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A PRELIMINARY STUDY ON THE COMPARISON BETWEEN THE PETROGLYPHS OF TEMIYA AND FUGOPPE CAVES IN JAPAN AND THE PETROGLYPHS OF TANBALY IN KAZAKHSTAN

Abstract

This paper aims to compare the motifs of the petroglyphs from Temiya Cave and Fugoppe Cave in Hokkaido, Japan, with those of the Tanbaly petroglyphs in Kazakhstan. Based on previous studies, the rock art of Temiya Cave, Fugoppe Cave, and Tanbaly was examined in order to clarify the similarities and differences between the two cultural spheres. A Japanese archaeologist previously classified the motifs of the Fugoppe Cave rock art in order to compare them with rock art from sites in Northeast Asia. The author of this study has incorporated the motifs of the Tanbaly rock art into that typology. The results of the comparative analysis reveal that both traditions share common representations of human figures, animals, fish, and shamans. There are differences in the symbols or representations associated with shamans. Although boats are not depicted at Tanbaly, where there is no sea nearby, unlike in Japan, deities are represented there, and a greater variety of animals is depicted. The absence of boats at Tanbaly may be explained by its inland location, while the abundance of animal representations likely reflects the animals that were familiar and present in the surrounding environment. Although animals must also have existed in Japan, they may not have been as closely connected to the daily lives of the inhabitants of Temiya and Fugoppe. There are differences in the symbols or representations associated with shamans. Although boats are not depicted at Tanbaly, where there is no sea nearby, unlike in Japan, deities are represented there, and a greater variety of animals is depicted. The absence of boats at Tanbaly may be explained by its inland location, while the abundance of animal representations likely reflects the animals that were familiar and present in the surrounding environment. Although animals must also have existed in Japan, they may not have been as closely connected to the daily lives of the inhabitants of Temiya and Fugoppe. This comparison further highlights cultural adaptation, symbolic diversity, and environmental perception in prehistoric communities, suggesting that rock art functioned as both spiritual expression and a reflection of everyday subsistence practices shaped by geography and regional ecological conditions and environmental context.

Keywords: Petroglyph, Temiya Cave, Fugoppe Cave, Tanbaly, Motif, Shaman, Animal

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ЖАПОНИЯДАҒЫ ТЕМИЯ ҮҢГІРІ ЖӘНЕ ФУГОППЕ ҮҢГІРІНІҢ ПЕТРОГЛИФТЕРІ МЕН ҚАЗАҚСТАНДАҒЫ ТАҢБАЛЫНЫҢ ПЕТРОГЛИФТЕРІН САЛЫСТЫРУ

Аңдатпа

Мақала Жапонияның Хоккайдо аймағындағы Темия үңгірі мен Фугоппе үңгіріндегі петроглифтердің мотивтерін Қазақстандағы Таңбалы петроглифтерімен салыстыруды мақсат етеді. Алдыңғы зерттеулерге сүйене отырып, Темия үңгірі, Фугоппе үңгірі және Таңбалы ескерткіштеріндегі жартас өнері екі мәдени аймақ арасындағы ұқсастықтар мен айырмашылықтарды айқындау үшін қарастырылды. Жапон археологы бұған дейін Фугоппе үңгіріндегі жартас суреттерінің мотивтерін Солтүстік-Шығыс Азиядағы басқа ескерткіштердің жартас өнерімен салыстыру мақсатында жіктеген болатын. Осы зерттеудің авторы Таңбалы жартас өнерінің мотивтерін аталған типологияға енгізді. Салыстырмалы талдау нәтижелері екі дәстүрде де адам бейнелері, жануарлар, балықтар және шамандардың ортақ түрде бейнеленетінін көрсетті. Сонымен қатар, шамандарға қатысты таңбалар мен бейнелеу тәсілдерінде айырмашылықтар бар. Таңбалыда теңіз жақын болмағандықтан қайықтар бейнеленбеген, ал Жапониядан өзгеше, онда құдайлар бейнеленген және жануарлардың түрлік алуандығы көбірек көрсетілген. Бұл ерекшеліктер әр өңірдің табиғи-географиялық және мәдени даму ерекшеліктерімен тығыз байланысты болып табылады және ежелгі қоғамдардың дүниетанымын түсінуге мүмкіндік береді. Сонымен қатар, мұндай айырмашылықтар халықтардың шаруашылық өмірі мен қоршаған ортаға бейімделу деңгейін де айқын көрсетеді. Екі өңірдің жартас өнерін салыстыру олардың рухани мәдениетінің әртүрлі бағытта дамығанын дәлелдейді және тарихи-мәдени байланыстарды зерттеуге маңызды дерек береді. Осылайша, петроглифтер тек көркем бейне ғана емес, сонымен бірге сол дәуірдің әлеуметтік, діни және табиғи жағдайларын сипаттайтын құнды тарихи ақпарат көзі болып табылады.

