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QUANTITY AND SEMANTICS OF MONGOLIAN-TRANSBAIKAL STYLE DEER ON THE SURFACE OF STAG STONES AND IN ROCK CARVINGS AND THEIR "SOCIOLOGICAL" INTERPRETATION*

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Abstract. The article is devoted to the interpretation of Mongolian-Transbaikal style stag stones from the Ushkiin-Uver site in Mongolia and stag stone style petroglyphs of Mongolian Altai. One part of the article is aimed at conducting a census of the deer figures on the surface of each of the well-preserved stag stones of the Ushkiin-Uver site near Mörön city in Northern Mongolia. This research suggests that each stag stone of Mongolian-Transbaikal style symbolized the ancestor of the ancient tribe and at the same time, the Universe of that tribe. Figures of deer covering the surface of the statue corresponded to social groups (lineages) comprising the tribe. If the society that created stag stones had a dual exogamic structure, the number of deer depicted (each of which symbolized a lineage) on the surface of every stele should be an even number and often a multiple of four. Another part of the article is aimed at the interpretation of stag stone style petroglyphs from Mongolian Altai. The study supposes that because stag stones and rock carvings of deer were created by representatives of the same society, they reflected the same ideas. So the number of deer depicted (each of which symbolized a lineage) on rock surfaces should be an even number and often a multiple of four. The article gives examples and interpretations of rock carvings with four, six, ten and two deer to confirm these claims.

Keywords: Mongolia, Ushkiin-Uver, stag stones of Mongolian-Transbaikal style, Mongolian Altai, stag stone style petroglyphs, interpretation, dual exogamic structure

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КОЛИЧЕСТВО И СЕМАНТИКА ОЛЕНЕЙ МОНГОЛО-ЗАБАЙКАЛЬСКОГО СТИЛЯ НА ОЛЕННЫХ КАМНЯХ И В НАСКАЛЬНЫХ ИЗОБРАЖЕНИЯХ И ИХ «СОЦИОЛОГИЧЕСКАЯ» ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИЯ

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* This article synthesizes and expands upon the author's previously published work, which will be of interest to English-speaking researchers. Данная статья обобщает и дополняет ранее опубликованные работы автора, которые будут интересны англоязычным исследователям.

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Резюме. Статья посвящена интерпретации оленных камней монголо-забайкальского стиля с памятника Ушкийн-Увэр в Монголии и петроглифов «в стиле оленных камней» из Монгольского Алтая. Одна часть статьи отведена подсчету точного количества фигур оленей на каждом из хорошо сохранившихся оленных камней памятника Ушкийн-Увэр близ города Мурен в северной Монголии. Идея исследования заключается в том, что каждый оленный камень монголо-забайкальского стиля олицетворял первопредка воздвигшего его древнего коллектива (племени?) и одновременно его вселенную (макрокосм), а отдельные фигуры оленей соответствовали входившим в данный коллектив социальным (скорее всего, родовым) группам. Если создавшее оленные камни общество имело дуально-экзогамную организацию, то количество оленей (каждый из которых символизировал отдельный род) на каждой стеле должно быть четным, а часто и кратным четырем. Идея другой части статьи заключается в том, что, поскольку оленные камни и петроглифы в стиле оленных камней создавались представителями одного и того же общества, то оленные камни и наскальные изображения стилизованных оленей отражали одни и те же представления. Соответственно количество оленей (каждый из которых также символизировал отдельный род) в группах на скальных плоскостях должно быть четным, а часто и кратным четырем. В статье даны примеры интерпретации наскальных композиций с четырьмя, шестью, десятью и с двумя оленями в подтверждение высказанных предположений.

Ключевые слова: Монголия, Ушкийн-Увэр, оленные камни монголо-забайкальского стиля, Монгольский Алтай, петроглифы в стиле оленных камней, интерпретация, дуально-экзогамная организация

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Introduction

Stag stones are stylized anthropomorphic figures rendered as vertically set stone slabs or pillars. A defining characteristic of these monuments is the presence of engraved earrings, necklaces, and belts adorned with weaponry. Furthermore, these stones are frequently covered with depictions of deer with antlers (i.e. stags as opposed to female does), which accounts for their conventional name. Stag stones are categorized into three primary morphological types: Type I: Mongol-Transbaikal (characterized by deer with elongated, sinuous bodies and beak-shaped muzzles); Type II: Sayan-Altai (depicting deer standing on straight, extended legs — the so-called "on-tip-toe" posture); Type III: Eurasian (devoid of deer imagery) (Novgorodova, 1989, p. 185). The stag stone culture is generally dated to the first half of the 1st millennium BC, while stones executed in the Mongol-Transbaikal style are attributed specifically to the first third of that period (Savinov, 1994, pp. 110–113).

Similar stylized animal figures are also found among petroglyphs, though their distribution is broader than that of the stag stones themselves. This is evidenced by the discovery of such imagery in Inner Mongolia and the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region of China, areas where stag stones are absent (Varenov, 2018a, p. 35; 2018b, pp. 10–11). One part of this article provides an exact census of deer figures on each well-preserved stone at the Ushkiin-Uver site in northern Mongolia. Such quantitative analysis has not been previously conducted. It is hypothesized that determining the precise number of deer figures on individual stones will facilitate the reconstruction of the social structure of the population that created them.

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In another part of the article, these reconstructed models are applied to the interpretation of "stylized" deer petroglyphs in the Mongolian Altai Mountains.

On Dual-Exogamous Organization

The author previously proposed that "each stag stone of the Mongol-Transbaikal style embodies the primal ancestor of a specific ancient tribe, while individual deer figures correspond to the social (most likely kin) groups within that collective" (Varenov, 2016, p. 210). The earlier working hypothesis suggested that the society that produced these stag stones possessed a dual-exogamic organization. Dual-exogamous organization is a form of social structure in primitive society in which the entire tribe is rigidly divided into two large exogamous moieties (phratries), with marital relations permitted exclusively between members of different moieties and categorically prohibited within the same moiety. In its pure form, dual exogamy is recorded among Australian aborigines and among certain tribes of South America (the Bororo Indians). Among agricultural peoples, it rapidly transforms into more complex systems (four- or eight-section marriage classes), because simple binarity, with population growth, leads to a logical collapse in determining degrees of kinship.

Lewis H Morgan is rightly considered the discoverer and chief theorist of the "first wave" of dual-exogamous organization. However, his ideas were subsequently reinterpreted in the works of a whole cohort of scholars. Morgan's fundamental work "Ancient Society" (1877) became the starting point for all subsequent research. Morgan not only described dual division; he also gave it a theoretical grounding, placing it within his evolutionary schema of human development. He believed that the basis of primitive society was the clan (*gens*), which was initially matrilineal and strictly exogamous (prohibiting marriages within the clan), and that two such clans, linked by mutual marriages, formed a larger unit (the *phratry*) which was the most ancient form of social organization. Morgan also introduced the term "phratry" into scholarship, having discovered similar structures among the North American Indians and in ancient Greece (Morgan, 1935).

