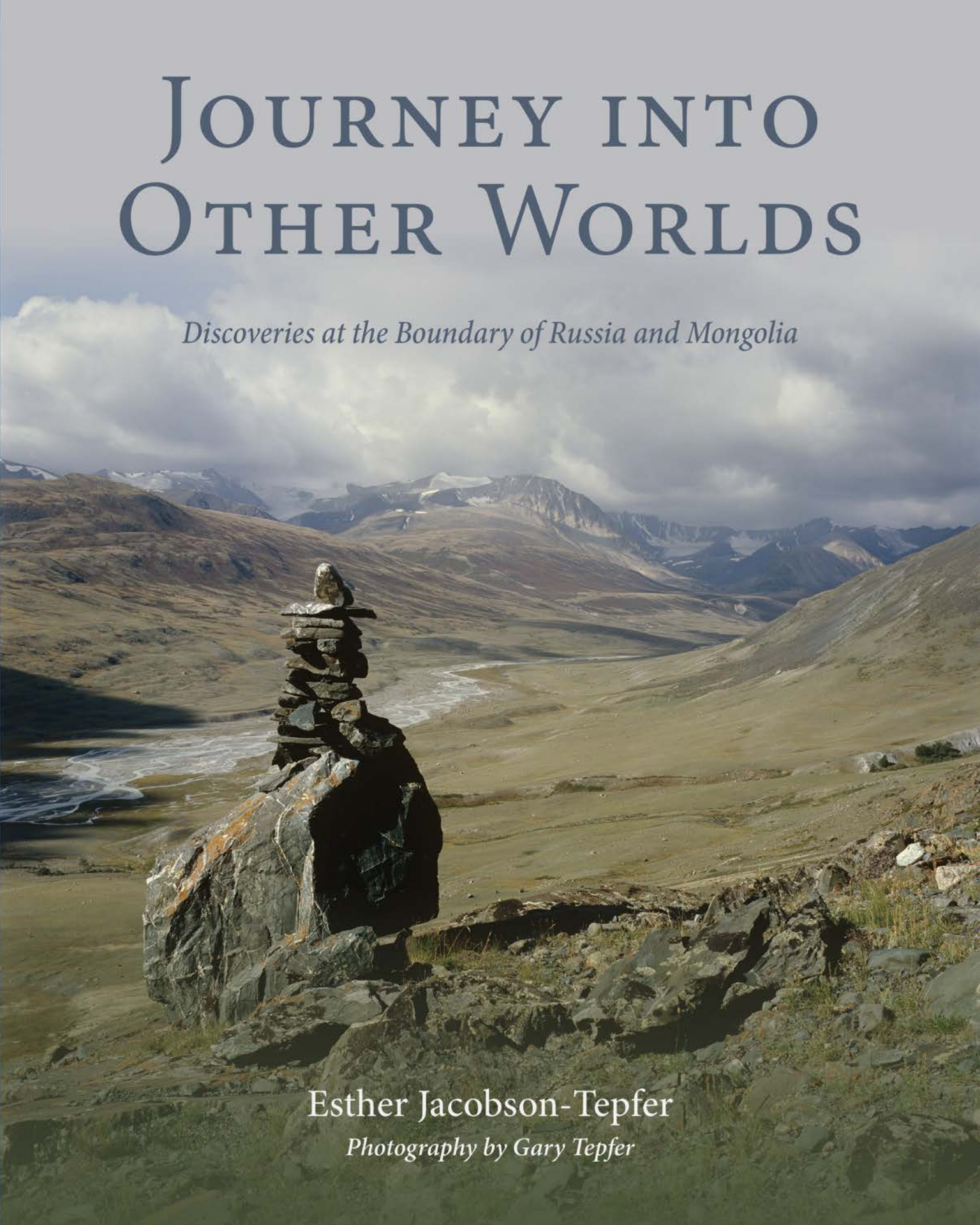
Journey into Other Worlds

Discoveries at the Boundary of Russia and Mongolia



Esther Jacobson-Tepfer

Photography by Gary Tepfer

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To Anna and Davina,
beloved and forbearing friends

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Map of Asia. Our study area is indicated by the red square in the upper center of the map. (U.S. National Park Service)

Preface

In the following pages I mention places and terms unfamiliar to most people. Here I'm not referring only to Russia, or even Siberia, which is usually thought of as somewhere "out there," a land of cold, mosquitoes, immense rivers, tundra, and oil. Rather, I have foremost in mind the Altai Mountains, a range that rises in South Siberia and extends down through western Mongolia. The highest mountain in the Altai, Belukha, has an elevation of 4,506 m (14,783 ft), while a knot of similarly glaciated peaks known as Tavan Bogd—the Five Masters—marks the point where Russia, China, and Mongolia meet. Forested on their western slopes, increasingly desiccated on their eastern Mongolian sides, the Altai Mountains slowly decrease in height and finally disappear into Mongolia's Gobi Desert.

Another way to think of the Altai region is this: from Eugene, Oregon, the point where I am writing this account, go straight down through the earth all the way to the other side of our globe. When you reach the surface, turn west, travel across Inner Mongolia and Mongolia's dry grassland for about 2000 miles, and you will come to the Gobi Desert and the rocky lowlands of the Altai. Then turn northeast and continue in that direction, and eventually Tavan Bogd will come into view on the western horizon. At that point you will have arrived in the region that became our study area, indicated in the map within a red square. Once you are there in that remote part of the world, you will have northwestern China on your south, Kazakhstan on your west, and Russian Siberia stretching across the continent, to your north. The Mongolian Altai mark the division between rivers that flow west or northwest and those that flow east or northeast, thus physically dividing Central from North Asia. To the east of this dividing line, Mongolia extends eastward like a great clamshell, locked between the immensity of Russia and China.

This, then, gives you a sense of where I will be taking you in the pages that follow. Keep in mind that to get there we must go from one of three major points—Moscow, Seoul, or Beijing—to Ulaanbaatar, the capital of Mongolia, and from there west out to Bayan Ölgiy. Of those three approaches, we found that the most efficient and least unpleasant was to go through Seoul; and that is what I would recommend to anyone trying to get anywhere in Mongolia. To someone trying to reach the Russian Altai, of course, one would have to go through Moscow to Novosibirsk, and then down to the southeast. On two occasions we entered and left Mongolia by way of Russia's Tran-Siberian railroad, but that is not a trip I would now recommend.

In describing the Mongolian Altai, I will often refer to administrative points and to points of physical geography by their Mongolian terms. It works best if I list the most used terms here:

Gol: river

Salaa: branch (as of a river)

Nuur: lake

Uul: mountain

Nuuru: mountain range

Aimag: roughly equivalent to a province or state

Sum: an administrative unit roughly equivalent to a county

Bag: an administrative location roughly equivalent to a township

In gathering this material together to form my account, I depended primarily on my own experiences, supplemented greatly by the way in which Gary recalled our years in the Altai. His photographs have been a key element in shaping our collective memories, in giving them a concrete form. I also draw considerably on my years of collaboration with Jim Meacham. It should be obvious, that much of my understanding is grounded in the research of many other scholars, from many parts of the world. If you want to know more about those sources, I recommend going to one of my previously published books. Of course, our experiences were deeply shaped by our relationships with the herders we encountered, but these people are introduced in the later chapters.

I am deeply grateful for the comments of several friends who read this text in earlier forms and offered excellent suggestions for improvement. These include Margaret Paris, Gina Psaki, Ellen Todras, and Rebecca Wolle—she of the sharp editorial eye.

