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Tamga Petroglyphs from Akkainar (Almaty Region) in Kazakhstan

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Keywords: Kazakhstan, rock art, Akkainar, Old Turkic period, medieval nomads, tamga

Түйін сөздер: Қазақстан, жартастағы өнер, Аққайнар, көне түркі кезеңі, ортағасырлық көшпенділер, тамға **Ключевые слова:** Казахстан, наскальное искусство, Аккайнар, древнетюркский период, средневековые кочевники, тамга

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As a result of the archaeological investigations conducted by the authors, more than 6100 rock engravings in the cultural landscape of Akkainar, located between two important sites of rock art, Tamgaly and Kulzhabasy, were documented. Over 800 of them were attributed to the ancient Turkic period. A small group among them consists of tamgas, representing clan signs placed on hereditary property, including cattle. These tamgas are dated wider from the Early Turkic period to the beginning of the 20th century. While some tamgas from Akkainar have been previously published, a complete repertory for this area has not been available until now. This publication presents new material consisting of 20 tamgas or signs similar to tamgas from Akkainar. Some of the images presented here may not necessarily be tamgas and are published for further discussion. Regarding some images resembling tamgas, two questions arise. Firstly, some of them were previously found in South Kazakhstan, raising questions about the consistent connections between Akkainar and the oases of South Kazakhstan. Secondly, certain signs are associated with zoomorphic images, raising questions about the reuse of former petroglyphs to create new tamgas.

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Қазақстандағы (Алматы облысы) Аққайнардан табылған тамға петроглифтер

Авторлардың басшылығымен жүргізілген археологиялық зерттеулер нәтижесінде екі маңызды жартас өнері ескерткіштері Тамғалы мен Құлжабасының ортасында орналасқан Аққайнар мәдени ландшафтында 6100-ден астам жартас гравюрасы

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Тамга петроглифы из Аккайнара (Алматинская область) в Казахстане

В результате проведенных авторами археологических исследований было задокументировано более 6100 скальных гравюр в культурном ландшафте Аккайнара, расположенном между двумя важными памятниками наскального искусства Тамгалы и Куль-



құжатталды. Жалпы санынан 800-ден астамы ежелгі түркі кезеңіне жатқызылды. Олардың аз тобы рулық отбасылық белгілерді бейнелейтін, ірі қара малды қоса алғанда мұрагерлік меншікке салынатын тамғалар болып табылады. Бұл тамғалар ерте түркі дәуірінен бастап XX ғ. басына дейінгі үлкен кезеңмен мерзімделеді. Аққайнардан алынған жекелеген тамғалар басылымдарда жарияланғанымен, бұл аймақ үшін толық репертуар әлі күнге дейін жоқ. Мақалада Аққайнардан табылған тамғаларға ұқсас 20 тамға немесе белгіден тұратын репертуарымен жаңа материал ұсынылуда. Бұл жерде ұсынылған кейбір бейнелер тамға болмауы және олар талқылау үшін жариялануы мүмкін. Тамғаға ұқсас кейбір белгілер бейнелері бойынша екі сұрақ туындайды. Біріншіден, бұл белгілердің кейбіреуі бұған дейін Оңтүстік Қазақстанда табылды, бұл Аққайнар мен Оңтүстік Қазақстан оазистері арасындағы тығыз байланыс жайында сұрақ тудырады. Екіншіден, жекелеген белгілер зооморфтық бейнелермен байланысты, бұл жаңа тамға жасау үшін бұрынғы петроглифтерді қайта пайдалану туралы мәселе көтереді.

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жабасы. К древнетюркскому периоду было отнесено более 800 из общего числа. Из них немногочисленная группа является тамгами, которые представляют собой родовые знаки, размещённые на наследственной собственности, включая крупный рогатый скот. Эти тамги датированы более широким периодом от раннетюркской эпохи до начала XX в. Отдельные тамги из Аккайнара уже были опубликованы, но полного репертуара их для этого региона до сих пор нет. Публикация предоставляет новый материал с репертуаром, состоящим из 20 тамг или знаков, похожих на тамги из Аккайнара. Некоторые изображения, представленные здесь, возможно, тамгами не являются и публикуются для дальнейшего обсуждения. По некоторым изображениям знаков похожих на тамги возникает два вопроса. Во-первых, некоторые из них были обнаружены ранее в Южном Казахстане, что ставит вопрос об устойчивых связях между Аккайнаром и оазисами Южного Казахстана. Во-вторых, отдельные знаки связаны с зооморфными изображениями, что ставит вопрос о повторном использовании бывших петроглифов для создания новых тамг.