Morgan's followers expanded and deepened his theory, while subjecting some of its aspects to criticism. Lorimer Fison and Alfred William Howitt, in their work on Australian aborigines, developed Morgan's idea, regarding dual organization as the result of the division of a single primordial "commune" into two exogamous moieties (Fison & Howitt, 1880). Edward B. Tylor and William Halse Rivers Rivers proposed an alternative view. Tylor, the founder of cultural anthropology, in his "Primitive Culture" (1871), while remaining within the framework of evolutionism and the progressive development from primitive to modern culture, advanced the hypothesis that dual organization arose not through division but, on the contrary, through the unification of two isolated groups for the sake of establishing peaceful alliance and regulating marital ties (Tylor, 1989). Rivers, in "Kinship and Social Organisation" (1914), based on Melanesian materials and continuing Morgan's line while refining his conclusions, analysed different types of kinship terminology and demonstrated the connection between these terminologies and forms of family, marriage, and kin relationships. This book was written in a purely evolutionist style. In another work published at the same time, "The History of Melanesian Society" (1914), Rivers, now from a diffusionist perspective, substantiated the theses concerning the profound antiquity and universality of dual organization and its connection with classificatory systems of kinship (Rivers, 1914).

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In Soviet scholarship, this topic also received further development. D.A. Olderogge, following Rivers, demonstrated that the Malay kinship system is not the most ancient but arises as a simplification of the Turano-Ganowan type of kinship system (Olderogge, 1951). A.M. Zolotarev, in his works, showed that dual organization is the foundation of the entire social structure in early stages and exerts a profound influence on people's worldview and mythology. The greater part of his study "Clan System and Primitive Mythology" is devoted to proving the universality of dual-clan organization. To this end, the author drew on historical, ethnographic and folklore materials from Australia, Oceania, India, Indonesia, the Americas, Siberia and Europe. Special sections are devoted to the characteristics of the primitive human herd and to the question of the origin of exogamy and dual organization (Zolotarev, 1964). Yu.I. Semyonov also developed theoretical questions concerning the origins of this form of organization, viewing it as a universal stage in the formation of clan society (Semyonov, 1974).

Claude Lévi-Strauss approached dual organization from a completely different, structuralist position. He was less interested in the history of its emergence than in its role in human thought. Lévi-Strauss showed that the dual division of society reflects deep-seated binary oppositions (male/female, up/down, day/night, war/peace) that structure consciousness and serve as a universal tool for ordering the world. He also argued that at the basis of these systems lies the principle of reciprocity (mutual exchange), primarily the exchange of women between two groups, which makes them a necessary element of social structure (Lévi-Strauss, 1985). If the dual-exogamous system is the "binary code" of society, then the transition to four- and eight-class systems is a transition to a "quaternary" and "octal" code. This transition was not a random caprice; it became a mathematical necessity dictated by demographic growth and the increasing complexity of kinship ties.

Anthropologists (especially Lévi-Strauss and his followers) identify three driving forces of this process: (1) the demographic factor — when a group becomes too large, its members cease to perceive themselves as a single clan; internal factions arise, each demanding its place in the system of bride exchange; fragmentation is a way of preserving exogamy amid population growth; (2) logical completion (the principle of symmetry) — primitive thought tends toward symmetry and completeness; if there are two groups, they strive to mirror each other in detail, giving rise to pairs of "elder/younger" within each moiety, which yields a division into four; (3) economic alliance — with an increase in the number of classes, the number of affinal ties (kinship through marriage) grows; instead of a single ally (the neighbouring phratry), the tribe acquires four or eight cross-cutting alliance networks, which is critically important for survival in conditions of intertribal warfare.

For a long time, scholars (following Morgan) believed that four- and eight-class systems arose evolutionarily (from simple to complex) in all societies. However, modern anthropology has shown that this is not a universal law. Often the four-class system is not the result of evolution from a two-class one, but an initially given matrix that emerged through the simultaneous unification of four independent clans into a single alliance. In this case, dual organization (two classes) is a simplification or secondary merger, not a primary state. Dual-exogamous organization is not merely a "marriage rule" but a complex self-regulating socio-cybernetic system that, through the mechanism of compulsory exchange of women, addresses the tasks of population survival, the construction of intergroup peace, and the creation of fundamental cognitive categories of human thought.

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Dual-exogamous organization, presupposing the exchange of women between two groups, could serve as an important instrument of political integration. The unique political order of Sparta, with its two kings from different dynasties (the Agiads and the Eurypontids) is a striking example of the dual principle in the political sphere. This system was not directly connected with marital alliances but represented a fundamental way of dividing power to avoid internal conflicts between elites. The dual monarchy made it possible to curb the ambitions of each royal dynasty and served as a mechanism for smoothing intra-elite strife, which was important for maintaining stability in a militarized society that also feared an uprising of the numerous helots. Unlike Sparta, in other ancient and early medieval societies, dual-exogamous organization was realized through strategic marital alliances.

In medieval Japan, after the beginning of so-called Taika Reforms (645 CE), which led to the concentration of political power in the hands of the imperial clan and the Fujiwara clan that entered into alliance with it, throughout the Nara-Heian period (710–1185), emperors were obliged to take wives only from this clan, while representatives of the Fujiwara occupied the highest court offices, including Chancellor (*kampaku*) under an adult emperor or Regent (*sesshō*) under a minor emperor (History of Japan, 1998, pp. 172, 183, 184, 188). In the political life of ancient and medieval states, the dual-exogamous system functioned as a mechanism that ensured political stability through the division of power (as in Sparta) or through the prevention of conflicts between clans. It formalized and strengthened alliances between elites or different political groups through marital ties, and also maintained hierarchy and continuity of power by determining who had rights to status, property, and political participation.

Dual-exogamous organization was a fundamental part of the social structure of many non-literate Siberian peoples. The fullest and most direct evidence of its existence comes from ethnographic descriptions that recorded this system among many Siberian peoples well into the 19th-20th centuries. Detecting the manifestation of social norms in archaeological materials is more difficult. Several indirect indicators pointing to dual organization may be used. Differences in the ornamentation of synchronous ceramics within the same territory may indicate the coexistence of two different ethno-cultural groups that entered into marital alliances. Another indicator may be specific features of the funerary rite in the presence of identical grave goods among synchronous burials. For example, at large cemeteries of the Shajing culture, which existed in the Gansu Corridor in northwestern China from the 7th to the 3rd centuries BCE, approximately equal proportions of burials in vertical earth pits and in catacombs occur. There are no sex-age differences between those interred, the accompanying goods are identical in both cases, and no chronological differences are observed, which can be interpreted as burials of members of two exogamous groups that were marriage partners (Varenov, 2011, p. 33). Similar biritualism with identical grave goods is also observed at the Xianbei cemetery of Tuanjie in Inner Mongolia (Varenov, Mitko A.O., Mitko O.A., 2006, p. 303).

