

## Tamgaly (Kazakhstan)

No 1145

### 1. BASIC DATA

*State Party:* Republic of Kazakhstan  
*Name of property:* Petroglyphs within the Archaeological Landscape of Tamgaly  
*Location:* Almaty Oblast (Region)  
*Date received:* 28 January 2003

*Category of property:*

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *site*. In terms of *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*, paragraph 39, this is a *cultural landscape*.

*Brief description:*

Set around the comparatively lush Tamgaly Gorge, amidst the vast, arid Chu-Ili Mountains, is a remarkable concentration of some 5000 petroglyphs, associated settlements and burial grounds, which together provide testimony to the husbandry, social organisation and rituals of pastoral peoples from the Bronze Age right through to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The large size of the early petroglyphs, their unique images and the quality of the iconography sets them apart from the wealth of rock art in Central Asia.

### 2. THE PROPERTY

*Description*

Towards the western end of the Tianshan Mountains in the southeast of Kazakhstan, the Chu-Ili mountain spur forms a canyon around the Tamgaly Gorge. An abundance of springs, rich vegetation and shelter distinguishes the area from the arid mountains that fringe the border of Kazakhstan with Kirgystan to the south, and from the flat dry plains of central Kazakhstan to the north. The Gorge and its surrounding rocky landscape, where shiny black stones rise up rhythmically in steps, have attracted pastoral communities since the Bronze Age, and have come to be imbued with strong symbolic associations.

The site covers a roughly circular area of 900ha and includes the 982m peak of Mt Tamgaly. The Tamgaly river flows through the centre and out onto the plain below, to the north. Surrounding the site is a large Buffer Zone of 2900 ha which to the northwest and south east of the site includes outliers of the petroglyphs, and further burial mounds and ancient settlements.

The site consists of the following cultural qualities:

- *Over 5000 rock petroglyphs*
- *Ancient settlements, burial sites, and quarries*

➤ *Sacred sites*

*Over 5000 rock petroglyphs*

Petroglyphs on unsheltered rock faces are the most abundant monument. They are formed using a picketing technique with stone or metal tools. No painted images have been found.

Altogether over 5,000 images have been recorded in 48 different complexes. Of these five complexes are the most important, displaying about 3,000 images.

Overall the petroglyphs appear to cover a period from the second half of the second millennium BC right through to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The images have been associated with five distinct phases:

*Middle Bronze Age – Tamgaly type petroglyphs*

By far the most exceptional engravings come from the earliest period: large figures deeply cut in a sharp way with a wide repertoire of images including unique forms such as solar deities (sun-heads), zoomorphic beings dressed in furs, syncretic subjects, disguised people, and a wide range of animals.

The sequence for the rock art has been established from stratigraphic and illustrative analysis, and from comparisons with dated figures from tombs. The Tamgaly type engravings date from the second half of 14<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century BC. All are similarly oriented on the rocks, and their large size allows them to be seen from 20-50m away.

One of the most characteristic images of Tamgaly is the sun-head, of which a total of 30 have been found, and 26 still survive. All date from the Bronze Age, but the most expressive ones are the earliest. The images seem to convey the qualities of deities through their size, disposition and anthropomorphic appearance. A large vertical panel holds what is called a 'masterpiece of rock art'. Its images show 6-7 divine subjects, 10 dancing men and worshippers, each in their own part of the picture, with solar deities at the highest level.

*Late Bronze Age – transitional*

These are much smaller, less well formed images than the earlier ones. The repertory is less varied, but with more scenes from life, particularly pastoral life, which reflects the rise of nomadic cattle breeding activities. The increasing mobility of people means that similar images are also found across a very large part of central Asia. The Tamgaly Late Bronze images have strong similarities with those in Western Mongolia, Altai and Western Tianshan.

*Early Iron Age – Sakae, Wusun, peoples*

These are the most numerous images in Tamgaly but they are not homogenous, their variety apparently reflecting their creation by different peoples such as Sakae, Wusun, Yueche, Huns, who inhabited the area between the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC and the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium AD. The scenes still show the hunt of wild animals but camels also begin to appear. The most proficient drawings seem to have been done by the Sakae people with much rougher images created by other peoples. The petroglyphs reflect the complex process of interaction between the ancient central Asian tribes, with some of the earlier images overlaid or damaged.

