en écriture 'phags-pa. Pièces de chancellerie en transcription chinoise (Budapest 1972).

This Handbook renders good service to those interested in Chinese phonetic history in general and Old Mandarin phonetics in particular.

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In this impressive sixth fascicle of the series Répertoire des pétroglyphes d'Asie centrale, the authors, editors and publishers have accomplished something of which they should be very proud. This rich and exactly presented collection of rock images were collected from a 10 kilometer stretch of the valley and mountain sides of the Tsagaan Salaa and Baga Oigor rivers in the extreme west of Mongolia. Volume I consists of nine fairly brief articles that vary in detail (the longest one in Russian, and the others in English), followed by a corpus of 1323 ink representations of the petroglyphs made in by tracing them through plastic sheets laid on the rocks.1 Volume II consists of 15 maps and landscape images, and 28 color and 399 black and white photographic plates of the petroglyphs. The articles in volume I concern regional environmental history, dating, cultural meanings, style, ritual function, hunting and herding, and present a history of the study of related petroglyphs.

This compilation of studies and geographic analyses significantly advances research on petroglyphs in Eurasia. The mapping and

1 As Jacobson has pointed out in a recent article, transferring images from inscribed, carved or otherwise marked rocks is difficult because of how easily the rock may be damaged. In particular, lichen should never be removed, which presents a challenge to those who wish to document the images precisely. "The Rock Art of Mongolia." The Silk Road [Newsletter of the Silk Road Foundation]. Vol. 4, No. 1, Summer 2006, pp. 5-13. Accessed online at: http://www.silkroad.com/newsletter/vol4num1/srnewsletter_v4n1.pdf
inventory of the petroglyphs themselves is very important. It will be very useful to have similar data on other regions for comparative purposes, in order to develop larger scale mappings and even databases that can potentially show relationships among different regions, styles, associated cultural practices and distributions and movements of cultural groups.

The articles in Volume I present few original arguments, but are valuable overviews of work that has been done on Central Eurasian petroglyphs. These articles also raise some of the controversies and arguments about the content and meaning of these figures. I will touch on a few of these here to provide a sense of the contents of this work. I also suggest further directions for research that might solve some of the problems presented here.

D. Tseveendorj (or Tseveendorzh, but not Tseevendorj as it is written on the cover and title page) offers an excellent overview of the study of petroglyphs found in Mongolia and a brief discussion of the archeological work in the Bayan Olgiy Aimag (I: 40-51). His summaries of A. P. Okladnikov's theories remind us of how uncritically nineteenth century evolutionism, Marxism, romanticism, solar mythology, and even Jungian ideas were embraced by many Soviet scholars of culture (45). Without strict empirical methods of interpretation, it is easy to reduce cultural complexity to the unilinear, monomythic and single-theoried world that James Frazer and Joseph Campbell also popularized.

V. D. Kubarev's ambitious "Analiz petroglifov i kommentarii" explores the research, interpretations and debates about petroglyphs in a somewhat wider geographic scope, and organizes his discussion chronologically and then according to figures and thematic interpretations (I: 60-83). His approach emphasizes the critical rancor in some debates about dating and meaning (65). He argues that Neolithic-Bronze age images reflect the encounter of steppe pastoral and mountain taiga hunting cultures, in strong distinction to cultural evolutionists who argue that one stage supplants the other (66). He explores the possible images of shamans with masks, horns, and bird costumes (67-70), and the representations of figures in sexual positions (70). Perhaps most interesting within this latter theme are what he terms "love triangles" with a male-female couple apparently involved in intercourse while a second man stands nearby. Some authors have given this a ritual interpretation, but Kubarev interprets the standing figure as an aggressor attempting to interfere with the sexual activity of the couple (71).
Kubarev completes his chapter with discussion of the animal images, the early nomadic or Arzhan period with its syncratic images of animals and use of non-representational symbols X and S. He discusses what he calls the Scythian period, and briefly the Hunno-Sarmatian and medieval periods.

In her discussion of the relationship of culture and images, Esther Jacobson points out an important and well-recognized fact: the mortuary remains follow a more consistent and limited range of cultural rules, and it is often difficult to see any cultural connections. The petroglyphs are more autonomous from such ritualized cultural determinants, because they must have played a less consistent and central role in shared cultural practices. This raises the possibility of seeing the petroglyphs as containing elements of more individualized artistic expression (I: 17-19).