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Introduction

Tamga is a generic family sign, a seal placed on the ancestral property, including cattle. As a rule, a descendant inherited the tamga of his ancestor and added an additional element to it or modified it. These tamgas carved on rocks date from the Early Turkic period to the beginning of the 20th century [Bazylkhan 2012; Rogozhinskiy 2012].

The aim of this paper is to provide a repertory of the tamgas of the Akkainar Tract with new material for researchers in Turkology. Until now, this rock art area is less published even though it is located between the important rock art sites of Tamgaly and Kulzhabasy. Since the authors are not specialized in Turkic and Kazakh tamgas, this new material is published without a chronological or historical interpretation. Some of these signs look like tamgas, but perhaps they are not. However, they are also presented in this paper for further discussion.

Please note that the names of the Kazakh sites are written according to the traditional English transliteration, but also to former publications in English. Cyrillic names of authors are written in English according to their own transliterations in their papers and books, even if they wrote their names in English differently in different papers. We respected the different transliterations of a same Cyrillic name for the bibliography in English.



Location of the site

The Akkainar Tract is a hilly place located near Otar, 130 km north-west of Almaty (fig. 1). The Akkainar is a salty river, but with several freshwater springs, that flows in a north-west/south-east axis through a steppe of an altitude between 750 and 950 meters. In summer, many portions of this river are dry. The main valley is cut by several valleys of dry tributaries. Petroglyphs were made on numerous schist outcrops with a black patina on the hills along the river and its tributaries. The hills are between 10 and 50 meters high.

This area, extending over 70 km², has numerous rock art groups both stylistically and thematically homogenous. As these different groups are daily frequented by shepherds and their flocks, it seemed judicious to consider the whole of this area as a single site, in which the authors have distinguished nine groups with more than 1600 panels for more than 6100 drawings. Among the petroglyphs, more than 800 could be attributed to the Old Turkic period. The chronological attribution is based on a chronology established by many Russian and Kazakh archaeologists (among them: [Kasanov et al. 2017; Rogozhinskiy 2011; Samashev 2012; Sher 1980; Shvets 2012]).



Fig. 1. Location of the Akkainar tract (1), Tamgaly (2), Almaly (3) and Akterek (4) in Almaty Region. ©GoogleEarth 2023

1-сур. Алматы облысындағы Аққайнар (1), Тамғалы (2), Алмалы (3) және Ақтерек (4) шағын аймақтарының орналасуы. ©GoogleEarth 2023 Рис. 1. Расположение микрорегионов Аккайнар (1), Тамгалы (2),

Алмалы (3) и Актерек (4) в Алматинской области. ©GoogleEarth 2023

Despite its proximity with Kulzhabasy, the area differs from it both topographically and stylistically. Topographically, Kulzhabasy is characterized by more than 20 parallel valleys opening to the south, which are closed by hills on the north. In Kulzhabasy, the hills closing the valleys are abrupt and of a high altitude. In contrast, Akkainar is a net of tributary valleys with small or average hills, joining to a main valley with a river. Stylistically, the Bronze Age bull depictions largely differ in Akkainar and in Kulzhabasy. For these reasons, Akkainar should be considered as an own rock art area, and not as a prolongation of Kulzhabasy.

