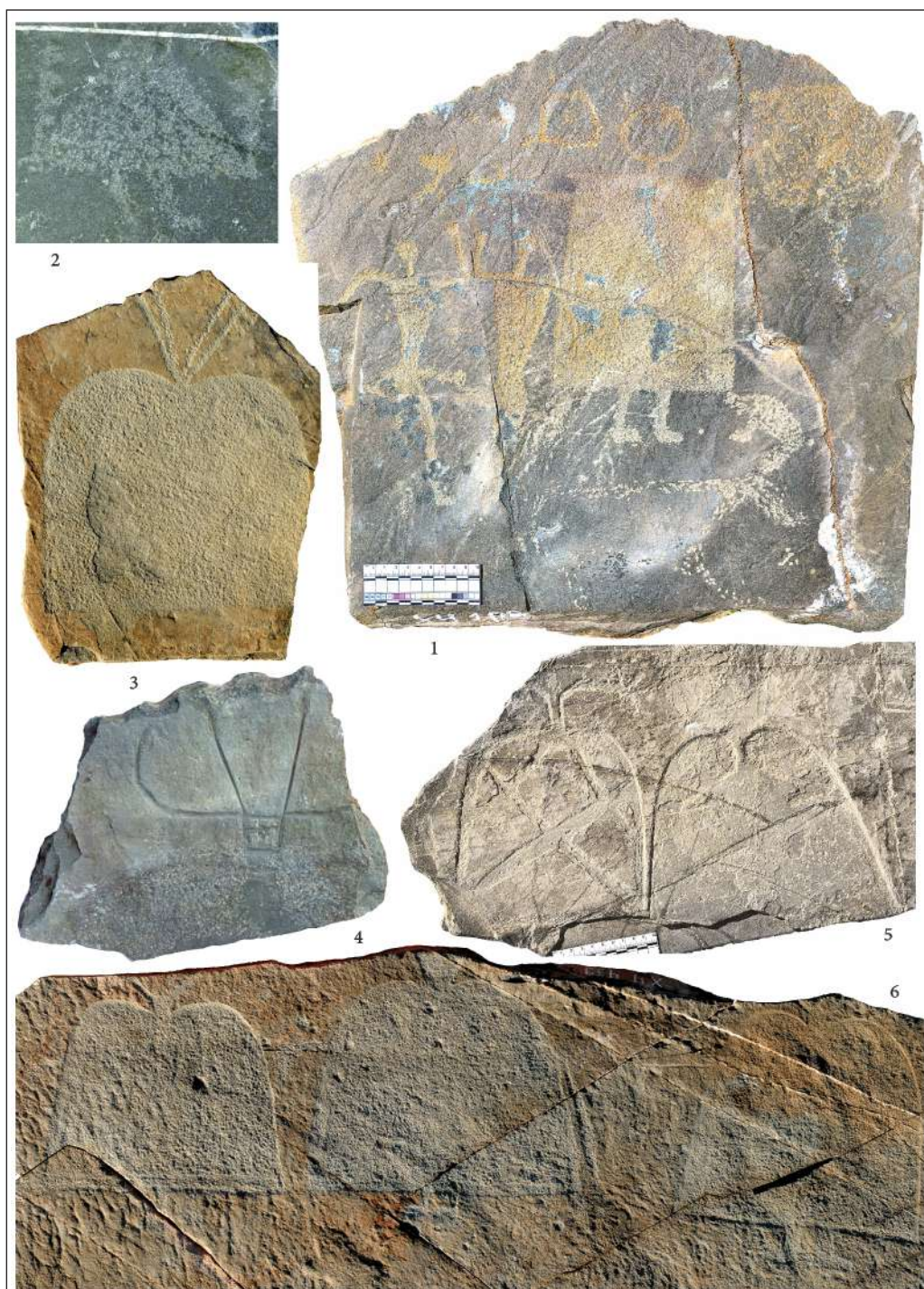


Fig. 5. Parabolic and rectangular deities with "antennae" pictured on fences' slabs (1 — KHCH 109 (with one-leg dancing mans, bull, boar (?) and signs); 2 — KHCH 326; 3 — KHCH 426; 4 — KHLG 61; 5 — KHCH M1-1; 6 — KHCH 429/439/440 (each figure hold socketed axe, figure in middle additionally have spear or dagger). Not to scale

Рис. 5. Параболические и прямоугольные «божества» с антеннами, изображенные на плитах оград (1 — ХЧ 109 (с одноногими танцующими мужчинами, быком, кабаном(?) и символами); 2 — ХЧ 326; 3 — ХЧ 426; 4 — ХЛГ 61; 5 — ХЧ М1-1; 6 — ХЧ 429/439/440 (каждая из фигур держит боевой кельт, фигура в середине также вооружена копьем или кинжалом). Без масштаба

Despite the fact that many of the fence slabs were broken in ancient times, and their fragments lay haphazardly both within the enclosures and on their periphery, the following circumstances help to reconstruct the repertoire of images associated with ritual activity at the sites:

- many slabs with images or their lower parts were fixed standing in situ or fallen outward under the pressure of inside stone covering (Fig. 3.-2, 3); a number of fragments lying in disarray belong to these slabs;

- damaged fence slabs and their parts in ancient times were collected and buried in directly near the monument; such “caches” were discovered both at Khar Chuluut and at Khulagash;

- several slabs prepared for installation with unfinished images were found at the Khulagash, 0.5–1 m from the enclosure at the level of the ancient horizon;

- fence slabs were usually treated to give them a sub-rectangular or sub-trapezoidal shape; the top of the slab often had a wavy outline, so fragments with such treatment are reliably associated with ritual complexes (Fig. 5.-1, 4; 7.-1, 4; 9.-1; 10.-1);

- compositions on the massive irregularly shaped stone fragments found in the center of the Khar Chuluut fence (Fig. 4) are inscribed within the boundaries of the plane of each fragment, that is, these stones were lying separately on the field with their drawings facing up for viewing.

We used only verified excavation technique, excavations were carried out manually with preserving all flattened stones in situ and drawing plans and cross-sections at a scale of 1:10. Careful cleaning at different levels helped to fix the position of fragments of decorated stones, which facilitated the reconstruction of the compositions.

