

RESULTS OF NEW RESEARCH ON THE SUZMOYILOTA ROCK ART © 2025

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Abstract: The Suzmoyilota rock art site, located in the Jizzakh oasis, has recently been the subject of in-depth research using modern technologies and tools. With the help of Agisoft software, 3D models of certain rock surfaces were created, while QGIS software was used to develop a detailed location map of the petroglyphs. As a result of archaeological surveys conducted in the area, more than 800 petroglyphs have been recorded, over 500 of which are newly discovered. The petroglyphs at the Suzmoyilota site were created using techniques such as pecking, scratching and rubbing on the smooth surfaces of slate rocks. In terms of style, they can be categorized into shadowed, contour, and schematic representations. Additionally, the petroglyphs display varying degrees of sun-induced patination, ranging in color from light brown to dark brown and black. The stylistic features, techniques of execution, thematic content and levels of solar exposure of the newly discovered petroglyphs were analyzed and compared to assist in determining their approximate age. Based on these analyses, the rock art at Suzmoyilota has been preliminarily dated to the Bronze Age, the Early Iron Age (Saka-Scythian period), Antiquity and the Middle Ages.

Keywords: human figures, mountain goats, cart, dog, bow, shadow, contour, schematic.

The first official scientific expedition to study the historical and archaeological monuments of the Jizzakh oasis was carried out in 1867 by the renowned orientalist P. I. Lerch. This expedition organized under a special directive of the Russian Imperial Academy of Sciences was conducted in the territory of Turkestan. During the mission, researchers made copies of two historical inscriptions in Arabic script found on a rock in the Ilonutti gorge near Jizzakh. These inscriptions were successfully deciphered and interpreted. One of the inscriptions recounts the victorious military campaign of Mirzo Ulughbek Kuragan to the land of the Yetis (Moghulistan) in the 828 AH (1425), while the other describes the victories of Abdullakhan II, ruler of Bukhara, over Tashkent, Fergana and the Kazakh sultans (Пардаев, Ғофиров 2016, p. 26). In the next years that followed, extensive research was carried out on the rock art of the Jizzakh oasis, resulting in the discovery of a wealth of new information (Пардаев, 2024, pp. 275–286; Пардаев, 2024, pp. 287–295). The mountainous and foothill regions adjacent to the Jizzakh oasis are now considered highly promising areas for the study of petroglyphs (Пардаев, 2024, pp. 275–295).

One of the significant rock art sites in the region is the Suzmoyilota petroglyph complex located on the northern slopes of the mountains near the village of Jelli-Gulli in Sharof Rashidov District of Jizzakh Region, in the northeastern part of the Nurata mountain range.

The Suzmoyilota site was first identified in 2016 during archaeological field surveys and preliminary studies were conducted (Холматов, 2018, pp. 254–257). In subsequent years, researchers recorded the geographic coordinates of the petroglyphs using modern equipment. More than 800 individual images were documented and a cartographic map of their distribution was created (see Fig. 1).