### *Middle Ages – ancient Turks*

These differ from all the previous images in reflecting the symbols of power of the emerging huge steppe empires in the 6<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries AD., with their aristocratic military leaders and rich cattle breeding cultures. Warriors, standard-bearer, archer, military banners and horse equipment all appear.

### *Modern period – Dzungarians and Kazakhs peoples*

After the conquest by Mongolia, 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century AD, engraving largely ceases until the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century when popular Kazakh figures display a burst of artistic creativity.

### *Ancient settlements, burial sites, and quarries*

The settlements mostly occupy the flat areas of the lower hills. They all face to the south, southeast or southwest. The stone-built remains consist of clusters of one or two houses and animal enclosures. Some of the settlements were clearly used only seasonally in the winter months, by cattle breeders, while others were permanent dwellings. More modern buildings also exist in the area: these are temporary summer dwellings for shepherds who spent the winter lower down on the plains.

The earlier sites are multi-layered and show occupation over an extensive period of time. In one excavated site the earliest house dates to the Bronze Age. It is circular with a central hearth and a ritual burial of a sheep under the floor. Above it are Early Iron Age and late Middle Age dwellings.

A huge number of ancient burials are known on the site. These come in two basic types. The earliest is a stone enclosure with boxes and cists, dating from the middle and late Bronze Age, while the later types consist of mounds (*kurgans*) of stone and earth built above tombs. The latter seem to date from the Early Iron Age to the present day.

Seven of the early enclosures have been studied in the alluvial foothills. Detailed analysis of the remains, which include petroglyphs of the most ancient type, has defined a chronological sequence.

The *kurgan* structures are found all over the site with the largest in the foothills, where they are laid out in parallel lines. Up in the mountains they are arranged in small clusters.

Ancient quarries are found associated with the Bronze Age cemeteries – providing the large stone slabs used in the construction of cists.

### *Sacred sites*

The central canyon is devoid of dwellings and also contains the densest concentration of engravings and what are believed to be altars, located near rocks with petroglyphs, which it is suggested functioned as places for sacrificial offerings. It seems that the central area as a whole was imbued as a sacred site or cult area.

Elsewhere, stone fences, some engraved, are arranged around the top of rocks or hills near permanent Kazakh villages. Within the roughly circular enclosures, between 3.5 and 10m in diameter, are usually found a rich cultural layer of animal bones, suggesting ritual associations. None of these sacred sites has been excavated.

### **History**

The petroglyphs with their associated settlements, burial grounds and altars, reflect the social and cultural life of the inhabitants of the area from the Bronze Age to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century – as discussed above.

Throughout the whole period no dwellings were constructed in the canyon where the five major groups of images are found. The tombs and cult structures are found in the neighbouring valley, while there is a large scatter of settlements, burial grounds and small petroglyphs sites all over the mountain periphery. From this disposition, it has been posited that the central area was a cult zone and was separated from the residential periphery by a neutral area, containing no remains. In the early Iron Age the residential area was substantially enlarged but still didn't touch the cult zone. In the Middle Ages the residential area is reduced but still occupies the same sites. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century came a complete change: many Kazakh winter dwellings appear in new places and in neighbouring gorges, as well as occupying old sites. Many large patronymic groups of dwellings ringed the cult area – which still seemed to have significance.

The 1930s and 40s collectivisation removed people from Tamgaly. Only in 1956 did people once again live there as part of a Soviet farm. They came from Russia and Ukraine. Later Kazakhs migrated from China and together these newcomers absorbed the few local people who were the repository of ancient local traditions. A track was constructed across the site and until 2001 heavy vehicles drove right near the rocks.

Respect for the cult areas remains amongst the Muslim population who hold traditional festivals, which recall ancient traditions, such as hanging rags on bushes near the springs. Their direct relationship with the petroglyphs has, however, been broken.

