
THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL LANDSCAPES OF TAMGALY AND ESHKIOLMES SANCTUARIES RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND CULT CEREMONIES

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Abstract

This article examines the archaeological landscapes of Tamgaly and Eshkiolmes sanctuaries, religious beliefs and cult ceremonies based on the analysis of petroglyphs. The intertribal Tamgaly sanctuary of the Bronze Age, Early Iron Age and Turkic period is located in the lower Chu-Ili Mountains of the Tian Shan mountain system. With a pantheon of the Sun gods and the composed and coherent groups of petroglyphs in the centre, the sanctuary represented 'looped' areas in the canyon of the dried-up bed of the Tamgaly River with the compositional centre. Dedicated to the Sun gods of the sanctuary, the Tamgaly religious theatrical ceremony of a sacred rite had references to Indo-Aryan mythology. Cult ceremonies were performed moving along particular routes, most likely along circles. Back in time, the Tian Shan architectonics together with the Eshkiolmes petroglyphs represented a sacred space with numerous deep gorges leading to the Koksuu Valley. Each gorge was a separate regional sanctuary of a clan or tribe. Compared to Tamgaly rites, Eshkiolmes inhabitants developed and practiced more individualized models of appealing to higher powers by the end of the Iron Age. It was likely that every hunter or farmer had the right and could 'personally' appeal to higher powers without the mediation of shamans, priests, or others. The Indo-Iranian myths with the images of heavenly horses, argalis, solar chariot, archers, warriors, celestial deer, cosmic bird, were familiar to the Sakas. The Eshkiolmes petroglyphs unfold their special artistic topography and ontology of human life centred on the belief in the gods of Indo-Iranian mythology in the Iron Age.

Keywords: religious cults, petroglyphs, Bronze Age, Early Iron Age, mythology

1. Introduction

In ancient times, petroglyphs were a means of communication between man and gods, man and society, man and man. Since petroglyphs had a communicative

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function, we can examine them as an art shaping a new way of thinking and expression of a worldview and social organization.

In the early Bronze and Iron Ages, ceremonial shamans chose particular mountain landscapes to perform sacral and religious ceremonies according to the functional purpose of the sanctuary and the availability of suitable surfaces for engraving petroglyphs.

Employing a comparative analysis of the two sanctuaries (Tamgaly and Eshkiolmes), we have sought to show that these religious rites, rituals and ceremonies had been taking shape during 3000 or 4000 thousand years in a particular mountain landscape. Shamans chose a landscape believing that the gods were invisibly present in those sacred places. The gorges used as sanctuaries had a certain sacred purpose and application: intertribal – in Tamgaly, and regional – in Eshkiolmes. Other criteria were excellent acoustics creating a magic effect and rock surfaces for engraving petroglyphs.

Performed in the sanctuaries for many centuries, numerous sacrificial rites testify to the stability of religious rites on the territory of Jeti-Su. In a sacrificial rite, the image of a sacrificial victim was drawn on the rock to connect the world of the living with the world of the ancestors.

The Eshkiolmes petroglyphs of the Iron Age serve as the evidence to support a suggestion about the individualized human consciousness in the Saka era. They also reveal synchronicity in phenomenological dimension of ancient humans. Perhaps, contemporary Kazakh sacrificial rituals with their iconic symbolism replicate universal semantic mythic models and units rooted in the structural constants of the ancient myths.

2. Results and discussion

2.1. Archaeological landscapes of Jeti-Su - physical and geographical descriptions of Tamgaly and Eshkiolmes

Located in the south-eastern part of the Chu-Ili Mountains, Tamgaly is a part of the plain desert-steppe zone of the Northern Tian Shan Province within 160 km from Almaty. Its natural and cultural landscape consists of the following components: natural boundary, picturesque relief, and numerous archaeological sites (settlements, burial grounds, petroglyphs, etc.) beginning from the Bronze Age. The terraced mountains with gloss-black patina surfaces create a unique canvas for ancient petroglyphs.

Currently, the region is seismically active with possible earthquakes up to 5-6 points on a 12-point scale [1].