It is even more outrageous that E. Jacobson-Tepfer allowed herself to slander our excavations in her books without any basis, based solely on information from a preliminary report (Kovalev, Munkhbayar, 2015). It remains a mystery to us what exactly in our article allowed Jacobson-Tepfer to claim that Khar chuluut is “a poorly excavated site” with “leaving unclear the original locations” of decorated slabs (named by Jacobson “boulders”!) (Jacobson-Tepfer, 2019, p. 315, 323; 2020, p. 66). However it seems she knows Russian, which is the language in which this is explained in detail in the article of 2015. It is necessary to remind the reader that E. Jacobson organized the long-term explorations of the Altai petroglyphs, fully exploiting experience and qualification of famous Russian specialist Dr. V.D. Kubarev. She did not excavate a single site there, moreover, she did not notice discussed ritual enclosures, which she passed repeatedly during expeditions. Why is she trying to evaluate our work?

Fig. 6. Parabolic anthropomorphs with “axes”: 1, 2 — figures with socketed axes fixed at 100–112 degrees relative to the handle (Ikh oigor rock art site) (Ikh oigor rock art site); 3–5 — deities with sticking up axes of different kinds (3 — Khar chuluut, slab KHCH 483; 4, 5 — Baga oigor rock art site) (1, 2 by Delkhiin öv, 2021; 4, 5 — by Adilbek, 2025). Not to scale

Рис. 6. Параболические антропоморфы с «топорами»: 1, 2 — фигуры с кельтами, закрепленными в положении 100–112 градусов относительно рукояти (петроглифы Их ойгора); 3–5 — «божества» с торчащими сверху топорами различных видов (3 — Хар чулуут, плита ХЧ 483; 4, 5 — петроглифы Бага ойгора) (1, 2 по Дэлхийн өв, 2021; 4, 5 — по Адилбек, 2025). Без масштаба



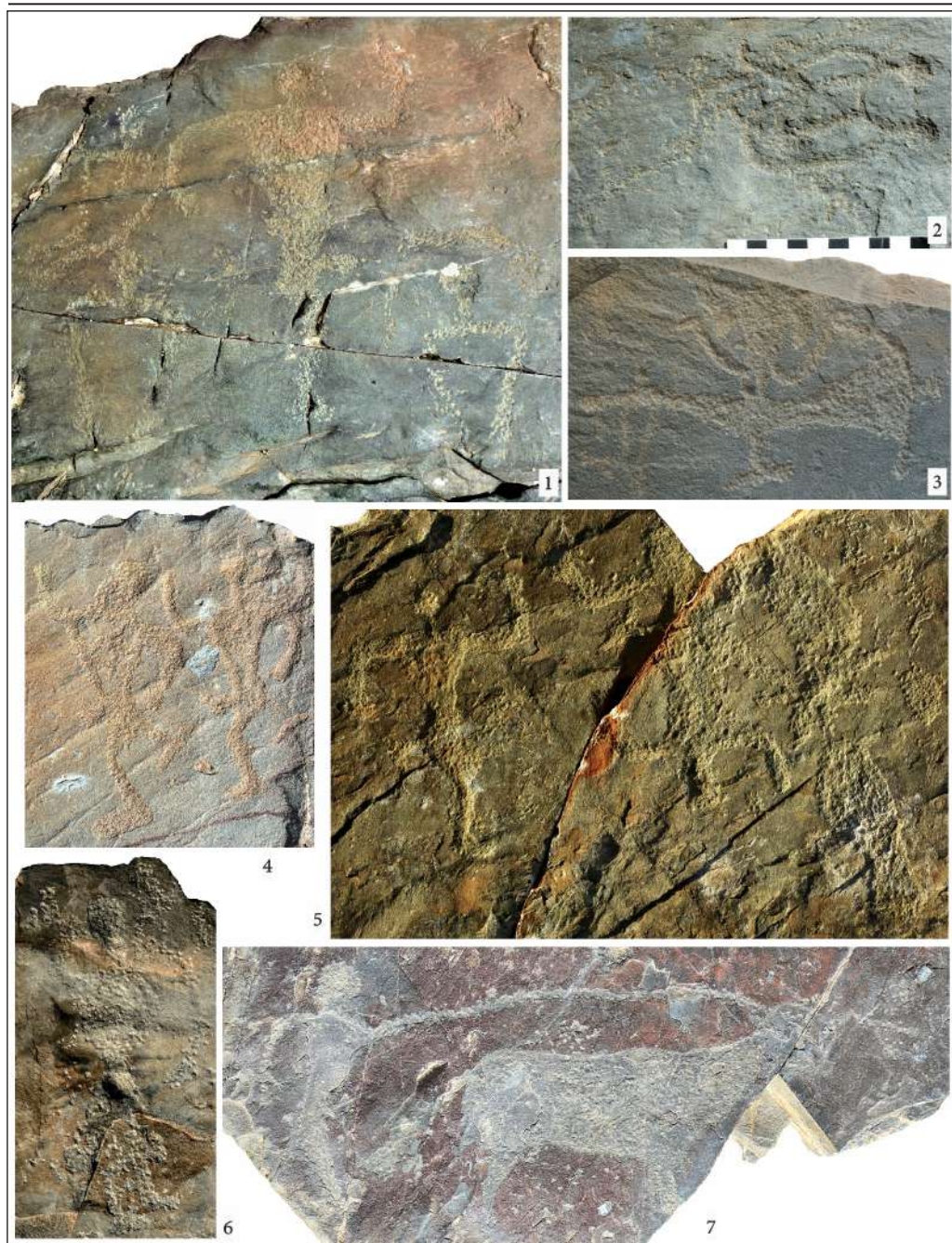


Fig. 7. Anthropomorphic figures. 1–5, 7 — one-leg mans: 1(KHLG 50); 4 (KHCH 219) — dancing; 2 (KHLG 132); 3 (KHLG 203) — having sex; 5 — dancing and having sex (KHCH 432); 7 — steering a bull (KHCH M1–8); 6 (KHCH 136) — woman(?) with bitriangle-shaped corpse holds sling or whip. Not to scale

Рис. 7. Антропоморфные фигуры. 1–5, 7 — «одноногие мужчины»; 1(ХЛГ 50); 4 (ХЧ 219) — в танце; 2(ХЛГ 132); 3 (ХЛГ 203) — в соитии; 5 — танцующие и совокупляющиеся (ХЧ 432); 7 — ведущий быка (ХЧ М1–8); 6 (ХЧ 136) — женщина с битреугольным туловищем держит пращу или кнут. Без масштаба