Finally, the existence of dual-exogamous organization may also be indicated by settlement pattern. In the Neolithic Zhaobaogou culture, which was distributed in the southern part of northeastern China (Manchuria) and dated to the turn of the 6th-5th — mid-5th millennium BCE, a series of ceramic vessels with carved ornamental friezes on the body, composed of two dragons with long curved bodies and deer heads, have been found (Varenov, 2016). In dwelling 3546F1, belonging to the Zhaobaogou culture at the Nantaidi site in Aohan Banner, Inner

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Mongolia Autonomous Region, four such vessels with depictions of differently shaped deer-dragons were found, with two fantastic creatures on each vessel. Dwelling 3546F1 is larger than the others and is located in the centre of the settlement, on the top of the hill, above all others on the slope. It should have belonged to the chief of the community or served as a place used by the entire collective for religious ceremonies — that is, a temple (Shao Guotian, 1991, p. 10).

The discovery in the central dwelling of four ornate ceremonial vessels seemingly reflected the social structure of the ancient collective that inhabited the Nantaidi settlement, with its division into four parts (phratries), each built on the principle of dual-exogamous organization. Similar results had previously been obtained by V.V. Evsyukov on the basis of painted pottery from the Banpo variant of the Yangshao culture, synchronous with the Zhaobaogou culture (Evsyukov, 1988, pp. 70–72). We regard the Zhaobaogou culture (still fully sedentary and agricultural, based on millet cultivation) as the source culture for the stag-stone culture, since it also contains genuine anthropomorphic stone sculpture. Admittedly, these relatively small statues, 50–70 cm high, depicted women, which may have reflected notions not of the father-ancestor (as in the stag-stone culture) but of the mother-forebear and, accordingly, matrilineal kinship reckoning (Varenov, 2016, pp. 206–210). In the Kayue (Qiayao) culture of the second half of the 2nd millennium BCE, widespread in Qinghai Province in northwestern China, which A. A. Kovalev considers the immediate genetic predecessor of the stag-stone culture, the shoulders of some ceramic vessels bear painted decoration in the form of eight antlered deer (Kovalev, 2001).

The existence of dual-exogamous organization is confirmed not only by later ethnographic records or archaeological data, but also by genetic research, which traces its roots back to the Bronze Age. A genomic study of skeletal remains from 14 individuals from the Kurma XI cemetery of the Early Bronze Age in the Lake Baikal region (about 4000 years ago, roughly synchronous with the Zhaobaogou and Banpo cultures in China) provided "preliminary confirmation of the idea that an exogamous and/or patrilocal marriage pattern may be detected" at this site (Moussa et al., 2021). The results of palaeo-genetic studies of 17 individuals from the Eki-Ottug 1 and Eki-Ottug 2 cemeteries, belonging to the Aldy-Bel and Uyuk cultures of Tuva, indicate that in the Eerbek River valley during the formation of the Uyuk-Sagly culture (late 6th — early 4th centuries BCE), different tribal groups — both local and incoming — coexisted, suggesting the multi-component nature of the Scythian cultures in the region (Kilunovskaya et al., 2023, p. 270). These tribal groups in the Eerbek valley practiced different burial rites but used similar sets of grave goods, which is reminiscent of the situation with the Shajing culture in China. Whole-genome analysis of three representatives of the Aldy-Bel culture from the elite kurgans Arzhan-2 and Chinge-Tey I (7th-6th centuries BCE) showed that the studied individuals were genetically close to synchronous bearers of the Tasmola culture from Central and Eastern Kazakhstan and to Early Iron Age pastoralists from Xinjiang (Nedoluzhko et al., 2025, pp. 10–11).

According to V.V. Evsyukov, the horizontal division of space into two (or four) parts in ancient Chinese cultures genetically preceded its vertical division into three parts (as on the stag stones). The latter originally represented a vertical projection of a two- or three-part horizontal division of space (Evsyukov, 1988, pp. 59–61). Since the cosmology of a kin-based society generally mirrors its sociology, the number of deer (each symbolizing a distinct lineage) on each stele — which personifies the tribal ancestor and thus represents both the microcosm and macrocosm of the entire collective — should be an even number, and frequently a multiple

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of four (Varenov, 2018b, p. 26). The proposed hypothesis is intended to be tested by counting the deer on all surfaces of each of the stag stones at the Ushkiin-Uver site.

Deer Figures on the Ushkiin-Uver Stag Stones

One of the most renowned and extensively studied sites is Ushkiin-Uver (the toponym is also transliterated as Ushkiin-Uvur or Ushkiingiin uver), located in the Khövsgöl Aimag of north-central Mongolia. This site features fifteen stag stones of the Mongol-Transbaikal style. According to current counts, including partially preserved fragments of broken stelae, the site had up to 24 stag stones (Deer Stone…, 2021, p. 232). The site was initially surveyed in 1970 and its results subsequently published five years later by V.V. Volkov and E.A. Novgorodova (Volkov, Novgorodova, 1975). Their study provided a concise description of all fifteen stones — focusing primarily on the weaponry depicted around the belt area — along with a site plan and complete line drawings of stones No. 14 and No. 15. However, detailed descriptions of the deer figures and an exact count of their number were absent. In Volkov's later monographs on Mongolian stag stones, the section regarding Ushkiin-Uver largely recapitulates the 1975 text. References to the specific number of deer depicted on various stone faces appear only sporadically (Volkov, 1981, pp. 62–66; 2002, pp. 78–83). Furthermore, the plates at the end of these volumes provide drawings of only selected planes; only stones No. 14 and No. 15 are illustrated from all four sides (Volkov, 1981, pp. 196–202, Tables 73–79; 2002, pp. 188–194, Tables 73–79).

From 2003 to 2006, a Japanese-Mongolian expedition led by Professor Takahama Shu of Kanazawa University conducted fieldwork at the site, which they designated in their reports as Ulaan Uushig I. In addition to excavating portions of the site, the Japanese researchers performed comprehensive tracing of all stone surfaces and conducted 3D digital recordings. This approach revealed numerous previously unnoticed details and significantly refined Volkov's original drawings (Takahama Shu et al., 2006, p. 76). The author of this article had the opportunity to visit these excavations in 2006 and meet Professor Takahama Shu personally. In 2013, a Russian-Mongolian expedition led by A.A. Kovalev, in which the author participated, also worked at Ushkiin-Uver. D. Erdenebaatar served as the Mongolian director for both joint expeditions. The Russian-Mongolian team cleared stone structures over a significantly larger area during one season than the Japanese-Mongolian expedition over the course of four seasons (Kovalev, Erdenebaatar, Rukavishnikova, 2016).