Most of the Tamgaly archaeological landscape is composed of Devonian sedimentary layers consisting of a mixture of sandstones and siltstones positioned at 40° angle. These particular rock surfaces carry the petroglyphs of I-V groups (see Figure 1). The dry bed of the Tamgaly River separates the petroglyphs of IV-V groups. Over the ages, tectonic activity and thermal heating cracked the rocks and contributed to the deterioration and destruction of rocks with the petroglyphs.

Some fallen rocks with the petroglyphs can be found near the petroglyphs of II group [1, p. 159-164].

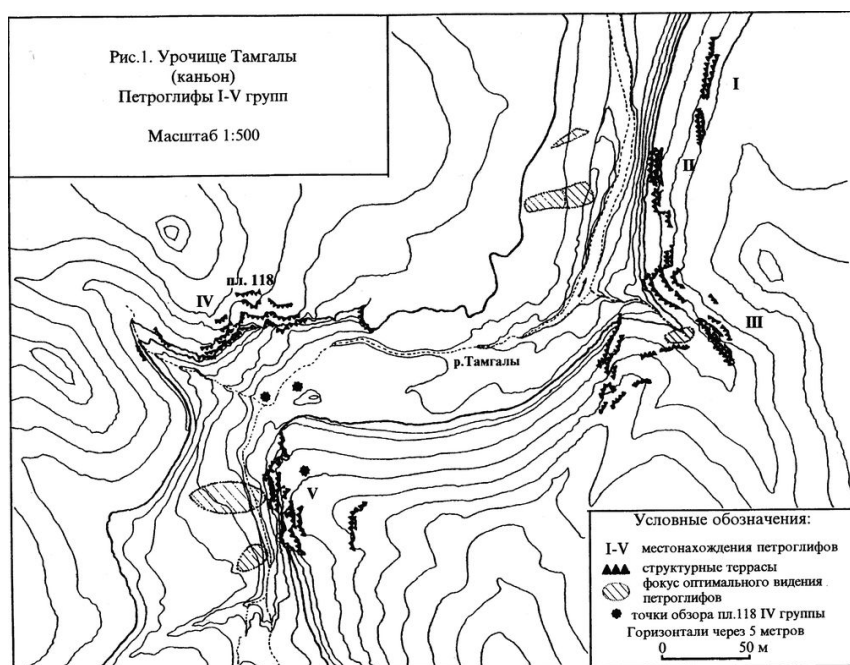


Figure 1. The Tamgaly tract (canyon) (scale 1:500). Legend: местонахождение I-V - location of petroglyphs; структурные террасы - structural terraces; фокус оптимального видения петроглифов - focus of optimal vision of terraces; точки обзора пл. 118 IV группы - point of view pl. 118 group IV; горизонталь через 5 метров - horizontal after 5 m.

The dome-shaped hill and the S-shaped canyon are important characteristics of the archaeological landscape because they are hallmarks of the sanctuary. In ancient times, the Tamgaly Valley was located in a zigzag rocky canyon where, according to archaeological research, there are five main areas with the petroglyphs (groups I - V) with about three thousand images [1, p 180].

Consisting of the petroglyphs of I, II, V groups, the gallery is located at the top west side of the canyon. The petroglyphs of group I are located 400 meters from the dome-shaped hill and followed by the petroglyphs of group II. The third group of the petroglyphs is located in the cleft to the east from the petroglyphs of group II. Finally, the petroglyphs of group V are located approximately 800 meters from group III and opposite, across the valley of the canyon, to the central group IV – the ‘pantheon’ of the Sun gods.

Unlike the Tamgaly petroglyphs on the terraced rocks of the canyon creating a unified mythological and cultural space, petroglyphs of the Eshkiolmes sanctuary fit a completely different landscape because they are carved and etched on the numerous cliffs of the Eshkiolmes range located to the south of Taldy-Kurgan.

A.E. Rogozhinsky, B.J. Aubekeroev and R. Sala [2] provide a detailed description of the geological structure of the Koxsu Valley and the Eshkiolmes mountain ridge (Figure 2). Inhabited since ancient times, Talapty depression is located between the ridge Jungarian Alatau of Tian Shan and the ridge Eshkiolmes with the Koxsu River basin. The low mountains of Eshkiolmes have heights from 850 to 1300 meters. The northern mountains have hilly slopes with rocky remains of the Devonian period. The southern side is steep, divided by numerous gorges. The petroglyphs are found on patina parts of the cliffs in the crests and slopes of steep gorges. As of now, the petroglyphs on the right bank of the Koxsu River and the western part of the Eshkiolmes ridge are better documented and described while the research of the ones on the left bank leaves much to be desired.

