

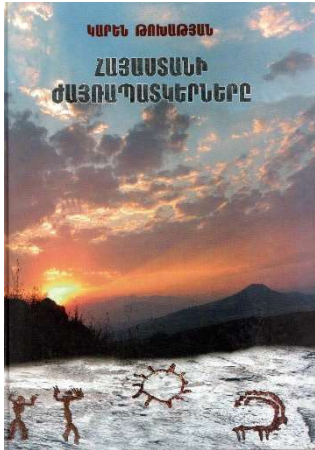
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KAREN TOKHATYAN. Petroglyphs of Armenia. Yerevan: “Gitutyun” Publishing House of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia, 2025. 520 p., 248 plates, 7 maps) *.

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Petroglyphs are intentionally created images, symbols, signs, and compositions engraved, pecked, incised, or otherwise executed on natural rock surfaces. They



represent one of humanity's earliest and most enduring forms of visual communication and symbolic expression, occupying a unique position at the intersection of art, cognition, religion, and social practice. Being a materialized manifestations of human thought, petroglyphs function simultaneously as archaeological sources, historical documents, artistic creations, repositories of collective memory, and carriers of cultural knowledge¹.

Reflecting diverse aspects of human life, they preserve information concerning economic activities, social organization, ritual practices, mythological narratives, cosmological perceptions, environmental adaptation, and intellectual achievements. As a system of non-verbal communication, petroglyphs enabled the recording, transmission, and accumulation of experience, beliefs, and knowledge across generations long before the emergence of formal writing systems. In many cultural traditions, they also formed an integral component of sacred landscapes, serving religious, commemorative, educational, territorial, and practical functions.

Beyond their immediate cultural context, petroglyphs constitute a valuable source for reconstructing the worldview and mentality of ancient societies. Their study provides insight into the development of symbolic behavior, artistic

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¹ For broader discussions of the interpretation, significance, and methodology of rock art studies: see E. A n a t i. The Typology of Rock Art. – “Expression”, 2019, № 23, pp. 7–23; P. G. B a h n. Prehistoric Rock Art: Polemics and Progress, 2010, Cambridge University Press, XVI + 222 p., 90 Ills.; A. L e r o i - G o u r h a n. The Art of Prehistoric Man in Western Europe, 1968, Thames & Hudson, 543 p.

traditions, scientific knowledge, and systems of communication, while illuminating the complex relationships between humans, nature, and the supernatural. Consequently, petroglyphs should be understood not merely as rock engravings, but as a multifaceted cultural phenomenon embodying the historical memory, intellectual heritage, and spiritual experience of past communities.

Petroglyphs may be understood as a visual and symbolic archive of humanity, preserving in durable form the intellectual, spiritual, social, and artistic experience of past communities. Being a materialized thought embedded in the landscape, they served simultaneously as instruments of communication, repositories of collective memory, markers of identity, and mediators between human beings, nature, and the sacred realm. In this regard, the Armenian Highlands occupy a particularly important position and significance, as various regions of this area can be regarded as an exceptionally important source and, at the same time, an archive of rock art and its related aspects. It should be noted that there already exists a substantial body of highly valuable research on the petroglyphs of different parts of the Armenian Highlands, carried out primarily by Armenian scholars such as G. Karakhanyan, H. Martirosyan, H. Israyelyan, S. Petrosyan, S. Sardaryan². A comprehensive and significant study of various regions of Western Armenia has been conducted by M. Uyanik³. The works of Karen Tokhatyan should likewise be regarded as major contributions to the study of Armenian rock art. Their particular significance lies in the fact that they synthesize the results of previous research while also incorporating the extensive material collected and documented by the author himself. It should be emphasized that the present monograph is the culmination of approximately forty years of tireless and dedicated scholarly work by K. Tokhatyan. He devoted a considerable part of his academic career to fieldwork in mountainous regions,

