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Fantastic predator of Kalbak - Tash (High Altai Mountains): Göbekli tepe parallels

Elena A. Okladnikova*

Sankt-Petersburg State Economic University, St. Petersburg, Russia

Abstract

Mountain Kalbak-Tash – it is a unique monument of rock art in High Altai Mountains. The aim of the research is to reveal the presence of traces «of the bridges of cultural contacts» between the West and the East of the ancient Eurasia on the example of analysis of the semantics of one fascinating rock art image of Kalbak-Tash: fantastic predators of syncretic nature. According to recent archaeological investigations the image of a fantastic predator appeared in the Neolithic Turkey. The appearance of the fantastic predator image found by the archaeologists on the one of Göbekli-Tepe temple columns let as assume that gradually over time this image has acquired both chthonic and astral features. Similar features have Kalbak-Tash and Okunev (Yenisei river basin) fantastic predators. It can be also assumed that the image of Fantastic predators has reached the territory of South Siberia through the Caucasus “bridge of contacts”. This “bridge of contacts” existed between the West and the East of Eurasia during the long period. Its existence reveals the cross-communication problem. Population of ancient Eurasia was bound by cultural contacts. The mythological image of fantastic predator acquired features of the «Lord of the Universe» in South Siberian culture of Bronze age. The image of the fantastic predator of syncretic nature appears alongside the image of a mythical hero in rock art of Altai (Kalbak-Tash).

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* Corresponding author. Tel.: +7-812-602-32-64; fax: none.
E-mail address: okladnikova-ca@yandex.ru
1. Introduction

Kalbak-Tash Mountain was marked by tradition and was worshiped in ancient times. The evidences of such worship are the following: 1) the presence of a large number of rock drawings, which date back as Neolithic times; 2) same images existed in Altai petroglyphs in Chalcolithic period, Bronze age, Tagar and even in ancient Turkic periods; 3) on the surface of Kalbak-Tash rocks many drawings (petroglyphs) of ritual character were found; 4) the compact isolation of the dozens of groups of drawings on a rock-press to Chuya River located at 729 km. of Chia high road; 5) findings of stone mortars for grinding the paint directly under the rocks with petroglyphs (Kubarev, 2011: 6) burial without equipment in the gap between the rocks and the drawings, which V.D. Kubarev dated by early Bronze age (Kubarev, 2011: 7) availability of images, which allow us to speak about Kalbak-Tash rock art as evidence of ancient contacts between the population of the Altai mountains of Bronze age, with the inhabitants of Near East, as well as the population of the Scythian and Turkic periods and even with China. To the number of subjects, which may testify the “information flowing of historical landscapes”, are the following: the carved on the stones drawings of ancient chariots (dated be Bronze age), images of men in the mushroom caps with oval objects at the waist, ritualists in the radiant hats, bulls with stone bodies, lattice figures, Fantastic predators syncretic appearance and etc.

2. Study area

Mountain Kalbak-Tash is located in the heart of the territories of the Eurasian continent, which we define as the Central Asia (Mongolia, areas of Northern China (Xinjiang, Gansu province, the Northern parts of the provinces of Shaanxi, of Shanxi, Ningxia), Transbaikalia, East Turkestan, Tuva, Altai mountains, Minusinsk depression and the Krasnoyarsk territory. We can realize it is a big part of Southern Siberia (Fig.1).

Kalbak-Tash is located on the shore of the Chuya River, forming a crop to the river or in the Altai language – “bom” (rock density to the river), covered with rock paintings of different historic periods. The mountain is a special type of sanctuary or temple under open sky.

![Fig. 1: Mountain Kalbak-Tash in Altai](image)

As in many other similar types of ancient sanctuaries (grotto Kujs, Kucherla, outlet of Oroktoy Creek, etc.) Kalback-Tash has many zoomorphic petroglyphs. Among them according to estimates done by V.D. Kubarev, predators are found in the following quantity: wolf/dog (465), bears (34), fantastic zoomorphic images of a predator of the cat's nature (leopard, lynx (?) (12) (Kubarev, 2011: 18).