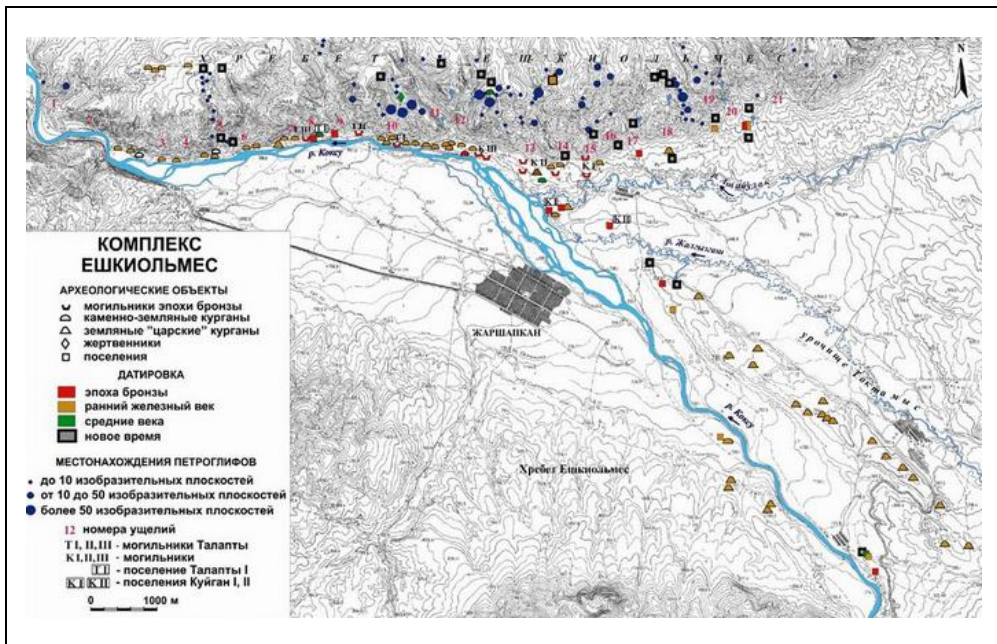


Figure 2. The map of Eshkiolmes complex. Legend: АРХЕОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ ОБЪЕКТЫ - ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBJECTS; могильники эпохи бронзы - cemeteries of the Bronze Age; каменно-земляные курганы - stone-earth burial mounds; земляные 'царские' курганы - earth 'royal' mounds; жертвенники - altars; поселения - settlements; ДАТИРОВКА - DATE; эпоха бронзы - Bronze Age; ранний железный век - Early Iron Age; средние века - Middle Ages; новое время - Modern Age; МЕСТОНАХОЖДЕНИЕ ПЕТРОГЛИФОВ - LOCATION OF PETROGRIFTS; до 10 изобразительных плоскостей - to 10 fine planes; от 10 до 50 изобразительных плоскостей - from 10 to 50 fine surfaces; более 50 изобразительных плоскостей - more than 50 graphic planes; 12 номера ущелий - 12 gorges numbers; Могильники Талапты - Talapty burial grounds; Могильники - burial grounds; Поселение Талапты I - Settlement of Talapty I; Поселение Куйган I, II - Settlement Kuysan I, II.

A. N. Maryashev's expedition researched and explored the site to find a concentration of petroglyphs in the gorges 10, 11-14 and 18 [3]. They contain more than 50% of the Eshkiolmes petroglyphs, including cave paintings of the Bronze Age, Early Iron Age and Turkic time. The Eshkiolmes petroglyphs can also be found in the foothill and mountain zones of the Koxsu River.

Compared to the Chu-Ili Mountains the Eshkiolmes ridge is much higher. It also has a system of deep gorges stretching off the Koxsu Valley for almost 20 kilometres. We suggest that every canyon of Eshkiolmes is essentially a private or shared sanctuary of a clan or tribe, unlike the intertribal Tamgaly sanctuary.