I.1 View south over the Potanin Glacier and peaks of Tavan Bogd at the boundary of Mongolia, Russia, and China. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

I.

Background and Beginnings

I first traveled to the Russian Altai Mountains in 1989 and to the Mongolian Altai in 1994. At that time, there were no Western archaeologists working in that highland region, nor had any yet visited the great burials at Tuekta, Bashadar, and Pazyryk.[1] The site of Arzhan 1, in Tuvy, was only familiar to scholars in the Soviet Union; and the wealth in gold artifacts of Arzhan 2 was undiscovered. If there were any comparable ancient burials in northwestern Mongolia, they were unknown. The massive standing stones and khirgisuur, the superb rock art covering the outcrops of high valleys on each side of the Mongolian border, and the stone images of nameless Türkic warriors: these were unfamiliar to any but scholars working in the still walled-off Soviet Union.

Ordinarily I wouldn't put much stock in being first in anything. But it could be argued that to get to the distant world of the Altai Mountains, to pierce the existing curtain of political prohibition in Soviet Siberia and of intellectual ignorance in the West, required a certain amount of foresight and effort. Once I was there, to do something with the opportunity was certainly significant on some level. But as I now look back over my life and try to discern the lineation of my path leading from youth to Mongolia and to the high valleys where we worked for many years—that involved as much serendipity and just plain not-knowing-what-I-was-getting-into-ness as any intelligent forethought. Again and again, I was lucky, and I was in the right place at the right time. But I was also looking for something I had not yet found, an intellectual challenge that I could barely formulate. I wanted to see worlds that I had only vaguely conceived in imagination.

Over the years, friends and relatives have encouraged me to write about our life and work in the Altai Mountains; and, indeed, after several seasons of fieldwork I have written long accounts for family members. But one weekend in February 2009, when we were visiting with Davina, Carrie, and Bolo, they reminded me that I really had to do this—I had to find a way to recount our years in that other world. At that time, it did seem appropriate: I was looking to the end of my 69th year, hurtling (it seemed) toward 70. Gary had been saying I should write down what I had experienced before I began to forget, and if I didn't, he would do it for me…and that was a serious threat. So, I started then, wanting to integrate a chronicle of our time in the Altai Moun-

1 The one possible exception to this statement may have been the German scholar Karl Jettmar who published an important article on the Turkic people of the Altai in 1951 and a study that remained for many years the only overview of the nomadic steppe world, *The Art of the Steppes* (1967).

tains with some thoughts about the process of our investigation itself; adding, perhaps, some consideration of the material that had so seized my imagination over more than twenty years. But I only began that chronicle, and then put it aside to continue working on the *Atlas* I was preparing with Jim and Gary.[2] So now it is 12 years and five books later. I am trudging my way beyond 80 and have perhaps one other major project in front of me but this: my recollection of those years in Russia and Mongolia, of what led up to that extraordinary experience, and of how it has reshaped the way I look at life, material culture, and the world of the past.

First steps

In many respects my early life was unremarkable; it certainly did not foretell my later Mongolian adventures. As a young girl coming of age in the suburbs of Boston in the 1950s, I was restless and rebellious, but there is nothing unusual in that. Perhaps the only sign that my path might take a different course was my horror at the thought of a conventional existence: middle-class, suburban, and confined by certain standards of taste in material life and deportment. Of course, that mindset was not at that time conscious, and I grant that such a life must have looked desirable to others. Certainly, it offered security and that was attractive to many of my peers. I only knew that I did not want that conventional existence. At the same time, I didn't know what I wanted or how to get there. Thus began the process of what I came to refer to as "moving backwards through life": seeing where I was coming from but not necessarily where I was going. That awkward process lasted throughout my teens and twenties, but along the way there were small shifts in my trajectory as well as a growing sense that I had to shape my life, not simply follow its fateful curves. In looking back at those years and the decades that followed, I discern several points where I could have gone one way or another: moments where the metaphoric signposts offered unclear choices of uncertain value. What is striking to me now is that at each crossroad in my journey, the choices I made decisively shifted my direction; and in a curious, uncanny way I now see that there was a kind of logic to those choices, with each taking me steadily in what would be my ultimate direction.

My college and graduate school years as an art history major at the University of Chicago shaped me profoundly, but I was uncomfortable with the prospect of becoming a classical art historian. Over years of formal study, I came to realize that I did not want to spend the rest of my life in museums, private collections, and libraries. I wanted to be challenged both intellectually and physically in ways that I could not yet articulate. So, my subsequent adventures—and they were, really, adventures—in the Russian Altai and in Mongolia represented a completely unanticipated phase of my life.

Throughout my high school years, I thought of myself as awkward and ungainly, but smart. I loved to spend hours in the local public library, a classic example of the ivy covered, stucco buildings endowed by Andrew Carnegie in the early twentieth century. The building was a haven, a cool and quiet place where I could indulge my unclear dreams of other worlds. I recall that I browsed widely (and much of the time, aimlessly) through the open shelves, but often I found myself drawn to the section that included a few books of Chinese poetry. I do not remember who had done the translations of those poems, nor could I know whether the translations were reliable or even "good." I'm also not sure how that attraction happened—there was certainly nothing in my home culture, other than a general love of books, that would have encouraged such an exploration. But that is where I first became interested in poetry and in its ability to evoke in few words vast dimensions of space and time. It is also where I first became aware of the distant world of Asia and the Far East.

I recall that the poets who most riveted my attention were those of the Tang dynasty—Du Fu and Li Ho, especially—and most particularly the verses that conjured up China's northern borderlands: a space far from China's heartland, a vast region filled with cold air, wind, and stony steppe. The poets' verses reflected China's constant struggle with the northern nomads, horsemen who confronted the Han in the plains beyond the Great Wall. Perhaps I was drawn by the expression of pervasive sorrow in the lives of Chinese soldiers sent to the front, most never to return. I think, though, that it was the sense of a vastly distant world that pulled me out of my conventional life in a quiet American community. I now realize that those hours in the library and my absorption in the verses of the Tang poets may be seen, from here, pointed to the first crossroad I encountered in a long road into a distant region and a far-flung intellectual journey I could not then possibly imagine.

Second steps

I entered the University of Chicago in 1957, full of anticipation and eager to test my intellectual abilities in new academic adventures. Experience did not justify that initial optimism. I certainly did well enough, if by that is meant that I passed all my exams with flying colors and made Phi Beta Kappa during my sophomore year. Yet, before then, and even at the end of my freshman year I continued to feel restless and uncertain about what I was doing at the university or even why I was there. Since I had earned enough money in various summer jobs to support myself out of college, I persuaded my parents to allow me to leave for an unaffiliated year in Paris. That kind of year abroad has become common among young people, but in those days it decidedly was not. In retrospect, I can't help but think that my parents were too preoccupied with their lives and perhaps too naïve, also, to realize that such a journey would be a considerable challenge for a young girl. But I had my own funding and it seemed like the right time in my life to step off the shore, so to speak….without knowing, of course, where I would land.

I reached Paris in September of 1958 after a long ocean voyage and the train ride from Le Havre to Paris. Despite my college accomplishments in French, at the beginning I couldn't understand a thing. It took maybe two weeks for me to relax and realize that I

2 *Archaeology and Landscape in the Mongolian Altai: An Atlas* (ESRI 2010).

could respond and speak, albeit not half as fast as my interlocuters did. With reference to language, those first weeks in Paris were painful in the extreme. On the other hand, I don't have to describe the impact that beautiful but then still faded city had on me. The layers of experience and the turbulence of emotional response that defined my life there have probably been repeated by countless young women with a similarly extended stay in Paris. Certainly, that decision to go and to stay for one year was effectively another stage in my meandering journey forward in life.

