

Chuluut River Rare Mongolian Rock Art

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Introduction

Neolithic rock art has been found all across Europe for example in Portugal, Spain, Italy, France, Germany and in the north up to Sweden. Also in the Near East especially rock formations in the desert areas in Saudi Arabia are littered with hundreds of thousands of animal and human images.

We also know that Australia, India and South Africa have huge areas full of pre-historic rock paintings and engravings. It is often difficult to date them, but the cave paintings in France are with 40,000 years the oldest so far discovered. But the majority of rock art falls into a time span of 15,000 to 2,000 years.

Rare Mongolian Sites

Mongolian rock art sites were first recorded in 1977, but little more came to light thereafter. There are various sites, all situated along the Chuluut River about 700 km west of the Mongolian capital Ulan Bator in the Archangai Province.

The most important engravings are found in the 170 km long middle section of the river as seen above. This part has gorges and cliffs with heights of up to eighty meters. Engravings were created during various periods from 10,000 to 3,000 BP (before present times).

Some of these engraving sites are situated at rather special locations, such as on a significant 180 degree sharp river bend creating an amphitheater like setting. These extraordinary locations suggests that they were used for important rituals and key ceremonies such as a fertility cult or initiation rites.



Motives

All images found along the Chuluut River are engravings. If there were any paintings, they have been wiped out by the harsh climatic conditions.

Chuluut engraving motives show different periods of rock art creations.

Nevertheless experts recognized a certain continuity in what makes their dating even more difficult. We can assume that the majority of Chuluut creations are about 5,000 years old, but the oldest possibly up to 10,000 years. Similar engraving images are also found in the Gobi Desert further north.

Key Fertility Images

Most of the human images can be interpreted as fertility symbols. For example on one panel dancing women are depicted in a circle. They include six pregnant females as a sign of an important fertility cult. One figure has been engraved with a new born child between her legs, still connected with one arm or umbilical cord to the mother.

On same huge boulder two more motives include two and three females stacked on top of each other. The meaning of this stacking depiction is uncertain. Some experts have interpreted it as family tree. But this assumption might be wrong, as our knowledge of the true meaning of rock art creations worldwide is still very limited.

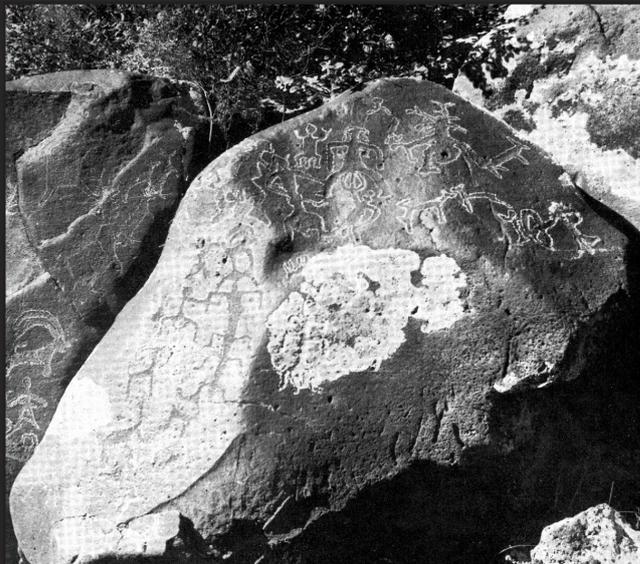
Another rock panel shows two birth giving animals, possibly sheep. This creation is situated in a hidden place away from sunlight, so it could possibly have been a secret place of birth giving or a site for fertility cult rituals. This panel also include images of various oxen, which bodies are decorated with stripes.

It is interesting to note that these decorations are similar to oxen depictions in the Near East in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Sudan. They might be representing tribal symbols of ownership. In addition this panel only shows one male figure, a hunter with bow and arrow.

Key Female Depictions

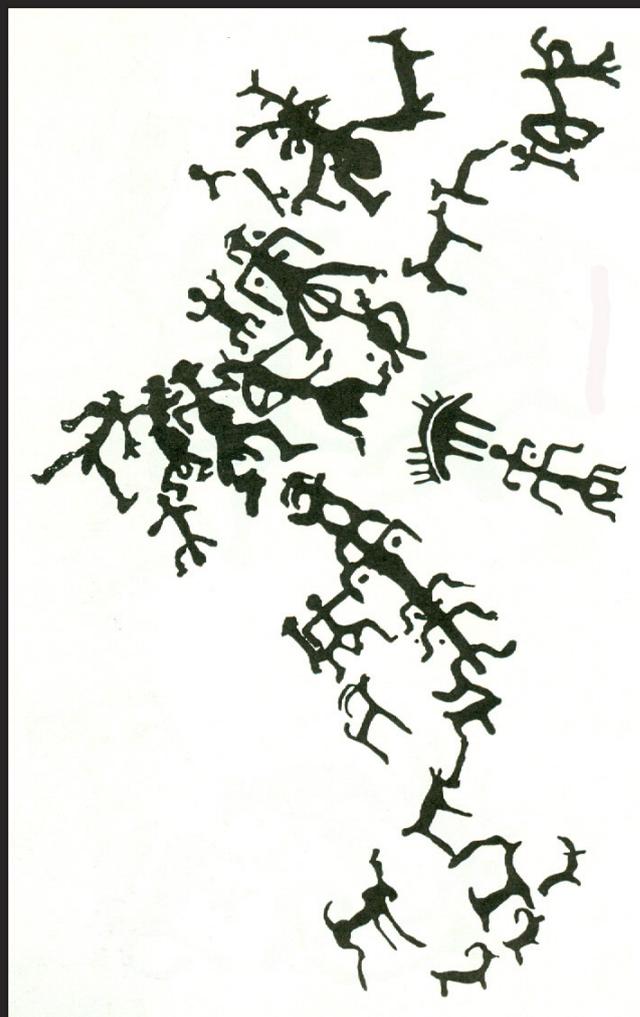
A third noteworthy panel shows two oxen ridden by females. I can't remember having seen a similar images at any of the over twenty rock art sites I visited. The first oxen with a female on top is held or led by a male and the second oxen is ridden by a mother and a child. Could this be a hint to a matriarchate society? Which were possibly more present in our pre-history as we today assume.