The rock art site has been known since 1957. Archaeological research has been carried out under the supervision of Dr Alexey E. Rogozhinsky. The methodologies used by the research team are of the highest standards. The Tamgaly rock art can be considered as one of the best studied in central Asia. The Republic of Kazakhstan has created a Central Asian Petroglyphs Database and a workshop was held in the area in 2003 to develop this.

### **Management regime**

#### *Legal provision:*

The majority of the site is owned by the State. There are a few private properties, mostly burial grounds. The site is protected by the 1992 Law on the Protection and Use of Historical and Cultural Heritage. The Archaeological Landscape is a Property of National Significance inscribed on the Kazakh List of Monuments of History and Culture of National Significance in 2001.

It is proposed that the boundary of the buffer zone, and the boundary of the nominated area, should both be legally established in the near future.

Both the site and its Buffer Zone are to become a 'territory' of the future State Archaeological Reserve of Tamgaly, a reserve museum to be established in 2003. This

will be a permanent management agency under the direction of the Ministry of Culture. Once this is established private use of the area will be forbidden.

*Management structure:*

A temporary management agency has been established by the State Institute for Scientific Research and Planning on Monuments of Material Culture (NIPI PMK), which has been responsible for the management of the site. This temporary agency will function until the Reserve is established.

The NIPI PMK and the Tamgaly Reserve have together developed a protocol to ensure cooperation between both institutions although this has yet no clear guidelines.

To date there is no agreed plan for the property, apart from the tourist development plan for Zhambyl District that mentions Tamgaly as an object of tourism.

The NIPI PMK has acknowledged the need to develop a specific management plan for Tamgaly. Norwegian advisers have been involved in preliminary meetings. The plan was due to be finished in 2003 and to be submitted to UNESCO by the end of March 2004.

A bilateral agreement between the governments of Norway and Kazakhstan was due to be signed in spring 2003 after which a project for the Management, Conservation and Presentation of Tamgaly would begin. However the dossier suggests that funding was halted after the preliminary mission in 2000 by the Norwegians. The report following the mission sets out a triennial action plan for the site covering reinstatement, visitor access, literature, conservation etc.

*Resources:*

Currently six security guards patrol the site – four in the day and two at night. These posts were established in 2001 and have contributed greatly to the stability of the site – see below under threats.

Under the order for the establishment of the Reserve, the staffing is set as 29 permanent members including: 6 Managers/ Administrators, 8 for Scientific Research, and 15 support workers. An Advisory Committee will also be set up with representatives from the State, from the Region, from the Academy of Sciences and other specialists.

The proposed annual budget for the new Reserve is 6 million Tenge (around US\$ 40,000).

The administration will be set up in the Buffer Zone where a visitor centre or Museum is expected to be built.

***Justification by the State Party (summary)***

The nomination puts forward the site as having outstanding universal value for the following reasons:

- The particularity of the landscape, related to its geological features, climate and abundance of springs and shelter, were the main pre-conditions for the use of the Tamgaly site by generations of pastoralists from early times

- Tamgaly is at the cross roads of Central Asian ancient communications along the North of the Tienshan mountains.
- The rock formations, and particularly the rocks covered in shiny black lichens, attracted human artistic efforts
- The rock petroglyphs, and their associated settlements, are a vital record of the pastoral lifestyle of people from the Bronze Age to the 20<sup>th</sup> century
- The collection of petroglyphs include an outstanding collection of Bronze Age images which demonstrate the highest levels of development for this kind of rock art in Central Asia

**3. ICOMOS EVALUATION**

***Actions by ICOMOS***

An ICOMOS mission visited the site in December 2003.

ICOMOS has also consulted its International Scientific Committee on Rock Art.

***Conservation***

*Conservation history:*

The site on sandstone rocks is vulnerable to weathering with the rock faces displaying images being prone to lamination from the underlying rocks. The first major conservation works carried out in 1990, aimed at reducing water ingress into cracks. Unfortunately this programme has been stopped through lack of finance.

Since then the major intervention has been in connection with preventative conservation. Security guards have been on site since 2001 to prevent unauthorised visitor access and to deter graffiti, and barriers have been installed to prevent vehicles getting into the canyon. In addition, visitor paths have been constructed to channel visitors away from the rocks.