Кілт сөздер: петроглиф, Темия үңгірі, Фугоппе үңгірі, Таңбалы, мотив, шаман, жануар

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ПРЕДВАРИТЕЛЬНОЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ СРАВНИТЕЛЬНОГО АНАЛИЗА ПЕТРОГЛИФОВ ПЕЩЕР ТЕМИЯ И ФУГОППЕ В ЯПОНИИ И ПЕТРОГЛИФОВ ТАНБАЛЫ В КАЗАХСТАНЕ

Аннотация

Статья направлена на сравнительное исследование мотивов петроглифов пещер Темия и Фугоппе на острове Хоккайдо (Япония) и петроглифов Танбалы в Казахстане. На основе предыдущих исследований были рассмотрены памятники наскального искусства Темии, Фугоппе и Танбалы с целью выявления сходств и различий между двумя культурными ареалами. Японский археолог ранее классифицировал мотивы наскальных изображений пещеры Фугоппе для их сопоставления с памятниками наскального искусства Северо-Восточной Азии. Автор настоящего исследования включил мотивы танбалыских петроглифов в данную типологию. Результаты сравнительного анализа показали, что обе традиции имеют общие изображения человеческих фигур, животных, рыб и шаманов. Вместе с тем существуют различия в символике и способах изображения шаманов. В Танбалы, расположенном вдали от моря, отсутствуют изображения лодок, тогда как в японских памятниках они присутствуют. Эти особенности тесно связаны с природно-географическими и культурными особенностями развития каждого региона и позволяют понять мировоззрение древних обществ. Кроме того, такие различия наглядно отражают уровень хозяйственной жизни народов и их адаптации к окружающей среде. Сравнение наскального искусства двух регионов подтверждает, что их духовная культура развивалась в различных направлениях и предоставляет важные данные для изучения историко-культурных связей. Таким образом, петроглифы являются не только художественными изображениями, но и ценным историческим источником, который отражает социальные, религиозные и природные условия той эпохи.

Ключевые слова: петроглиф, пещера Темия, пещера Фугоппе, Танбалы, мотив, шаман, животное

Introduction. Japan and Kazakhstan are geographically far apart; however, both regions contain important archaeological sites that reflect the culture and lifestyles of ancient peoples. In particular, the rock art found in Japan's Temiya Cave and Fugoppe Cave, as well as the rock art of Tanbaly in Kazakhstan, is valuable material for understanding human history and culture.

Rock art is globally recognized, particularly through the cave paintings of Lascaux in southwestern France and Altamira in northern Spain. At these sites, a wide range of animals, including horses, cattle, and deer, were depicted by prehistoric peoples. This raises the fundamental question of what constitutes rock art. Rock art is defined as follows: "Rock art refers to diverse figures drawn or engraved on rock surfaces by human hands. The creators of rock art were capable of interpreting the messages that conveyed by these images and lived within networks that shared their systems of value and meaning. Many of them maintained highly mobile, non-agricultural lifestyles, such as nomadism, hunting, and fishing, and possessed the ability to transmit the messages embedded

in rock art across vast regions. Historically, they formed social groups that did not require written language" [1, p. 2]. Against this background, the present study raises several research questions: What types of motifs were depicted in the rock art of Kazakhstan and Japan? What kinds of messages are conveyed through these images? Furthermore, what roles did rock art play within the nomadic society of Kazakhstan and the hunting-based society of Japan?