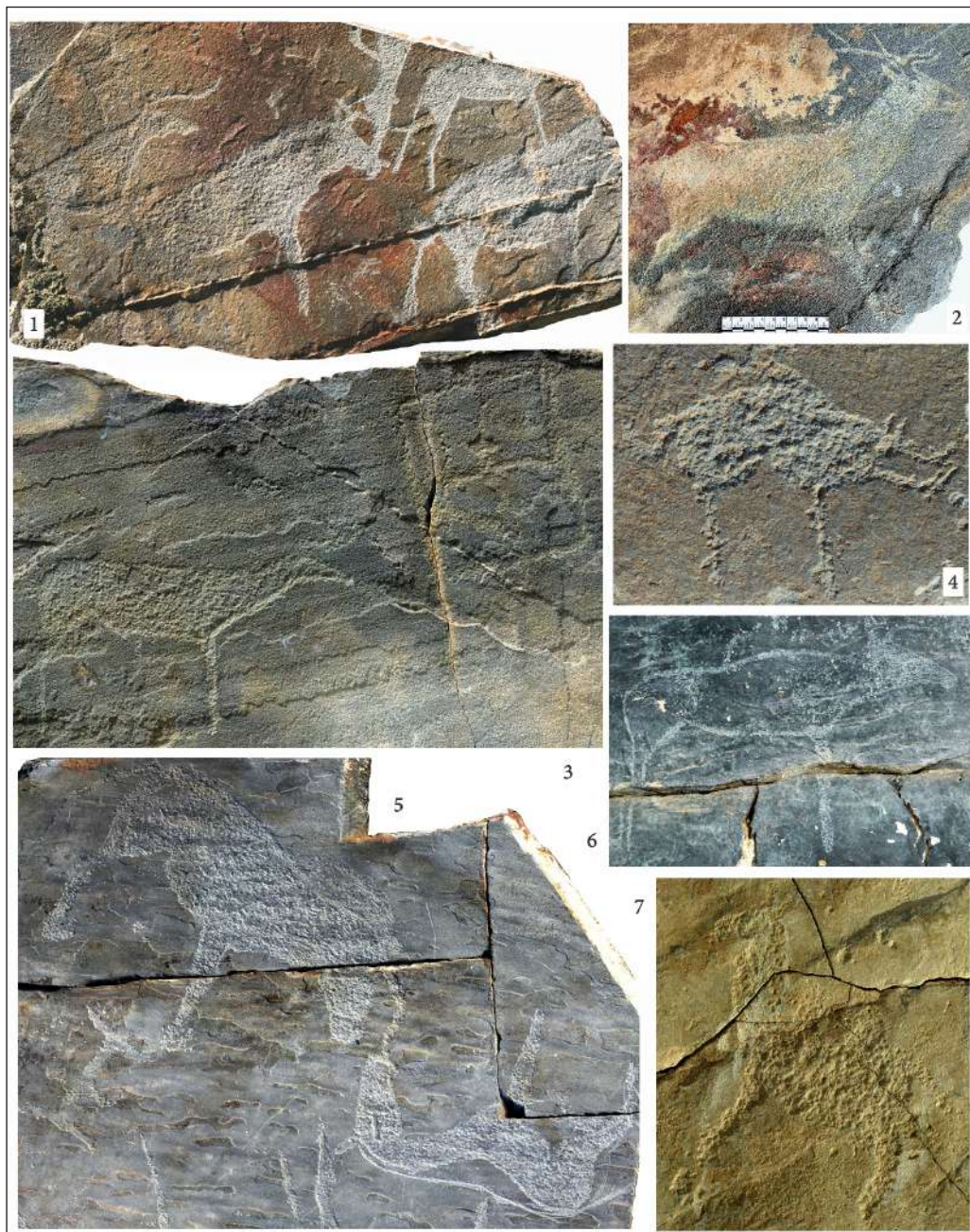


Fig. 8. Animals: 1 (KHCH 145) — cows and horses with one-leg man; 2 (KHCH 163) — deer; 3 (KHCH 462) — deer and rectangular figur with antennae; 4 (KHCH M1–2) — boar; 5 (KHCH 474) — bull and horse; 6 (HLG 50) — moose or deer; 7 (KHCH 413) — camel. Not to scale

Рис. 8. Животные: 1 (ХЧ 145) — коровы и лошади с «одноногим»; 2 (ХЧ 163) — олень; 3 (ХЧ 462) — олень и прямоугольная фигура с антеннами; 4 (ХЧ М1–2) — кабан; 5 (ХЧ 474) — бык и лошадь; 6 (ХЛГ 50) — лось или олень; 7 (ХЧ 413) — верблюд. Без масштаба