The comprehensive three-volume album on the stag stones of Mongolia, published in 2021, contained colour photographs of all 24 stelae from Ushkiin-Uver (including fragmented ones discovered during excavations), but line drawings were provided only for the first fifteen, and these were taken from the publication by Takahama Shu (Deer Stone…, 2021, pp. 265–279). Therefore, in the illustrations to the present article, and also for counting the number of depicted animals, we use the Japanese drawings of the stag stones from Ushkiin-Uver (Takahama Shu et al., 2006, pp. 95–102, pl. 13–20). Naturally, only completely preserved stones — those without missing fragments containing deer imagery — are suitable for this calculation. For descriptive convenience, the lateral surfaces of the stag stones are referred to as "sides", while the front and back surfaces are termed "faces". The count is conducted for each individual surface, with the figures summed at the end of the description. In cases where deer figures wrap around from one surface to another, the animal's eyes are used as the reference

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point for attributing the figure to a specific plane. The presence of earrings on the sides serves as a primary indicator of the preservation of the stone's upper section.

Stag Stone No. 1. The top of the stone is broken. There are no depictions of earrings on the sides. Three deer figures are preserved on the right side and three on the left; the front face is devoid of imagery, while the back face shows the antlers and part of the muzzle of a single deer. There are no depictions of a belt or weaponry. The stone is unsuitable for the census.

Stag Stone No. 2. The top of the stone is intact. Clear depictions of earrings are present on the sides. The right side contains 16 deer figures, the left — 15, the front face: 4 and the back face: 6; an additional 3 deer figures are located on the top surface. A belt is depicted on the right side and partially on the back face; a shield is also shown just below the belt on the back face. The total count is 16 + 15 + 4 + 6 + 3 = 44 deer figures (Fig. 1.-*1*).

Stag Stone No. 3. The top of the stone is possibly broken. There is no clear depiction of earrings on the sides. Four deer figures are preserved on the right side and four on the left; the front face has no imagery, while the back face shows part of the antlers and the rump of one deer, and the hornless forepart of another. The sides depict a belt with suspended weaponry, and a shield is shown on the back face. The stone is unsuitable for the census.

Stag Stone No. 4. The top of the stone is intact. Clear depictions of earrings are present on the sides. The right side contains 17 deer figures (14 above the belt and 3 below), the left side has 13 (10 above the belt and 3 below), the front face has 5 (4 above the belt and 1 directly on the belt), and the back face has 13 (11 above the belt and 2 below). A belt with weaponry is shown on all surfaces except the front face; a shield is depicted above the belt on the back face, and a circular mirror is shown on the left side. The total count is 17 + 13 + 5 + 13 = 48 deer figures (Fig. 1.-*2*).

Stag Stone No. 5. The stone is fractured, but the top is preserved, allowing the overall appearance to be reconstructed. A clear depiction of an earring is present on the right side. The right side contains 6 deer figures and the left side — 4; the front face has 6 (5 complete figures above the belt and a fragment of antlers below), the back face has 4, and 2 additional figures are on the top surface. A belt is shown on all faces and sides; a shield is depicted above the belt on the back face, a dagger and circular mirror on the left side, and a bow with an arrow and quiver on the front face. The total count is 6 + 4 + 6 + 4 + 2 = 22 deer figures (Fig. 1.-*3*).

Stag Stone No. 6. The top of the stone is broken; no earrings are present on the sides. Two deer figures are depicted on the right side, two on the left, two on the front face, and one on the back face. A belt with suspended weaponry is depicted on all surfaces. A circular mirror is shown above the belt on the left side, and a shield is present on the back face. The stone is unsuitable for the census.

Stag Stone No. 7. The stone is fractured in the middle but remains complete. Clear depictions of earrings are present on the sides; however, the deer figures on the left side and back face may be only partially preserved. The right side contains 12 deer figures, while the left side has 9 (5 above the belt and 4 below). The front face features 2 figures, and the back face has 5. A belt with suspended weaponry is shown on the back and front faces, the left side, and partially on the right side. A shield is located below the belt on the back face, and a circular mirror is shown above the belt on the left side. The total count is 12 + 9 + 2 + 5 = 28 deer figures (Fig. 1.-*4*).

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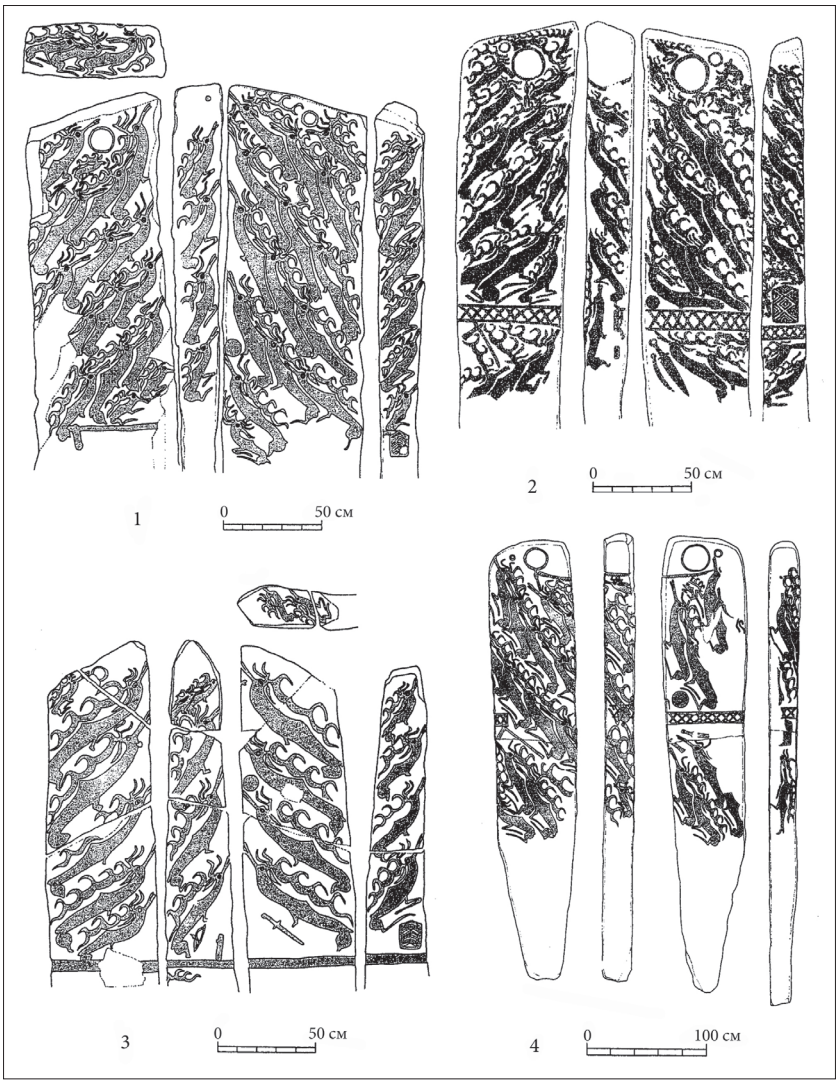


Fig. 1. Stag stones from Ushkiin-Uver: 1 — stone no. 2; 2 — stone no. 4; 3 — stone no. 5; 4 — stone no. 7. As per: (1–4 — Takahama Shu et al., 2006, pp. 95–98, pl. 13–16)

Рис. 1. Оленные камни из Ушкийн-Увэра: 1 — камень № 2, 2 — камень № 4, 3 — камень № 5, 4 — камень № 7. По: (1–4 –Takahama Shu et al., 2006, pp. 95–98, pl. 13–16)

Stag Stone No. 8. The top of the stone is possibly broken; no earrings are visible on the sides. Four deer figures are preserved on the right side and three on the left; the front face has no deer imagery (though two goats are present), and the back face contains two deer. A belt with suspended weaponry is depicted on the back face and partially on the right side. A shield is shown above the belt on the back face, and a circular mirror on the left side. The stone is unsuitable for the census.