2.2. Functional zoning and reconstructed ceremonial cult in the Tamgaly sanctuary

The territory of the Tamgaly sanctuary was functionally divided into ceremonial and residential areas separated by a 'buffer' space with no signs of development. The traditional character of space zoning is confirmed by the fact that it was preserved without changes for over three thousand years of history of the site, since the Middle Bronze Age [1, p. 209].

In the Late Bronze Age, small groups of petroglyphs appear over a greater part of the gorge. They only partly preserve continuity with the ancient petroglyphs of Tamgaly. At the same period new burial grounds arise.

The researchers suggest that the sanctuary was the place for performing collective and private ceremonial and sacrificial rites [4].

In the Bronze Age, sacrifice was a major element of the worship along with dancing, chariots, and chants. Only as parts of the ritual, the elements acquired a particular meaning, reflecting and shaping the worldview of the primitive man. Birds, animals, plants and humans could be chosen as sacrificial victims.

For many years, researchers have studied the Tamgaly petroglyphs and the archaeological landscape of the sanctuary to find the cult sanctuary area (group IV-IVa) with images of the sun gods (Figure 3) [1, p. 209]. It was demarcated by a 'buffer' zone of 500 meters with no signs of development or sites of the Bronze Age. The Tamgaly River flows through the valley in a close proximity to the right slope of the gorge with the petroglyphs of V group. Most likely, dividing the space into the 'profane' and sacred space of the sanctuary, the river was an important element of the sacred topography [5].

We also believe that the sacrificial rite was performed as a ceremonial procession through the sacral space of the Tamgaly sanctuary. Only priests and shamans could invite a limited circle of ordinary people to participate in the sacrificial rites. Our conclusion is based on the topography of the space and spatial characteristics of the sanctuary. In our opinion, the limited space precluded a huge number of participants in the ceremonial procession.

A.E. Rogozhinsky was among the first archaeologists who drew attention to the fact that different types of galleries of groups II-IV offer a certain view to a visitor (in our case - the participant of ceremonial procession). There is a special 'stop' place or a platform, labelled by a particular image, for example, a horse, which is present as a stop mark in III and IV groups. Thus, the system of the

uniform petroglyphs offers a map of the route for a leading priest and ceremonial procession. The movement of the procession from one group of petroglyphs to the other followed a specific algorithm and logic of religious narrative embedded in the rocks of the sanctuary [1, p. 82-85].

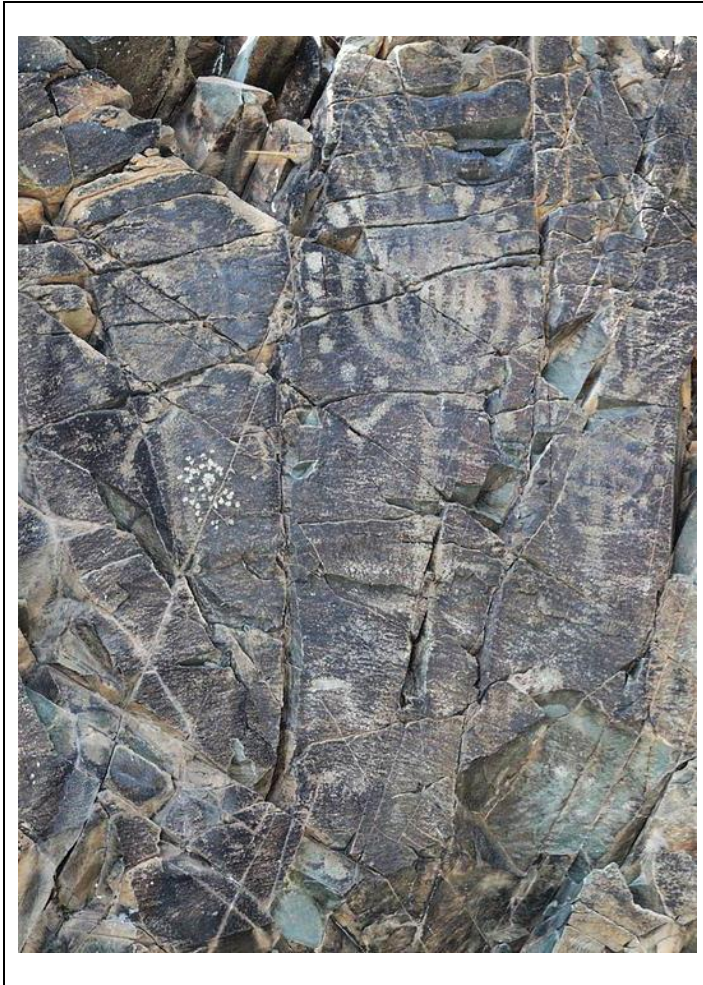


Figure 3. The image of the sun god on the rocks of Tamgaly
[https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%A2%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%B3%D0%B0%D0%B%D1%8B#/media/File:Tamgaly_main_petroglyph.jpg/].