The purpose of this paper is to compare motifs found in the rock art of Temiya Cave and Fugoppe Cave in Hokkaido with those in the rock art of Tanbaly in Kazakhstan. These examples of rock art are classified as petroglyphs. The impetus for writing this paper arose from a question posed by a Kazakh researcher, who asked what kinds of rock art exist in Japan and whether Japan also has rock art comparable to that of Tanbaly in Kazakhstan. In response to this question, the author began investigating Japanese rock art. While this paper compares the rock art of Kazakhstan and Japan, it also serves as a preliminary study aimed at providing materials on Japanese rock art to scholars studying the rock art of Kazakhstan.

Materials and Methods. As a preliminary step, this paper observes the characteristic petroglyphs identified in previous studies at Temiya Cave and Fugoppe Cave in Japan, as well as at the Tanbaly site in Kazakhstan. The two Japanese caves are located along the northwestern coast of Hokkaido, whereas Tanbaly is situated in southeastern Kazakhstan. Unlike the Japanese sites, the petroglyphs at Tanbaly are not found within caves but are distributed across the open steppe. The Japanese cave sites are registered as National Historic Sites, while the Tanbaly petroglyph complex is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site. After reviewing the petroglyphs based on previous research, this study compares the motifs of the sites to clarify their similarities and differences.

Results Ohtsuka [1, p. 5] compared rock art from multiple archaeological sites in Asia, particularly in Northeast Asia. He arranged rock carvings from Japan's Fugoppe Cave, as well as sites in Korea, China, Mongolia, and Russia (Figure 1), and classified the depictions of human bodies, human faces, hunters, animals, birds, fish, and boats at each site. Ohtsuka [1, p. 4] noted that the human figures depicted in the rock carvings of Temiya Cave resemble those found in China, Mongolia (especially the Delger mörön site), and the Altai region. He also pointed out that rock carvings similar to the winged human figures of Fugoppe are not found in the Japan Sea Rim region but rather in the Altai. However, he stated that it is not possible to establish a direct relationship between them. Furthermore, he indicated that depictions of fish (more precisely, marine animals) at Fugoppe can also be found at a site in Korea.

Ohtsuka [1, p.4] proposed the concept of an Asian rock art cultural sphere and noted: "Images depicted in Asian rock art are fundamentally based on characteristic animals adapted to each region's ecological environment, as well as on human lives rooted in the land. At the same time, there existed a network of rock art sites sharing common imagery." Based on Ohtsuka's observations, the rock art of Fugoppe and Temiya likely depicts animals and humans adapted to the environment of northwestern Hokkaido, while the rock art of Tanbaly likely depicts animals and humans adapted to the environment of the Tanbaly region. While the two sites in Hokkaido are located along the coast, the Tanbaly site is situated in a grassland. It is therefore possible that the animals and humans depicted at these sites differ from one another. Furthermore, by comparing Tanbaly petroglyphs not included in Figure 1 with other Asian rock art, if similarities are found, Tanbaly may thus be recognized as part of a broader network of Asian rock art sites.