Stag Stone No. 9. The top of the stone is broken; no earrings are present on the sides. Three deer figures are preserved on the right side, three on the left, two on the front face, and one on

the back face. A belt with suspended weaponry is depicted on the front and back faces and the right side. A shield is shown above the belt on the back face, while a bow with an arrow, a quiver, and a circular mirror are depicted on the right side. The stone is unsuitable for the census.

Stag Stone No. 10. The top of the stone is intact, but the base is not clearly defined. An earring is depicted on the right side. The right side contains 12 deer figures (11 complete figures and one at the very top near the earring, of which only the antlers and an eye remain); the left side also contains 12. There are 5 deer on the front face and 5 on the back face (4 above the belt and 1 below). A belt with weaponry is shown on the back face and partially on the right side, with a shield above the belt on the back face. The total count is 12 + 12 + 5 + 5 = 34 deer figures (Fig. 2.-*1*).

Stag Stone No. 11. The top of the stone is intact, but the base is not clearly defined. An earring is depicted on the right side. The right side contains 9 deer figures (7 above the belt and 2 below), while the left side has 12 (10 above the belt and 2 below). The front face features 5 figures, and the back face has 8 (7 above the belt and 1 below). A belt with suspended weaponry is shown on all sides, with a circular mirror above the belt on the left side. The total count is 9 + 12 + 5 + 8 = 34 deer figures (Fig. 2.-*3*).

Stag Stone No. 12. The top of the stone is broken; no earrings are present on the sides. Three deer figures are preserved on the right side; the left side features three complete deer and the forepart of a fourth. There are four deer on the front face and one on the back face. A belt with suspended weaponry is depicted on all four planes. A shield is shown above the belt on the back face, a dagger in its scabbard on the right side, and a circular mirror on the left side. The stone is unsuitable for the census.

Stag Stone No. 13. The top of the stone is potentially intact. A depiction of the right earring is present, but the preservation of the deer figures across all planes is poor. Three (possibly four) deer figures are partially preserved on the right side, five on the left, four partially preserved figures on the front face, and two on the back face. No belt or weaponry is depicted, though a shield is present on the back face. The stone is unsuitable for the census.

Stag Stone No. 14. The top of the stone is intact. The front face features a human face in relief carving, while circular earrings are depicted as if inserted into ears on the sides. The right side contains 10 deer figures (5 above the belt and 5 below); the left side has 7 (3 above the belt and 4 below); the front face has 5 (2 above the belt and 3 below); and the back face has 10 (5 above the belt and 5 below). A belt with suspended weaponry is shown on all sides, with a circular mirror above the belt on the left side and a shield on the back face. The total count is 10 + 7 + 5 + 10 = 32 deer figures (Fig. 2.-*2*).

Stag Stone No. 15. The stone is fragmented: the top is broken, the base is lost, and a section from the middle is missing. No earrings are currently visible on the sides (though one was previously noted on the right side). However, based on earlier publications, nearly all deer figures can be reconstructed (Volkov, Novgorodova, 1975, p. 82, Fig. 2; Volkov, 2002, p. 193, Table 78). The right side contains 7 deer figures. The left side has 5 (the hilt of a dagger with a deer-head pommel located below the belt — the blade of which is now lost — could be mistaken for an additional deer figure). The front face features 9 figures (8 above the belt, of which 6 are actually preserved, and the antlers of another deer whose head and neck are lost below the belt). The back face has 5 figures. A belt with suspended weaponry is depicted on the front face and partially on the left side. A circular mirror is shown above the belt on the left side, and a shield on the back face. The total count is 7 + 5 + 9 + 5 = 26 deer figures (Fig. 2.-*4*).

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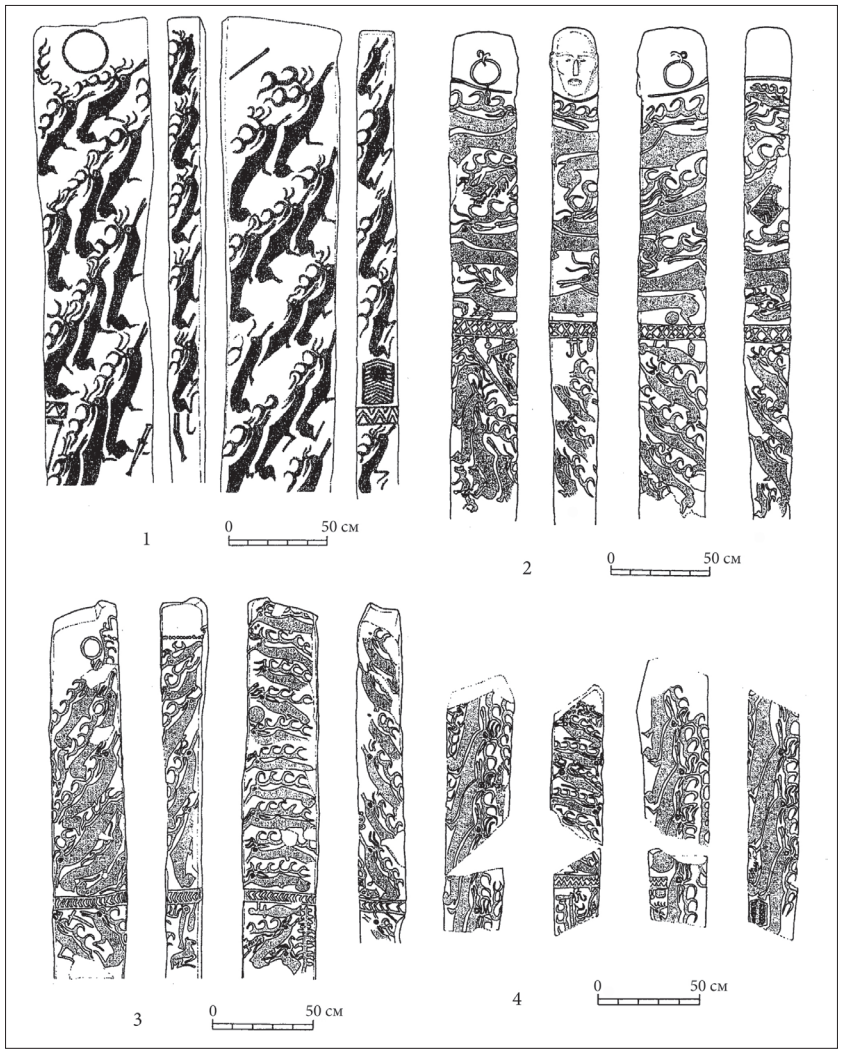