Research history

The Akkainar Tract has been little prospected and published. The first field research and subsequent publication was carried out by A.N. Maryashev in 2009, with the exploration of two groups. Among the discoveries, we noted the thematic richness of bull depictions, sometimes associated with solar symbols, as well as the presence of a sunhead [Baipakov, Maryashev 2009]. New research followed in the same year by A.E. Rogozhinskiy, who published two new "sunheads" of a group near Tanbalytas (former Gorny) [Rogozhinskiy 2009: 57], as well as a third "sunhead" [Rogozhinskiy 2011: 287]. The Belgian researcher Luc Hermann carried out a systematic survey of the tract between 2011 and 2014, with first results published in 2015 and 2016, among them a repertory of 30 "sunheads" [Hermann 2015; 2016a; 2016b]. Furthermore, he also published some panels in thematic studies, for example about *Felidae* depictions in rock



art [Hermann, Schnitzler 2020]. For the more recent periods, two Arabic inscriptions from this tract were documented and published [Zheleznyakov et al. 2019], and seven tamgas were also published as drawings [Rogozhinskiy 2019: 257ff].

Other rock art sites are located near this tract: Akkainar is 25 km south-west of Tamgaly, 30 km west of Almaly, 50 km north-west of Akterek, circa 30 km south-east of Kogaly and circa 20 km east of Kulzhabasy. In four of these five sites, not only tamgas but also Old Turkic runic inscriptions were found [Rogozhinskiy 2023]. Until now, no runic inscription was found in the Akkainar Tract, but the author documented 20 tamgas or signs, some of them already published.

Methodology for studying the functions of tamga-shaped signs

As a specific field of archaeology and turkology, the methodology for studying tamgas was poorly developed. However, thanks to the works of N. Bazylkhan, A.E. Rogozhinskiy and Z. Samashev (among others), the research method is now quite clear [Bazylkhan 2012; Rogozhinskiy 2012, 2016, 2019; Samashev 2020: 73]:

- 1. Quantitative analysis of medieval tamgas identified in the territory of modern Kazakhstan (and eventually neighboring countries).
- 2. Comparative analysis: characterization and differentiation of the tamgas of the different tribes and regions (Kazakh Altai, Zhetysu, Shu-Talas region).
- 3. Content analysis in the context of "character connectivity", for example with the transition of zoomorphic symbols into tamga signs.

Tamgas from Akkainar

20 rock carvings are presented here. Among them, twelve are tamgas and eight are unclear signs that could be tamgas. There are nine groups of petroglyphs in Akkainar, but tamgas or similar signs were documented in seven groups. No tamga or sign was found in the groups 1 and 9. The repartition by groups is the following: group 2: two depictions; group 3: seven; group 4: one; group 5: one; group 6: one; group 7: four, and also four depictions in group 8. The most important groups with tamgas or signs (groups 3, 7 and 8) are also directly located by the main river and comprise 15 of 20 tamga-signs (fig. 2)* (*The drawing or photograph is by Luc Hermann).

In the description of the tamgas below, the tamgas are attributed to a type following Rogozhinskiy's typology if it was possible [Rogozhinskiy 2012: 94]. All rocks with carvings are numerated here according to the surveys of the author.

Group 3, rock 12 (fig. 3A): this tamga of type 3 similar to the Greek letter omega has a dimension of 17×14 cm and is south facing. It was already published as drawing [Rogozhinskiy 2019: 286]. A variant of the same type 3 was found in group 3 on rock 41 (fig. 3B): this tamga measures 13×19 cm and is oriented to the west. Its picture was also already published [Baipakov, Maryashev 2009: 91]. Another variant of type 3 was documented in group 7 on rock 168 (fig. 3C): this tamga measures 17×19 cm. It is oriented to the west. It was already published as drawing [Rogozhinskiy 2019: 286]. This kind of tamga is also known in the nearby site of Tamgaly [Rogozhinskiy 2011: 213].

Group3, rock 350 (fig. 4A) and group 8, rock 123 (fig. 4B): the same sign – a circle with a horizontal line – was found on two different panels. In group 3, it was associated with a Bronze Age bull but it has a slightly different patina showing that this engraving is more recent. This sign measures 13×6 cm and is oriented to the west. In group 8, the same sign, but turned to the left, measures 23×7 cm. It was no more *in situ* because the rock fell down. This sign is more probably a tamga and is known as such in Mongo-