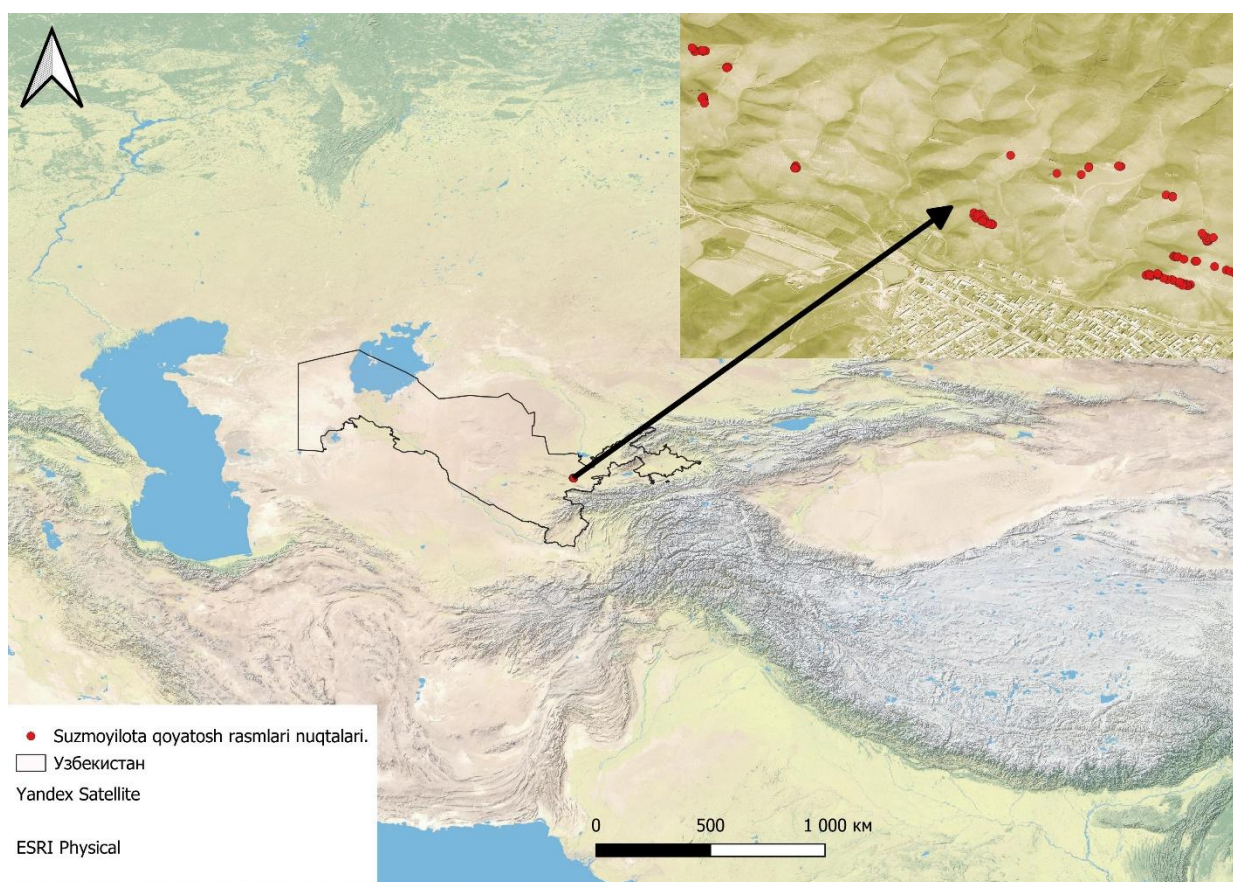


Figura 1. General view of the Suzmoyilota petroglyphs from the air.

The Suzmoyilota petroglyphs were created using techniques such as pecking, carving, scratching, rubbing, and incision. In terms of artistic style, they include shadowed, contour and schematic forms. These images display varying patination due to sun exposure, ranging from light brown to reddish-brown and dark tones. Most of the engravings are concentrated on rocks situated at the mountain tops and slopes while they are rarely found in the lower parts of the mountains. This is likely due to recent human activity as people have been breaking and removing stones from the area.

Wide variety of images at the Suzmoyilota rock art site are found engraved on rock surfaces. These include depictions of human figures, horse riders, bulls, camels, horses, mountain goats, arhar, deer, wild boars, dogs, wolves and other wild animals. Additionally, circular symbols, inscriptions in latin and cyrillic scripts, roman numerals and a number of indistinct or partially preserved images can be observed.

Some of the petroglyphs have been intentionally damaged or altered in modern times re-engraved, painted over or vandalized. Moreover, many engraved stones have been removed or destroyed for construction purposes. It is leading to a reduction in the total number of preserved petroglyphs at the site.

Research at Suzmoyilota indicates that petroglyphs were created across various historical periods, ranging from the Bronze Age through the Early Iron Age (Saka-Scythian period), the Medieval period and even into more recent times.