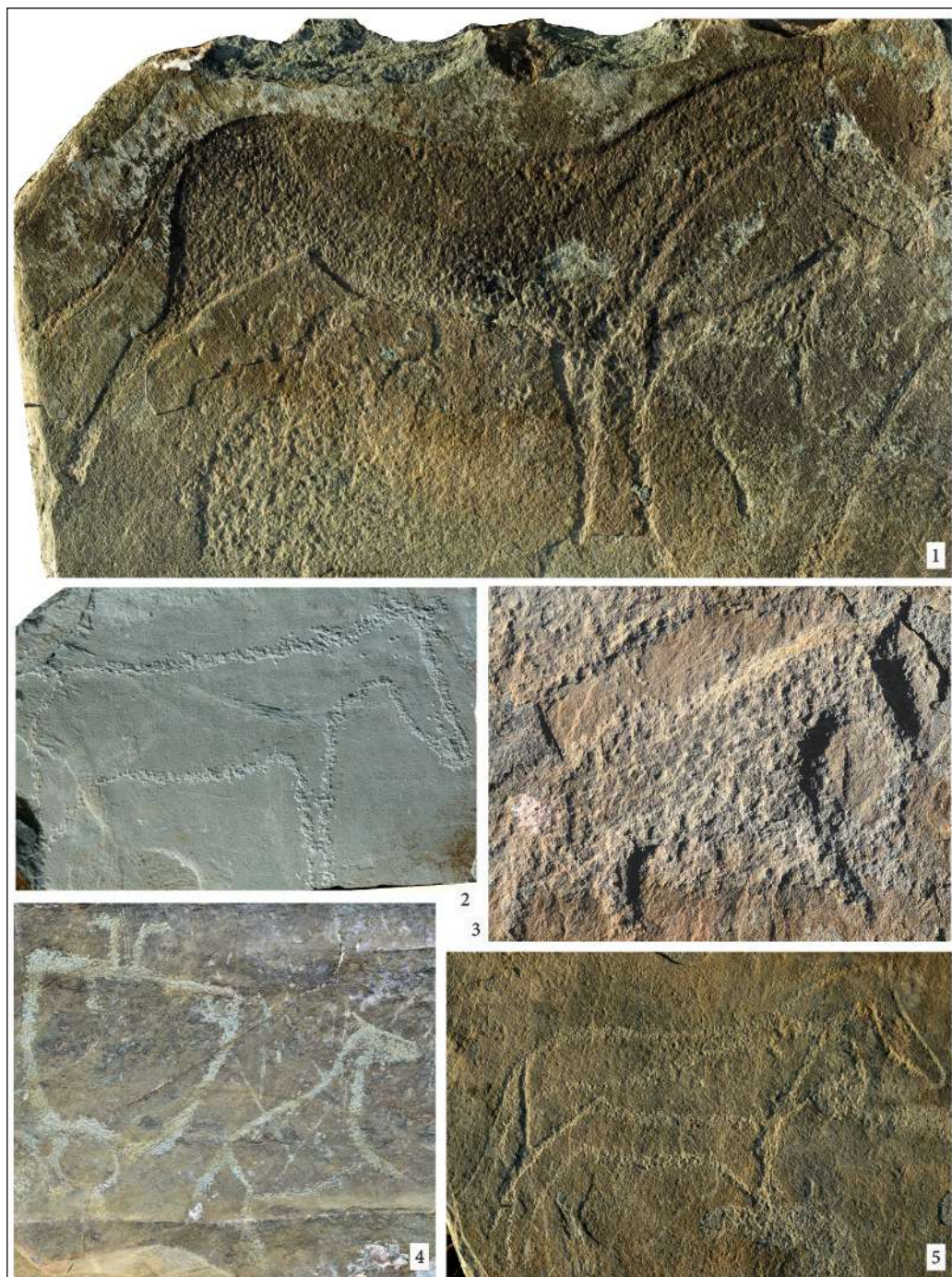


Fig. 9. Horses: 1 — ЧБ 4 (with a dog and parabolic anthropomorph); 2 — КНЛГ 165; 3 — КНЧН 135; 4 — КНЧН 483 (with parabolic figure); 5 — ЧБ 4 (overlying contour of a feline predator, below head of cow moose). Not to scale

Рис. 9. Лошади: 1 — ЧБ 4 (с собакой и параболическим антропоморфом); 2 — ХЛГ 165; 3 — ХЧ 135; 4 — ХЧ 483 (с параболической фигурой); 5 — ЧБ 4 (перекрывает контур кошачьего хищника).



Fig. 10. Signs and vehicle: 1 (KHLG 119) — “tree”; 2 (KHCH 149) — engraved row of festoons; 3 (KHCH M1-1) — engraved rows of foliate-shaped figures; 4 (KHCH 300) — footprints and sitting one-leg women(?) figure; 5 (KHCH 146) — four-wheels chart; 6–8 (KHCH 434, 158) — subrectangular figures. Not to scale

Рис. 10. Знаки и повозка: 1 (ХЛГ 119) — «дерево»; 2 (ХЧ 149) — выгравированный ряд фестонов; 3 (ХЧ М1-1) — выгравированные ряды листовидных фигур; 4 (ХЧ 300) — «стопы» и сидящая одноногая женщина(?); 5 (ХЧ 146) — четырехколесная повозка; 6–8 (ХЧ 434, 158) — подпрямоугольные фигуры. Без масштаба