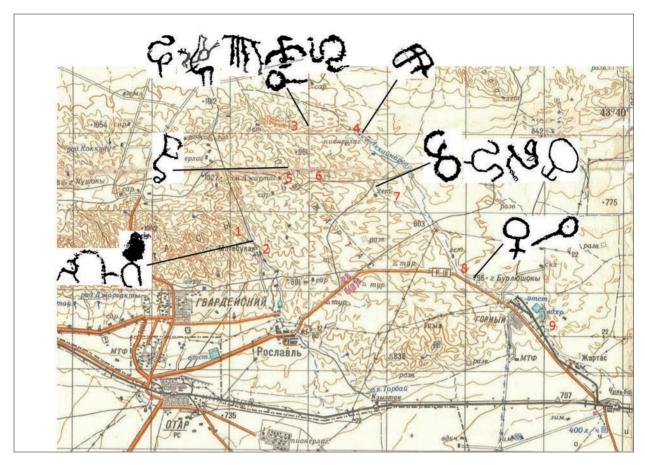


Fig. 2. Location of the nine rock art groups in Akkainar (on map of the 1986) 2-сур. Аққайнар петроглифтер ескерткішіндегі петроглифтердің тоғыз тобының орналасуы (1986 ж. топонегізде)

Рис. 2. Расположение девяти групп петроглифов памятника петроглифов Аккайнар (на топооснове 1986 г.)

lia [Samashev et al. 2010: 85], but also in Kazakhstan where this tamga is attributed to the Sadyr as a variant of the "key-tamga" and dated back to the 18th–19th centuries [Castagné 1921: 50; Rogozhinskiy 2016: 234].

Group 6, rock 54 (fig. 5B): this tamga of type 1 measures 28×38 cm and is oriented to the west. It was already published as drawing [Rogozhinskii 2019: 286]. This kind of tamga is also known in Tamgaly [Rogozhinskiy 2011: 213] and in Kulzhabasy [Kasanov et al. 2017: 95]. A variant of this type was also found in group 7 on the west-facing rock 192 (fig. 6E).

Group 7, rock 16 (fig. 6D): this tamga is south-facing and has dimensions of 20×9 cm. It is in Rogozhinskiy's repertoire without having been attributed to a specific type [Rogozhinskiy 2012: 94]. This tamga was already published by A.E. Rogozhinskiy as picture and drawing and compared with two similar tamgas from Kogaly [Rogozhinskiy 2019: 257].

Group 7, rock 196 (fig. 6C): this tamga is oriented to the west and belongs to the type 10.

Group 8, rocks 19, 20 and 21 (figs. 6F, G, H): on these three panels near each other (two oriented to the west and one facing the east), a same tamga was engraved three times, each measuring circa 21×13 cm,



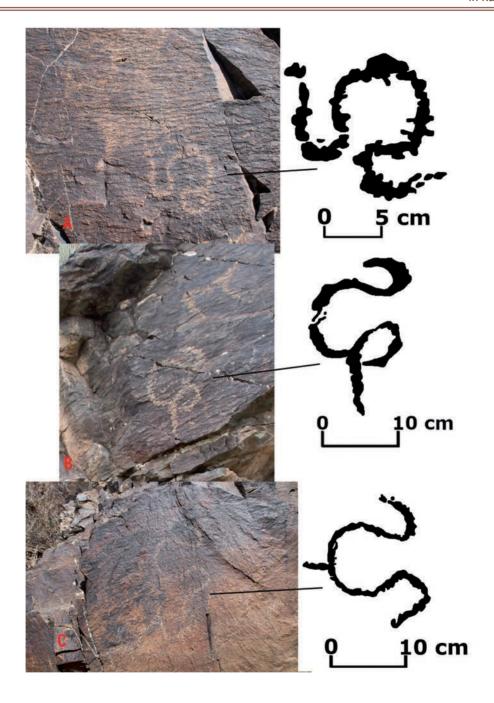


Fig. 3. Akkainar: A – group 3, rock 12; B – group 3, rock 41; C – group 7, rock 168 3-cyp. Аққайнар: A – 3 топ, 12 жартас; B – 3 топ, 41 жартас; С –7 топ, 168 жартас Рис. 3. Аккайнар: A – группа 3, скала 12; В – группа 3, скала 41; С – группа 7, скала 168