Bronze Age. Petroglyphs dating to the bronze age show evidence of long-term natural weathering including discoloration, cracking, chipping and erosion caused by exposure to sun, rain, snow, wind and earthquakes. In many cases, later petroglyphs from the Iron Age and



beyond were superimposed on earlier bronze age engravings (Хўжаназаров, 2018, pp. 40–44). Similar overlaps are also found at Suzmoyilota.

images related to the bronze age at the Suzmoyilota site were discovered including depictions of human figure, primitive bull, cart, camel, mountain goats, and other motifs. Among these petroglyphs, one depicts a primitive bull skillfully engraved on a horizontally positioned stone facing south (Figure 2). This petroglyph shows a thick-necked, broad-shouldered, four-legged bull with a long tail, forward-pointing horns. According to the engraving technique, this image was created using the shadow style of pecking. Additionally, under sunlight, the color of the stone harmonizes perfectly with the petroglyph. Similar depictions of this bull can be found at the Soy Sobag site in Tajikistan (Rogozhinsky, Novozhenov, 2018, pp. 181–195). Furthermore, primitive bull images frequently appear in Sarmishsay (Хўжаназаров, Мирзаахмедов, Грицина, Рахимов 2001, pp. 46–49). Moreover, such images have been discovered and studied by specialists at other sites including Qoraqiysay (Хўжаназаров, Холматов, 2012, pp. 54–57), Noqisay (Холматов, 2010, pp. 166–169, Fig. 1), Ilonbuloqsay (Хўжаназаров, Холматов, 2012, pp. 111–117), Quduqchasay (Холматов, Хўжаназаров, 2014, pp. 103–110), Burgansay (Хўжаназаров, 1991) and Bironsay (Хўжаназаров, Razvadovsky, 2003, pp. 196–202). All of these primitive bull depictions have been dated to the bronze age.

According to specialists working with petroglyphs, depictions of aurochs (wild cattle) in Central Asia are dated to the 3rd–2nd millennium BC (Хўжаназаров, 2018, p. 42). Archaeological sites from the 1st millennium BC do not contain any remains of such animals (Цалкин, 1966, pp. 144–154). This is explained by paleozoologists who suggest that after humans began to settle in regions inhabited by aurochs, their population started to decline from the second half of the 2nd millennium BC and completely disappeared by the early 1st millennium BC Батиров, 1969, pp. 18–25). This pattern can also be observed in the petroglyphs found at the Suzmoyilota site.



Figura 2. Bull image.

Additionally, ambiguous symbol images draw particular attention among the petroglyphs dating to this period. This depiction consists of three rows, each containing 10 symbols, totaling 28 figures (see Figure 3). Therefore, we hypothesized that ancient people might have used this image as a form of calendar. When making an analogy, a similar image was found at the Qoraqiyasay site where the total number of carvings is 40. A.N. Kholmatov linked this image to religious customs, suggesting that it marks a place of sacrifice. The first reason is the nearby depiction of a goat tied up and secondly, the local population performs sacrifices at this site to this day, honoring it as an ancient sacred place (Холматов, 2019, p. 41). A similar situation can be observed at the Suzmoyilota site where a pilgrimage is held around two hearths located on a rocky slope. Fire is lit, offerings are made, wishes are expressed, and so forth. This rock served as a sacred sanctuary where ancient people sought refuge and this tradition has been preserved to the present day (Хўжаназаров, 2018, pp. 122–124). Thus, at this sacred site studied in our research, ancient hunters and herders conducted various religious ceremonies. Moreover, similar images have been found in the Palomera cave in Alkesar (Lopez, 2017, Fig. 4, p. 161), where they are interpreted as representing several enclosures possibly used for controlling livestock. Studying petroglyphs involves examining the archaeological monuments and artifacts surrounding them. This not only helps determine their age but also provides evidence that the petroglyphs were carved by the people who once lived in these areas. In 2008, a bronze age burial was discovered in the Bakhmalsay area of Sharof Rashidov District. Bronze bracelets two on the arms and two on the legs were found on the body (Хасанов, 2022, pp. 89–92). Additionally, in 2022, Furqat Toshboev conducted field surveys in the mountainous regions of the villages of Qorangul, Bakhmalsay, Qorasoy, Jelli-Ghulli, Qipchoq and Bog'ishamol (Sharof Rashidov District). As a result, nearly 20 burial mounds were identified. Through the excavation and study of 15 of these, the stone tombs in Jelli-Ghulli were dated to the late bronze age (Ташбоев, 2023, pp. 30–45). Moreover, archaeological research conducted in the Jizzakh oasis has led to the documentation of numerous burial mounds as well (Пардаев, 2024, pp. 56–



65). These findings once again confirm the arguments presented above.