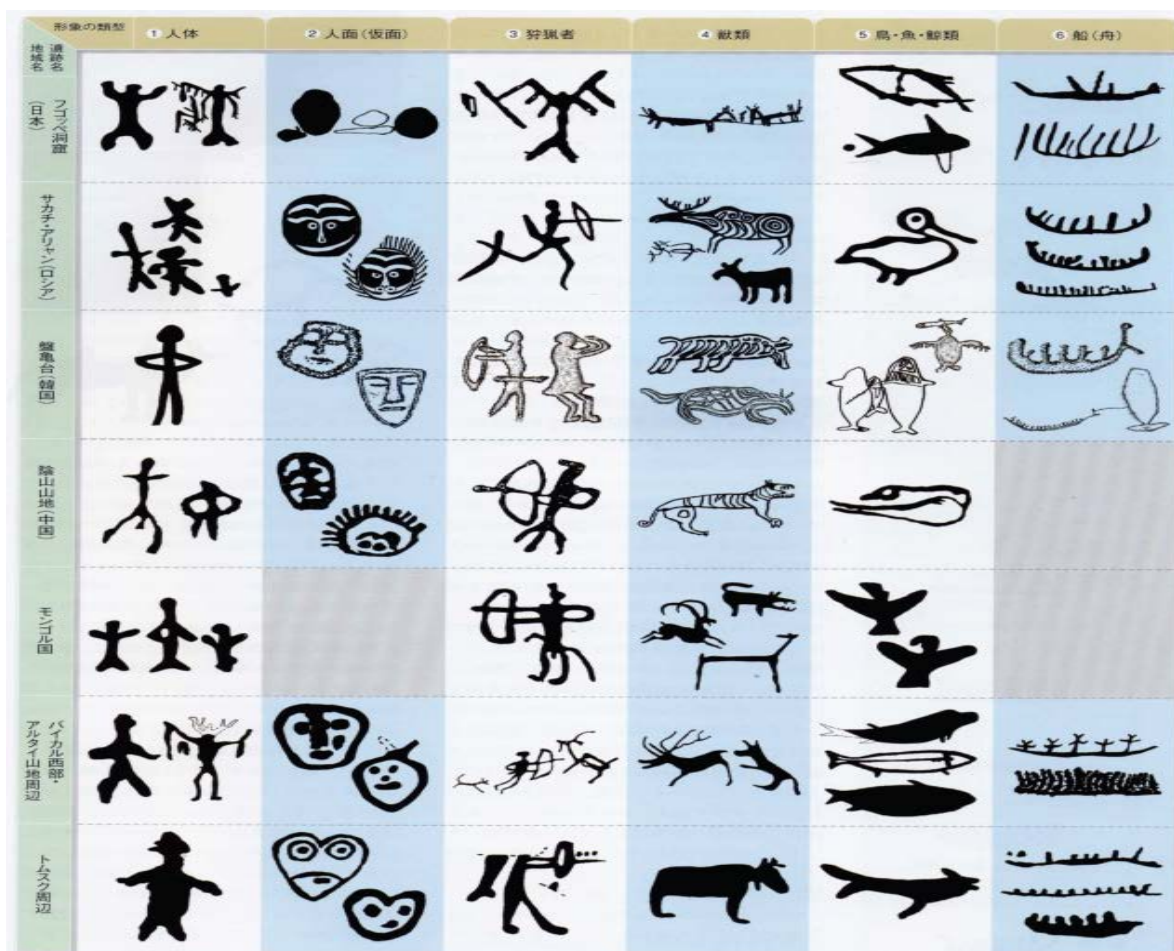


Figure 1 – Typology of Figures by Region [1, p. 5]

Petroglyphs of Temiya Cave and Fugoppe Cave. According to Otaru City [2, p. 16], "Cave sites with incised petroglyphs are limited to only two examples in Japan: Temiya Cave and Fugoppe Cave. Based on similar examples in neighboring countries, connections with rock carvings in the Amur River basin and around Lake Baikal have been suggested." If the rock carvings of Temiya Cave and Fugoppe Cave in Hokkaido resemble those found in regions far from Japan, it would be archaeologically meaningful to compare these Japanese rock carvings with those of Tanbaly in Kazakhstan.