The mythic connotations of the Bronze Age petroglyphs prove that Tamgaly served as a sacred place for rituals and ceremonies. The group IV served as a compositional and semantic centre of the sanctuary. The rituals and ceremonies culminated in sacrifice and cremation, performed in the area near the IV group petroglyphs [4]. The famous researcher A.G. Medoev was interested in the mysteries of the sanctuary and spent long time studying Tamgaly. He also coined the term ‘Tamgaly tradition’ to refer to the repertoire and content of the

Bronze Age petroglyphs of Kazakhstan [4, p. 169]. In addition, in his book ‘The Engravings on the Rocks’ A. G. Medoev described the layout of Tamgaly and contemplated that the territory might have served as a primitive temple for ritualistic theatrical performances [6].

The functional zoning of Tamgaly as the most important sacral centre in the Central Asian region was almost invariably preserved for over three thousand years of history since the Middle Bronze Age. It was divided into sacred and residential zones with three formative parts: 1) ‘propylaeum’ symbolically marked by the hill; 2) sacral centre of the sanctuary – the pantheon of the Sun gods; 3) the galleries of petroglyph groups forming the coherent and cohesive narrative with the pantheon in the centre [7]. In addition, the Tamgaly sanctuary had a developed cult ritual dedicated to the gods of the sanctuary. It was manifested in the sacred ceremonial procession moving along a certain route, possibly in circles.

2.3. The development of the Eshkiolmes ridge landscape and the description of petroglyphs

In 1982, the expedition of the Abai Kazakh State Pedagogical Institute studied the mountains of Eshkiolmes. In 1980-2000, it was followed by the expeditions of the A. Margulan Institute of Archaeology of the National Academy of Sciences of Kazakhstan headed by A.N. Maryashev. Indeed, it was A.N. Maryashev who dated the petroglyphs of Eshkiolmes by the Bronze Age to Turkic period [8].

Covered with dense forest, the Koksuy Valley was settled and developed more than three thousand years ago: tribes engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry, used trees for construction and ore smelting in the Bronze Age. Archaeologists have found the Bronze Age settlement in the Talapty Valley on the right bank of the Koksuy and the burial of the Bronze Age and Early Iron Age in the area of the 13th gorge. They also determined that the Koksuy Valley was settled by nomadic tribes from XII AD to XII BC [8]. Over time, the population of Jeti-Su, and in particular, of the Koksuy Valley changed from the complex pastoral-agricultural economy to a nomadic one. Numerous burials of the Saka era stretch for 20-25 km on the right bank of the Koksuy River and testify the important fact - compared to the Bronze Age in the Early Iron Age the population of the valley increased considerably. Archaeologists have found that the burials belonged to different tribes distinguished by ground pits, stone structures and mounds [8]. In Saks and Usun periods, the valley was also densely populated. The claim is supported by a large number of burials compared to a little number of settlements, due to the fact that, probably, the nomads moved around and used temporary tents. There are a few medieval settlements found in a tributary of the Koksuy River.

Archaeologists confirmed the fact that the Koksuy Valley has been inhabited since ancient times: first, people settled at the piedmont of the Eshkiolmes on the right bank of the Koksuy River, and later they spread over the wide valley on the

right side of the river during the turn of II - I millennium BC [8]. After that the settlements have been established in the gorges and flat parts of the ridge. Starting the late Bronze Age, there was a road along the river to the alpine pastures of Jungarian Alatau [8].

Rock paintings have been found in many gorges stretching from west to east for more than twenty kilometres. A few small groups of petroglyphs are found in all gorges, but the larger clusters of petroglyphs are found in eleven gorges. During expeditions A.N. Maryashev examined twenty-four gorges of the Eshkiolmes ridge. In one of his recent monographs, he mentioned that about 10,000 petroglyphs were found in the valley with most of them located in the gorge 11, downstream the Koksuy River [9].