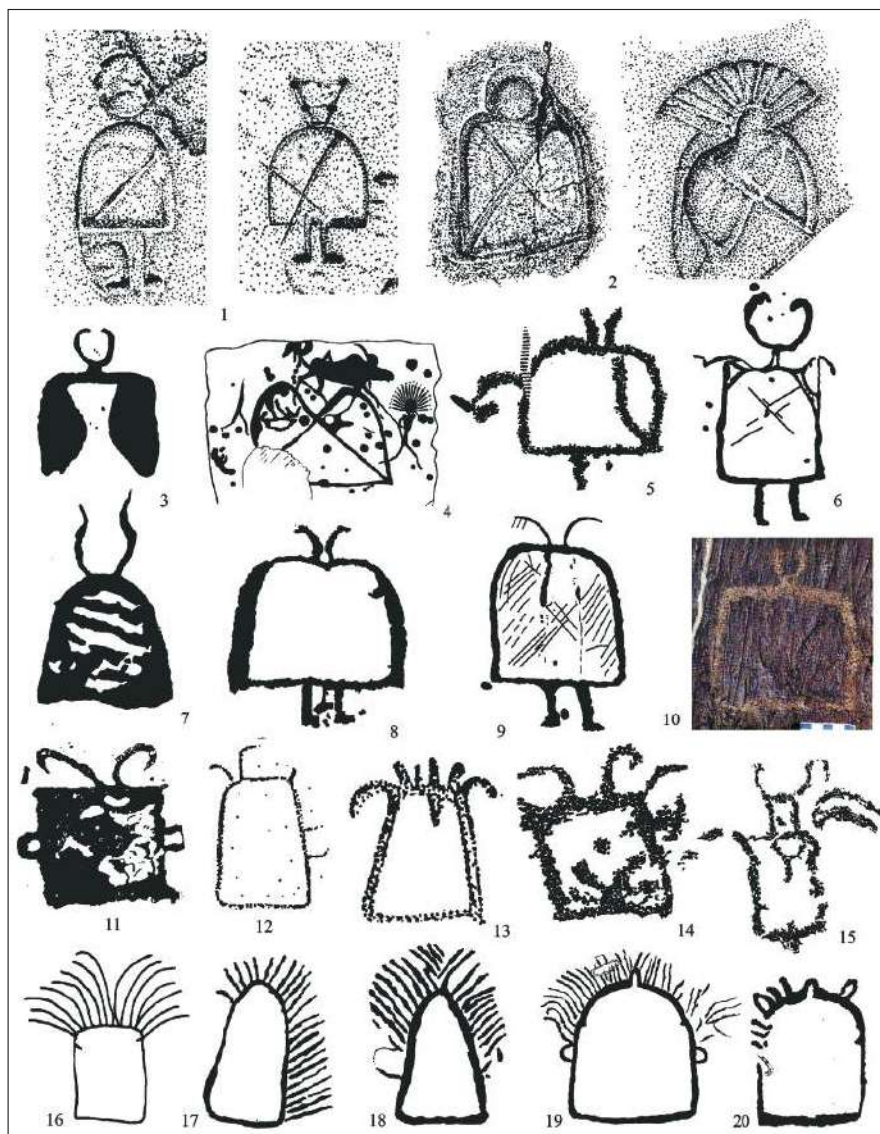


Fig. 11. Parabolic and rectangular figures with "antennae": 1, 2 — on Chemurchek statues Alepabulake III No. 2, Alepabulake I; 3–10 — Altai petroglyphs (3, 5, 7 — Tsagaan salaа; 4 — Karakol burial No. 5; 6, 8–10 — Baga oigor); 11–15 — Late and Final Neolithic of France and Italy (11 — dolmen du Berceau (Eure-et-Loire); 12, 13 — la Pierre aux Fees and les Ublaies menhirs (Saône-et-Loire); 14 — Chenal (Aosta); 15 — La Barma (Valtournenche); 16–20 — Middle Neolithic megaliths of Brittany (by Kovalev, 2012; Kubarev et al., 2005; Arca et al., 2016; Shee Twohig, 1986). Not to scale

Рис. 11. Параболические и прямоугольные фигуры с антеннами: 1, 2 — на чемурчешких статуях Алпабулак III № 2, Алпабулак I; 3–10 — петроглифы Алтая (3, 5, 7 — Цагаан салаа; 4 — Каракол, погребение 5; 6, 8–10 — Бага ойгор); 11–15 — поздний и финальный неолит Франции и Италии (11 — дольмен du Berceau (Eure-et-Loire); 12, 13 — менгиры la Pierre aux Fees and les Ublaies (Saône-et-Loire); 14 — петроглифы Chenal (Aosta); 15 — петроглифы La Barma (Valtournenche); 16–20 — мегалиты среднего неолита Бретани (по Ковалев, 2012; Кубарев и др., 2005; Arca et al., 2016; Shee Twohig, 1986). Без масштаба

Discussion

Common features of ritual enclosures, neighbouring petroglyphs and Chemurchek burial sites. There is no doubt that these ritual enclosures and related pictures belong to Chemurchek cultural entity. First of all, the form, the orientation, and fences construction of the enclosures is similar to the Chemurchek burial structures of Kermuqi type in the Chinese Altai mentioned above. Stelae were erected at the eastern side in both cases. Two “giant” enclosures — Khar chuluut and Khulagash — are accompanied with portals laying out of boulders. Similar portals often accompany the Chemurchek barrows of the Bulgan type (Tishkin et al., 2012; Earliest Europeans..., 2015). Images of parabolic deities were registered on the two Chemurchek statue-menhirs in the Buerjin county, Xinjiang (Kovalev, 2012, No. 34, 36) (Fig. 11.-1, 2). Pictures of bulls with an elongated head, S-shaped, forward pointing horns, cut (triangular in profile) tuft on the tail and indispensable two (not four) legs (Fig. 7.-7; 8.-1, 5) belong to the Chemurchek entity: it is exactly these bulls that even are depicted on typical Chemurchek statues Aktubai (阿克土白), Kayinarl 1 № 3 (喀依纳尔一号石人组三号石人), Akexi (阿克希), Kalatasi 3 № 2 (喀腊塔斯附近二号石人) (Kovalev, 1999, p. 152–157; Kovalev, 2012, No. 3, 14, 16, 20).

Pictures of headless creatures with parabolic or rectangular “bodies” are recorded in neighbouring Tsagaan salaa, Baga oigor and Ikh oigor rock art complexes (Kubarev, Tseveendorj, Jacobson, 2005, p. 73–76, Tab. 69) (Fig. 6.-1, 2, 4, 5; 11.-3, 5–10). One similar contour, protuberant on top and crossed with two diagonals, is recorded 150 km northwards in Kalbak Tash I (Russian Altai) (Kubarev, 2009b, fig. 161.-4, Kubarev, 2011, Tab. 57.-11). It is very interesting that a similar parabolic figure was the earliest of the original embossed drawings on re-used slab 3 from gravel No. 5 in Karakol (Kubarev, 2009b, Fig. 94, 96, 161.-1) (Fig. 11.-4).

One-legged “dancing” figures with the body en face and the leg in profile were also recorded in neighboring Tsagaan salaa, Baga oigor, Shiveet khairkhan petroglyphs (Kubarev, Tseveendorj, Jacobson, 2005, Tab. 78.-8, 9, No. 151, 185, 262, 627; Kubarev, 2009a, No. 2, 4, 22, 25, 27, 66, 122) (Fig. 12.-2–5). Our expedition discovered additional group of four such creatures during exploration on the northern bank of the Tsagaan gol river, 20 km east of Shiveet khairkhan (Fig. 12.-1).

Mentioned pictures of classical “Chemurchek” two-legged bulls with S-shaped horns and a triangular tuft on the tail are recorded both in Xinjiang Altai region and among petroglyphs in Tsagaan salaa, Baga oigor, Shiveet khairkhan, Aral tolgoi in Upper Khovd basin (Wang Linshan, Wang Bo, 1996, Fig. 143, 159, 177; Kubarev, Tseveendorj, Jacobson, 2005, Tab. 32–35; Kubarev, 2009a, No. 592, 767; Tseveendorzh, Kubarev, Jacobson, 2005, No. 86; Yu Jianjun, 2015) (Fig. 12.-6–10).