² Գ. Հ. Կարախանյան, Պ. Գ. Սաֆյան. Սյունիքի ժայռապատկերները, Հայաստանի հնագիտական հուշարձանները, հ. 4, Երևան, 1970, աղ. 342, Հ. Ա. Մարտիրոսյան. Հայաստանի նախնադարյան նշանագրերը և նրանց ուրարտա-հայկական կրկնակները, Երևան, 1973, աղ. 23, Հ. Ա. Մարտիրոսյան. Գիտությունն սկսվում է նախնադարում, Երևան, 1978, աղ. 40, նկ. 127, Հ. Ա. Մարտիրոսյան. Գեղամա լեռների ժայռապատկերները, Հայաստանի հնագիտական հուշարձանները, հ. 11, Երևան, 1981, նկ. 40, աղ. 81, Հ. Ա. Մարտիրոսյան, Հ. Ռ. Իսրայելյան. Գեղամա լեռների ժայռապատկերները, Հայաստանի հնագիտական հուշարձանները, հ. 6, Երևան, 1971, նկ. 333, Ս. Պետրոսյան. Հայկական ժայռապատկերներ, Երևան, 2005, նկ. 648, Ս. Սարգսյան. Հայաստանի ժայռապատկերները քարի դարից մինչև բրոնզի դար, Երևան, 2010, նկ. 205:

³ M. Uyanik. Petroglyphs of South-Eastern Anatolia: Asiatic Rock Paintings and Petroglyphs. Graz, 1974, "Akademische Druck-u. Verlagsanstalt", 166 tab.

meticulously recording, one by one, both previously known and newly discovered petroglyphs. It should also be noted that petroglyphs currently play an important role as symbols of national identity in Armenian society. They are widely employed in architectural decoration, jewelry design, and various other forms of applied and decorative art.

The significance of the study also lies in the author's multifaceted approach to the analysis of rock art. The various images, symbols, and compositional groups are presented within a comprehensive analytical framework. Particularly valuable is the author's approach of systematically comparing these materials with later chronological parallels, thereby demonstrating their semantic and ideological continuity. The author's high level of scholarly professionalism is further demonstrated by the extensive range of literature utilized in the study and, in particular, by the rich visual documentation presented in the monograph, including nearly 255 plates and maps.

This monograph presents a comprehensive study of the petroglyphs of the Armenian Highlands, one of the most significant and extensive corpora of rock art in region. Petroglyphs constitute a unique historical and cultural source that preserves information about the worldview, intellectual achievements, ritual practices, economic activities, and artistic traditions of ancient societies. As visual expressions of human thought and experience, they served as a means of communication, transmission of knowledge, and preservation of collective memory long before the emergence of formal writing systems.

The rock art of Armenia is distinguished by its antiquity, thematic diversity, precision of execution, and close integration with the natural and cultural landscape. Spanning a chronological range from the 7th millennium BC – and possibly even earlier – through to the medieval period, these monuments provide invaluable evidence for reconstructing the cognitive, historical, and cultural development of the Armenian Highlands.

The study is based on a broad documentary foundation, comprising approximately 6,000 petroglyphs at 80 of the 85 currently known petroglyph sites in the Armenian Highlands (primarily within the Republic of Armenia, Artsakh, Nakhijevan, and throughout all historical Armenia), as well as more than one hundred associated ritual, residential, defensive, irrigation, and astronomical structures. These materials are supplemented by previously published corpora of petroglyphs, archaeological findings, linguistic, folkloric, and ethnographic evidence, as well as testimonies preserved in the works of ancient and medieval Armenian historians and philosophers. The research also incorporates verified information from scholarly literature, archival sources, digital repositories, maps, photographs, and other documentary materials.