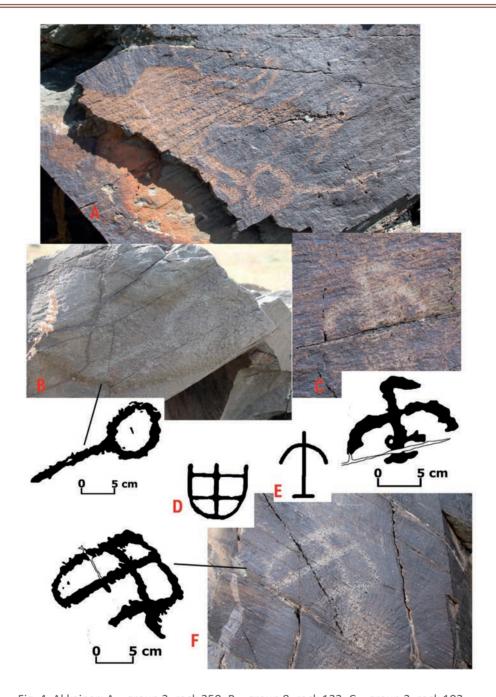


Fig. 4. Akkainar: A – group 3, rock 350; B – group 8, rock 123; C – group 3, rock 102; D – sign from a ceramic, Sidak, after – Smagulov, Yatsenko 2019: 166; E – sign on a coin, Termez, Uzbekistan, after – Babayarov 2019: 348; F – Group 4, rock 72

4-сур. Аққайнар: А – 3 топ, 350 жартас; В – 8 топ, 123 жартас; С – 3 топ, 102 жартас; D – Сидақтан табылған белгі ([Смагулов, Яценко 2019: 166] бойынша); Е – тиындағы белгі. Термез, Өзбекстан ([Бабаяров 2019: 348] бойынша); F – 4 топ, 72 жартас

Рис. 4. Аккайнар: А – группа 3, скала 350; В – группа 8, скала 123; С – группа 3, скала 102; D – знак из Сидака (по: [Смагулов, Яценко 2019: 166]); Е – знак на монете. Термез, Узбекистан (по: [Бабаяров 2019: 348]); F – группа 4, скала 72



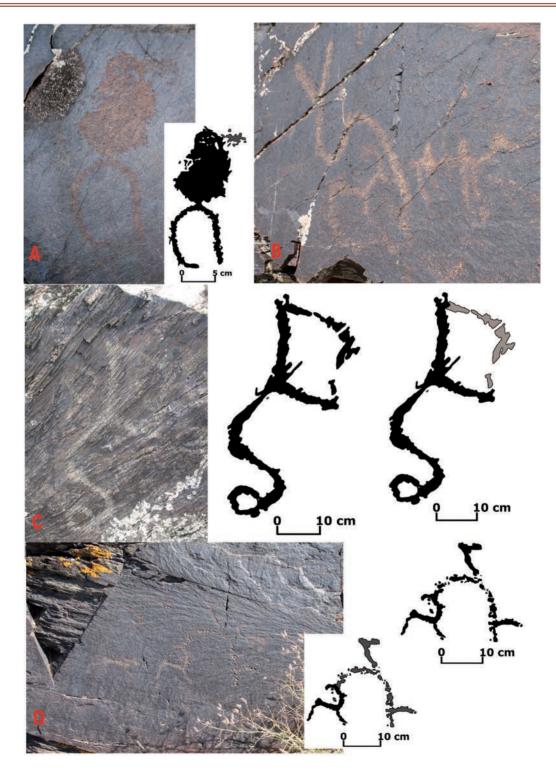


Fig. 5. Akkainar: A – group 2, rock 151; B – group 6, rock 54; C – group 5, rock 27; D – group 2, rock 172 5-сур. Аққайнар: A – 2 топ, 151 жартас; B – 6 топ, 54 жартас; C – 5 топ, 27 жартас; D – 2 топ, 172 жартас Рис. 5. Аккайнар: A – группа 2, скала 151; B – группа 6, скала 54; C – группа 5, скала 27; D – группа 2, скала 172