The expeditions headed by A.N. Maryashev [8, p. 20-21, 46-50] studied 24 gorges and found the conglomerates of petroglyphs of different periods in the gorges 5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 19, 20, 22, 24. Most petroglyphs represent animal figures, there are also scenes of hunting, sacrifice, fighting, more than a hundred chariots, a few figures of sun deities [8]. Consequently, archaeologists acknowledge that it is difficult to establish the date of the petroglyphs by stylistic criteria, since stone carving methods combined different traditions: the figures of people and animals were carved, and such details as the mane, tail and sometimes legs were etched. The researcher identifies two groups of petroglyphs belonging to the Bronze Age, one dates back XIV - XIII BC and the other – XII - IX BC, both including most of the Eshkiolmes petroglyphs [10].

It should be noted that the petroglyphs of the Saka time included a few images of goats and argali, and the petroglyphs of the Early Iron Age make up 40% of all petroglyphs with the largest number found in the gorges 10, 11, 12, 13 and 20. Therefore, we can consider the Eshkiolmes petroglyphs to be historical monuments of the Saka time. The key images of the Saka petroglyphs include deer, oxen, horses, goats, wild rams, eagles, panthers and wolves [8, p. 67]. The high artistic value and concentration of petroglyphs in the gorges 11 and 14 are exemplary of the Saka time. A.N. Maryashev writes that the earliest petroglyphs in the gorges 11-14 differ from the petroglyphs of the Tamgaly tradition [9, p. 20]. The researcher also underlines the continuous evolution of carving and etching that culminated in the development of the technique of graffiti starting from the Late Bronze Age to the Middle Ages. This intricate technique probably used a thin cutter that allowed ancient artists not only to supply the images with small details like arrow heads, quivers, chariots, teeth, but also to achieve a high level of expression. This technique has been further developed during the Early Iron Age [9, p. 22].

Nomadic tribes settled in and developed the Koksuy Valley from XII BC to XII AD. Compared to the numbers of the Bronze Age, the population of the valley has increased significantly in the Saka time. The total number of the Saka petroglyphs is approximately 40% of the total number of the Eshkiolmes petroglyphs. It indicates that the Eshkiolmes historical monument of the petroglyphs in Eshkiolmes belong mostly to the Saka time.

2.4. Religious plots of the Eshkiolmes petroglyphs

A number of researchers including E.E. Kuzmina [11] and A.K. Akishev [12] insist on the applicability of the Rig Veda and Avesta to the reconstruction of Scythian (in this case Saka) cosmogony and mythology. The researchers found that the central concepts and subjects, the names of gods and heroes as well as many rituals, poetic imagery and ceremonial formulas are typical for both Avesta and the Rig Veda. Thus, the ontological system belonged to all Indo-Iranian peoples including the Scythians-Sakas who preserved it [11, p. 21].

Let's examine the natural landscape of the Eshkiolmes historical monument and the archetypes of petroglyphs in the context of Indo-Iranian mythology. First, it should be emphasized that no other region in Central Asia and Kazakhstan comes close to Jeti-Su of the Saka epoch in terms of quantity and quality of historic monuments and royal burials. Jeti-Su - is a sacred country of Sakas, the royal residence and Saka sanctuary.

We believe that the tradition of engraving patterns on the top of the ridge is associated with the cult/worship of the mountains, so, in our opinion, the researcher of Saka mythology A. Akishev has solid grounds to claim that the mythopoeic consciousness viewed the topography of the Tian Shan mountain range as a metaphor for the connection of the three worlds (upper, middle, and lower). It illustrates the common "Indo-European mythological motif specifically related to shamanism as a religion (that particular mythological image is known to almost all peoples, familiar with the concept of the mountain)" [12, p. 21].

In his study of Saka mythology and art, A. Akishev writes that the ancient tribes of Jeti-Su had Indo-European words as toponyms reflecting vertical nomadic routes from winter locations in the foothills up to highland summer pastures [12, p. 21]. Thus the vertical connecting the top and the bottom was a part of both nomadic *praxis* and petroglyphs' location that depended on their proximity to the top of the mountain. God Mitra was an intermediary between the gods and humans. He was considered a guarantor of the social contract. Omniscient Mitra observes the world from the top of the mountains [12, p. 22]. Thus, natural sanctuaries of the Tian -Shan including Eshkiolmes with numerous drawings of sacred animals symbolized the model of the Universe.