Figure

3.



Circular holes.

Early Iron Age. According to scientific research on the petroglyphs of Suzmoyilota, some of them date back to the Early Iron Age. These include depictions of humans, mountain goats, wild boars, wolves, dogs, horses, camels and similar figures.

The weapon traces found in the early iron age petroglyphs at Suzmoyilota have shapes such as dots, elongated marks, triangles, quadrilaterals and ambiguous forms, with a depth of 1–2 mm and a diameter of 1.5–2 mm. Additionally, these depictions are mostly rendered in an animal style. Furthermore, later petroglyphs were carved over some of these early iron age images which helps in dating these motifs.



Among the Suzmoyilota petroglyphs attributed to the early iron age (Saka-Scythian period), depictions of mountain goats constitute the majority. They mostly appear either individually or within various composite scenes.

On one of the stones in this ravine, depictions of a human figure, camels and mountain goats have been pecked into the rock. Focusing on the human figures, four individuals are shown raising their hands, with one of them holding a bow (see Figure 4). Below these figures, there are depictions of mountain goats and camels arranged in a line, seemingly moving forward. Judging by the composition, these humans appear to be hunting mountain goats. Additionally, the same stone features an image of a person holding a camel as well as other camel figures. The mountain goats moving in a line have darkened under the effect of sunlight. Based on the engraving style, these figures were created using the shadow-style pecking technique. What particularly drew our attention is the presence of elements of the **“animal style”** (Звериный стиль) in the depiction of mountain goats. Therefore, it can be concluded that these images were carved during the early iron age (Saka-Scythian period) and perhaps also in subsequent periods.

Similar mountain goat depictions in this stylistic manner have also been recorded at various sites across Uzbekistan, including Sarmishsay (Хўжаназаров, 2018, p. 50), Quduqchasay (Холматов, Хўжаназаров, 2014, pp. 103–110), and Ilonbuloqsay (Хўжаназаров, Холматов, 2012, pp. 111–117). Furthermore, comparable images have been identified at Eshkiolmes in Kazakhstan (Марьяшев, Рогожинский, 1991, p. 66), Arkharli (Горячев, Галимжанов, Гумирова, 2021, pp. 77–78), and at the Saimaly-Tash site in Kyrgyzstan (Tashbaeva, Khujanazarov, Ranov, Samashev, 2001, p. 24) as well as among petroglyphs in Tuva and Mongolia (Grach, 1980, p. 86). These petroglyphs are typically dated to the Saka-Scythian period.