According to the Otaru City Board of Education [3, p. 20], 34 rock carvings have been identified in Temiya Cave in Otaru City. Ishizaki [4, p. 66] states that the rock carvings in this cave date back to AD 400–500 (the middle phase of the Epi-Jomon period). Figure 2 shows the rock carvings of Temiya Cave.

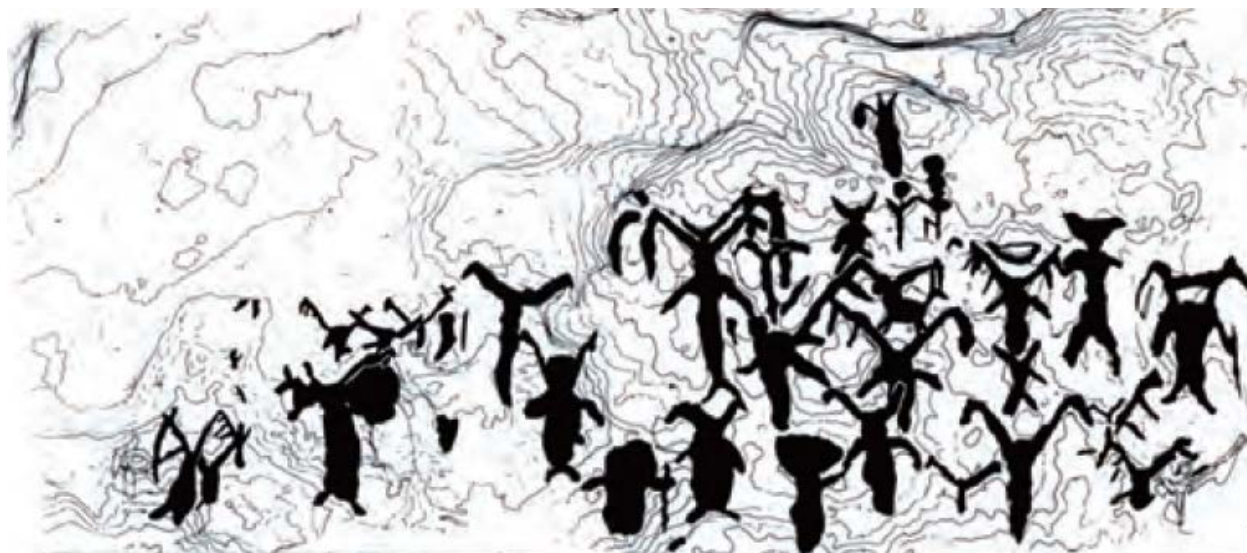


Figure 2 – Rock carvings of Temiya Cave [3, p. 20]

The Otaru City website [5] states as follows: "At Temiya Cave, in addition to figures of 'horned humans,' there are depictions of individuals holding staff-like objects and individuals wearing square, mask-like objects. There are also representations of horned quadrupeds. Such horned human figures are widely believed to represent shamans—individuals who performed intense dances and prayers to deliver oracles or prophecies related to harvests—who were once widely found throughout Northeast Asia, including Siberia." Observation of Figure 2 confirms the presence of horned humans, people holding staffs, people wearing square masks, and animals (Figure 3).

			
Horned human	Person holding a staff	Masked person	Animal

Figure 3 – Motifs in the rock carvings of Temiya Cave

According to Inui [6, p. 16], Fugoppe Cave is located in Yoichi Town, Hokkaido. It is a marine erosion cave approximately 7 meters wide, 5 meters high, and 7 meters deep, and contains about 800 motifs inside the cave. Figure 4 shows the rock carvings of Fugoppe Cave.