Jacobson argues for dating some images to as long ago as the late Pleistocene, or roughly 12,000 years ago, since they represent mammoths, aurochs, cave bears and other animals that have since become extinct (I: 9-10). She mentions that these images are also more worn, as one might expect from their apparent age based on represented content. Unfortunately, she does not carefully consider technical methods for dating images, merely saying that chemical changes in the rock and rates of lichen growth are too variable to be reliable. Methods could be developed for quantifying wear that would take into account the hardness and wear-resistance of different stones, as well as the characteristic geometries of more and less worn peck marks and inscribed lines. Though perhaps true, it is inadequate to simply state “there are no proven methods for directly dating art pecked onto rock surfaces” (I: 101).

Another element that suggests chronology is the late appearance of camels in this region and in these images, and their lack of coincidence with the figures in mushroom-shaped hats, or with carts, suggesting that these latter elements are from earlier periods, or simply did not appear in the same cultural contexts as camels (I: 20).

Jacobson cites her own earlier article “Early Nomadic Sources for Scythian Art” to suggest that the rock art images are a source or origin for Scythian animal style imagery, particularly the stylized deer antlers composed of a symmetrical series of alternately branched curves that sweep back closely along the animal’s spine (I: 29, II: plates XI, XII, 247, 248). This style is undeniably characteristic of some petroglyphs, although with numerous variations (e.g., figures 5, 11, 48a and b, 103, 214, 290, 326, 384, 510, 564, 759, 775, 809, 913, 1080, 1253, 1268). These differ somewhat from Scythian images,
which have the antlers close to the body but with varying stylized symmetries. It would also be possible to argue that the Scythian style emphasizing massive symmetrical antlers is a technical feature related to forming physically strong figures from soft gold: the antlers are attached to the body to strengthen the structure. In turn, this style may have also been developed in less durable media, such as wood, and been adopted by artists creating both petroglyphs and gold objects.

In any case, this style is an excellent example of a representational convention that can be traced through the images. It departs from realism towards a cultural style apparently transmitted through observation of images or their makers, rather than developed only from the form of the animals themselves. The question of learning and using stylistic conventions raises an important question about the interpretation of rock art as a cultural practice: to what extent are these representational conventions autonomous from the cultural contexts in which they appear? In other words, do the artists creating these images learn both the content and style of their representational techniques within social interaction in their own community, or do they develop some of their skills from observation of nature, through imagination and through observation of other images from other times and places? Jacobson brings up this issue in her discussion of individual creative expression (I: 19-20), but more work needs to be done to identify the specific stylistic and technical elements that might indicate a particular individual’s work, or at least a community sharing similar techniques.

Representational conventions, artistic techniques including kinds of engraving or peck marks, closeness of lines or chips, and the stylistic details of the very common animal images, could be used to further classify these images. An artist acquires technical methods through observation, experimentation and long practice, and representational conventions through observation and imagination. Although it would take considerable effort, it is a potentially rich source of information to organize these petroglyphs materials more specifically than only by period and content. Since the images are not rigidly determined by the cultural communities whose members made them, more specific patterns could be found by identifying individual and perhaps communities of artists that developed particular content and styles.

In order to clarify some of the questions Jacobson raises, I would argue that a distinction should be made between things like headdresses or carts that are cultural objects, and therefore useful as marks of particular cultural contexts, and objects such as antlers or
actions such as bow shots (figures 424, 432, 721), that are physical realities, but perceived and represented in particular ways by these cultural specialists, the artists, who might develop concepts in a number of ways, not governed by their specific cultural experience within their community. The specialized representational conventions and concepts that artists develop, such as the curling style of antlers, or those that are straight and branch almost perpendicularly (e.g., figures 8, 121, 282, 514, 516, 661, 663, 883, plate 298), also vary according to individual techniques and conventions which might be distinguishable from among the many similar works. In general, we have both kinds of information in images: cultural activities, objects or species can be discerned, as well as specialized artistic conventions and concepts that are not bound to the general community, but are more likely associated with the individual and his or her community of specialists. Figures with outstretched arms, for instance, are both most likely, an observable culturally shaped posture, shaped by artistic conventions about how to represent that posture, with exaggerated fingers (e.g., figures 560, 604-5, 608).

Improving analysis of technical features such as pit geometries and patterns that might characterize individual techniques raises a technical question: would it not be possible to find better non-invasive imaging technology? When working on stone inscriptions, the method of choice has been the so-called squeezes, but obviously this is too aggressive for the proper preservation of petroglyphs. Instead, a variety of different kinds of digital photography and microphotography, especially using different kinds of light, and laser or other scanning techniques should be considered to provide greater precision without damaging the rock.