Fig. 2. Stag stones from Ushkiin-Uver: 1 — stone no. 10; 2 — stone no. 14; 3 — stone no. 11; 4 — stone no. 15. As per: (1–4 — Takahama Shu et al., 2006, pp. 100–102, pl. 18, 20)

Рис. 2. Оленные камни из Ушкийн-Увэра: 1 — камень № 10; 2 — камень № 14; 3 — камень № 11; 4 — камень № 15. По: (1–4 — Takahama Shu et al., 2006, pp. 100, 102, pl. 18, 20)

In summary, the relatively well-preserved stag stones at Ushkiin-Uver yield the following counts: No. 2: 44 figures, No. 4: 48 figures, No. 5: 22 figures, No. 7: 28 figures, No. 10: 34 figures, No. 11: 34 figures, No. 14: 32 figures, No. 15: 26 figures. All of these totals are divisible by two. Furthermore, the counts for stones Nos. 2, 4, 7, and 14 are also divisible by four (representing 11, 12, 7, and 8 phratries, respectively), which may serve as corroboration for our proposed hypothesis. Notably, the number of deer on stone No. 5 is exactly half that of stone No. 2; incidentally, these are the only two stones where animal imagery is also present on the top surfaces. It is also significant that the neighbouring stones No. 10 and No. 11 feature an identical number of deer figures.

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Rock Art Depictions of "Stylized" Deer

D.G. Savinov was the first to devote serious scholarly attention to rock art executed in the stag stone style. He defined this as a "distinctive and vibrant artistic canon, epitomized by the Mongol-Transbaikal type stag stones, characterized by deer with smoothly outlined bodies and a triangular dorsal protrusion, beak-shaped muzzles with a leaf-like ear and large rounded eye <…> branched antlers extending along the entire length of the back" (Savinov, 1990, p. 174). Beyond Mongolia, Savinov identified such imagery in Transbaikalia, Tuva, Gorny Altai, and Kazakhstan. However, the Mongolian Altai Mountains remain a true sanctuary for stag stone style petroglyphs, a fact brilliantly confirmed by the international expedition led by V. D. Kubarev, D. Tseveendorj, and E. Jacobson. Their work resulted in two monographs (Kubarev, Tsevengorj, Yakobson, 2005; Kubarev, 2009). The present article utilizes line drawings of "stag stone style" petroglyphs from these volumes.

Many researchers have viewed these rock art depictions of deer as the origins of the tradition of creating Mongol-Transbaikal style stag stones and the source of their specific decorative treatment (Novgorodova, 1989, pp. 170, 226, 232; Savinov, 1994, pp. 122, 141; Devlet E.G., Devlet M.A., 2011, pp. 57, 62). This perspective was also shared by V.D. Kubarev and his colleagues (Kubarev, Tsevengorj, Yakobson, 2005, p. 59). A specific feature of these petroglyphs, frequently emphasized in comparative studies with stag stones, lies in the spatial organization of the imagery (Savinov, 1994, p. 122). "On a rock face, unlike on a stone stele, there was generally sufficient space for a more liberal placement of figures" (Devlet E.G., Devlet M.A., 2011, p. 60). "The boundaries of rock surfaces, unlike those of statues, are far less constrained, allowing the carriers of the tradition and the authors of the petroglyphs much greater freedom to reproduce the meaning embedded in individual animal figures and multi-figure compositions" (Cheremisin, 2012, p. 311). The paradox of this position lies in the fact that, within the "limited surface space of the statues," their creators managed to arrange dozens of deer figures, achieving a "carpet pattern" effect (Savinov, 1994, p. 121). Conversely, on expansive rock planes, stylized deer are found depicted individually or in small groups of two, three, or four — reaching a maximum of ten at any one time.

We believe the explanation for this contradiction lies in the semantics of the stag stone and the stylized deer figures that cover it. Over forty years ago, E.A. Novgorodova wrote that the structure of a stag stone — specifically the connection between its three segments (divided by the lines of the necklace and belt) — conveys the "essential structure of the universe," while "the monument itself is a hymn to the ancestor who gave life to its descendants," with the "primary space and role reserved for the totemic image — the stag" (Novgorodova, 1984, p. 109). From this, it is only a small step to the conclusion that if the stag is the totem of an ancient collective, then its individual depictions on the stele-macrocosm correspond to the social groups constituting that collective — most likely lineages. Our working hypothesis, verified in the previous part of this article, suggests that the society that created the stag stones possessed a dual-exogamic organization, meaning the number of deer on each stele should be even, and frequently a multiple of four.

Scholars of Mongolian Altai rock art have emphasized that "the diagonal arrangement of deer figures in petroglyphs <…> is identical to their placement on many Central Asian stag stones. It stands to reason that the semantics of such subjects are consistent across both types of archaeological monuments" (Kubarev, Tsevengorj, Yakobson, 2005, p. 98). If this reasoning holds true, the rules of

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ancient sociology (dual-exogamic lineage organization) proposed to explain stag stone semantics should also apply to petroglyphic depictions. We shall attempt to test this idea below.

Composition 397 (Khar-Salaa IV): This panel features a group of four deer rendered in the "stag stone style" (Fig. 3.-*1*). All deer face right; they exhibit elongated, sinuous bodies with dorsal protrusions ("humps"), extended muzzles (the lead pair being longer and more slender), branched antlers, and — in three out of four cases — non-reduced legs. The deer are arranged in pairs, one above the other. In our view, this perfectly illustrates the concept of a social union consisting of four lineages within a dual-exogamic framework.