I registered at the Alliance Française to improve my French. That turned out to be a very positive experience. To deal with housing, I found myself a position as an *au pair* with a family living on the edge of Paris. My room was a tiny *chambre de bonne*, and I received one meal a day (*petit déjeuner*) and limited kitchen privileges. I don't recall my responsibilities very precisely, but they involved attending to two rather annoying children before and after their school days. There were three other adults in the house: a grandmother, who confessed to me that she loved listening to Elvis Presley; a mother whom I recall as cool and aloof; and the father who was a sculptor of large religious crosses, and very nice. It goes without saying that the whole arrangement was utterly new to me, the people and the environment truly foreign. Nonetheless, I made it through six months with the family and then decided to strike out on my own, renting with a new American friend a run-down apartment right in the neighborhood of the Sorbonne. The ensuing six months involved more than my share of adventures, but one aspect of our apartment life has stayed in my memory: the way in which we came to be a kind of crash pad for other Americans in Paris. One night I had a dream that someone came to the door, knocked, and asked to stay, saying that he was a friend of a friend of…. Sure enough, the next day, that scenario played itself out in real time.

One day that winter I decided to visit the Louvre. At that time the museum had not yet been remodeled and one could easily become quite lost in endless, dark corridors and silent rooms. I soon found myself in a long and somber hall surrounded by ancient Chinese bronze vessels. Despite the many visits I had made in my earlier years to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, I had never paid attention to its great collection of Chinese art, including its bronzes from the Shang and Zhou dynasties. My wanderings in the BMFA generally took me to the reliable exhibitions of Egyptian mummies, Renaissance painting, and Impressionists. But in that silent hall of the Louvre, almost empty of people, the bronze vessels astounded me with their jutting flanges, monster faces, writhing zoomorphic décor and massive weight. As I wandered among the heavy vessels, I recall thinking that I had never seen anything so ugly in all my life. Yet despite the abruptness with which they confronted me, and my initial reaction, the vessels demanded and held my attention. In their material self-confidence they intimated strange worlds and distant ages. My initial, ignorant response and my perception of an unaccustomed intensity in those bronze vessels signaled yet another major crossroad in my formative travels. When I returned to the University of Chicago the following fall, I declared a major in Oriental Languages and Literature, with an emphasis on Chinese language and culture.

I don't clearly recall those succeeding years at Chicago. I know that I did well, though I struggled (as did everyone else) with the classical Chinese then taught in the method developed by the sinologist Herrlee Creel. This method involved beginning, cold turkey, with the reading of classical texts and learning the pictorial derivation and contextual reworking of each character. I seem to recall that we began with the *Hsiao ching* and went on to the *Lun yu*, the *Analects of Confucius*. Creel was a demanding, even intimidating professor. His approach was laborious and terribly difficult; I'm not even certain that it is still used anywhere for beginning students. However, the resulting emphasis on each character as concept and as pictographic image embedded in a larger literary context shaped the way I would later look at rock art: with close attention to individual details, to their combinations and re-combinations, and to the larger context in which each image or composition was embedded. Of course, at that time I had no idea that rock art would be in my future (I don't think I even knew what it was); but the habit of mind that Creel and his method inculcated in me took root and would eventually shape my approach to a very different visual text.

During those undergraduate years I remained uncertain where I would be going with my interests in Chinese studies. I played with the idea of studying political science, but one series of lectures with a major scholar of international relations so totally bored me that I realized I probably should be looking in other directions, perhaps at the humanities. Fortunately, in the Department of Art History, the histories of Chinese and Japanese art were being taught by Father Harrie Vanderstappen, a man steeped in the arts and culture of the Far East. I took several courses from him as an undergraduate and in that period profited enormously from his example of paying close attention to small details within the larger pictorial and cultural context. Vanderstappen had learned to discriminate strokes, lines, and tonalities of ink from his mentor, Ludwig Bachhofer, and Bachhofer, in turn, had learned from his mentor, the eminent Swiss art historian, Heinrich Wölflin (1864–1945). That initial study of East Asian art, set within an impressive scholarly lineage, persuaded me to move into Art History to complete my degree. For the rest of my undergraduate program, I immersed myself in the study of Chinese bronzes, painting, sculpture, and poetry and in the arts of Buddhism stretching from India through Central Asia and China to Japan. Even though I ultimately turned to other fields, I am convinced that these studies, and especially my study of Chinese painting, taught me how to see texture and form and how to think about process in terms of individual, expressive gestures.

My early fascination with Chinese landscape poetry was slowly transferred to a focus on Chinese landscape painting: its evocation of extended space and the resulting inextricability of space and time. The small figures trudging through the painted landscapes or looking out from pavilions in their quiet, mountainous worlds deeply impressed me, and not simply because they seemed to offer an escape from the unpleasant aspects of their (or my) world. Those figures taught me that the object of our attention—be it a painted

figure, a mountain, or even a hut—itself has a point of view; and that to understand the power of a work of art, one must attempt to experience that other subjective vantage point. In retrospect, I realize that it was not the tradition of Chinese landscape painting itself that drew me in but rather the inexorable pull I felt to the subjective world suggested in the winding paths and perched huts, to their implications of extended space beyond China's borders. This perception would radically shape my conviction that within pictorial representations of many kinds can be found structures of relationships that carry meaning in themselves. When considered within a series of paintings, for example, those relationships intimate understandings of significant space, time, and the relationship of individual humans to their larger world. These perceptions gradually formed as I went through my graduate studies with Father Vanderstappen. They came to underpin the approaches I would take in my studies of rock art, in an as-yet unimagined future. They would become fundamental to the way in which I would look at stone monuments in the vast Mongolian landscape. But that was then far away in a still unknown land.

In addition to Chinese and Japanese art history, I studied Indian art and architecture with Professor Pramod Chandra. In that material, the religious painting and architecture of Buddhism and Hinduism introduced me to the philosophical depths of worlds within worlds, visually embodied in myriad layers of existence reflected in the godly personae of sculpture and painting, and in the spatial and decorative complexity of temple architecture. Here, again, I had no idea at that time of how this study of Indian religious architecture would profoundly inform my approach to prehistoric art in the mountains of North Asia. At that time, I was only aware that analyses of the temples as structure and ornament drove my desire to engage art and architecture in the terms of John Dewey, that is as experience in full, lived or imagined.

India's religious and artistic traditions took me further, north to the Silk Road and the art of the Central Asian oasis kingdoms with their unique blend of Gupta Indian, Persian, and Chinese elements. As I wandered in imagination in that truly exotic region, I realized that my restlessness was leading me inexorably to cultural landscapes beyond the well-trodden worlds; so rather than staying with Chinese painting for my M.A. thesis, I received permission to work on the painting tradition of the once magnificent Buddhist site of Qizil, along the northern Silk Road.

In those days, the old routes of the Silk Road were still politically unavailable to foreigners. The only sources for the study of Silk Road art took the form of books written by explorers such as Paul Pelliot, Sir Aurel Stein, and others: older texts (often in German or French) with fine but not terribly informative photographs or painted illustrations. The Russian sources I found intrigued me, but I did not yet know that language; and this was before the period of the magnificent Japanese volumes on Buddhist art of the Silk Road. But for some strange reason, the art of the Silk Road was what drew me on in my intellectual journey, and Professor Vanderstappen seemed quite willing to indulge my intellectual wanderings, at least on the Masters' level.