Rancorous debate and uncertainty are particularly difficult features of such interpretive research: modern scholars fill gaps in their knowledge about the past by projecting their own interpretations and presentist perspectives. Overcoming this, and being willing to accept that there are things that cannot be known, assumptions that must be avoided, and concrete data to explore despite limited certainty about its meanings, in short cultivating objectivity, becomes most vital when working in areas such as prehistory, where the data is thinnest. The captions to the figures and plates in these two volumes are admirably free of assumptions imposed through assuming the character of particular images: Jacobson writes “we have tried to avoid culturally loaded terms or appellations such as ‘shaman’ or ‘goddess,’ which are the subjects of ongoing debates in the field of rock art studies” (I, 101).
In keeping with this principle, Jacobson challenges the common interpretation of the animal-drawn wheeled cart as a war chariot, on the fairly strong grounds that there does not seem to be anything martial about the figures riding in these carts. This argument challenges a number of existing interpretations, and generates more heat than light in some responses. For instance, in a critique of Jacobson and some of her colleagues, D. V. Cheremisin examines the ambiguous evidence but ends up insisting on his own position, apparently unable to accept that there might be no conclusive interpretation. "In my opinion, the mere fact that a chariot is depicted begets a whole range of semantic meanings connected to military symbolism and determining the context of scenes and images." 

But the authors of the present work also have lapses from objectivity: Jacobson concludes with an art-historical flourish commenting that some of the stylized stags are reduced from “major symbol” to “conventionalized emblem” (I: 29). The article on “The Origins of Animal Herding in Mongolia” (I: 57-59), by D. Tseveendorj tilts towards nationalist interpretations. He relies upon 1920s and 1930s morphological analyses to arrive at sweeping conclusions about the wild origins of domestic species raised in Mongolia: “Basic animal species (cattle, horses, camel, reindeer, and possibly goats and sheep) were domesticated by the ancient inhabitants of Mongolia from local stock and independently of other regions” (I: 59). These methods and conclusions are not reliable: images and morphology do not prove where domestication happened, and there is no reason except nationalism to project the modern bounded territory of Mongolia onto the species and people of this region. Of course there are valid and interesting interpretations to be drawn from images of stock raising practices, and perhaps even questions about dating and species can be answered, but there is little scientific reason for extending these arguments to conclude where the species were domesticated and by whom. His analyses of cultural practices such as hunting or milking techniques are more interesting and concrete (I: 52-56).

Recent scientific methods of studying domestic animal genetics are challenging and require advanced equipment, but enough reports of analyses are available that it seems unnecessary to rely upon less precise earlier methods. Admittedly genetic studies can be difficult to

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2 D.V. Cheremisin “Toward a Discussion on the Information Content of Petroglyphs and the Methods of their Study.” Archaeology, Ethnology & Anthropology of Eurasia 3 (27) 2006: 89-100.
read and interpret. In the abstract of a study on sheep domestication we read “Diagnostic restriction fragment length polymorphism polymerase chain reaction (RFLP-PCR) tests which distinguish type A and B haplotypes were used to test an additional 223 animals from 17 breeds of European and Asian origin.” But these studies must not be ignored, since such genetic histories are excellent ways to determine how wild and domestic animals varieties are related, and how much interbreeding has occurred. Exact times and places of domestication may not be possible to determine, but the effort to establish independent origins is not a scientific concern so much as an ideological commitment.

These two impressive volumes reflect the work of three experienced scholars whose intellectual biographies can be seen in the issues they choose to write about: it demonstrates their intellectual commitment that they diverge in methods and interpretations and yet have cooperated well. That the publisher is offering them at a relatively reasonable price (currently €95 for both volumes) will allow many more research libraries to acquire these important works.

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The title is from the Latin version of the history of Ammianus Marcellinus; the full passage is the motto of the book (p. 7): “The nation of the Huns, which is sparsely mentioned in the ancient records and dwells beyond the Maeotian marshes near the Frozen Ocean, exceeds all measures of ferocity.” This is the first volume of a colorful collection of papers on Central Asian issues celebrating the septuagenarian linguist and philologist Michael Weiers’ rich and manifold scholarly œuvre. As the editors’ preface (pp. 9-10) states,