

## **The Hidden Meaning of Petroglyphs**

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Petroglyphs are images created by removing part of a rock by carving or engraving. This term is made out two Greek words, "petros" (stone) and "gliphein" (to carve). The oldest petroglyphs are believed to be at least 10,000 years old but as they are carved on rocks the exact date cannot be determined by carbon-14 dating. Petroglyphs are also defined as "rock art" but the message that they convey is totally disregarded. This is because the meaning in these carvings is closely related to the beliefs of that forgotten period. Without knowing the belief system of these ancient people it is quite impossible to decipher the hidden meaning of the petroglyphs. In this chapter I will try to unravel the hidden meaning of petroglyphs.

Petroglyphs are found worldwide, but the maximum concentration of these carvings still exists in the high regions of the Altai Mountains of Central Asia. The number of these carvings surviving in Central Asia is estimated to be around 50,000. This huge number of carvings cannot be simply explained as being *love of art* or *addiction to carving*. There must be another important reason for such a continuous and consistent effort.

The most common figure found worldwide is the wild goat (ibex) with long curved horns. Why were they carved on rocks by ancient people? Was it because they were the main prey of these people? Were the petroglyphs related to some magic wish for an abundant hunt? I do not think so. This is because we can find the same figure of the ibex in regions where they were very scarce, such as the hot plateau of Arizona, Nevada and New Mexico in the south and central parts of North America. The pictures below show an ibex of the Altai Mountains.

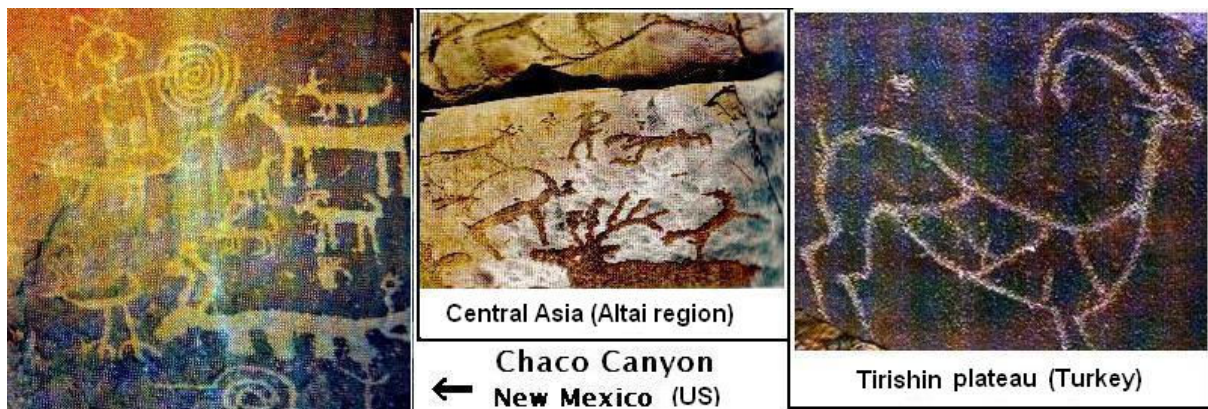


The ibex was venerated as being the symbol of agility and power. Its agility and capacity to climb the highest peaks was considered to be related to some super-power not existing in humans. Because as one climbs the high mountainous regions the air becomes thinner and oxygen concentration reduces. It becomes more and more difficult to breathe on these high mountains. But the ibex has no such problem. It can jump from rock to rock without any difficulty and climb the highest peaks. This special power was probably one main reason for venerating the ibex as a sacred animal. Another important reason for venerating the ibex was its capacity to approach the sun.

Ancient people considered the sun as their main deity. The sun was the holy power residing beyond the horizon. It gave heat and light during the daytime and was the symbol of the life-giving creator deity. When it moved beyond the horizon darkness settled and wild animal came out for hunting. Therefore, the sun was the symbol of life, protection and goodness. Its presence gave comfort and its lack gave fear to the early humans. Any creature that could approach the sun was venerated as having mystical powers. The ibex and most birds, especially the eagle, were such sacred animals. Also mountains were accepted as being special places. This is because mountains were natural formations rising towards the sun.

Early people believed that the power of the ibex resided in its horns. The horns of an ibex are much longer than an ordinary goat and therefore contain more power. The male ibex had longer horns compared to its female. This was also considered as a sign of force and special energy. So, not only the ibex but also all horned animals were considered to be sacred and their horn was the site where their power resided. Since the horn, by itself, was accepted to be the site where that mystical power resided, leaders of the ancient tribes started to wear horned helmets and horned head ornaments in order to show that they too were special and powerful. The leaders were incarnations of the sun deity on earth and therefore could rise towards the sun and perform mystical flights. This is how shamanism and mystical dances and rituals started among early humans speaking the proto-language. During these sacred gathering songs were chanted around bonfires. Fire became holy because it had the same power and characteristic as the sun.