It should be noted that the sacralisation of animals began with the advent of totems long before the Saka time. Totem is a patron of the tribe presented in the form of an animal. All members of the tribe considered totem to be sacred even before the advent of agriculture and animal husbandry in the Stone Age [13]. Domestic animals, especially cattle, were also objects of sacralisation [14].

The Eshkiolmes petroglyphs of sacred animals include goats, argalis, deers, sheep, camels, horses, snow leopards, tigers, eagles. The image of the goat is probably the most ancient and frequent one. A.P. Okladnikov links the cult of fertility with the goat. The images of goats are often found in erotic scenes and animal mating scenes, etc. In their studies B.A. Litvinskiy [15] and A.A. Gorjacheva [16] show the connection between the goat and the cult of the mountains, a tree cycle and fertility, and chthonic beliefs. In the Ancient East, the

goat was the agent of male fertility, the tree of life and mother-goddess. In Eshkiolmes one can find rocks with the petroglyphs of goats and a cup-shaped hole. A.N. Maryashev suggests that the stones with cup-shaped holes appeared in Jeti-Su in the Bronze Age and were used for a ritual of goat sacrifice [8, p. 73].

Since wild goats and argali have a wide habitat in the mountains, their images are the most popular motifs of petroglyphs in the Eshkiolmes gorges. Some Eshkiolmes gorges have goat petroglyphs depicted in circle [8]. According to Akishev, a circle (girdling, lineation, fencing) represents the idea of invisibility and protection from evil, relevant in such ceremonies as a wedding [12, p. 40].

Bull holds a special role among the sacred animals. Eshkiolmes have the petroglyphs of the shorthorn bulls while Tamgaly has ones of the longhorn bulls. Overall, the motif of the bull or the ox was central to Kazakh petroglyphs during the Chalcolithic era. In many religions, the bull is a part of the fertility rites. In Eshkiolmes one can find the bull images traced in a thin line or contoured in the Scythian-Saka style. Researchers also found earlier petroglyphs of bulls with ringed horns and dated them by the Bronze Age [8, p. 68]. A. N. Maryashev notes that in the mountains of Eshkiolmes the cult of the bull withered during the Late Bronze Age and later lost its leading position in the Saka time [8, p. 74]. However, the trend does not apply to the horse.

The big number of chariot petroglyphs supports the fact that in the Bronze Age the horse became the main means of transport. It can be assumed that the cult of the horse emerged and took shape at the same time. In the Eshkiolmes sanctuary the horse images as well as the chariot images associated with the sun cult are dated by the Bronze Age [10, p. 75]. In the Iron Age and the Middle Ages, the horse was also one of the central sacred images in the Eshkiolmes sanctuary and in other ancient sacred sites of Kazakhstan. Thus, the horse is the central sacred symbol in Central Asia and Kazakhstan [8, p. 75].

According to A. Akisheva, the 'animalistic style' took shape under the influence of southern traditions when Sakas went to the Near East and Iran. There Sakas also borrowed the images of the lion, the lion-griffin, and 'the tree of life.'

In general, the Saka or Saka-Scythian 'animalistic style' can be seen as the expression of the Saka tribe's worldview. The art embodied tribal mythology and served as a sign system to express the nomadic ideology.

Among other sacred images the deer iconography in the Eshkiolmes sanctuary deserves a special attention for its pronounced Scythian-Saka 'animalistic' style. Many researchers pointed out to several variants of the deer representation in the sanctuary: a) on the tips of the hooves with short curly horns and a tubercle on the back; b) with the round eye and ear and a spiral on the side c) with slingshot antlers and d) schematic. Many of the deer figures from the Eshkiolmes are considered the early examples of Scythian-Saka art [8, p. 68].

Bird is a universal symbol of the sky and the Sun. No wonder that the eagle petroglyph is found in one of the Eshkiolmes gorges [8].

In Eshkiolmes one can find scenes of wolves chasing the argali or the goat. The wolf is often depicted with terrifying snarling mouth, or as a contour with eyes, claws and tail [8]. The ancient songs about persecution and torture endow

wolves with magic properties. Among fighting, chaos, decay and death, the wolf often represents balance and order.