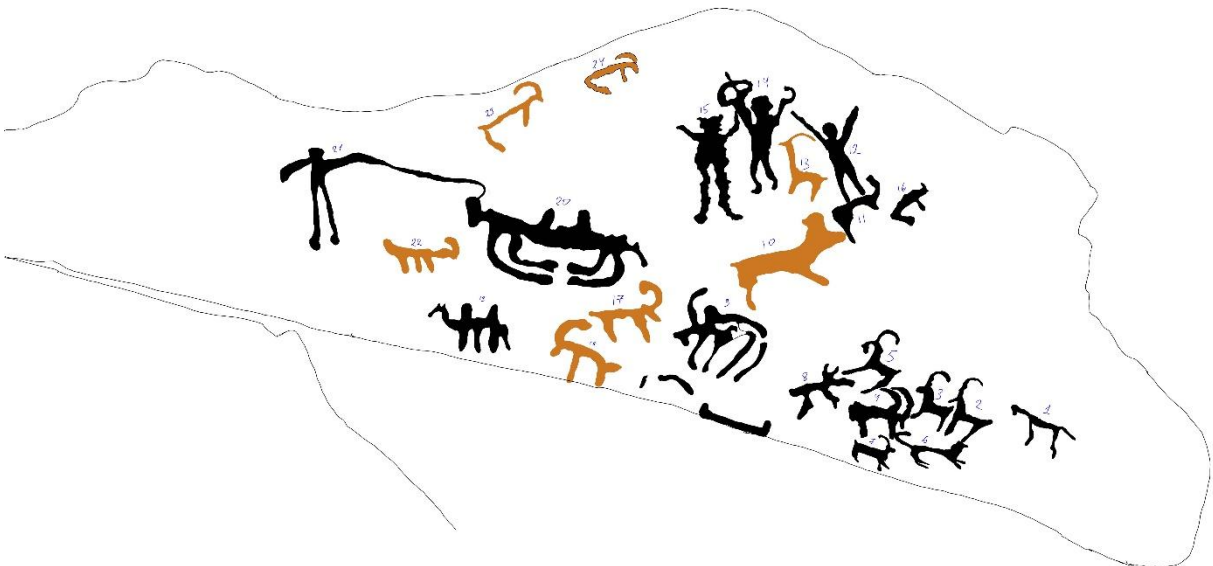


Figure 4. Images of men, mountain goats and camel.



Early Medieval Period as previously mentioned, some of the petroglyphs at Suzmoyilota belong to the early medieval period and later. These images differ significantly from those of the earlier bronze and early iron ages (Saka-Scythian period). This distinction is evident in several aspects such as the types of images, the engraving style, technique of execution, degree of preservation and the extent of darkening from sun exposure.

While petroglyphs from the bronze and early iron ages were engraved in shadow, ornamental, contour, and schematic styles, those from the early medieval and later periods were primarily created in shadow and schematic styles. Additionally, the surface of ancient petroglyphs often appears darkened blackish, deep brown, or chestnut in color due to prolonged exposure to sunlight. In contrast, the petroglyphs from the medieval and post-medieval periods typically appear in lighter brown tones.

By studying petroglyphs, we not only learn which animals once inhabited these regions but also gain insight into the daily life, religious beliefs and worldviews of ancient peoples. In addition, they provide valuable information about ancient hunting practices specifically which animals were hunted and the methods used. One such scene is depicted on a vertically positioned stone at the Suzmoyilota site where a group of people is shown hunting mountain goats with the help of dogs person is aiming a bow at a mountain goat in the image (see Figure 5).



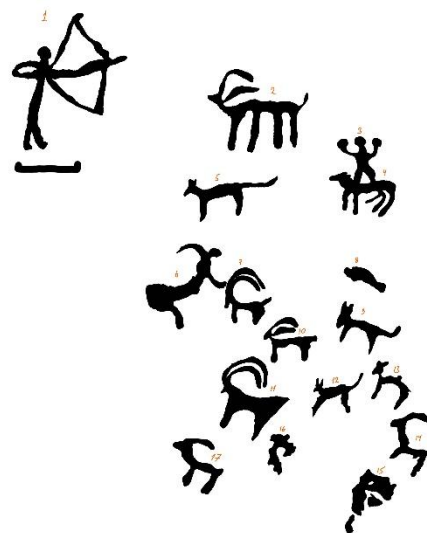


Figura 5. Composite landscape.



In conclusion, it can be stated that this region was one of the favorable areas for hunting and animal husbandry. The presence of depictions of wild animals such as primitive bulls, mountain goats, arhar, deer and gazelles suggests that ancient people hunted and raised livestock in places where these animals were abundant. Therefore, the variety of wild animal depictions carved into the rocks reflects the richness of the local fauna and flora in the past.

The archaeological materials, burial mounds and petroglyphs discovered in the Suzmoyilota region clearly indicate that people inhabited this area during the bronze age and in later periods, engaging in both pastoralism and hunting activities. However, it cannot be ruled out that people may have lived here even earlier than currently evidenced. It is entirely possible that future excavations may uncover archaeological materials dating to more ancient periods.

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