Figure 4 – Rock carvings of Fugoppe Cave [6, p. 18]

Inui [6, p. 17] states as follows: "Most of the engravings depict human figures, including horned and winged humans, boats, animals such as orcas or whales, and rows of dots. These elements are understood as representing hunting scenes and compositions containing magical or ritualistic elements; however, the specific meaning of each individual engraving remains unclear. The winged and horned humans seen on the back wall of the cave evoke images of shamans." Furthermore, Ushiro [7, p. 64] pointed out that "The types of petroglyphs on the rock surfaces of Fugoppe Cave include human figures, boats, quadrupeds, marine animals, and cup marks. Human figures and cup marks are overwhelmingly predominant at the site (Kimura 2002; Ogawa 2002). Human figures can be broadly classified into standing figures and spread-leg standing figures, with representative types including horned human figures and winged human figures. In addition, distinctions between male and female figures are also expressed." Based on an observation of Figure 4, the author was able to identify horned humans, winged humans, ordinary humans, fish, animals, and boats (Figure 5).

		
Winged human	Horned human	Human
		
Fish	Animal	Boat

Figure 5 – Motifs in the rock carvings of Fugoppe Cave

Petroglyphs of Tanbaly. The Tanbaly petroglyphs in Kazakhstan were inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2004 under the name "Petroglyphs within the Archaeological Landscape of Tanbaly." According to Sakai [8], approximately 5,000 petroglyphs dating from the Bronze Age through the Iron Age and the medieval period to the 20th century have been preserved. The archaeological area of Tanbaly is divided into several blocks, with petroglyphs concentrated in Blocks

2, 3, 4, and 5. The rock motifs include not only animals such as deer, horses, cattle, wolves, camels, wild asses, goats, and wild boars, but also human figures—such as hunters, dancing people, and figures with sun-shaped heads (Figure 6)—as well as material objects including chariots and wagons [8, p.50–51]. The figure with a sun-shaped head is considered to represent a sun deity [8, p. 54–55].

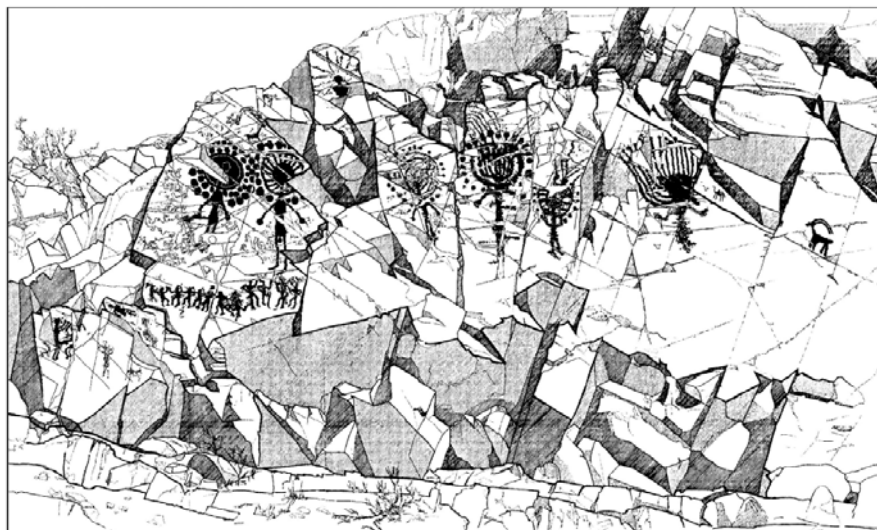


Figure 6 – Sun-head man in Tanbaly [9, p. 10]

How, then, were shamans who worshipped this sun deity depicted in the Tanbaly petroglyphs? Sakai [8] identified two types of shamans (or shaman-like figures). First, he described the dancing shaman. The four figures dancing beneath the sun deity on the far left of Figure 6 (enlarged in Figure 7) "appear to be stamping their feet forcefully. They raise one hand while placing the other on their waists. The two figures on the right appear to wear head ornaments, which are presumed to be branches, fur, or bird feathers. The hood worn by shamans is called a 'bird hood,' which consists of horned owl feathers planted upright along the upper edge of a narrow headband" [8, p. 59].