As I look back on that decision—as on too many of the decisions I made in those early years—I realize that I was a blinkered person, fleeing in the direction of a vague light but not knowing where it was taking me or why or whether my journey was worthwhile on any intellectual or practical level. It would probably be correct to say that embarking on a study of Qizil paintings was a foolish path for a young scholar supposedly heading for further studies in Chinese painting and an eventual teaching career. On the other hand, the Qizil project allowed me to broaden my understanding of the Buddhist tradition, which I loved, and to trace that tradition as it was transformed over the long route from India through present-day Afghanistan and Pakistan through to Xinjiang and the Chinese heartland. It certainly taught me about a great stretch of world geography with a deep cultural history and about the interconnections between culture and geography. During this phase of my studies, I unconsciously began to look at the world as if from the steppes and deserts of Central Asia rather than from my home in the United States.

The very project of following the journey north from India and then east toward China gave me a deep sense of satisfaction, even if it was a virtual journey. My Silk Road studies forced me to think about the cultural value of highly syncretic traditions—those that existed on the margins of established, wealthy, and settled civilizations. Indeed, perhaps it was the very otherness of the Central Asian physical world and its painting and sculpture (by comparison with the established Chinese traditions) that drew me on, that spoke to my persistent preference for the less well known—the cultural underdog in a sense—and to my basic tendency to rebel against authority. At that time the great landscape painting of China was nothing if not stamped with all the academic and intellectual authority of established tradition (at that time, I should say, overwhelmingly male). By contrast, the art of Central Asia seemed to offer an opening to an unlimited intellectual and aesthetic space. Most importantly, perhaps, the Qizil project forced me to study independently: to hone my preference for being an autodidact rather than the follower of a well-cultivated tradition. Thus, my intellectual foray into Silk Road studies represented yet another point where I came to a crossroad and took a specific turn—one that led me inexorably away from well-established traditions and toward the focus of my later inquiry. I should hasten to say that at every stage of my journey, I acquired layers of understanding: my journey was like that of a Bactrian camel heading out over the deserts of Central Asia loaded with silks and ceramics that would be traded along the way for exotic animals, fruits, and finely wrought handicrafts—or, in my case, for artistic traditions of which I then had little knowledge.

The Soviet Union and new awakening

I COMPLETED MY M.A. THESIS IN 1964, anticipating that I would leave my Central Asian detour and continue doctoral studies in Chinese art history. What instead followed turned out to be one of the most significant jolts in my intellectual and personal

journey. My then-husband, a student of Russian literature at the University of Chicago, received an IREX grant to spend the following year, 1965-66, in the Soviet Union. Our base was to be Moscow State University. While my husband was the grantee, I would be able to shape my own activities within the extreme limitations imposed by the Soviet state. I believe that this exchange year was the first that had been arranged with the Soviet Union through the State Department; and as we were to find, the restrictions on the movement of foreign scholars were significant and the oversight was omnipresent.

Preparation for that year in Moscow required me to study Russian over the summer months at the NEH Russian Language program held at Indiana University. This was my introduction to that beautiful but most difficult language; and at times I thought my brain would explode with Russian's utter (it seemed to me) infatuation with exceptions to rules. Declensions and conjugations were bad enough, making the transpositions in my high school Latin look sophomoric. More daunting were the exceptions: a compendium of changes and seemingly illogical shifts that seemed to make up a language in itself. While my husband studied advanced Russian at the summer program, I plugged along with the beginning stages, often feeling as if I were banging my head against the proverbial wall. Somehow enough knowledge of Russian sank into my brain so that when we finally settled into our lives in Moscow, I found that I had some fluency if little accuracy.

I. 2. Wild animals and Bactrian camel in a mountainous setting. Detail of a gold and silver inlaid design on a bronze tube. Tokyo School of Art. Early Han Dynasty.

In those days, all foreign scholars, like the Soviet students, were housed in small, two-room apartments of Moscow State University. The difference was that the Soviets had to live four to a "block" while the foreigners had the luxury of two to the same space. The university building on the Lenin Hills was a monument to Stalin's taste for aggressive, overgrown, authoritarian buildings designed, I expect, to utterly intimidate the individual while proclaiming the unchallenged power of the State. The main university structure presented a disorienting aspect: the lower half of the massive building took the form of four identical parts arranged back-to-back and tapering up to a shared and massive superstructure. Since all four sections looked so alike, it was quite easy to enter the wrong section of the building and then find oneself aggressively stopped by one of the many *dejournie* (guardians) and their relentless checking of documents. More positively, the university's setting on the Lenin Hills was then within a great extent of forest and meadows, which I came to realize were typically Russian: lush and green, covered with wildflowers in the spring and summer. In the fall, the dark evergreens contrasted with brilliant foliage; and in the winter, forest and meadows were dark, silent, and blanketed with snow. After the years in Chicago, this open, natural space forever changed how I would react to living in cities. That part of my experience in the Soviet Union would ultimately make me realize that whatever I did in life, it had to include significant periods of time far from urban environments.

I. 3. Nomadic rider shooting a tiger within a mountainous landscape. Detail of the inlaid design on a bronze tube in the Tokyo School of Art. Early Han Dynasty.

However fragile the linguistic base I had acquired in the preceding summer's intensive study, it allowed me to make good use of our year in Russia—albeit not in the direction I had expected. In that period (1964–65), the relationship between Mao's China and post-Stalinist Russia had deteriorated to the point of essential rupture. In fact, after months of having our apartment door flung open by stony faced, blue clad Chinese students looking for their own apartments on the next floor up or down, these students were all yanked out of the university and sent back home. I, in turn, was not allowed to continue my studies of Chinese or of Chinese art, at least not in any open manner. It seemed as if doors that I had spent years opening were closing in my face. However, in my earlier study of Chinese bronzes (those vessels that in the Louvre had struck me as so monstrously ugly) I had become intrigued by elements in their decor that seemed quite unlike the highly stylized motifs that dominated the vessels. These elements included, in the Shang vessels, the naturalistic heads of wild mountain sheep. In the late Zhou vessels and in decorative objects of the Han Dynasty, a growing Chinese preoccupation with the nomadic world became expressed in exotic elements including figures of horse-riding archers and hunters within mountainous landscapes (I. 2, 3).

These pictorial details had fascinated me throughout my graduate years. They indicated the cultural clash between the ancient Chinese and their nomadic neighbors—herders and horsemen who roamed the steppe north of China and across present-day Mongolia in the first millennium BCE. It was only through that nomadic world that the Chinese could have encountered the horse-riding archers and the mountains filled with wild animals. I realized that the landscapes of the Han inlaid tubes and ceramic objects, with their stags and wild boars and tigers, were early versions of a world later reflected in the northern verbal landscapes of the Tang poets. With this awareness behind me came the realization that while in the Soviet Union I could begin to explore a field that was almost never acknowledged in Western art studies: the cultural world of the northern nomads, those who roamed the steppe and mountain world north of China's Great Wall. I could devote my year in the Soviet Union to teaching myself about the early nomadic world of North Asia.