Western origin of peculiarities of ritual structures just like in other kinds of Chemurchek sites. While animal imagery has local roots (see Kovalev, Munkhbayar, 2015, 2022; Munkhbayar, Kovalev, 2024), images of parabolic deities and some signs could have arrived in the Mongolian Altai only from Western Eurasia. This fact is an additional argument in favor of the Chemurchek attribution of the discovered enclosures and the aforementioned types of petroglyphs of the Mongolian Altai in light of A. Kovalev’s idea about Western-European origin of the Chemurchek cultural phenomenon (see Kovalev, 2011, 2022). From his point of view Chemurchek cultural phenomenon means simultaneous (not later than the middle of 3rd mill. BC) appearance in western foothills of the Mongolian Altai (from the Aletai Region to the Trans-Altai Gobi desert) of Western-European late megalithic tradition (3200–2800 BCE). This is evidenced by barrows shaped as multiple cairns and stone pavements built around

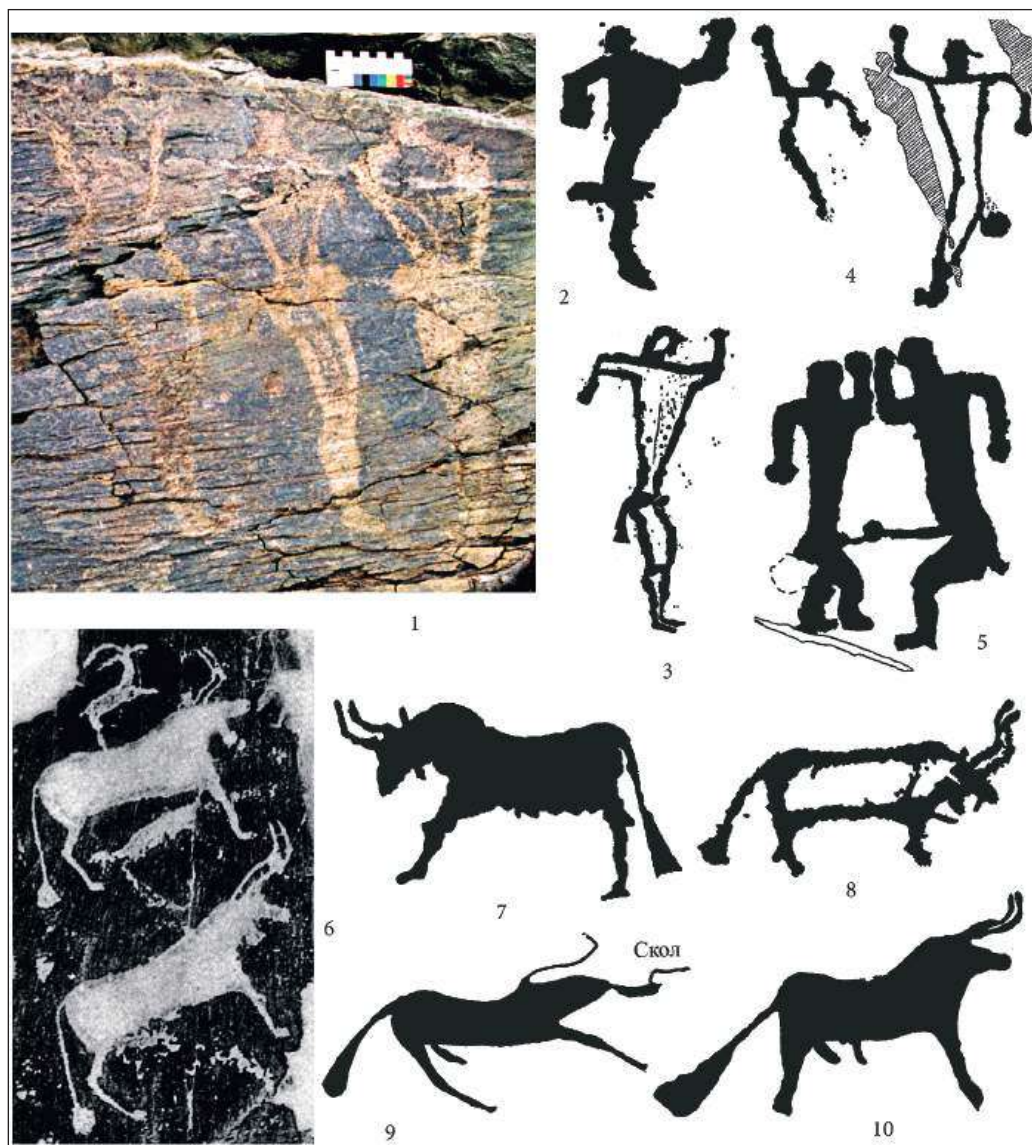


Fig. 12. "One-leg" figures: 1 — Tsagaan-gol valley; 2, 4, 5 — Shiveet khairkhan; 3 — Tsagaan salaа. Oxes with two legs, S-shaped horns and triangular tuft on the tail; 6 — Dulate (Aletai county, Xinjiang); 7, 10 — Baga ойгор; 8, 9 — Shiveet khairkhan (by Kubarev 2009; Kubarev et al., 2005; Wang Linshan and Wang Bo 1996; Kovalev, Munkhbayar, 2015). Not to scale

Рис. 12. «Одноногие» фигуры: 1 — долина р. Цагаан-гол; 2, 4, 5 — Шивээт хайрхан; 3 — Цагаан салаа. Быки с двумя ногами, S-образными рогами и треугольной кисточкой на хвосте; 6 — Дулатэ (уезд Алтай, Синьцзян); 7, 10 — Бага ойгор; 8, 9 — Шивээт хайрхан (по Кубарев, 2009; Кубарев и др., 2005; Ван Линьшань, Ван Бо, 1996; Ковалев, Мунхбаяр, 2015). Без масштаба

stone burial chambers with numerous skeletons inside, statue-menhirs similar to Western-European types, mural paintings with geometrical patterns and specific features of vessels. Along with Western European cultural features, some features from the steppes of Eastern Europe also appeared.

Elongated proportions of excavated in the Upper Khovd Chemurchek ritual enclosures (Fig. 2.-1-4; 3.-1) can be traced back to ritual rectangular or trapeziform enclosures, that were built in 5th-4th mill. BC in Western France (Fig. 2.-5-8). Stone stelae were often installed at the eastern side of such rectangular enclosures both in France and Mongolia. There are no signs of burial within such West-European structures, however traces of fire, pottery fragments, charcoal, burnt bones are usually found, as well as, sometimes, pits filled with stones and soil mixed with charcoals, stone pavements (pavings) and enclosures (Briard, 1992, p. 55-62; Patton, 1993, p. 48-56; Briard, Gautier, Le Roux, 1995, p. 45-47; L'Helgouac'h, 1998, p. 330-336; Joussaume, Laporte, 2006, p. 322-330).

Parabolic creatures which depicted in our enclosures and in neighbouring sites (Fig. 4.-2; 5; 6; 7.-3; 8.-4; 11.-1-10) can be seen on Brittany megalithic graves, Berseau dolmen, Burgundy menhirs, Piedmont (Aosta) petroglyphs and (latest) in Mont Bego (Shee Twohig, 1981; Arca et al., 2016, p. 145-160; Lumley, Echassoux, 2012, p. 234-249; Huet, 2017, p. 108-111) (Fig. 11.-11-20).

