

**SARMISHSOY ROCK PETROGLYPHS AND THEIR STUDY HISTORY***Polvonova Farida Omonboyevna**Senior Lecturer, Department of History, Navoi State University*

**Abstract:** This article presents information about the Sarmishsoy rock petroglyphs—one of the historical monuments left from ancient times in our land, which is one of the cradles of ancient civilization. It also discusses the history of their study.

**Keywords:** Sarmishsoy rock petroglyphs, open-air museum, Altamira cave, wildlife, primitive humans, tribes, rock art, UNESCO cultural heritage.

To date, there are more than 100 locations in the mountainous and foothill regions of Uzbekistan where ancient rock carvings can be found. One of the most significant among them is the Sarmishsoy rock art monument. Due to the diversity of its content, themes, stylistic features, and structure, it has gained worldwide recognition. The Sarmishsoy petroglyphs are in no way inferior to those found in Soymalitosh, Angara, Lena, Baikal, Amur, the Urals, Karelia, Gobustan, and even those in Africa's Sahara Desert, Spain (Altamira cave), and France.

Sarmishsoy is located on the southern slope of the Qoratog' range, opposite the Oqtog' mountains. Today, this area is part of the Navbahor district in the Navoi region. In the northeast, Sarmishsoy merges with the low hills and ridges of the Oqtog' mountain range. The region is a mountainous area with a typical temperate climate similar to other parts of Uzbekistan. Compared to other mountainous regions of our country, the climate of Sarmishsoy, Qoratog', and the surrounding areas is relatively dry. The hottest months are June and July, with an average temperature of 27°C, while the coldest is January, with an average temperature of -2°C. Precipitation in Qoratog' is not particularly heavy or dense and mostly occurs in late autumn, winter, and early spring. From May onward, precipitation decreases, the soil dries out, and plants begin to wither. In winter, early spring, and sometimes even in summer, strong winds blow from the north and northeast.

The southern slopes of the Qoratog' mountains are home to numerous ravines and streams such as Bironsoy, G'urtutsoy, Otchoparsoy, Qorong'iungursoy, Naychaliksoy, Qoranmarvoqsoy, Tongotarsoy, Do'lanasoy, Ko'ksarosoy, Oltinsoy, and Sarmishsoy. These streams are fed by rainfall, snowmelt, and freshwater springs. During the summer months, water from smaller springs diminishes, and some even dry up completely. Among them, the most water-abundant is the Sarmishsoy, which is fed by a large spring originating from a place called Suvboshi. Despite their small size, the Qoratog' area is rich in springs, with over 70 identified within the 500 km<sup>2</sup> area of the Sarmishsoy gorge and its surroundings. According to local shepherds, these springs can provide water for up to 50,000 livestock daily.

The regions of Nurota, Oqtog', and Qoratog' are rich in vegetation. In these areas, 686 species of plants belonging to 62 families and 335 genera have been recorded.<sup>1</sup> Most of them are perennial and serve as food for wild animals and livestock. This biodiversity has made the area a favored grazing ground for pastoral tribes since ancient times. It is likely that these mountain valleys served as winter pastures, protecting livestock from harsh winds and snowstorms. Currently, however, the local wildlife has become relatively sparse.

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<sup>1</sup> Zakirov, P.K. The Vegetation Cover of the Nurata Mountains. – Tashkent: Fan Publishing, 1969. – p. 66.

Since ancient times, humans have been drawn to depicting the creatures and environment around them—a need as old as human history and art itself. It is only natural to wonder what motives the primitive people and tribes had in creating the rock carvings found in Sarmishsoy. The purpose of these images can be interpreted in multiple ways.<sup>2</sup>

They may have been created to satisfy cultural or educational needs, to pass on knowledge about nature and wildlife to future generations, or as a means for skilled hunters to showcase their prowess. These images could also have been used to teach hunting techniques or to express human emotions. Through such illustrations, fathers may have aimed to show their children that humans are the most intelligent and powerful beings—a message that aligns with the idea of nurturing well-rounded and noble individuals.

For example, images of people riding horses or holding bows could have served to inspire young men and women to be brave, agile, and capable of defending their tribe. Depictions of hunters riding horses accompanied by dogs highlight the relationship between humans and animals. These could also have served to promote domestication and the development of livestock herding.<sup>3</sup>

Researchers who have studied rock art offer a variety of interpretations. Scholars such as V.V. Bartold, German researchers G. Obermayer and J. Haukis, I.M. Jafarzoda (who studied the Gobustan petroglyphs), A.P. Okladnikov and A.A. Formozov (who studied Zarautsoy), G. Kuhn, A. Breuil, and N. Casteret, have suggested that the images depict real events from the lives of ancient people or reflect religious beliefs tied to primitive tribal magic.<sup>4</sup>

In contrast, V.F. Zybkovets disagreed, arguing that these rock art samples were not related to religious beliefs or magical ideas. Another scholar, V.A. Gorodtsov, who researched the petroglyphs in Turgay province, believed the images were intended to increase the number of livestock and wild animals. Meanwhile, I.G. Poslavskiy took a cautious approach to interpreting the ideological meaning of the carvings, suggesting that they may hold a mysterious and unclear purpose.<sup>5</sup>

Notably, the renowned scholar M. Khojanazarov discovered and thoroughly studied 66 previously undocumented petroglyphs in Sarmishsoy. His work represented a significant step forward in the research of the Sarmishsoy site. Today, significant efforts are being made to preserve and transmit the heritage of Sarmishsoy to future generations, including initiatives to register it as a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage site.<sup>6</sup>

The current condition of the Sarmishsoy images has been carefully studied, and responsibilities for their preservation and transmission have been outlined, with important recommendations issued. Among them is the proposal to place this unique historical-natural monument under state protection, officially declare it an “open-air museum,” ensure its safeguarding, and organize regular tours.<sup>7</sup>

As a result, the Sarmishsoy petroglyphs have been officially recognized by UNESCO as an “Open-Air Museum” and listed as a unique example of global heritage. Indeed, the Sarmishsoy rock art is a rare and invaluable historical legacy not only for Uzbekistan but for all of Central

<sup>2</sup> Larichev, V.E. Enlightenment. – Moscow: Nauka Publishing, 1990. – p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Kabirov, A. Sarmishsoy Rock Carvings. – Tashkent: FAN Publishing, 1976. – pp. 93–96.

<sup>4</sup> Zybkovets, V.F. Man Without Religion. – Moscow: Nauka Publishing, 1995. – p. 69.

<sup>5</sup> Gorodtsov, V.A. Rock Paintings of the Turgay Region. Transactions of the State Historical Museum, Issue 1. – Moscow, 1926. – p. 52.

<sup>6</sup> Poslavsky, I.G. From a Trip to Saymaly-Tash. PTKLA, Issue XIII. – Tashkent, 1903. – p. 301.

<sup>7</sup> Proceedings of the International Conference. Navoi – October 2004.



Asia. Its collection of diverse and distinctive petroglyphs has captured the attention of scholars from around the world.

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