But here one needs to understand a basic problem for any scholar of nomadic studies. At the time I began to dig into the steppe tradition, nomadic art was known through two primary sources. The first was what we call chance finds, said to be from Central and North Asia. "Chance finds" are exactly that: materials that come to the attention of researchers through plunder or through objects found on the steppe, or in any other manner that is not scientific. These finds usually took the form of bronze objects for personal use or horse adornment, or they came from the plunder of gold and bronze from unidentified burials. These unprovenanced materials would then be sold but without any indication of their source. The usual designation of their original location would be something general, like "China borderlands," or "Siberia." Associated with the Central Asian steppe or North Asian grasslands, these materials were customarily assigned to something called "animal style art," presumably because zoomorphic motifs dominated the plaques and horse trappings. At the time I began my new inquiry, the most important chance finds from the nomadic world had been gathered into collections such as Tsar Peter the Great's Siberian Treasure, housed in the Hermitage State Museum in what had been and is now again, St. Petersburg, but was then Leningrad. It was assumed that this material had been fabricated by the nomads of North and Central Asia before the beginning of our era.

The second source of nomadic art was through nineteenth century excavations of Scythian burials in the Black Sea region. Since many of these "excavations" were conducted by individuals looking for gold, the scientific character of their investigations was minimal. Moreover, the magnificent gold materials from Scythian burials were automatically attributed to Greek craftsmen, the idea being that the barbaric nomads immortalized by Herodotus had neither the gold-working skills nor the artistic expression to produce such objects. At the same time, because those finds were made in what became part of the Russian and then Soviet world,[3] most of the scholarly writing about early nomadic art was by Russians and in Russian. For these many reasons, I decided to make my project for the year the combined study of the Russian language and of the artistic tradition of the nomads of the northern steppe. I could (theoretically) become proficient in Russian while also developing a knowledge of the art of the nomadic world bordering northern China, and of relevant scholarly resources.

During the months of our stay in Moscow, I was given permission to work in the main Moscow library, named—like so much else across the Soviet Union—after Lenin. In those days, Lenin was indeed ubiquitous, as were busts of Marx and Engels. (In the city, images of Stalin had by then pretty much disappeared.) Most weekday mornings I would make my way down from the Lenin Hills to the center of the city, using the superbly organized subway that links all parts of Moscow in a great hub. In trying to imagine the subway, it is useful to realize that the stations were all intended to serve as bomb shelters; they were thus deep in the ground, accessible only by long escalators, sometimes on several levels. To this day, one of my clearest sensations from that year is of descending deep into the earth, crowded on all sides by burly men and women wrapped in heavy Russian coats and fur hats, all soft, substantial, and silent. On the other hand, the subway worked well and in the cold months it offered temporary warmth before venturing out into the frigid streets to get to the library. There I received a pass and was given a place in the large, general reading room.

3 This region is now a part of Ukraine, or it had been until the recent Russian war against that country.

I. 4. Bronze horse ornament in the form of a coiled feline. Late Bronze Age. Arzhan 1. Tuvyn Republic

The Lenin Library card catalogue was then an archaic thing composed of darkened and uneven pieces of paper covered with loopy writing. There was no computerized catalog, of course, and no such thing as open stacks, so anything I wanted had to be requested. I quickly learned that the delivery of items might take a considerable amount of time, and that I had to stagger my requests and reading in order to make good use of the hours in the library. My "work" there was in some ways a wonderful journey of discovery, but in other ways it was a slow and painful process. Being a complete neophyte in the study of the Early Nomadic archaeology, I could not know what I should be looking for in terms of specific books or journals. Thus, I began to pry the field open by going from one reference found in one article or book to another, following a kind of academic trail of crumbs. Slowly I began to discern the contours of the vast nomadic world of Eurasia and gradually I accumulated an extensive array of sources relating to nomadic traditions across the Eurasian steppe. Even more slowly but steadily, I began to assimilate the Russian language.

When I think back to that period in the Lenin Library, I wonder how I could have managed to get through the wearying process required to overcome my initial ignorance of both language and essential literature or to keep myself awake in the overheated reading rooms. On most days, however, there were usually two events that startled me out of my increasingly somnolent state. The first would occur in the reading room itself when at some point in the middle of the morning, an invariably lady librarian—always swathed in a warm shawl pinned at her usually ample chest with a large broach—would walk quickly to the windows and fling them open to let in *vozdukh*—"fresh" air. The ensuing blast of cold certainly woke me, as it did everyone else who had also been falling asleep in the stuffy atmosphere of the hall. The second daily event that woke me and raised my spirits was to descend into the basement and buy a special treat for my lunch: a small plate of good Russian bread spread with caviar, for example, or a piece of an elegant cake. I always marveled that there, in the dark basement where too often one caught sight of a cockroach or two hiding in a corner of the vitrine, one could also return momentarily to a bit of the elegant style of a much earlier Russian period.

Most of our year was spent in Moscow, but in the middle of the winter we took six weeks in Leningrad,[4] so that my husband could use the library at the University. In that city we lived in the much more primitive conditions of the University dormitory, replete with bed bugs (well, we had them in Moscow, too) and hot water only twice a week. The city stunned us with its worn beauty and battered us with its dank, tubercular cold. Fortunately, in that city I received permission to work in the Institute of Archaeology and the Hermitage State Museum. Both experiences proved to be the basis of my future studies, although it would be ten years before they come to fruition with a second stay in Leningrad.

That year in Russia was a long process of discovery in many ways. By this I mean discovery of myself and of that strange and troubling world of post-Stalinist Russia. I went from being an idealistic, naïve person who could at first see only the positive aspects of life in the Soviet world—universal housing, medical care, education—to recognizing the extreme toll the repressive Soviet world had on individual initiative and on an individual's sense of well-being. Among the many students with whom we became friendly were several whose families had been repressed under Stalin and others who by virtue of their ethnic or economic backgrounds had little hope of finding positions suitable to their talents. We became vividly aware of the government's secret surveillance of individuals (including ourselves) and the way in which protest frequently resulted in a person's disappearance. It was a troubling discovery when we realized, at the end of the

4 St. Petersburg, founded by Peter the Great in 1703, was renamed Petrograd in 1914 and then Leningrad in 1924, in commemoration of Lenin's death. In 1991, following the fall of the Soviet Union, the city was renamed St. Petersburg.

academic year, that a young man with whom we had become close friends was, in fact, the head of the University's Komsomol, the organization of Young Communists. We could not resolve whether Volodja (Vladimir D.). had befriended us because he truly liked us or because that was his "assignment."[5] I also became aware that there were no Jews among our acquaintances at the University, as if that group of my *landsmen* were in hiding. At the same time, we cringed in the face of extreme anti-American propaganda rising to a fever pitch as the U.S. began bombing in Vietnam. While appalled by what we began to understand about the Soviet Union, we were forced to address the horrors that our own country was perpetrating on that small country, on the African world, and on the Americas.

The experience of living with so many contradictions and without the safe harbor of an American way of life took its toll on each of us and on our relationship. It made me realize that we generally live shielded by a kind of exo-skeleton of assumptions that support our psyches. The layers of that protective covering had been provided by religion or by families or by the national myths that cocoon us through childhood. Without that protective barrier, one begins to reassess all assumptions, trying to find stable footing where none seems to exist. In other words, that year of 1964-65 was disorienting on many levels. It was, however, a major step in that slow process of redefining my personal and intellectual directions.

I. 5. Horse crest in the form of a stag head in the beak of a griffin. Wood and leather. Early Iron Age. Pazyryk 2, Altai Republic. (Drawing: L.-M. Kara.)

5 Years later I stopped in Moscow on my way out to Novosibirsk and arranged to meet Volodja. By that time our old friend had become successful, in a Soviet fashion. He was the vice-rector of Moscow State University, he had become heavy and quite satisfied looking. He and his family lived in one of the fancier apartment buildings near the Kremlin, in a suite that had once belonged to one of Stalin's henchmen (I can't recall now which….). Since then, and with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, I have no idea what happened to him and his family.