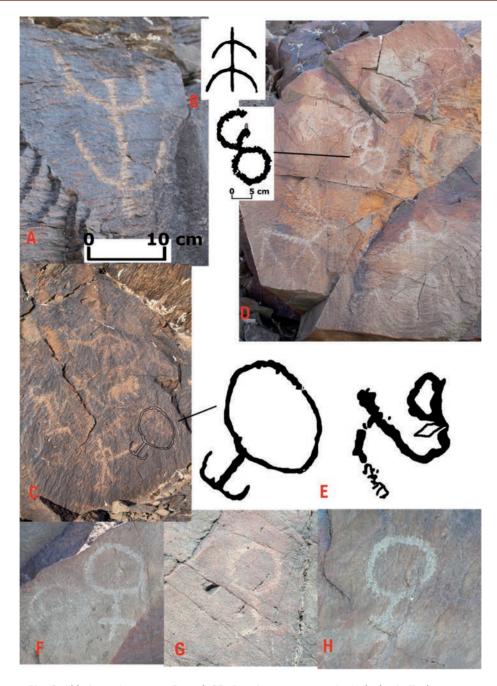


Fig. 6. Akkainar: A – group 3, rock 82; B – sign on a ceramic, Kultobe in Turkestan, after – Smagulov, Yatsenko 2019: 164; C – group 7, rock 196; D – group 7, rock 16; E – group 7, rock 192; F – group 8, rock 19; G – group 8, rock 20; H – group 8, rock 21

6-сур. Аққайнар: А — 3 топ, 82 жартас; В — керамикадағы белгі, Түркістандық Күлтөбе ([Смагулов, Яценко 2019: 164] бойынша); С — 7 топ, 196 жартас; D — 7 топ, 16 жартас; Е — 7 топ, 192 жартас; F — 8 топ, 19—20 жартас; H — 8 топ, 21 жартас

Рис. 6. Аккайнар: А – группа 3, скала 82; В – знак на керамике, Культобе Туркестанское (по: [Смагулов, Яценко 2019: 164]); С – группа 7, скала 196; D – группа 7, скала 16; Е – группа 7, скала 192; F – группа 8, скала 19–20; Н – группа 8, скала 21



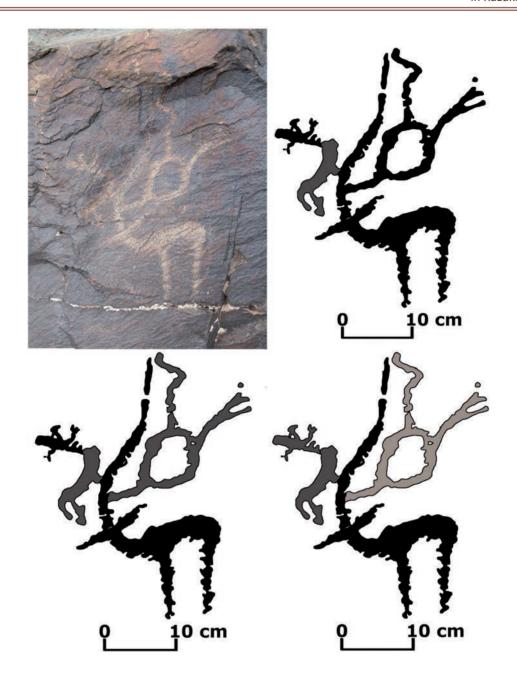


Fig. 7. Akkainar. Group 3, rock 45 7-cyp. Аққайнар. 3 топ, 45 жартас Рис. 7. Аккайнар. Группа 3, скала 45



and having the same patina. We suppose that these three tamgas were done by a single person due to their proximity, to the technic and the style. This type of tamga is from the Alasha tribe [Bazylkhan 2012: 88].

Unclear signs from Akkainar

Eight signs from Akkainar look like tamgas but we are not sure that they should be interpreted as such. We present this material for further discussion.

Group 3, rock 102 (fig. 4C): this sign measures 14×10 cm and is southwest facing. It looks like a stylized bird, but is also similar to a tamga from Kaishi in the Usek valley in Kazakhstan [Hermann, Zheleznyakov 2022: 115], and also to a sign on a coin found in Termez in Uzbekistan (fig. 4E) [Babayarov 2019: 348]. We classified it in the unclear signs, because this sign looks like a bird-head with the line at an extremity, and this line is not present on the mentioned tamgas.