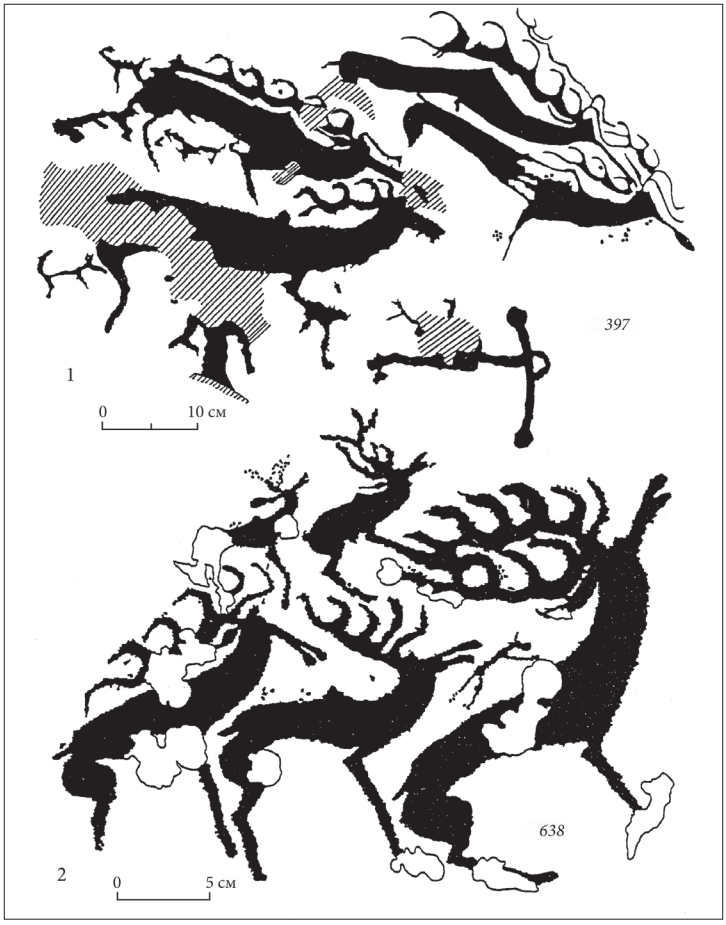


Fig. 3. Stylized deer of Mongolian Altai: 1 — composition 397, Khar Salaa IV; 2 — composition 638, Khar Salaa VI. As per: (1–2 — Kubarev, 2009, pp. 151, 211)
Рис. 3. Стилизованные олени Монгольского Алтая: 1 — композиция 397, Хар Салаа IV; 2 — композиция 638, Хар Салаа VI. По: (1–2 — Кубарев, 2009, с. 151, 211)

Composition 638 (Khar-Salaa VI): A similar group of four animals is depicted here (Fig. 3.-*2*). All deer again face right and are arranged in pairs. However, rather than the classical Mongol-Transbaikal style, they demonstrate a stylistic variation transitional to the Sayan-Altai

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style. A deer pecked in a similar manner is also found on the western slope of the Mongolian Altai within the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China (Varenov, 2018b, p. 17, Fig. 4.-*3*).

Groups of four animals have been identified at several other sites in the Mongolian part of Altai. Composition 1300 (Tsagaan-Gol, left bank) depicts four antlered stags moving in single file from left to right on long, non-reduced legs, executed in a style transitional between the Mongol-Transbaikal and Sayan-Altai traditions (Fig. 4.-*1*). Composition 358 (Khar-Salaa IV) presents four horses facing right, arranged vertically in the Sayan-Altai "sudden halt" posture (Fig. 4.-*2*). Composition 631 (Khar-Salaa VI) shows four antlerless deer — likely female does — moving diagonally upward and to the left (Fig. 4.-*3*). These represent the simplest cases of group compositions where the number of animals is a multiple of four, all being of the same species and sex.

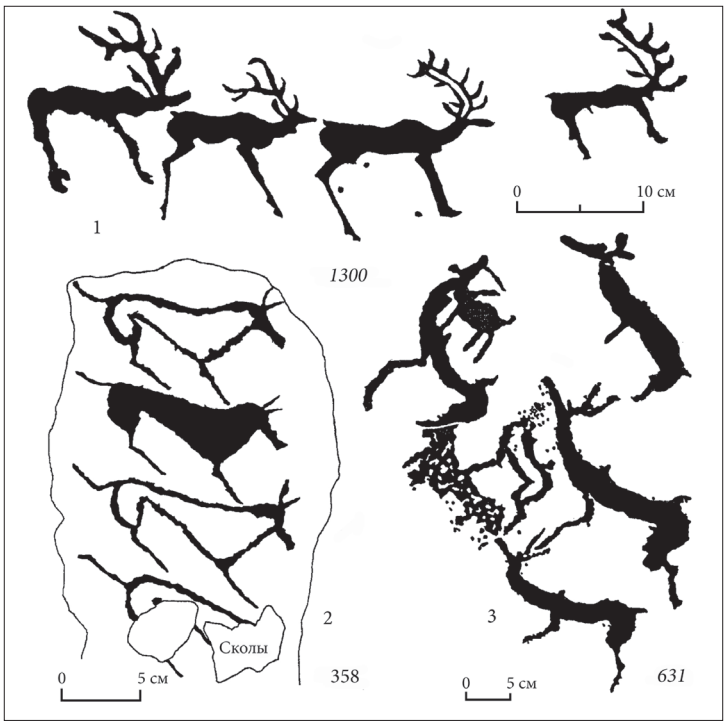


Fig. 4. Stylized deer of Mongolian Altai: 1 — composition 1300, Tsagaan-Gol (left bank); 2 — composition 358, Har Salaa IV; 3 — composition 631, Har Salaa VI. As per: (1–3 — Kubarev, 2009, pp. 142, 208, 390)

Рис. 4. Стилизованные олени Монгольского Алтая: 1 — композиция 1300, Цагаан-Гол (левый берег); 2 — композиция 358, Хар Салаа IV; 3 — композиция 631, Хар Салаа VI. По: (1–3 — Кубарев, 2009, с. 142, 208, 390)

Composition 1276 (Tsagaan-Salaa): This panel features six stylized deer in a so-called "circular motion" arrangement (Fig. 5.-*1*). The figures are densely packed and only partially depicted. Three consist only of heads and necks, while the other three include the head, neck, and forepart of the torso, making a detailed analysis of the imagery quite challenging. We utilized the animals' eyes as diagnostic landmarks to determine the exact number of figures. The lower tier contains four deer moving from right to left: the two rear animals have muzzles extending forward (to the

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left), while the heads of the two lead animals are turned back, facing the rear deer. The upper tier consists of partial figures (heads and necks only) of two additional deer facing one another.



Fig. 5. Stylized deer of Mongolian Altai and their Chinese analogues: 1 — composition 1276, Tsagaan Salaa; 2 — composition from Guitougou gorge; 3 — composition from Suyukou gorge. As per: (1 — Kubarev, 2009, p. 383; 2, 3 — Varenov, 2018a, pp. 31, 32; 2018b, pp. 20, 21)

Рис. 5. Стилизованные олени Монгольского Алтая и их китайские аналоги: 1 — композиция 1276, Цагаан Салаа; 2 — композиция из ущелья Гуйтоугоу; 3 — композиция из ущелья Суюйкоу. По: 1 — (Кубарев, 2009, с. 383; 2, 3 — Варенов, 2018a, с. 31, 32; 2018b, с. 20, 21)

It is evident that in Composition 1276 at Tsagaan-Salaa, the lower tier — comprising four deer with muzzles facing each other in pairs — represents four lineages linked by a dual-exogamic organization. It appears that the two upper deer represent an additional two linked exogamous lineages belonging to the same six-lineage social structure, though occupying a higher hierarchical position than the others. Compositionally similar layouts of stylized deer are found in the Helan Mountains within the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region of China (Varenov, 2018a, pp. 31–32; 2018b, pp. 19–22). In the Guitougou Gorge of Pingluo County, a flat stone slab measuring 23×25 cm was discovered with seven stylized deer pecked onto its surface. Three of these depictions are complete — one capping the composition at the top and two at the bottom — while the four figures situated between them are partial representations. In two instances, only the heads, necks, and antlers are shown, while the remaining two consist solely of a circular eye and a beak-shaped muzzle (Fig. 5.-*2*). In a composition from the Suyukou Gorge in Helan County, three stylized deer

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surround a predation scene: two face each other from opposite sides to enclose the scene from above, while a third closes it from below (Fig. 5.-*3*).