79 small slate plaques were found near the fence of the Khar chuluut enclosure, some plaques were found inside the Khar chuluut and Khulagash enclosures (Fig. 13.-1-5). Most of them were decorated by rows of triangles, garlands of foliate-shaped figures and bands. A trapezoidal slab (KHCH 149) installed nearby in the fence was decorated in a similar manner. Its edges were engraved with hatched triangles (Fig. 10.-2), and a "necklace" with triangle festoons was depicted in the center (Kovalev, Munkhbayar, 2015, fig. 38, 39). These treasure and slab has obvious analogies both with the engraved plaques (idols) of the Iberian Peninsula (see Lillios, 2008) and with the final Neolithic statue-menhirs of the Sion-Aosta type (Dei di pietra, 1998, p. 166-167, 174-177, 180-181, 186-187; Favre et al., 1998; Corboud, 2009) (Fig. 13.-7-9). Statues-menhirs from Spain and Portugal are decorated with similar rows of festoons and garlands of foliate-shaped figures too (Kovalev, 2022, p. 789). Similar Iberian engraved plaques without facial features dated back to 31st to 27th centuries B.C. (Buonaventura, 2011, p. 167-169) however Sion-Aosta statue-menhirs with horizontal rows of triangles belong to "pre-Bell-Beakers phase", i.e. dated earlier than 2600 BCE (Curdy et al., 2021).

On a flattened stone laid out in the center of the Khar Chuluut main enclosure, an image of a four-wheeled cart was carved, the body of which is designed as a square filled with two rows of dots (Fig. 10.-5). The earliest dated image of this kind with a circle in the center dated back to the middle of the 4th mill. BC found on a vessel from Bronocice (Poland) (Bakker, 2004, p. 288-289); later images in the same style spread to Southern Europe and to the Eurasian steppes (Zürchner, 2004, s. 404-406; Novozhenov, 2012, p. 99-101). On the others slabs, several more square contours with lines and dots inside were discovered (Fig. 8.-3; 10.-6-8), which also find correspondence in Eurasian steppe and in Western Europe (Arca, Borel, 2015). Human "bi-triangle" figures with raised hands like on our KHCH 136 slab (Fig. 7.-6) were depicted on ceramic vessels from Szelevény and Vučedol of early 3rd mill. BC (Horváth, Balen, 2012). Clearly of European origin are foot- or shoetprints (Fig. 7.-5; 10.-4),

depicted on the statue-menhirs of the Yamnaya culture, as well as in the early petroglyphs of the southern Alpine region (Telegin, Mallory, 1994, p. 47–48; Arca, 2015). The images (mostly engraved) of rows of triangular festoons, garlands of leaf-shaped figures, an oblique grid, and lined rectangles (Fig. 10.-2, 3) most likely originated from Western Europe (see Shee Twohig, 1981; Hameau, 2002; Kovalev, 2022, p. 781–789). Inside the Khulagash enclosure a trapezoidal stone slab with symbolic tree-shape image was discovered (Fig. 10.-1). Such “tree-like” figures are part of the imagery of Salzmünde und Bernburger cultures of second half of 4th — early 3rd mill. BC (pictures on walls of megalithic burial chambers, ornamentation of vessels) (Schunke, 2013; Kovalev, 2025b), in Eastern Europe they were included in decoration of stone tombs of late Maykop, Kemi-Oba and Yamnaya cultures (Daragan, Polin, Svoysky, 2021; Kovalev, 2025b).

An ancient trail, which the local population used up to the 20th century, leads from western foothills of the Mongolian Altai straight to the Upper Khovd on the eastern slope. It starts from Qiemuerqieke township, goes uphill up to sources of the Kran/Kelanhe (客兰河) river, then across Urmogaity/Irmegetiin davaa high-mountain pass on the current China-Mongolia border to the Dayan lake (Fig. 1). The whole way from Qiemuerqieke in the western foothills to the Dayan Lake plain on the eastern slope is no longer than 100 km. Expeditions of Russian geographers of the 19th — the beginning of the 20th century (G.N. Potanin, V.V. Sapozhnikov, J.G. Granö, G.Ye. Grumm-Grzhimaylo) walked along this trail; they left detailed descriptions of pathways and the pass that are walkable in summer (Sapozhnikov, 1948, p. 370–373; Grumm-Grzhimailo, 1914, p. 263–271; Granö, 1912, p. 74–75).

So well accessible highlands lie on average 1500 m higher than western foothills inhabited by the Chemurchek people: their barrows are located at about 1000 m above sea level, while ritual structures at the Khovd headstream are situated higher than 2400 m a.s.l. The sharp differences in climatic conditions between these two neighboring regions were noted back in the 19th century (Grumm-Grzhimailo, 1914, p. 417–425). Inhabited area southwest of the main Altain-nuruu ridge (today's Altay Prefecture) are characterized by high humidity and a relatively mild climate, allowing for good harvests and the storage of hay for the winter. The high mountains block rain clouds moving from the west. Judging by petroglyphs, cattle (cows) played a significant role in the Chemurchek people's economy, and the western foothills of the Altain-nuruu ridge were favorable for their raising. In contrast, the highland region northeast of the main ridge falls within the extreme continental climate zone of the Mongolian Plateau, which at such a high altitude is only suitable for breeding sheep and goats, as well as yaks (which arrived here two thousand years later, during the Xiongnu period). According to data of our investigations, this highland was practically uninhabited in the Early Bronze Age, although individual burials of the Afanasievo culture and other people associated with the Altai Mountains took place here (see Kovalev, Erdenebaatar, 2009; Kovalev, 2025a). On the way to these high-mountain valleys from western foothills one need to get over a chain of snowy peaks visible from the plain. It could have been perceived as a territory dedicated to the gods. It is highly probable that these peculiarities of the landscape predetermined the role of the Upper Khovd river basin as the territory for practicing rituals and mysteries.