Before I continue it would be wise to back up and clarify what was encompassed in the 1960s and 70s by the term "nomadic tradition." The nomads referred to here were specifically those horse-dependent people who roamed the vast steppe north of China and west into present-day Central Asia. That nomadic period encompassed most of the first millennium before our era—from about 700 to 300 BCE. After that period, the northern steppe became dominated by other nomadic groups who figured prominently in Chinese historical records of the Han through Tang dynasties. It was the previous group—whom I have referred to as the Early Nomads—who had spread westward across Asia to the borders of the Hellenic world, where they became known as Scythians. That term is even today confusing. It should refer specifically to the nomads who took up residence on the shores of the Black Sea beginning about 600 BCE; but it is frequently used, also, to refer to what we may call their forebears, the nomadic peoples who began to leave their homeland somewhere in North Asia at the beginning of that millennium. In speaking of the groups I had chosen to study, I will distinguish Early Nomads of North Asia from the Scythians; but it should be realized that even today, many scholars still refer to the whole trans-Eurasian tradition as Scythian. Not helpful, perhaps, but that is what it is.

As for the artistic tradition that had so attracted my attention, a few more distinctions may be useful. When I began my studies in Russia, the Early Nomads were known through three large material collections, almost none of which had been scientifically discovered. The first collection was encompassed in the Siberian Treasure of Peter the Great, to which I have already referred. The second collection of materials encompassed a great number of bronze plaques that had been collected from the region of the present-day Ordos region of north China, that part of China that lies within the northern bend of the Yellow River. These plaques, or belt buckles, usually take the form of rectangular frames filled with animals in battle, animals in addorsed pairs, or within a decorative interweave. Unfortunately, over the last few decades many of those plaques have been shown to be modern fakes.

The third body of material associated with the nomads—in this case, with the Scythians proper—included the gold and bronze materials recovered from Scythian burials in the region of Crimea, Kuban, and southern Ukraine. Often of considerable beauty and craftsmanship, this material had been excavated by Russian adventurers, amateur archaeologists, and even plunderers in the nineteenth century. In most cases the materials ended in the collections of either the Academy of Sciences or the Hermitage State Museum.

I have had to simplify the array of material referred to here as "nomadic", but it should be obvious that there was no unified field of study called "nomadic art history," nor can one even speak honestly of an "art history" at all. At the time I started digging into this material there were disparate articles on the material from northern China and a few picture books relating to the Siberian and Scythian material. Perhaps the most important sources for a consider-

ation of that material included site reports by nineteenth century archaeologists and early reports by Soviet archaeologists on Siberian burials. When I began my studies in the Lenin Library, I had yet to discover three fundamental sources for the study of Siberian materials: Gryaznov's study of Pazyryk I (1950), Rudenko's study of Altai nomadic burials (1960), and Rudenko's study of materials in the Siberian Collection of Peter the Great (1962). Other sources by both Western and Russian scholars would later become fundamental to my developing understanding of the sources of nomadic art.

One last comment is in order. When I finished my doctoral studies in 1970, there were several persuasions that dominated the study of nomadic art. The first, following the account of the Scythians by Herodotus, was that these people were essentially barbarians, with no artistic ability to work gold. As a result, it was assumed that the Scythians had commissioned the gold objects found in their burials from Greek craftsmen living, also, along the northern shores of the Black Sea. A second persuasion is that the most important motifs originated in the Iranian lands and were brought to Scythia by incoming nomadic horsemen. The third persuasion was that there was nothing significant to be found in the so-called Ordos bronzes; that material reflected, one might say, the artistic limits of the North Asian nomadic world. And, finally, it was accepted that the term "animal style" was a perfectly appropriate (if demeaning) way of designating the art of a barely known world.

That was the state of the field when I first entered it. By the time I struck out on my own in the late 70s and 80s, I had developed several hypotheses that many of my colleagues would have called contrarian. These will become clearer as I go on. For now, let me say that I was convinced that much (but not all) of the great gold work of the Scythians was executed by Scythians working in a Greek idiom, and that this material implicitly refuted the simplistic and patronizing term, "animal style" art. I strongly suspected (but had yet to prove) that the three most important motifs in the earliest Scythian pantheon—the recumbent stag with great antlers, the coiled feline (I. 4), and the bird of prey—referred to a mountain environment much further to the east and north. And I was convinced that to understand the art of the nomads it would be necessary to look to earlier traditions in northern Asia. I suspected that those earlier traditions might be embedded in imagery pecked and engraved on the boulders and cliffs along Siberian rivers. I was familiar with Soviet studies of petroglyphic materials from the 60s and 70s, but what had been published was almost useless. This included scanty text juxtaposed with muddy photographs or page after page of line drawings of individual motifs, almost only of wild animals. Yet I suspected that in that material might be found not only the origins of the tradition emergent in the art of the Scythians, but also earlier northern traditions of their own considerable artistic value. I began to suspect that the nomadic tradition could not be subsumed in the simplistic category of "animal style art." There was, rather, a significant pictorial tradition that intimated a concern for narrativity going back to the Bronze Age. That, at least, became one of my working hypotheses.

Traveling on

The following September of 1966 we returned to Chicago and the University. My challenge was to re-engage my doctoral thesis topic: the expression of space and time in Chinese painting and poetry of the late Ming and early Qing dynasties. With many regrets I set aside the notebooks I had filled with notes and questions about the ancient nomadic tradition of the Eurasian steppe; but I did not forget them. I sensed that eventually I would be able to return to that field of studies and to what had become an emerging intellectual passion.

The ensuing years involved finishing course work, writing my thesis, accepting a teaching post in Asian art history at the University of Oregon in Eugene, and—not least—starting a family. (From that point on, my two lovely daughters would have to suffer my intellectual wanderings; but they did so with humor and grace.) In those days in the field of art history, "Asianists" were responsible for all Asian traditions—a division of labor that more nearly reflected the limited knowledge and academic imagination of specialists in Western art than any fundamental truths about Asian art. Thus, it happened that I was assigned responsibility for introductory courses in Indian, Chinese, and Japanese art as well as advanced courses in Chinese bronzes and painting and an occasional course on art of the Silk Road. (Imagine asking a specialist in Renaissance art to cover all Western art from antiquity through the modern period, spread across several very different cultures…) Given the position I was entering, I had expected an extensive course load and was more-or-less prepared. Perhaps, however, I had become used to the need to dig into relatively unfamiliar subject areas and make sense of them. My task was made a bit easier because the couple I replaced in the teaching of Asian art[6] had been inveterate travelers, photographing compulsively if not always successfully as they traveled the world. As problematic as was the resulting slide collection (and yes, in those days we used only slides and slide projectors), it gave me a basis for building a significant teaching collection.