Composition 948 at Baga Oigur II depicts ten stylized deer, including both antlered (male) stags and antlerless (female) does (Fig. 6.-*1*). The upper tier features four stags moving to the right with their antlered heads facing forward, preceded by a single antlerless female doe. These figures exhibit slender, elongated bodies, long straight legs, and antlers of moderate size. Below the stags are four smaller antlerless figures (females). Further down, a single male faces left, differing in body proportions and antler shape from the animals in the upper tier. A seated male figure is pecked near its muzzle, while a female figure is placed before the doe in the upper row. Judging by the stylistic variations, the upper tier of five deer (four males and one female) was likely pecked first, and another individual subsequently added a second row of five deer below it, though of the opposite sex. Alternatively, the original composition may have consisted of the four males in the upper row and the four females in the lower row. In this scenario, the female in the upper row and the male at the very bottom were later additions, a possibility supported by the latter's peripheral placement. The inclusion of male and female human figures adjacent to these two deer clearly indicates that the animal drawings represent humans — most likely entire social groups.

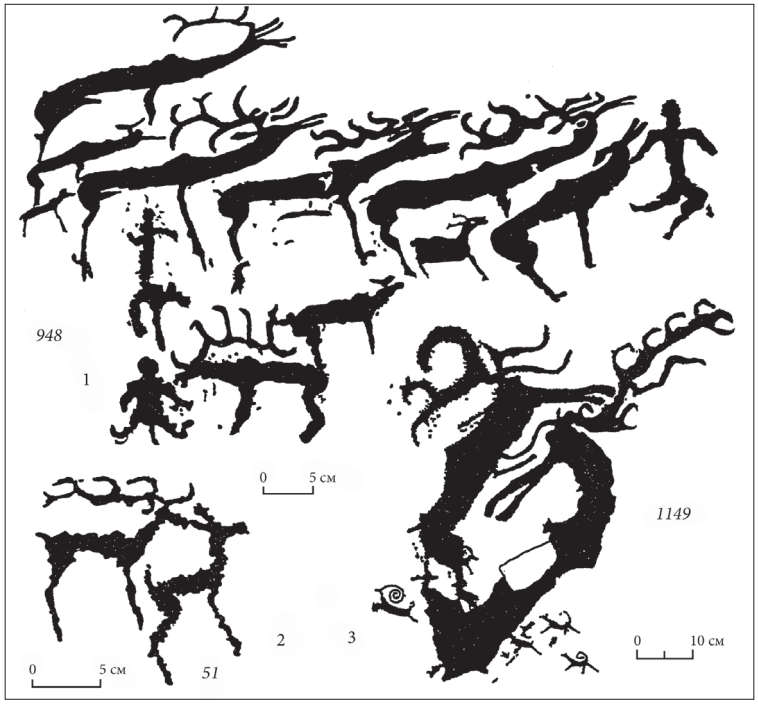


Fig. 6. Stylized deer of Mongolian Altai: 1 — composition 948, Baga Oigor II; 2 — composition 51, Tsagaan Salaa I; 3 — composition 1149, Tsagaan-Gol (right bank). As per: (1, 2 — Kubarev, Tsevengorj, Yakobson, 2005, pp. 158, 373; 3 — Kubarev, 2009, p. 349)

Рис. 6. Стилизованные олени Монгольского Алтая: 1 — композиция 948, Бага Ойгур II; 2 — композиция 51, Цагаан Сала I; 3 — композиция 1149, Цагаан-Гол (правый берег). По: (1, 2 — Кубарев, Цэвэндорж, Якобсон, 2005, с. 158, 373; 3 — Кубарев, 2009, с. 349)

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The most numerous depictions are paired stylized deer. These include both same-sex pairs (most frequently both antlered) and opposite-sex pairs (Fig. 6.-*2*). According to E. G. and M. A. Devlet, "the combination of a pair of deer and a fawn <…> is associated with the concept of reproduction" (Devlet E.G., Devlet M.A., 2011, p. 61). This observation was echoed by researchers of Mongolian Altai petroglyphs, who posited that "frequently encountered opposite-sex pairs <…> reflect the eternal theme of fertility" (Kubarev, Tsevengorj, Yakobson, 2005, p. 98). However, while the invocation of reproduction and "fertility" may be justified for depiction of opposite-sex figures, this model fails to account for same-sex pairs (Fig. 6.-*3*). The recent trend of same-sex unions observed among members of today's Western civilization was unlikely to have found understanding or sympathy among the Cervidae or other animal species. Naturally, in such a case, reproduction would not have been a factor.

Conclusion

In our view, the same interpretive methods rooted in ancient sociology that apply to large-scale compositions — including those featuring dozens of individuals on the planes of stag stones — are equally valid and justified for paired depictions of stylized deer in rock art. As is well known, stag stones exclusively depict antlered deer, i.e., males. From the perspective of the entire tribe and its primal ancestor embodied in the monument, all constituent lineages within said collective are gender-equal; hence, antlerless deer (females) are absent from these stelae. Consequently, the figure of an individual stylized deer on a rock surface likely represents the desire of a member of the ancient society to denote their specific lineage, a practice analogous to the application of tamgas to rock faces in later periods (Varenov, 2018b, p. 26). The occasionally crude renderings of stylized deer in rock art, which depart noticeably from the classical canon, were likely produced by amateur artists rather than the professional masters — who presumably utilized templates — entrusted with the decoration of stag stones (Devlet E.G., Devlet M.A., 2011, p. 60).

The presence of two deer figures on a single rock plane likely reflects a situation where individuals sought to represent not only their own lineage but also that of their spouse, linked to their own within a dual-exogamic framework. In such cases, the deer could be depicted as either same-sex or opposite-sex, with the latter emphasizing that the spouse's lineage was, from the artist's perspective, specifically the female lineage. If the creator of the petroglyphs was a woman, all four deer representing the kin groups might be depicted as females, as seen in Composition 631 at Khar-Salaa VI (Fig. 4.-*3*). It is possible that Composition 948 at Baga Oigur II, featuring ten deer, was initiated by a man who depicted four stags symbolizing closely related lineages. Subsequently, his wife may have added four females (the lineages linked to the first four) and, as a "finishing touch," individual drawings of a stag and a doe adjacent to male and female human figures, thereby designating herself and her husband (Fig. 5.-*2*).

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