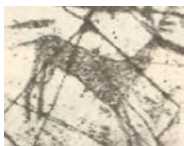
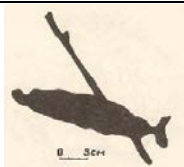
Figure 7 – Dancing people (enlarged image from Figure 6, [8, p. 56])

The next type of shaman is a ritual practitioner or sorcerer. The human figure depicted in Figure 8 "clearly gives the impression of being different from an ordinary human. The figure holds tools in its hands, wears a fur-covered costume, and appears to have something resembling a tail" [8, p. 58]. These two figures are considered to have assumed shamanic roles and to have officiated rituals dedicated to the deity [8, p. 59].



Figure 8 – Petroglyph of a ritual practitioner at the Tanbaly site [8, p. 58]

Sakai [8] listed animal motifs such as deer, horses, cattle, wolves, camels, wild asses, goats, and wild boars. When the author examined the petroglyphs described extensively by Mariyashev [10] (Figure 9), in addition to these animals, dogs, wild sheep, fish, mice, and eagles were also identified.

			
Bull (Figure №5)	Onager (Figure №6)	Dog (Figure №35)	Wild sheep (Figure №35)
			
Deer (Figure №36)	Horse (Figure №39)	Goat (Figure №39)	Camel (Figure №48)
			
Fish (Figure №64)	Mouse (Figure №65)	Wild boar (Figure №211)	Eagle (Figure №219)

			
Wolf (Figure №232)			

Figure 9 – Animal motifs in the Tanbaly petroglyphs (created based on Mariyashev's paper [10])

Regarding human figures, in addition to the shaman dancing while wearing a "bird hood" (Figure 7) and the ritual practitioner or sorcerer (Figure 8), motifs of hunters and a person using chariots were also identified (Figure 10).

	
Archer (Figure №83)	Person using a military chariot (Figure №142)

Figure 10 – Human motifs in the Tanbaly petroglyphs (created based on Mariyashev's paper [10])

This section compares the petroglyphs of Temiya Cave and Fugoppe Cave in Japan with those of Tanbaly in Kazakhstan. The two Japanese caves and the Tanbaly site all possess significant cultural and historical value and are carefully protected by their respective governments. The motifs of the Tanbaly petroglyphs were incorporated into the typology proposed by Ohtsuka [1] (Figure 1), resulting in an expanded classification (Figure 11).

	Human	Human face	Archer	Animal	Bird, Fish	Boat
Kz.	 Fig. №80	 Fig. №14	 Fig. №83	 Fig. №48	 Fig. №219  Fig. №60	—

Figure 11 – Typology of figures in the Tanbaly petroglyphs (created based on Mariyashev 1994)

The depiction of animals, ordinary humans, and shamans is a common feature in both Japanese petroglyphs and those of Tanbaly. However, differences can be observed in the representation of animals. In Japan, quadrupeds were depicted, but it remains unclear what specific species they represent. In contrast, at Tanbaly, the species of animals are more clearly identifiable (Figure 9). This suggests that the people who carved the petroglyphs at Tanbaly recognized and classified animals more distinctly than those who produced the petroglyphs in Hokkaido, Japan. Due to environmental differences, several motifs are observed at one site but not at the other. Because there is no sea near

the Tanbaly site, boats such as those depicted in Fugoppe Cave were not represented there. Nevertheless, fish motifs have been observed at Tanbaly (Figure 9). While no boat motifs appear in the Tanbaly petroglyphs, chariots are depicted (Figure 10). The presence of grasslands in Tanbaly likely facilitated the extensive use of chariots, whereas such grasslands did not exist in the regions of Temiya and Fugoppe in Hokkaido, and consequently chariots were not depicted there. A comparison of the petroglyphs thus indicates that environmental differences influenced the tools utilized by people. Regarding shamans, in Japan, items such as wings or horns functioned as markers of shamanic identity. In Kazakhstan, however, dancing with head ornaments, holding implements, and wearing fur garments may have served as indicators of shamans. The two cultures appear to have differed in their conceptualization of shamans. Furthermore, while a deity with a sun-shaped head is depicted in the Tanbaly petroglyphs, no such deity has been identified in the Japanese petroglyphs.