As I expanded my knowledge of Indian, Chinese, and Japanese art history, I simultaneously began that long and often painful process of getting my work into published form, all the while realizing that the subjects I was choosing to pursue were not considered conventional. On the side, however, or better, when I could carve out some time, I continued to nibble away at the materials gathered while in Russian libraries and museums, looking at specific motifs that had first captured my attention in my study of early Chinese art. These included the way in which early Chinese expressions of extended space seemed to have been formed by imagined understandings of the northern nomadic world. They also included an investigation into the motif most central to early nomadic art: that of the stylized stag, an image that appeared ubiquitously in gold and bronze plaques and horse trappings across the nomadic world. From there I explored other questions, beginning investigations that would eventually carry my inquiry much further. These included a study of the motif

6 Wallace and Ellen Baldinger.

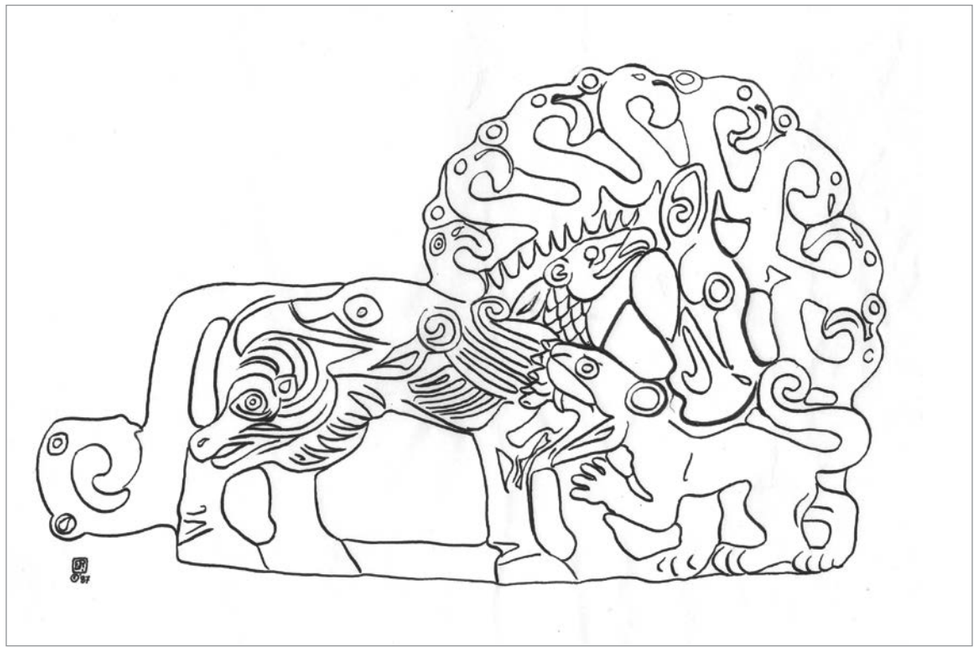
of the mythic animal (I. 6) and of the image of the stag with bird-headed antler tines (I. 7). I grant that these topics may seem rather academic, but I was increasingly convinced that if we could understand the origins of those representations, it might be possible to untangle the pictorial and symbolic roots of the larger nomadic tradition.

I. 6. Battle between mythic wolf and feline. Gold, one of a pair of plaques. Late Bronze Age. Siberian Treasure of Peter the Great, Hermitage State Museum

It probably sounds like an impossible task I had set myself: being a dedicated parent and continuing to teach and expand my knowledge of East Asian traditions, all while seeking to develop my knowledge of the early nomadic world. It was difficult, but each part of that whole brought me enormous pleasure. However, as I explored more deeply the world of the northern steppe and Russian and Soviet research, I was increasingly struck by significant barriers to my understanding. Beyond the essentially turgid character and bad reproductions of Soviet publications, I was often thwarted by their extremely vague indications of geography, especially that of Siberian sites. Specific locations might be identified as being so many versts from such-and-such a tiny village in the oblast of… (itself unmarked). Few of those sites could be found on any available maps; and, of course, there was nothing then like Google Earth. I found myself spending hours pouring over obscure documents, following the geographical crumbs dropped within the texts. But even there,

curiously, the search continued to feed my desire to know, see, understand the distant world of steppe and taiga. The very obscurity of that world drew me in, like a moth to a flame.

By the 1980s, there had still been few scientific excavations of nomadic sites. As I said, the materials on which I depended were recovered from poorly excavated burials or chance finds. Notable exceptions to this rule included materials from the great burial in Tuvy known as Arzhan 1 and the Russian Altai burials of Tuekta and Pazyryk. On the other hand, these burials had all been plundered in antiquity, so they could not offer a pristine basis for dating.[7] Some of the materials that most interested me included the objects within the Siberian Treasure of Peter the Great. Magnificent plaques such as those representing a battle between a mythic wolf and a feline, or a great gold coiled feline, or those representing a syncretic horse-stag with bird-headed antler tines continued to pull my attention to the north; but to try then to retrieve provenance and meaning was almost impossible.



I. 7. One of a pair of plaques representing a syncretic stag-horse, a feline, and superimposed syncretic animals. Plaques said to have been purchased in Verkneudinsk (present day Ulaan-Ude). Cast gold, weight 203.3 gr. Presently housed in the Siberian Treasure of Peter the Great, Hermitage State Museum. (Drawing: L.-M. Kara.)

7 Gryaznov 1950; Gryaznov and Mannai-Ool 1980; Rudenko 1960; Rudenko 1970. It would still be years before the major scientific excavations of Arzhan 2, Bashadar, and the excavations of commoner burials in the Kosh Agach region of the Altai Republic.

I was certain that the Siberian gold plaques as well as the felt and wood constructions from Altai burials, carried a symbolic significance that was deep and firm, and that their power of expression could not be encompassed by lumping all these artifacts into the vague category of "animal style." But the fact that these objects were often without provenance meant that one could use them only with considerable circumspection. Without analogous materials from scientific excavations this material was at best suggestive. Unlike the superb objects of gold and bronze that had been gathered in Soviet museums over the previous century from burials in Scythia, the Siberian materials lacked any solid basis in a datable world. This circumstance points to the primary obstacle to my inquiry: the fact that I did not know—and, at that time, could not know—what materials might exist on the rock faces and stone monuments of South Siberia that could give my hypotheses substance and meaning. I had no idea—and indeed no one did—of the vast complexes of original imagery that might be discovered in the Mongolian Altai. I only knew that across South Siberia,[8] researchers had noted and sometimes recorded extensive rock art imagery overlooking the great rivers of that region. It stood to reason, I thought, that petroglyphic traditions do not stop at international borders, despite that implication in the scholarly record.

Over the ensuing years I continued to offer courses in the artistic traditions of India and East Asia, but I also began to publish my first articles on the art of the early nomads. These initial published forays were really only hypotheses regarding the symbolic structures embedded in early nomadic material culture. I say they were hypotheses because without solidly excavated materials I could only propose meaning, not prove it in either time or cultural context. Despite the limitations with available sources on Siberian rock art, I began to explore that material, also, realizing all the while that what I was seeing was fragmentary and tentative. Nonetheless, I gradually discerned a compelling pattern in the ancient arts of South Siberia. It pointed to the cultural centrality of an antlered or horned animal fused with the vital forces of a female deity. This syncretic being gradually changed in form and substance, it seemed, between its earliest appearance in the Early Bronze Age and its disappearance in the IronAge. I knew that my thesis was built on shaky ground, but I felt I had to begin somewhere, and I sensed that I would ultimately find solid support for these ideas…if I could ever work in the field.[9]

In 1975 a grant from the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) allowed me to return to Russia, children in tow, to conduct research at the Institute of Archaeology and the Hermitage State Museum. For my young daughters it was, I think, an important and exciting half-year, in which they managed to discover a great range of new experiences. My own project was to continue my self-education in the art and archaeology of the nomadic world of the first millennium BCE. That involved continuing to acquire a broad familiarity with the written materials on the early nomads of Siberia, including all significant archaeological reports and historical and cultural theories regarding their art. For this work I had access to the Institute of Archaeology's extensive library and to the city's major library, the Saltykov-Schedrin.

