

THE ROLE OF ROCK PAINTINGS IN UNDERSTANDING
PREHISTORIC SOCIETIES: EVIDENCE FROM
SARMISHSOY AND LASCAUX

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Annotation: This article explores the scholarly study of the Sarmishsay petroglyphs, one of the most significant and historically valuable archaeological sites in Uzbekistan. It examines the discovery of the rock carvings, stages of their academic research, and the contributions of both foreign and local scholars. The spiritual, social, and philosophical meanings embedded in these ancient artistic representations are revealed through analysis. The article highlights the interdisciplinary role of archaeology, anthropology, and art history in understanding the petroglyphs. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance and necessity of digitally documenting the site through modern technologies such as laser scanning and Reflectance Transformation Imaging (RTI). The study also discusses strategies for preserving this cultural heritage and introducing it into international academic discourse for the benefit of future generations.

Keywords: Sarmishsoy, petroglyphs, archaeology, anthropology, spiritual culture, laser scanning, RTI technology, ancient societies, cultural heritage, landscape analysis, visual art, visual anthropology.

Introduction. The Sarmishsoy Valley is recognized as a region inhabited by hunter-gatherer societies during the prehistoric period. The rock paintings discovered in this valley date back to approximately 15,000–10,000 BCE [1]. Archaeological findings indicate that the region possessed rich natural resources, which significantly influenced patterns of human settlement. Sarmishsoy Valley is also regarded as one of the most important centers of prehistoric art in Central Asia [2].

The rock paintings of Sarmishsoy Valley prominently feature hunting scenes, animal depictions, and human figures. In particular, representations of animals such as horses and cattle are interpreted as reflections of hunting rituals and manifestations of social structure [3]. Among the pigments used in these paintings are iron oxide and natural charcoal, both of which were obtained from local sources [4].

Lascaux Cave, discovered in 1940, is recognized as one of the most significant artistic monuments of the Paleolithic period. The cave dates back to approximately 17,000 BCE and is especially renowned for its extensive depictions of hunting animals [5]. Lascaux contributes greatly to our understanding of the artistic abilities and social structures of prehistoric humans. The cave itself is relatively small, with the total length of all galleries not exceeding 235 meters and a depth of 30 meters. The ancient main entrance has been equipped with modern protective installations.

The rock paintings at Lascaux were created using natural pigments derived from minerals and plant-based substances. Techniques employed in the creation of these paintings include spraying, brush painting, and handprints. The details present in the paintings demonstrate the artistic skills of prehistoric communities and their close relationship with nature.

Results The similarities between Sarmishsoy Valley and Lascaux Cave reflect shared experiences within human history. In both regions, hunting constitutes the central artistic theme, indicating that hunting occupied a fundamental place in the lives of prehistoric peoples. Rock art created a universal visual language that united humanity throughout history. These artistic works provide profound insights into the belief systems, social structures, and environmental relationships of ancient societies[8].

The mountain and rock depictions found in both regions are primarily based on hunting themes:

- **Hunting Animals:** Both Sarmishsoy and Lascaux contain numerous depictions of hunting animals. These representations illustrate the central importance of hunting in prehistoric human life.

- **Human Figures:** Human figures are present in the paintings of both sites, often associated with hunting scenes. These images provide information regarding social structure and ritual practices.

The artistic works in both regions were created using natural pigments.

- **Use of Pigments:** Natural pigments such as iron oxide and charcoal were employed in both Sarmishsoy and Lascaux. This demonstrates how prehistoric artists utilized resources available in their surrounding environment[9].

- **Techniques:** In both locations, artistic techniques such as fine engraving and carving were used, reflecting the creativity and craftsmanship of the artists.

Sarmishsoy and Lascaux provide detailed information regarding the religious systems and social structures of ancient societies. The paintings at both sites reflect hunting rituals and social values. This contributes to a deeper

understanding of prehistoric peoples' relationships with nature and their spiritual beliefs.

- Ecosystem: While Sarmishsoy is characterized by a relatively arid climate, Lascaux is situated within a more forested environment rich in natural vegetation. These environmental differences influenced settlement patterns and hunting strategies.

- Historical Period: The paintings at Sarmishsoy date to approximately 15,000–10,000 BCE, whereas the paintings at Lascaux were created around 17,000 BCE. These chronological differences influenced the development of artistic traditions in each region[10].

Lascaux is regarded as one of the highest achievements of European Paleolithic art, while Sarmishsoy occupies a unique place within the prehistoric art of Central Asia. This distinction is significant from the perspective of cultural interaction and the evolution of artistic traditions[11].

- Artistic Style: The paintings of Lascaux exhibit a more complex and realistic artistic style, whereas the paintings of Sarmishsoy demonstrate a more stylized and abstract approach. These differences reflect the artistic traditions and aesthetic perceptions of the respective regions[12].

Both Sarmishsoy Valley and Lascaux Cave have been included in the UNESCO World Heritage framework, and conservation measures are being implemented accordingly. At Lascaux Cave, various measures have been introduced to reduce the number of visitors and preserve environmental conditions within the cave. In Sarmishsoy Valley, conservation projects have been developed to minimize environmental impacts and ensure the participation of local communities. Conservation methods at both sites aim not only to protect the physical environment, but also to preserve local cultural

traditions. The successes and challenges encountered in these preservation processes further emphasize the seriousness and complexity of heritage conservation efforts[13].

Conclusion In conclusion, Sarmishsoy Valley and Lascaux Cave represent important examples of prehistoric artistic expression. Although both regions share similar themes and techniques, they also demonstrate significant geographical, historical, and artistic differences. These distinctions play an important role in understanding the cultural diversity of human history. Rock art serves as a window illuminating the deeper dimensions of the past and reflects the shared heritage of humanity. Rock paintings constitute an essential part of human history, and their preservation and transmission to future generations are of great importance. As symbols of universal language and cultural heritage, Sarmishsoy and Lascaux play a crucial role in our understanding of humanity's collective past. Preserving this heritage for future generations is of vital importance for comprehending the values of prehistoric cultures.

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