Discussion. The comparative analysis of petroglyphs from Temiya Cave, Fugoppe Cave, and Tanbaly confirms Ohtsuka's concept of an Asian rock art cultural sphere [1, p. 4], in which geographically distant sites nonetheless share fundamental representational themes — human figures, animals, and shamanic imagery. The presence of these common motifs across Japan and Kazakhstan suggests the existence of broad cultural networks in prehistoric Northeast and Central Asia, consistent with findings from comparative studies of Siberian and Inner Asian rock art traditions [13].

The observed differences in motif repertoires are best understood as products of distinct ecological and subsistence contexts rather than cultural isolation. The absence of boat imagery at Tanbaly and its presence at Fugoppe directly reflects the coastal versus steppe settings of the respective communities. Similarly, the greater specificity of animal depictions at Tanbaly — distinguishing deer, horses, camels, wolves, and wild boars — compared to the more generalized quadruped forms at the Japanese sites suggests that the communities of the Kazakh steppe maintained a closer symbolic relationship with the specific fauna of their environment [14]. This aligns with Ohtsuka's observation that rock art imagery is “fundamentally based on characteristic animals adapted to each region's ecological environment” [1, p. 4].

The divergence in shamanic representation is particularly significant. At the Japanese sites, shamanic identity is marked by physical attributes — wings and horns — that transform the human figure into a hybrid being, evoking a crossing of boundaries between the human and spirit worlds. At Tanbaly, shamans are identified through performance and material culture: dance posture, head ornaments, and ritual clothing. This difference may reflect distinct cosmological systems, with the Hokkaido tradition emphasizing ontological transformation and the Kazakhstani tradition emphasizing ritual enactment. The exclusive presence of solar deity imagery (sun-headed figures) at Tanbaly further points to a solar cult that has no parallel in the Japanese cave sites, suggesting that while shamanism was practiced in both regions, its iconographic conventions developed independently.

A limitation of the present study is its preliminary character: the analysis draws on published typologies and descriptions rather than direct field examination of the sites. The Tanbaly corpus in particular is vast — approximately 5,000 petroglyphs — and only a selection has been incorporated into the comparison. Future research incorporating a larger sample and direct site observation would yield more robust conclusions. Additionally, incorporating other Northeast Asian sites into the comparison framework, such as those in the Amur River basin or the Altai [15], would help determine whether the Tanbaly–Hokkaido parallels reflect a bilateral relationship or a broader regional network.

Conclusion. This study set out to compare the motifs of petroglyphs at Temiya Cave and Fugoppe Cave in Hokkaido, Japan, with those of the Tanbaly petroglyph complex in Kazakhstan, with the purpose of introducing Japanese rock art to scholars working on Kazakhstani material and situating both traditions within the broader framework of Asian rock art. The comparative analysis, based on published typologies by Ohtsuka [1], the Otaru City Board of Education [3], Inui [6], Sakai

[8], and Mariyashev [10], reveals both significant commonalities and meaningful divergences between the two traditions. Both share fundamental representational categories — human figures, animals, and shamanic imagery — confirming their participation in a shared visual culture of prehistoric Northeast and Central Asia. At the same time, their differences in specific motifs (boats vs. chariots, generic quadrupeds vs. species-specific fauna, attribute-based vs. performance-based shamanic markers) demonstrate that each tradition developed its iconographic system in direct response to local ecological, subsistence, and cosmological conditions. These findings support the view that rock art functioned simultaneously as a shared cultural language and as a localized record of community identity and worldview. Future research should expand the comparative corpus to include a wider range of Tanbaly panels and additional Northeast Asian sites, and should conduct direct field-based semiotic analysis to move beyond the preliminary scope of the present study.

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