3. Material

In spite of the fact that in the monograph, devoted to drawings Kalbak-Tash V.D. Kubarev allocated thirteen of images fantastic predators syncretic nature, we tend to believe that the bedrock outcrops mountains are located only three images of fantastic predators syncretic nature, small one, see Fig. 2, bigger one (North-West flank of Kalbak-Tash), see Fig 3, and the great one see Fig.4.

One, the largest – great fantastic predator, is located on a sloping surface of the cliff, towering above the Central composition of rock panels of the upper tier of the mountain. The time of great fantastic predator’s appearance on the rock: the final stage of the cultures of the Bronze Age.

The composition of the central part of the upper tier of the mountain Kalbak-Tash is three-tiered, at the bottom it was damaged by the natural destruction of the rocks. The main subjects of the composition are: 1) the figure of a fantastic predator (66 x 45cm) is disposed on the smooth surface of the rock over the central composition; 2) the
multi-figured scene (animals, geometrical figures, people) is disposed on a horizontal surface just near the fantastic predator; 3) procession heading to the right of six men in the mushroom caps with oval objects from the waist. The figure of the second man is located under the toothy snout of a predator. It is twice more higher than the rest; 4) in the lower right part of the composition we can see eight deer in a row, turned their heads to the right, located over a long zigzag line, which is in the left part of the composition, rising to his feet male figures of the left part of the composition.

![Image 1](image1.png)  ![Image 2](image2.png)  ![Image 3](image3.png)

Fig. 2: Small fantastic predator of syncretic nature (Kalback-Tash)  
Fig. 3: Fantastic predator. North-West flank of Kalbak-Tash.  
Fig. 4: Great fantastic predator (Kalbak-Tash)

It remains an open question about the time of the creation of these petroglyphs. Figures on the second tier can be dated by the Bronze Age dating is carried out on the basis of a wide range analogy: petroglyphs of Sagan-Zaba (lake Baikal) (Okladnikov, 1980; 1981). Mongolia and others petroglyphs are male figures with oval objects around the waist in mushroom hats (Okladnikov, 1974). Feet of these figures depicted in profile, they have athletic appearance: with a narrow waist and broad shoulders. Part of drawings of the 1-st tier, to which belongs to the image of a fantastic predator, clearly represent different ages. Images of animals, geometrical figures (spots round shape), are of small size. They can be attributed to a later time than the image of a fantastic predator. The comparison of small in size figurines, schematic image execution on the vertical plane of the central panels allows to assume, that they were created by the artists of the later period. The image of the fantastic predators contains a lot of information: stylistic, semantic, composition, historical-genetic and astroarcheological. Each of these aspects can give scientists the information about the presence of the “bridges of cultural contacts”, which linked together the population of ancient Eurasia in different historical periods.

4. Methods

Semiotic analysis of the cross-communication problem is based on revelation of regional peculiarities and coincidences of stylistic, composition and semantic features of fantastic predators which image is common to South Siberia and Near-East ancient monumental art.

**Stylistic peculiarities of the petroglyphs.** Petroglyph of Kalbak-Tash fantastic predator clearly demonstrates the combination of the two stylistic features. First is Okunev culture monumental style. See Fig.5.

![Image 5](image5.png)  ![Image 6](image6.png)

Fig. 5: Fantastic predators. Okunev culture.  
Fig. 6: Fantastic predator. Scythian-Siberian culture.

Second is Scythian-Siberian culture monumental style. See Fig.6. These stylistic features are: iconographic and technological methods, methods of drawing the image on the surface of the rock.
It has been suggested that the manifestation of the Scythian-Siberian style indicate: 1) long tail of Kalbak-Tash predator; 2) the creeping posture; 3) the round shape of teeth. It seems to us that from the point of view of the analysis that is stylistic devices, this artistic image shows the stylistic unity only with the images of fantastic predators Okunev culture, despite the fact that its semantic parallels much more extensive. Semantic analogy, including the cosmological connotations found in the art of the Scythian-Siberian, ancient Turkic art, and the art of China (VII–III centuries B.C., Sassanian Iran and others.