The joint Norwegian-Kazakhstan project mission which took place in 2000 developed a project brief to tackle conservation, as well as management and presentation. Because of lack of funding this has not yet been progressed. Emergency work was undertaken in 2001/2 by the NIPI PMK.

*State of conservation:*

The main conservation threat comes from weathering in combination with the geological formation of the rocks. Water enters cracks and crevices. As the stratification of the bedrock is parallel to the surface, the rock faces are extremely vulnerable to exfoliation.

In places quite severe deterioration has been noted. For instance a whole section of rock with sun-head images is damaged by structural cracks and has separated from its underlying rock formation.

### *Management:*

The management structure due to be put in place is discussed above. The Management Plan was due to be submitted in spring 2004. The NIPi PMK have acknowledged the difficulty in preparing such a plan, which is quite a new departure.

Between 1991 and 2001 there was no visitor control on the site and this led to some damage from graffiti and some rocks even disappeared. Since 2001 security guards patrol the site and guards with horse and radio systems help the security process.

The only access route is the road from Almaty. Under the proposed Reserve, visitors will be charged for access at one central point.

### *Risk analysis:*

The following threats are identified in the nomination:

*Development pressures:* The lands currently in the hands of farmers will become the property of the State after the establishment of the Tamgaly Reserve.

*Environmental pressures:* Water ingress into the rocks is the major threat – as discussed above. Added to this is the extreme variation in temperatures daily and seasonally.

*Natural disasters:* There is also the threat of earthquake activity as the Almaty Region is acknowledged to be in an earthquake zone.

*Visitor/tourism pressure:* Between 1991 and 2001, lack of funds prevented the control of visitors on foot or in cars. Such uncontrolled access had severe consequences with visitor climbing on rocks and inscribing graffiti. Since 2001, visitor controls have been put in place and car access blocked.

Currently the number of visitor is low but the site is one of the key visitor attractions in the country and visitor number are growing slowly. Preventative measures are being put in place to ensure the carrying capacity of the sensitive areas is respected.

The following was not put forward:

*Shortage of resources:* The experience put forward in the nomination for the period 1991 and 2001, when resources were short, graphically illustrates the possible threats.

### ***Authenticity and integrity***

#### *Authenticity:*

The main intrusion into the site is a road across the northern part of the site constructed in the Soviet period. There are also concrete post, remains of a former electricity line, and some modern sheepfolds. The posts are planned to be removed in the next two years.

Also a threat to integrity is the graffiti – but management measures have now been put in place to stop further examples.

#### *Integrity:*

The natural landscape creates a discrete and finite setting for the rock art and the whole of the concentrated central

area and the immediate peripheral area is included in the nomination.

### ***Comparative evaluation***

There are a huge number of rock arts sites scattered across Central Asia which reflect differing social, economic and cultural traditions over the past 3 to 5 millennia. Taken as a whole this rock art, mostly in the form of petroglyphs, forms the most important cultural monument for the traditional steppes civilisations of Central Asia. It is currently not represented on the World Heritage list.

Much of this corpus of work remains poorly studied and therefore comparisons are difficult to make. Other than on a superficial level, it is impossible to say with certainty why Tamgaly is of greater significance than some of the other less well-understood sites. However, Tamgaly stands out as being particularly well documented and researched.

Other sites in Kazakhstan, such as Eshkiolmes and Saimlaly-Tash, have far more images than Tamgaly – amounting to tens of thousands, and similarly demonstrate a sequence of development from the Bronze Age to the Modern era. Being in a different geological and physical zone they reflect differing social and economic development. However Eshkiolmes has been quite severely eroded by the nearby river, and by recent agricultural activity, and taken as whole it doesn't seem to represent one coherent site- rather it is split into separate valleys, each with distinct characteristics. In addition, it is stated that the subject matter of the earliest engravings is far more 'trivial' than at Tamgaly, with fantastic images being rare.