I have mentioned in Chapter 1 that the Turkic Mu (Uighur) Empire was named as **Empire of the Sun**. Their symbols were representations of the sun and their leader was the shaman. The pictures below are clear indications of this connection. On the left side we see a person wearing horns and holding a spiral (1). There are several animals turned towards that person. The person on that petroglyph is the shaman incarnating the sun deity. He is the leader of the tribe. This is why all horned animals are looking in his direction. The same situation can be seen in the petroglyph at the center.



The central image is a petroglyph from a high peak in the Altai region of Central Asia (2). A long horned ibex and a horned deer are the main figures of this image. The length of the horn of the ibex is exaggerated on purpose to tell that this is not a regular ibex, but a special sacred one. The petroglyph on the right hand side is again an ibex from eastern Turkey, from the Tirishin plateau near the city of Van(3). If we find the same symbols in such distant regions of the world, we can conclude that these cultures were once connected and their source was common.

The early culture of the proto-world venerated a common **Sun god**. Since the sun resides in the sky, all creatures as well as natural formations rising towards the sun had also to be



venerated. This cultural belief started in Eurasia and spread into the world as these people moved towards new, unexplored regions and territories.

In the pictures below we see petroglyphs from the new world. Concentric circles are representation of the sun deity. A rope ladder and a hand is rising toward the sun. There are ibexes and a person wearing horns in the lower left side.

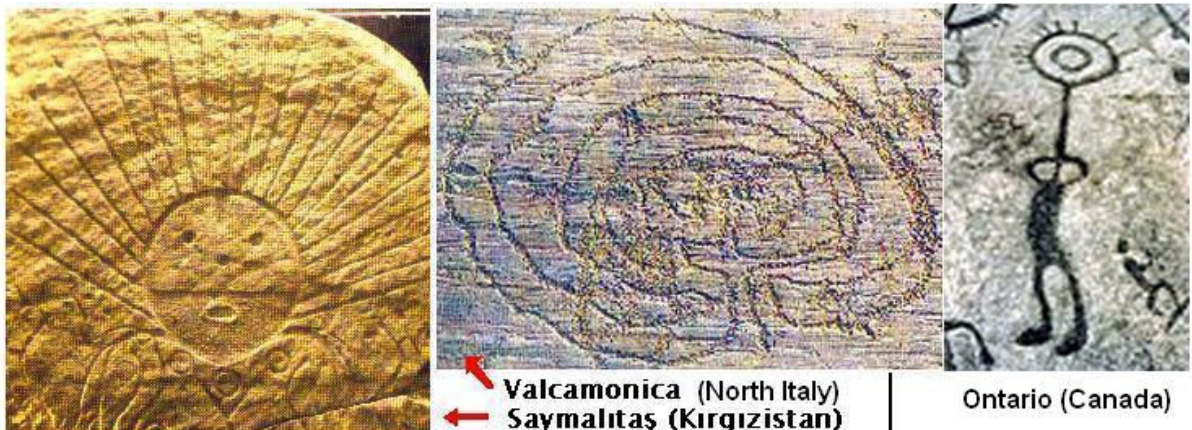


**Arizona**

**Nevada**

These petroglyphs are the precursors of the early ideograms. Ideograms are symbolic signs that convey an idea in a more sophisticated, rationalized and refined manner. They are the early forms of symbolic writing. They were not drawn by chance or by purposeless imagination. Their origin was rooted in the early forms and pictures existing in petroglyphs drawn by their ancestors. Let us not forget that several thousand years elapsed between the pictographic rock carvings and the symbolic ideograms.

There is a special term used to define the ideograms in Turkish. This word is “**Tamga**”, which means “**an ideogram containing a complete message**”. Therefore, the early ideograms were not phonetic letters but visual images conveying a sacred message. Early ideograms were not carved on rock or on the interior of caves just for fun or for counting herd animals, as many believe. They were carved for sending messages to the sun god. They were the early forms of written prayers. I will ponder and convey more detail on early ideograms in the future chapters.



Valcamonica (North Italy)  
Saymalitash (Kirgizistan)

Ontario (Canada)

In the picture above we see three different but similar carvings of the sun deity. The one on the left is from Central Asia. The one in the center is from the southern side of the Alp, in the mountainous region of north Italy. The one in the right is a petroglyph from Canada. One interesting common feature is that the sun and the human are merged in a single image. This is because the shaman who is also the leader of the tribe incarnates the power of the sun deity.

### **References**

- (1) **Geister, Götter und Symbole**, Felix R. Paturi, Frederking & Thaler, page 121
- (2) **Sibirya'nın Bilinçaltı**, Servet Somuncuođlu, Atlas magazine 178, page 95
- (3) **Anadolu'da Kayaüstü resimleri**. Ersin Alok, 1988, İstanbul, page 40