The parallels with similar rock art drawings in Okunev culture are visible in the following details of the image of a predator: 1) small, round, close-set ears on his head, a round, big eyes; 2) expanded in the front and tapered to the rear of the body; 3) the bear's muzzle with open toothy jaws, which are viewed sharp teeth and tusks; 4) long-bent in the joints of the legs, resembling bird legs with spurs and long slender curved inward claws; 5) skeletal manner the body of the predator; 6) clasped at the back of the tail. For example, the tail of a predator on the stele which was found near village Chernovaya is decorated with 24 increased waves. The tail of Kalbak-Tash predator divided into ten sections by nine horizontal lines; 7) rock art drawings of fantastic predators found in Yenisei river basin and in Altai mountains are distinguished by their size among the attendant drawings.


Archaeologists associate penetration of the Middle Eastern mythology elements to the South of Siberia and into the Yenisei river basin with the arrived bands of early cattle-breeders, (Antonova, 1984). According to L.R. Kizlasov migration of Afanasiev cultural tradition took place in the Late Neolith, according to J.A. Cher – in the epoch of Yamnay and Afanasiev cultures according to B.N. Pyatkin – in the period of the second period of more recent wave of Indo-European resettlement to the East which took place in III-II thousand years BC. Study of the influence of the style of monumental Afanasiev art (stone steles, rock drawings) on the petroglyphs of the neighboring regions (Altai) is carried out on the basis of carved images semiotic analysis and on analysis of Afanasiev archaeological artifacts, also on the archaeo chronological analysis of ancient art and monumental religious buildings. In rock art allocation of Afanasiev (Indo-European) group of drawings is traditionally carried out on the basis of semantic and stylistic analysis. Main subject groups of Afanasiev rock drawings are: 1) the bulls, 2) censers, 3) vertical structural elements of the drawing, 4) horizontal bands, etc. (Esin, 2010; Podolsky, 1997).

Compositional features. Such features are: 1) the vertical position of a large predator on a sloping plane of the rock over the top part of the Central composition of the panels Kalbak-Tash; 2) its exceedingly large size in relation to majority of the other drawings on the bottom of the center petroglyph panels; 3) allocation of the size of the Central panel of only two figures: the fantastic predators and one of the heroes with the mushroom cap; 4) tiered location of large blocks of figures; 5) carved technique done by small point-strikes, forming a clear line of the loop. These features of the composition and technology of execution bring together the image of Kalbak-Tash fantastic predators and Okunev period stone drawings. The sum of these compositional and peculiarities of technical execution of this image make us think that fantastic predator appeared on the rock surface later than was created the Central horizontal section of rock art composition bellow. So, a large Kalbak-Tash fantastic predator is a work of artists who have come from another territory, other ethno-cultural community. It could be Yenisei basin. Probably these artists could be creators of the Okunev art on Yenisei river or their direct descendants. Rock art images of fantastic predators were widespread in the ancient art of Tagar period on the adjacent territories (Cher et al., 1987; Kubarev, 1999; Sovetova, 2002).

Allocated by archaeologists in the ancient monumental art Yenisei basin population, as Tagar period, and more early Okunev period a group of images of fantastic predatory animals are distinguished by their synkretic features and the presence of “toothy mouth, sometimes with the language, clawed paws, long and curved at the end of the tail of a cat's predator, free hanging or throw back” (Sovetova, 2002:121). Expressive compositional features of this image are the hidden aggression, active position. The images of such beings are represented in the “catching up”, “waiting”, “upcoming”, but not “tortured” pose. Olga Sovetova wrote: “…it is obvious that strong emotions are only presupposed (petroglyphs introduce us to his imaginary world and we should assessed it according to the same rules” (Sovetova, 2002). Also Olga Sovetova pointed out that: “…most of the predators did not even touch to their
victims, although among the Oglahi petroglyphs there is a drawing in which the muzzle of a predator (a bear?) in contact with the deer’s ass, but this is the exception. Also unique are the rock art compositions, appearing on the same rock (Oglahi) with rapidly surging predators. In these compositions hoofed animals may not be present. Such composition can be interpreted as breeding scenes of animals. This subject is common in Near East art” (Sovtova, 2002). In Kalbak-Tash composition, as well as in the scenes on Okunev steles, fantastic predators performs a role of cosmological ideogram, or symbols of chthonic forces, markers of the dark side of the universe, connected with the concept of death and reincarnation processes.