Group 2, rock 151 (fig. 5A): this west-facing petroglyph has a dimension of 8×20 cm. It is a half-circle under a fully pecked diamond-shaped feature. However, we observe that this fully pecked part covers a former goat whose horns are still clearly visible above the diamond-shape. We see here the intention to destroy a former petroglyph and to transform it into another sign, even if the horns are not completely hidden under the later pecked surface. This new sign can be identified as a variant of the tamga type 13.

Three other examples of transformed zoomorphic engravings into signs are known in Akkainar:

- In group 2, the rock 172 shows a goat with a half-circle line starting from its horns (fig. 5D). This depiction measures 29×25 cm and is oriented to the south. We see no other explanation for this goat that to interpret it as a tamga, even if we found nothing similar in the literature.
- In group 3, rock 45, a deer has an antler transformed into a circle with two lines (fig. 7). With the difference of patina, we see that this sign is more recent than the deer. This antler-sign looks like a variant of the tamga type 13. Note that this deer was already published, but not as a tamga [Baipakov, Maryashev 2009: 94]. This deer measures 30×37 cm and is oriented to the south. In this case, an antler of the deer was reused to transform it into a probable tamga.
- In group 5, rock 27 (fig. 5C), an animal (stylized horse?), measuring 45×30 cm and facing the south, has a strong stylized tail ending in a circle. Furthermore, two lines added to this animal -one starting from the head, the second one from the front legs- transformed the front part of the zoomorph into a kind of rectangle. However, another interpretation is also possible: due to the patina, it seems that these two lines forming the rectangle are older than the rest of the depiction, as if a tamga was later partially renewed in order to transform it into an animal. In any case, this animal seems to be like a variant of the tamga type 24.

These four zoomorphs are not clearly tamgas, but we see that they were intentionally transformed into signs. If our interpretations are correct, two of these tamgas belong to the type 13. Does it mean that the reutilization of former petroglyphs was a habit in a specific tribe? Other examples of zoomorphs with a tamga or of zoomorphic signs are known in Kaishi in Kazakhstan [Hermann, Zheleznyakov 2022: 116] and in the Karakol in Kyrgyzstan [Hermann, DeKastle 2022: 400ff].

Another example is more problematic: in group 4 on rock 72, an east-facing sign looking like a goat measures 16×15 cm (fig. 4F). It is a sign and not a goat, but a goat was perhaps transformed in a later period into a sign. It is another example of a zoomorph becoming a sign or of a zoomorphic sign which is quite similar to a sign found in Sidak on a pottery (fig. 4D) [Smagulov, Yatsenko 2019:166]. This ceramic was found in the layers from the 5th to the early 8th centuries AD. Sidak is located 580 km west-south-west of Akkainar, and we do not know any other similar sign in the literature. If this sign is a tamga is unclear, as well as the relation between Akkainar and Sidak, if there is any at all.



The same question emerges with the unclear sign from the rock 82 in group 3 (fig. 6A): the depicted sign measures 15×21 cm and is west facing. It is a vertical line with two half-circles towards the upper part. Tamgas, bearing some resemblance to the one presented, were found in the Altai and belonged to the Yenisei Kyrgyz [Esin 2018: 70]. However, a very similar sign was found on a ceramic in Kultobe in Turkestan (fig. 6B) [Smagulov, Yatsenko 2019: 164]. In Turkestan, this sign belonged to the Kangju ruling elite, and was found in the layers from the 1st to the 3rd centuries AD. It would make more sense to see a diffusion through Kyrgyz tribes from Siberia to Southeastern Kazakhstan than an influence of the Kangju, but the question should be further examined due to the very similitude with the sign found in Kultobe. If the Akkainar sign is really a tamga which should be attributed to the Kangju remains a hypothesis for the moment. However, if it is the case, it would arise questions about the extension of the Kangju territory.