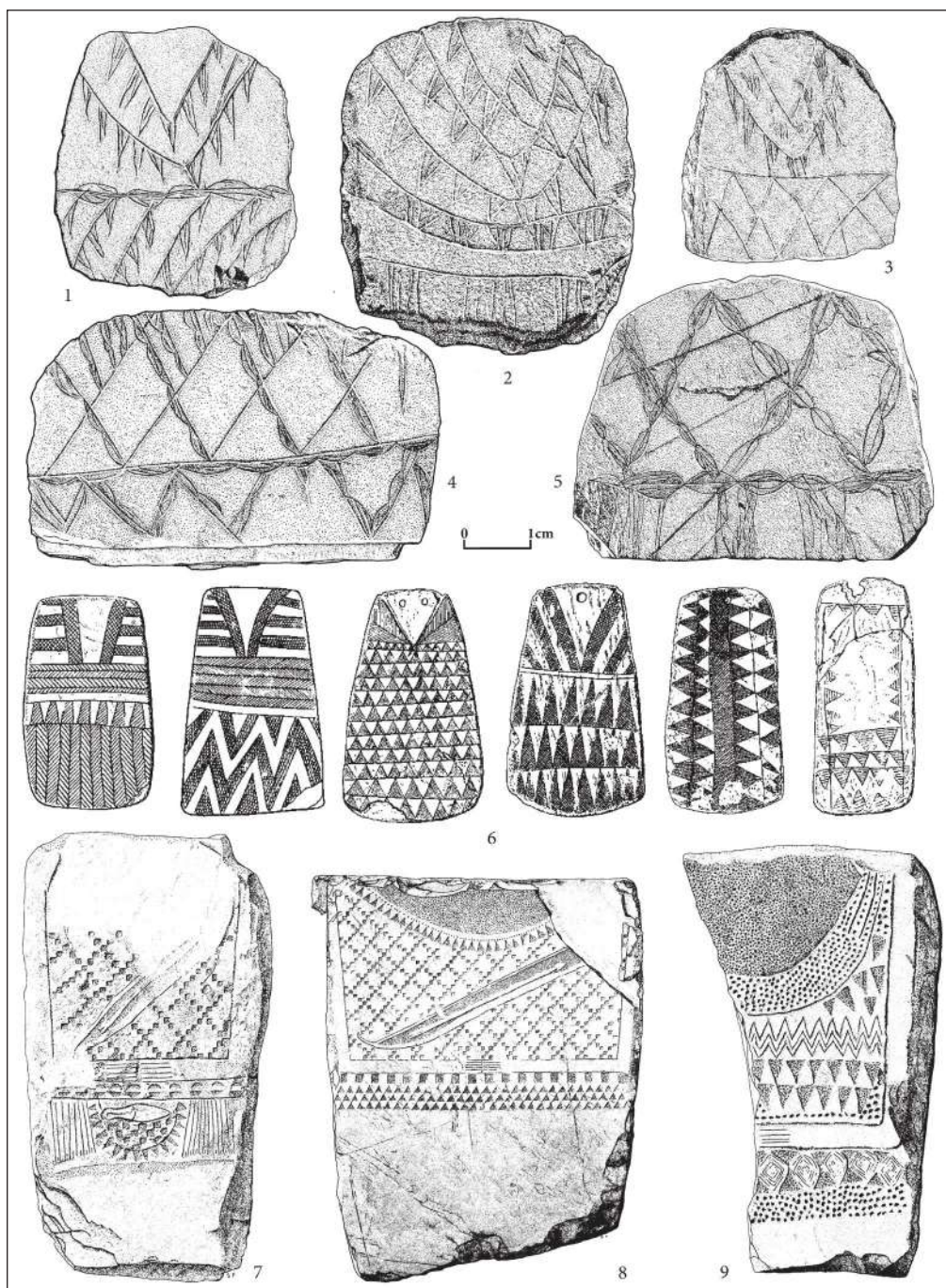


Fig. 13. 1–5 — slate plaques from Khar chuluut ritual deposit; 6 — slate plaques from south Iberian megalithic tombs; 7–9 — statues-menhirs of Petit-Chasseur (Sion, Valais, Switzerland) (6–9 by Lillios, 2008; Favre et al., 1986, not to scale)

Рис. 13. 1–5 — сланцевые пластинки из ритуального клада на Хар чулуут; 6 — сланцевые пластинки из иберийских мегалитических гробниц; 7–9 — статуи Пти-Шассёр (Сьон, кантон Вале, Швейцария) (6–9 по Lilius, 2008; Favre et al., 1986, без масштаба)

Conclusion

The unique high-mountain landscape in the upper reaches of the Khovd River turned out to be area of high concentration of ritual structures and rock art dating to the Early Bronze Age (3rd mill. BC). Long-term research by our expedition, with participation of Professor D. Erdenebaatar, has shown that the ritual structures of this period, like many nearby petroglyphs, belong to the Chemurchek cultural phenomenon. The architecture of ritual structures — rectangular enclosures with steles on the eastern side — is particularly similar to the Chemurchek barrows. Like finds from the Chemurchek graves and architecture of burial sites, many features of the ritual structures have parallels in western Eurasia. In the centre of figurative compositions on the fences of ritual enclosures often are “parabolic” or “rectangular” figures with antennae, apparently representing the main deities; similar images were found in the Chemurchek burial complexes. Earlier images of this kind are common at West European megalithic sites. However, within the Chemurchek phenomenon territory, the area where images of such deities and ritual enclosures are located is geographically isolated. The main Chemurchek burial sites and statue-menhirs were discovered in the western foothills of the Altai Mountains, at an altitude of approximately 1,000 meters above sea level, where exist favorable conditions for complex economic activity. Ritual sites are located very close, but behind a snowy ridge, one and a half kilometers higher, in an area where, apparently, no one lived permanently during that period. This area could have been dedicated to the gods and people climbed here not only to build fences and carve petroglyphs, but also to perform collective rituals, as evidenced by wooden stages and stone platforms inside “giant” enclosures. Discovered evidence of the presence of a separate ritual zone of the 3rd millennium BC in a peculiar mountain landscape opens up prospects for a new understanding of the spatial organization of the life of Bronze Age peoples in Eurasia.

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A.A. Kovalev: the idea of the publication, field archaeological research, common characteristic of ritual structures and petroglyphs, characteristic of analogies, writing the relevant sections of the article, as well as the introduction and conclusion.

Ковалев А.А.: идея публикации, полевые археологические исследования, общая характеристика ритуальных сооружений и петроглифов, характеристика аналогий, написание соответствующего раздела статьи, а также введения и заключения.

Ch. Munkhbayar: field archaeological research, analysis of archaeological materials, writing the relevant section of the article.

Мунхбаяр Ч.: полевые археологические исследования, анализ археологических материалов, написание соответствующего раздела статьи

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