Semantic peculiarities of the petroglyphs. Iconography, composite, technical and stylistic peculiarities of the image of the Kalbak-Tash fantastic predators allow us to bring together with fantastic syncretic deity, which was named after the “Lord of the Universe” (Leontiev et al., 2006; Pyatkin and Martynov, 1985). A distinctive feature of the image of in the monuments of Okunev art is bear’s outline of the head, rising to the Neolithic prototypes of the “Lord of the Universe” (Pyatkin and Martynov, 1985) (Fig. 3). The bear cult of the peoples of Siberia has deep historical roots, which is based on the idea of the bear as being semi beast-semi human being, combining the features of «Lord of the universe», and God of Thunder (Alekseenko,1960; Anisimov1958; Golan1994; Vasilevich 1969; Zelenin1936). Mythological essence of the image is implemented in the ancient art of the Yenisei basin different and nonspecific to real beast signs. This signs are the circles on the body; long tails curl over back, elongated three-toed feet (Leontiev et al., 2006). The iconographic detail of the Kalbak-Tash predator has many common features with the image of “Lord of the Universe” dated by the early stage of Okunev monumental art. The Kalbak-Tash predator has many common features with the Okunev fantastic beasts: heavy bull body, short, thick bird legs (possibly, crane) and a bear head. They are known only through the images on two steles found on the left bank of the Askis River. Boris Piatkin wrote: “Each of the component parts of the image of the beast of the first two groups correlate with one of the areas or elements of the universe: bird legs – with an air space, bull or a dog body – with the earthly world the bear's head with the other. The fantastic beast is a general personification of the Universe. It is not only the Lord but also the Creator of the World” (Pyatkin and Martynov, 1985).

When comparing the images of a predator on the rock near village Chernovay (Yenisey basin) and Kalbak-Tash fantastic predators as a symbolic sign of sharing these images, we can highlight the following elements for semantic analysis: 1) more «realism» in expression of the image of Kalbak-Tash predator, which was manifested in an effort to convey less stylized image of the animal, than it did Okunevsky artist. Artist wants to depict in fantastic beast’s characteristic features of such animals as the snow leopard (fat long tail), the bear (a square muzzle with rounded teeth and prominent front teeth, thin legs of a bird of prey with long talons); 2) the tendency to geometry symbolism of a Chernovay predator (maintenance of the image of a fantastic animal by geometric symbols in the form of a circle with a dot in the center, pointing up); 3) put a sign in the form of a circle with a diagonal cross on the rear of the predator body (Chernovay); 4) the body carved in skeletal manner (artist depicted 16 ribs); 5) pair of circles, located in the “below” the ribs. The semantics of skeletal decor body Okunev fantastic predator reveals the meaning of his image as being associated with the idea of death and chthonic forces. Without whose activity of that forces revival of life is impossible. Signs of revival of life are geometry and astral signs. More realistically transferred the image of Kalbak-Tash predator is not less cosmological than Okunev image of the “Lord of the Universe”. This is evidenced by three circular spots that are located under the tail of Kalbak-Tash predator, perhaps symbolizing the three stars of the constellation of Orion (Okladnikova, 1991). But on the body of Kalbak-Tash predator no such obvious signs of its chthonic nature as on Okunev the “Lord of the Universe”. The appearance of Kalbak-Tash fantastic creatures combined the features of the few living beings: bear, ibis, and bird of prey. Despite the fact that V.D. Kubarev found among 372-x images only 4 birds among the Kalbak-Tash drawings, only one of them identified as the crane (Kubarev, 2011). None of bird drawings has such long spikes and five curved long-clawed paws like a fantastic predator. Nevertheless, close to the shape of the figures of Kalbak-Tash fantastic predators and Okunev predator were found on the horizontal plates of the upper tier of the rocks of the North-Western slope of the mountain of Kalbak-Tash (Fig. 2 a-b). Perhaps they were more recent copies of large fantastic predators on the Kalbak-Tash central panel. See Fig.2 and Fig.3.

