



PROCEEDINGS OF THE IFRAO CONGRESS
September 2010

2013 # 5

<http://www.palethnologie.org>
ISSN 2108-6532

directed by
Jean CLOTTE

PLEISTOCENE ART OF THE WORLD

Short articles



PLEISTOCENE ART IN AZERBAIJAN

Malahat FARAJOVA

Out of the four petroglyph sites discovered on the territory of Azerbaijan, Pleistocene art is represented only in Gobustan, with images of women in profile, early hunters and Upper Pleistocene fauna: aurochs, gazelles and wild horses, depicted on the walls of the caves. The natural conditions in the Upper Pleistocene were closer to forests of the tugai type. We suppose there existed oak-pine woods in the nearest vicinity of Gobustan and in the coastal strip of the Caspian Sea. On the slopes of the Gobustan foothills grass vegetation of Gramineae type was predominant; today it can be found in some damp places of Gobustan. However, a number of deer rock engravings indicate the existence of well-developed tugai woods that were probably destroyed recently. From the tree remains found one can conclude that in the Upper Pleistocene, in the hilly area, a savannah landscape had developed but in a different way than contemporary savannahs in Africa. These north savannahs represented lightwoods, formed by trees with winter defoliation. General desertification of open landscapes in connection with glacier regression degraded the landscape of the north savannah and semisteppe and semi-desert plants developed in its place.

In Azerbaijan rock art images are silhouetted, continuous or contoured. Animals and birds are always depicted. The characteristic features of animals are vividly expressed in these realistic images that seem closer to Aurignacian images, although some coarseness is felt in them.

Beyukdash Mountain, “Kaniza” site-shelter. The images include the heads of aurochs, early hunters and oxen. Here petroglyphs are found on boulders. Besides, a large number of artifacts made on bone were found here.

Beyukdash Mountain, “Ana-zaga” site. Images of aurochs, women and early hunters predominate.

Beyukdash Mountain, “Okuzler” site. Conjugal themes predominate, with 2 aurochs, a man and a woman holding each other’s hands, 2 goats.

Kichikdash Mountain, “Gaya arasi” site. Specially interesting is the image of a big fish, 423 cm long, on stone no. 5 of the Kichikdash Mountain (figure). Judging from approximate data this is an image of a dolphin, which is an extinct animal in the region; the existence of dolphins in the Caspian Sea is dated to the Upper Quaternary. The image of a dolphin in its turn crosses depictions of oxen. Besides, this image was executed on the wall of an early hunters’ shelter, at the foot of which a cultural layer with Upper Paleolithic industry was found. From this cultural layer nuclei, trapezes, denticulate bladelets and bone awls with Upper Paleolithic characteristics were found out.



A big fish, 423 cm long, and figures of aurochs under it, on stone no. 5 of the Kichikdash Mountain.

Also, the image of an ox was found on the wall, which was covered with a cultural layer. The lowest part of the image is 1.50 m from the ground. So, one can come to the following conclusion: the given image was executed far earlier than the cultural layer. Another important fact is that a separate stone, revealed from the cultural layer of 3.5 m, served as a floor for the 1.85-2 m cultural layer and images of anthropomorphic figures were carved on it, particularly, claviform images of pregnant women in profile. So, images of oxen in the “Gaya arasi” site can approximately be dated to the end of the Upper Paleolithic, but claviform images on a separate stone are accordingly dated to an earlier period.

Kichikdash Mountain, “Jeyranlar” site. Various themes are represented on the walls of this site: images of gazelles, aurochs and women.

New data on the dating of petroglyphs, recently obtained, require some specification and modification in the chronology and periodization of Gobustan. Let us consider the archaeological inventory, revealed in the Ana-zaga site in Gobustan, based on the cultural division of western and Russian historians.

Ana-zaga shelter. Ana-zaga cave is situated on the upper terrace of the Beyukdash Mountain in Gobustan. It was excavated in 2009 and sediments up to a depth of 400 cm were exposed. With the aim to obtain absolute dates, samples from the cultural layer at the depth of 185 cm were taken and were dated; preliminary calibrated data showed 9 029 BC. From the cultural layer archaeologists discovered choppers, cone-shaped, pencilshaped and cylindric nucleuses. The inventory of the site also consists of chisels, micro-edges, knifelike plaits, segments, flint trapeziums, micro-plates, percussion tools from river stones and weight stones. Here fragments of separate stones with anthropomorphic silhouetted images were also found.

As we see petroglyphs are to a lesser or greater degree connected with the archaeological layer. Consequently, these petroglyphs are older or of the same age with the formation of the layer. Gobustan petroglyphs on the walls of Ana-zaga shelter are fully identical both by their style or techniques of execution with separate stones with images, revealed from the archaeological layer.





 **P@LETHNOLOGY**
Bilingual review of prehistory