The ancient myth defined the relationship between man and society, man and nature. The Sakas knew and practiced animal and human ritual sacrifices related to the Indo-Iranian tradition. Their mythology gave predators a special place. Celestial horses, goats and argali are also traditional images of Saka art. Saka tribes also knew traditional Indo-Iranian images of the solar chariot, archers, warriors, celestial deer, and celestial bird. The Eshkiolmes petroglyphs serve as supporting evidence to the statement.

In our view, the Eshkiolmes tradition differs from the Tamgaly one by a more personalized model of appealing to higher powers. In the Iron Age, each person probably had the right and could ‘personally’ appeal to higher powers without intermediaries like shamans, priests, etc. By carving animal petroglyphs on the rocks ancient people probably made and sealed the individual contracts with the deity. Thus, when comparing the archaeological landscapes of Tamgaly and Eshkiolmes we come to the conclusion that they are fundamentally different both in natural architectonic landscapes and in performance of religious rituals.

3. Conclusions

When comparing the archaeological landscapes of Tamgaly and Eshkiolmes we come to the conclusion that they are fundamentally different both in natural architectonic landscapes and in religious rituals.

1. Since the Middle Bronze Age functional zoning of the intertribal Tamgaly sanctuary, the most important sacral centre in the Central Asian region, remained unchanged. The period can be called foundational for the monument. The sanctuary cult zone was a unified ‘looped’ space in the canyon of the dried riverbed of the Tamgaly with the pantheon of the sun gods and petroglyphs in the centre. In addition, the Tamgaly sanctuary had a developed theatrical ceremony dedicated to the sun gods of the sanctuary. The ceremonial procession passed along a certain route, most likely in circles. The landscape of the Chu-Ili Mountains surrounding Tamgaly served as natural scenery for the rites of worship.
2. The composition of the central panel of the sun gods in the Tamgaly sanctuary represents a vertical model of the world. It reflects the beliefs of Indo-Iranian cosmology of the tribes inhabiting the territory of Kazakhstan in the Bronze Age. The sacred Sun-deities were worshiped in the form of sacrifices, rituals, and sacred rites.
3. The Tamgaly sanctuary has an entry group symbolically marked by the dome-shaped hill that is an important component of the sanctuary layout. There is also a running long frieze made of the gallery of petroglyphs representing the system of iconographic images sharing a plot, composition and narrative elements consistent with the Rig Veda. In fact, the ceremonies performed by religious scripts by groups of people in the Tamgaly sanctuary were sacrificial

rituals. Most likely, they were fertility rites celebrating the beginning of the next annual cycle.

4. The architectonic of the Eshkiolmes ridge stretches for almost 20 kilometres and belongs to the mountain system of the Jungarian Alatau. It is significantly different from the architectonic of the Chu-Ili Mountains with ridges and deep gorges leading to the Koksus Valley. We believe that every gorge of Eshkiolmes is essentially a regional sanctuary of a clan or tribe unlike the intertribal Tamgaly sanctuary.
5. Researchers found that the population of the Koksus Valley increased significantly in the Saka time compared to the Bronze Age. The total number of petroglyphs of the Saka time also exceeds the total number of petroglyphs of the Bronze Age indicating that the Eshkiolmes historical monument belongs to the Saka time. Here by the end of the Iron Age, men developed more personalized models of appealing to higher powers compared to the ones in Tamgaly. Probably, every hunter or farmer had the right to send the request to higher powers without intermediaries like shamans, priests, etc.
6. Saka art of the Iron Age represented in the petroglyphs of the Eshkiolmes ridge can be viewed as text – a special sign system requiring further research. Indo-Iranian mythological syncretism, zoomorphic symbolism, metaphors, polysemy together with the ideas about the ambivalence of images and magic contributed to the development of a specific animalistic style of the Eshkiolmes petroglyphs.

Saka animal sacrificial rituals are similar to the Indo-Iranian tradition. Fighting scenes represent a duality of the world for the ancient Iranians and chase scenes can be often found among the Eshkiolmes petroglyphs. The Eshkiolmes petroglyphs artistically unfold topography and ontology of human life centred on the belief in the gods of Indo-Iranian mythology in the Iron Age.

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