The composition with overhanging of fantastic predator over the men's figures middle-tier causes visual association with other rock compositions of Kalbak-Tash. See Fig.4. In drawing it is visible, that the muzzle of a predator limits on top of a complex multilayered composition. Rock art composition may has totemic and
cosmogony sense. The Kalbak-Tash multilayered composition through the image of fantastic predators can be considered as a representation of the series cosmological ideas associated with the notions of: 1) the Great Mother-Goddess, the analogue of which is a complex of Okunev zoo-anthropomorphic images, representing the connection of human and predator features being imprinted on the stele found near the village Razliv; 2) models of the Universe in the form of a circle, divided in parallel stripes on the same stele near village Razliv; 3) the system of fantastic zoomorphic spirits of ancestors, represented in the form of semi human, semi predator’s syncretic natures. It means that Kalbak-Tash predator, as well as its Okunev prototypes, is deeply cosmological.

But how far removed the “difficult unrealistic” iconographic type of Kalbak-Tash fantastic predator through the nature of the image and style of the execution of the Scythian pictures predators can be observed on the imagery of predators found in the archaeological artifacts (the second Bashadar Kurgan, Tuetka, Pasirik, etc.). Images of feline predators as a decoration of objects of small plastic and toreutics are known not only by the finds of Scythian time from the burial mounds of the Southern Siberia, but also on materials of Saglin culture of Tuva, petroglyphs of Tugar Period of the Minusinsk depression and Minusinsk bronzes, Sak petroglyphs of Kazakhstan, Scythian art of the South-Russian steppes.

Nevertheless, the image of Kalbak-Tash fantastic predators and predators of the Scytho-Siberian style, and even images of fantastic predators in the Sassanian art links identified by archaeologists owing to cosmological meaning of these images. The Sassanian dish (VI-VII centuries) according to the inscription on it, “military leader of Khorasan” Dadbarsuxr son of Frohman of the family of Gelsar shows the harmony of the Universe: its water with the fish, land, plants, fantastic creature, which combines the attributes of a predator and grazing, as well as birds, fish, and of the beast, and even plants.

It is the embodiment of all life on Earth supplied the allegorical figure of the flutist (perhaps, the goddess Anakhita?), playing, riding on the back of preceding fantastic predators. “In the VI-VII centuries in the Sassanian art of producing relief of art products from metal there is a theme of the Universe with its water, land, plants, animals – with the obligatory combination of predatory and peaceful creatures, is inherent in the world order. Updated subjects began, probably, during Khosrov I (531-578) after the suppression of the kingship of Mazdak. The Board of Khosrov was considered exemplary fair, and the idea of the world order and interdependence of all things related to late phase of development of Zoroastrianism” (Marshak, 1992).

Cosmology connects fantastic predator’s mountains Kalbak-Tash and later, the ancient Turkic drawings (the pommel of a saddle from a burial mound Kuderge) (Fig. 43). Cultural unity and the unity of artistic culture of Altai and Asia Minor in Scythian period are admitted by many researchers (Devlet, 1965). S.I. Rudenko wrote about extending the influence of the art of Southwest Asia in the Middle Asia and North of the Black Sea (Rudenko and Glukhov, 1927).

5. Discussion

Interpretation of cosmological sense of the Fantastic predator image as a subject of Altai rock art opens up possibilities for such kinds of analysis as: 1) historical-genetic; 2) historical-cultural space; 3) astroarchaeological. On the hill Kalbak-Tash the fantastic predator feline (semi bear, semi ibris, semi crane (?) was shown hanging over the procession of the warriors or priests in the mushroom hats with sticks and oval objects around the waist. The plane of the rock with a pattern is oriented to South-East, and the base of the rock was a unique astronomical observatories and, possibly, the venue of the ceremonies associated with the calendar cycles (Okladnikova, 2013). Profile image predator’s syncretic nature Okunev culture on the Yenisei river – these are the images of the “Lords of the Universe”. These zoomorphic deities associated with the idea of birth/death, respectively, time of life/time of death (Okladnikova, 2012).