Female depictions were all engraved in the typical praying or adorant position with raised arms and spread legs, often with varying head gear, hat or hair do and big bellies and breasts. The shown extensions between their legs are engraved in a bag like style or with an empty circle or stick like. The common adorant images are found in most of the rock art sites in the Near East and all across Europe



unfortunately only a rather old picture exist of this most intriguing rock with dancing females in a circle plus the cascading figures of uncertain meaning some experts talk of possible family trees only one male with bow and arrow in the top right

below we have the stylised design of the above rock which shows us more clearly the engraved images unfortunately the meaning of rock art motives are not yet fully known to us and we have to often use assumptions to interpret the possible expression





as well. The fact that females were always depicted together with oxen is a clear sign of the fertility cult interpretation of these images. Another interesting fact of the fascinating Mongolian rock art is, that female images were only created in frontal view compared to male in side view.

Male Depictions

Images of men were only engraved in profile with up pointing penis and raised arms mostly in dancing position.

Mostly a single man is shown in combination with various females and oxen, which supports the theory of a matriarchate social structure at the time, which also existed in other parts of the Neolithic world.

After female images were dominant in early Chuluut rock art, men became dominant in Bronze Age depictions and were shown as hunters and warriors.

One interesting dance scene includes men hold various cut ox tails. This image is also found at other sites. Dancing is a repeated motive of rock art creations along the Chuluut River. There are dance scenes which feature humans with oxen, deer or bear masks.

Other Motives

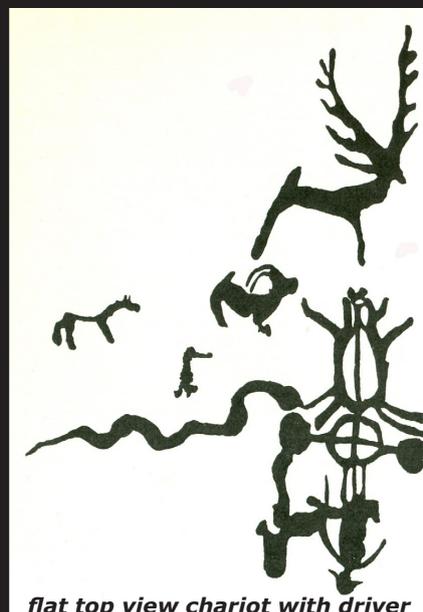
Other animal motives include domesticated as well as wild goats, sheep and trained hunting

dogs. Surprisingly horse riders were not part of the Neolithic imagery here. But horses were used in chariot depictions, some without human figures others with drivers.

Interestingly only few arms are depicted including bow and arrows and axes, but no spears. This suggests that the mountainous region was at the time open steppe and hunting was possible only with long distance weapons like bow and arrows.

Important Deer Motive

Some experts state that in one key image the "mother deer cow" is depicted. But this image looks more like a superimposition, because the angle of this profile depiction of an animal body and the antlers match.



flat top view chariot with driver

But it does not really match with the frontal view of the female figure. The assumptions based on the mother deer cow myth, which in the time line is of more recent date approx. 1,000 years ago, is called olun-go.

The deer sign played a mythical role in various Asian regions for example in Altai, Tuva, South Siberia, Kazakhstan and Mongolia. The deer was regarded as a key totem animal, often only it's antlers were depicted.

In addition deer stelae are found in Central Asia, West Mongolia, Trans Baikal and Tuva. In Mongolia the deer ornament is still known as ever chee and used on home utensils, knives and saddles.

Chariot Depictions

These images were created during the Bronze Age. They occurred first in the Karasuk Culture at Jenissey River. Experts believe that chariots were not used in the Chuluut Region and had only a ritual or cultural meaning.

This suggestion is based on two facts, in one depiction two deer were added in front of the horses. This addition seems to be of later date. And in another image oxen draw the chariot possibly linking it to fertility?

All chariots have two wheels and are shown in the simple flat



described chariot depiction with two deer in front but these were created some time later and point to a symbolic image as we can assume that chariots were not used in Mongolia at the time



dancing group seen here holding up cut ox tails the dancers could be female but are presumed male due to the profile view plus a single male on the left the two dots might symbolise female breasts

top view. It is fascinating that top view chariot or plough depictions are the only way of engraving technique, found in all other rock art sites in the Near East and Europe I have visited.

At the various Chuluut sites chariot engravings were created and also show hunting, fighting or warrior and fertility scenes. This supports the theory of symbolic meaning of those depictions. They were possibly used as figurative message.

Conclusion

I am always surprised how similar ancient rock art images across Europe, Near and Far East actually are. The kind of animals and the way they are shown are often the same. And the way humans were depicted are also rather similar. So we could assume a regular cultural exchange through regular tribal migration and long distance trading that took place already 10,000 years ago.

We also learn from a growing number of recent thought-provoking research results, that our ancestors were far more intelligent, technically advanced artisans and highly skilled hunters and herders than we still believe.