A third rock carving also found in group 3 on rock 95 (a couple of meters away from rock 82 just described before) underlines this problematic of relations between Akkainar and Southern Kazakhstan. This west-oriented-engraving with the dimensions of 23×21 cm looks like an animal (horse?) with elongated legs (fig. 8A). If we present it here, it is not only due to these peculiar legs but also because similar depictions were found on ceramics in the layers from the 5th to the early 8th centuries AD in Shaga (fig. 8B) and in Sidak (fig. 8C) in Southern Kazakhstan and are interpreted as stamped versions of signs [Smagulov, Yatsenko 2019: 166]. Furthermore, a similar sign but with small differences is also known in Kyrgyzstan [Samashev et al. 2010: 90]. It is unclear if the rock engraving is a tamga or a horse but the similarities with

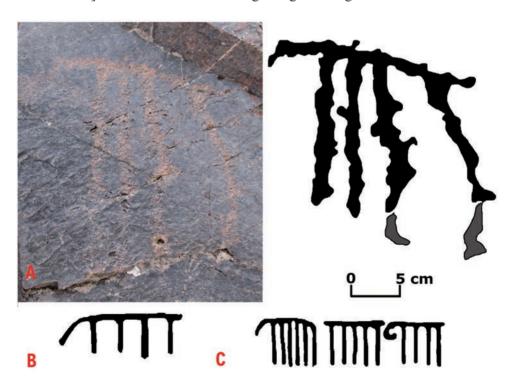


Fig. 8. Akkainar: A – group 3, rock 95; B – signs on ceramics, Shaga and Sidak (C), after – Smagulov, Yatsenko 2019: 166

8-сур. Аққайнар: А — 3 топ, 95 жартас; В — Шаға мен Сидақтан (С) табылған керамикадағы белгі ([Смагулов, Яценко 2019: 166] бойынша)

Рис. 8. Аккайнар: А – группа 3, скала 95; В – знаки на керамике из Шага и Сидака (по: [Смагулов, Яценко 2019: 166])



the ceramic signs and the Kyrgyz tamga arise questions. In any case, we observe that in groups 3 and 4, three engravings were found which have similarities with signs from Southern Kazakhstan. Only for this reason, these engravings should be considered with interest and more archaeological research in this region should be conducted to confirm or refute the link between Akkainar and the southern Kazakh oases during this period.

Conclusion

Tamgas from the Old Turkic period and the later Kazakh period were found in Akkainar. This repertory increases the number and the types of tamgas known in area. Some of these tamgas were already known at other Kazakh sites but are also similar to tamgas from Kyrgyzstan. Furthermore, many other signs look like tamgas (and perhaps are tamgas), but their interpretation remains unclear.

Two main questions emerge from these unclear signs. Firstly, we observe that some of them are associated with an animal depiction: goat, horse, and deer. In some cases, it seems that an older zoomorph was reused to transform it into a sign or to incorporate a tamga in the animal, as for example with the deer antler. In another case, it seems that the former sign or tamga was reused in order to transform it into a newly depicted animal. This kind of "zoomorphic tamgas" was also documented in Kaishi in Kazakhstan and in Karakol in Kyrgyzstan. Research should focus on these zoomorphic signs in the future to understand if it was a specific kind of tamga or if it was a kind of cultural reappropriation of former petroglyphs or tamgas: the newly arrived clan wanted to affirm its power and its property over a region by deleting former engravings from other tribes. For this reason, an older petroglyph was reused to transform it into a new clanic sign.

Secondly, three unclear signs from Akkainar show similarities with signs found on ceramics in Southern Kazakhstan. It would be necessary to clarify these signs from Akkainar, but also to analyze more unclear signs from nearby rock art sites to see if other similarities with tamgas from Southern Kazakhstan can be found. For the moment, due to the lack of archaeological research in the Akkainar Tract, it is too early to postulate the existence of a link between this area and tribes from Southern Kazakhstan in a period comprised between the 1st and the 8th centuries.

To conclude, it is necessary to conduct more detailed prospections in Akkainar: it is for example surprising that no runic inscription was found in this area until now, although there are present at other nearby sites, such as in Tamgaly or in Kulzhabasy.

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