Saimaly is the largest rock art site in Central Asia with around 100,000 petroglyphs. It is situated in the highland, alpine zone and displays a particular type of rock art linked to its position at the interface between agrarian societies on the plains and shepherds in the mountains. The images are unique in showing pictures of tillage. The site is notable for its lack of over-engraved rocks. Also there are little associated monuments such as dwelling sites and burial mounds. Both of these make it difficult to determine sequences and dates. However it is stated that the Saimaly-Tash engravings could date back to Neolithic times.

At Baikonur, a third area, the images are in a poor state of preservation and have been little studied. However they do contain sun-head images and, being in Central Kazakhstan from where the inhabitants of Tamgaly are thought to have come from, they could represent precursors for the Tamgaly petroglyphs.

The Tamgaly images appear to be differentiated from other sites in Kazakhstan, for their coherence, size, subject matter, state of conservation, and above all for their artistic proficiency and for their association with a cult centre to the site.

The nomination doesn't provide comparators across the wider central Asian region between the Pamirs and Altai. However it could be said that the inscription of Tamgaly, and furtherance of its database and research, could lead to it becoming a role model for other sites in the region, thus prompting more research and study, which could ultimately lead to a better understanding of the wider context of Central Asian rock art.

### ***Outstanding universal value***

#### *General statement:*

The nominated site is of outstanding universal significance for a combination of the following cultural qualities:

- Its dense and coherent group of 5000 petroglyphs, of which the earliest Bronze Age images, dating from around 1400 to 1300 BC, display deeply cut figures of high artistic quality
- The petroglyphs, together with their associated settlement and burial sites, together provide a substantial record of pastoral peoples of the central Asian steppes from the Bronze Age to the present day
- The delineation of the site into a sacred core and outer residential periphery, combined with sacred images of sun-heads, altars and enclosed cult areas, together provide a unique assembly, which has displayed persistent sacred associations from the Bronze Age to the present day

#### *Evaluation of criteria:*

The site is nominated on the basis of the *criteria i, ii, iii, iv and v*:

*Criterion i:* The earliest engraved images, such as those associated with sun-heads and anthropomorphic subjects, display a high level of artistic skill. Particularly singled out are the image of the solar deity on a bull and a cow with calf.

*Criterion ii:* This criterion is justified on the grounds that the continuing use of the site of several millennia shows how images become redundant and were overlaid with new images relevant to the changing society. Thus the sites reflect that development in society and in its social symbols. This is more relevant to criterion iii. To meet criterion ii the site needs to show how it has had an influence on values, technology etc, elsewhere.

*Criterion iii:* The rock art images, together with evidence from the surrounding settlement and burial sites, and the spatial division of the site into sacred and residential areas, provide a tangible testimony to the lives and beliefs of pastoral peoples in the area from the Bronze Age to the present day.

*Criterion iv:* The nomination acknowledges that in the current state of knowledge this is difficult to justify, but goes on to say that the 'creation' of the Tamgaly site could be linked to the consolidation of tribes in the southern half of what is now Kazakhstan. More evidence would be needed to fully justify this criterion.

*Criterion v:* The arguments put forward for criterion ii are equally applicable to this criterion.

### **4. ICOMOS RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### ***Recommendation for the future***

The road across the site and the buffer zone, constructed in Soviet times, is clearly a major intrusion into the site which impacts on its authenticity. Commitment should be given to moving this to the outside of the site in the medium term.

The conservation condition of the site is vulnerable because of water ingress into the rocks. The project outline agreed as part of the joint Norwegian-Kazakhstan agreement should if possible be progressed in the medium term.

In order to allow visitors to fully appreciate the site, and understand constraints put in place for access, it would be desirable if information and access strategies could be developed. These may be contained in the forthcoming Management Plan.

The nomination states that the Management Plan is to be completed by spring 2004. Given the complex management issues associated with the site and the need for best practice for the management of rock art sites to be developed, this Plan should be considered before a final decision on inscription is made and adopted by the Ministry of Culture.

This Plan had not been submitted by the end of March 2004.

#### ***Recommendation with respect to inscription***

It is recommended that the nomination be *referred* back to the State Party to allow it to be re-submitted once the Management Plan has been completed and approved.

ICOMOS, March 2004