Probably the fantastic predator syncretic nature was the “monster of the abyss”. It was a personification of the dark, annihilating powers of hell/death and darkness, time non-existence, for which, inevitably was a new birth, just as the astronomical winter causes the onset of spring and after it – summer. Since 1994 the process of excavations on the hill Göbekly-Tepe (Turkey) was found cult building, dating from the late Neolith.
By some scientists this cult complex is considered as the earliest temple in the world. On one of the stone pillars Göbekli-Tepe preserved image descend on the vertical wall of a massive stone pillar image of leopard. See Fig. 7.

We assume that Göbekli-Tepe leopard’s symbolic can be compared with the symbolic of Kalbark-Tash image fantastic predators mountains, see Fig. 8, as well as a fantastic predators Okunev culture, see Fig. 9.

Mountain Kalbark-Tash in ancient times could perform the function of a rocky sanctuary under the open sky. Kalbark-Tash ritual function can be the same as the function of Göbekli-Tepe temple. Artists who have forsaken the picture is fantastic predator on Kalbark-Tash, were mobile. On central panel of Kalbark-Tash was knock-out on a rock surface a ritual scene. In that scene carved decorated animals are represented. On the other hand, the outline of the figures of Kalbark-Tash heroes, see Fig. 10, are very similar to the image of the hero with two bird heads fighting a fantastic cat’s like predator in Bactrian art. Bactrian hero is shown fighting both the fantastic predator and wild boar.

This composition was cast from metal. It is a decoration of Bactrian battle axe or ritual vessel, see Fig. 11. This ritual scene decorated the handle of a ritual vessel, which was used in rituals, possibly connected with calendar computation of time (Okladnikova, 1991).

The origins of the fantastic predator’s syncretic nature image is worth looking for in the mythology and the art of the Middle East Neolithic periods. According to recent archaeological investigations the image of the worshiped tiger-like or irbis-like predator appeared in the Neolithic Turkey. The appearance of the image of Göbekli-Tepe temple worshiped tiger-like or irbis-like predator let as assume that gradually over time this image has acquired both chthonic and astral features. Similar features have Kalbark-Tash and Okunev Fantastic predators. It is possible, through the Caucasus bridge contacts between the West and the East of Eurasia, the image gets in Siberia (Okunev culture of the Yenisei and cultures of the bronze age of Altai).

The appearance of the fantastic predator image found by the archaeologists on the one of Göbekli-Tepe temple columns let as assume that gradually over time this image has acquired both chthonic and astral features. Similar features have Kalbark-Tash and Okunev (Yenisei basin) fantastic predators. In monuments of Altai (Kalbark-Tash) rock art the image of the fantastic predator syncretic nature appears alongside the image of the hero. In Bactrian art a mythical hero with two bird heads is fighting a fantastic cat’s like predator and aper. Images of a fantastic cat’s like predator and a muscular hero himself (Bactrian art) and fantastic predator of Kalbark-Tash and heroes in “mushroom” hats are more alike each other.
Thus the rock paintings of the mountain Kalbak-Tash, among which stands out the picture of fantastic predator, were developed under the influence of the Scythian and Ancient Turk’s cultures. This becomes evident by the semantics of the plot, the technique of drawing, vertical or diagonal location on the plane rock picture of fantastic predator.

6. Conclusions

The rock drawing of Altai Mountains contains information about:

1) The “bridges of cultural contacts”, emerged as a result of spread by Upper Paleolithic, Low Neolithic and Bronze age culture of Eurasia. These were the bridges of contacts, which linked the population of Eurasia (the Middle East and the South of Siberia) not only in the Bronze Age, but also in Tagar period, which were identified on the basis of Salbik burial mound archaeological data (15);

2) The presence of the developed world view of the South Eurasia Bronze age culture (including Altai Mountains). This world view included the idea of modeling the Universe with the use of zoomorphic and astral code, in which the images of fantastic predators were associated with the dark forces of the Universe. Potentially images of fantastic predators were also connected with the idea of reincarnation.

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