A major contribution of the study is the creation of a multilayered database integrating approximately 8,000 petroglyphs and image groups, together with nearly 800 archaeological sites and associated structures. Each monument is

documented through a comprehensive set of descriptive and analytical parameters, enabling systematic classification, comparison, spatial mapping, and statistical analysis. The database establishes a new methodological foundation for the investigation, preservation, and visualization of the rock art of the Armenian Highlands, while also opening new avenues for future interdisciplinary research. It enables scholars to examine monuments within their original environmental and cultural contexts.

The monograph examines petroglyphs through a multidisciplinary framework that combines archaeological, historical, linguistic, ethnographic, folkloric, philosophical, and archaeoastronomical approaches. Particular attention is devoted to the relationship between rock art and other spheres of Armenian culture, including mythology, religion, architecture, visual arts, crafts, calendrical systems, and writing traditions. The study argues that petroglyphs should not be viewed as isolated artistic creations but rather as integral elements of a broader cultural system reflecting the worldview and intellectual life of ancient communities. Their imagery preserves evidence of cosmological concepts, ritual behavior, social organization, and practical knowledge accumulated over millennia. A substantial section of the monograph is devoted to the historiography of Armenian petroglyph studies. The author identifies five major stages in the development of research in this field. The first stage begins with the observations of medieval Armenian scholars, particularly historians and philosophers of the 5th to 7th centuries AD, whose writings contain some of the earliest references to rock art and its later reflections. The second stage encompasses the discoveries and descriptive accounts of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The third is characterized by systematic scientific expeditions and the publication of the first specialized monographs. The fourth stage involves the application of digital technologies and map-based documentation, while the fifth focuses on three-dimensional modeling and virtual reconstruction of archaeological landscapes. Together, these stages demonstrate the gradual transformation of petroglyph studies into a distinct field of scholarly inquiry.

The research pays special attention to the astronomical and cosmological perceptions of Armenian rock art. Numerous engraved representations of celestial bodies and phenomena, including the Sun, Moon, stars, constellations, and other astronomical motifs, are analyzed in relation to ritual practices, calendrical systems, and sacred landscapes. The study argues that these images served not only symbolic and cultic functions but also practical purposes connected with the measurement of time and orientation in space. Comparisons with archaeological monuments reveal that celestial concepts influenced the location, orientation, and symbolic organization of settlements, sanctuaries, necropolises, and megalithic structures. Several archaeoastronomical sites are examined as possible observational and calendrical centers, contributing to a

broadier understanding of ancient scientific knowledge of the inhabitants of the Armenian Highlands.

The monograph further includes the role of petroglyphs in the development of symbolic communication and writing. It argues that certain ideographic and pictographic traditions preserved in rock art may have contributed to later forms of visual symbolism and writing systems. In this context, the study revisits questions concerning the origins of Armenian literacy, the development of calendrical knowledge, and the cultural environment that eventually culminated in the creation of the Armenian alphabet. While recognizing the complexity of these issues, the research emphasizes the importance of petroglyphic evidence for understanding long-term processes of cultural continuity and intellectual development.

The principal conclusion of the monograph is that Armenian petroglyphs represent a unique cultural phenomenon and one of the most important sources for reconstructing the ancient worldview of the Armenian Highlands. Their themes, symbolism, geographical distribution, and connections with other cultural domains demonstrate remarkable heredity across thousands of years. By integrating archaeological evidence with linguistic, folkloric, ethnographic, and archaeoastronomical data, the study reveals previously unrecognized relationships between rock art and broader historical processes. The results contribute not only to the understanding of Armenian cultural heritage but also to wider discussions concerning the origins of symbolic thought, the development of early knowledge systems, and the evolution of human culture. Ultimately, the monograph presents the Armenian Highlands as a major center of cultural creativity whose intellectual traditions have persisted from prehistory into historical times.

In conclusion, it can be stated that K. Tokhatyan's monograph is a foundational and significant study that offers a contextual and comprehensive analysis of the rock art of the Armenian Highlands. It is expected to serve as an important reference point for both researchers working in the field and a broader readership, playing a substantial role in the dissemination and popularization of Armenia's historical and cultural heritage.

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