At the same time, I had a very specific project: to learn as much as I could about the art and culture of the Scythians—the western-most early nomads of the Eurasian steppe and the best known of all the early nomadic groups. In pursuit of that goal, I was given extraordinary access to the Hermitage Museum's Gold Treasure, which included the rich collection of gold objects from Scythian burials in the region of the Black Sea and the materials from the Siberian Treasure of Peter the Great. For whatever reason—either because of their great generosity or because they were delighted to find a Westerner truly interested in this material—the Hermitage curators offered me the opportunity to sit for days on end with the gold objects, picking them up, turning them over, feeling their weight, and noting the contrast between the perfection of their front surfaces and the imperfections and flaws on the under surfaces. This opportunity for close inspection of the gold objects and related museum holdings in bronze, wood, and felt fed back into my fascination with questions of process, an interest I had first developed in my study of ancient Chinese bronze vessels. The close examination of this beautiful material ultimately resulted in my second book, *The Art of the Scythians. Cultural Interpenetration at the Edge of the Hellenic World* (Brill 1995).

The results of those weeks buried in the musty institute library and in the back rooms of the Gold Treasure began to reveal the contradictions that existed between received understandings and what I was seeing. The Siberian materials (as fragmentary as they were in Soviet publications and as poorly exhibited as they were in the dim halls of the Hermitage's lower floor) did not support the prevailing scholarly emphasis on the nomads' warlike lives. Their art seemed to refer to deep concerns rather different from simply war and plunder. This growing awareness was yet another force pointing me to that Siberian distant world. If I were to hope to resolve the contradictions between historical persuasion and objective fact, I needed to see the early nomadic burials in their landscapes and to begin an acquaintance with the rock art I knew existed but on which existing publications were totally inadequate.

Within the Scythian material, I experienced a similar discord. On the one hand the prevailing tradition was that the nomads were culturally poor neighbors of the urbanized Greeks and dependent on them for the beautiful gold objects recovered from such burials as Kelermes, Kul Oba, Chertomlyk, and Tolstaya Mogila in the region of present-day Ukraine. On the other hand, in many of those objects the images of Scythians were other than warlike. They were rather portrayed quietly tending to their animals or to each other and to homey tasks. Their presentation as

8 South Siberia here includes the Russian Altai Republic, Tuvyn Autonomous Region, and the vast region east to Lake Baikal.

9 I developed these ideas in several articles and in my first book, *The Deer Goddess of Ancient Siberia. A Study in the Ecology of Belief* (Brill 1993).

sturdy horsemen was quite at odds with the homogenized presentation of Scythians on contemporary Greek vessels. As I observed these contradictions, I sensed that I was looking at the gold descendants or first cousins of Siberian pictorial antecedents. In other words, it struck me that the images of Scythians in narrative contexts harked back to a pre-existing narrative pictorial tradition in North Asia, one that could only be retrieved in rock art. If it were possible to trace those cultural threads, I reasoned, I would have a basis for showing the inadequacy of the designation, "animal style" art. More importantly, finding the roots of that narrative tradition might open a rich prehistory in which early nomadic art would be located near the final stage.[10]

My time in the Archaeological Institute and the Saltykov-Schedrin Library was devoted to slowly going through old reports and scattered books on the archaeology of the Scythians and their Siberian ancestors in the Altai and Sayan regions of North Asia. Picking my way through that material, as in my earlier work in the Lenin Library and still hampered by a complete lack of any reliable maps, I attempted to conjure in mind archaeological sites reproduced in miserable images and located in far flung regions. I was mesmerized by the way a whole field of studies and a vast region slowly revealed itself in poorly printed pages of what earlier had been obscure publications. The vague geographic locations that continued to bewilder me were not by chance. They depended on a nineteenth century tradition of delineating travel in Siberia by rivers and versts; but they also reflected the imposed imprecision of space within the Soviet world, especially near border regions. I should point out, also, that in those days Mongolia basically did not exist in the intellectual traditions underlying nomadic studies. Maps stopped at the Mongolian border, and there was no interest in what lay beyond in that vast steppe world.

In many respects that second period in the Soviet Union was no less stressful than the first, not only because of the political situation then pertaining but also because of the difficulty of daily life in the city. To retrieve my allowance funneled from IREX through the Soviet government, I had to go once a month to a particular office and wait in line at a single window. Like all the other impatient people waiting in line for some disbursement or other, I watched the clock and the clearly marked "closing times" at the window. Too often, however, just as I got to the head of the line, the mirthless woman on the other side of the window would slam the shutter saying she had to close early. With time I began to understand how Soviet citizens so often became either surly and slavish or (like me) very angry. My small experiences with an intransigent bureaucracy made me aware of how difficult it was for individuals to survive in that society with their spirit intact; and that, in turn, made me realize the importance of poetry, music, and art in the Soviet world.

In addition to my research agenda, I had to be concerned with shopping, which meant waiting in lines for food of often dubious

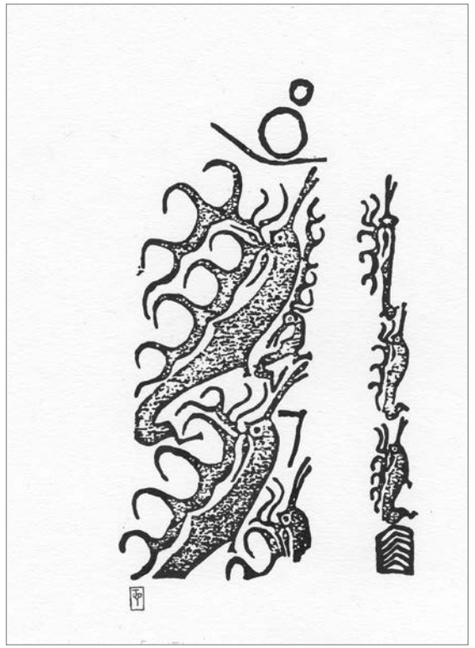
10 In fact, that is accurate, as I found. That early nomadic tradition was the penultimate stage; the final stage may be said to be that associated with the Xiongnu and related peoples to the north of India.

appearance. It also meant finding imaginative ways to prepare the same basic meals, day after day, on our one electric burner, and with daily care of my daughters (then 4 and 6). While my husband had agreed to help with child-care, he wanted to spend a significant amount of time on his own studies. Nonetheless, we managed to put together a schedule that was adequate, and Anna and Davina managed well, doted on by the various lady-watchers in our hotel, given rides up and down by the elevator attendants, and fussed over at the concerts, operas, and ballets that we were able to afford as foreigners. There were the little annoyances, as when we would turn on the faucet to wash or take a bath and out came liquid rust. More troubling was the clear fact that our hotel room was bugged; and every time my husband and I wished to discuss personal or sensitive matters, we had to walk outside, the girls playing somewhere nearby.

On the other hand, there were aspects of those months I will never forget: wondering through the endless and often deserted halls of the Hermitage, surrounded by magnificent works of art; ducking through a hidden door to mount the stairs behind the halls leading up to the offices of my mentors, Anastasia Mantsevich and Liudmila Galanina; and hours spent in their cluttered offices deep in the back spaces of that museum, drinking tea and listening to their stories of surviving the Nazi siege of Leningrad. Despite the time that had elapsed since those horrible years, they, and other similarly aged people whom I met, were deeply marked by those memories. These experiences and the sounds and smells of the Museum, the dingy Institute of Archaeology, and the city, worn yet still beautiful after decades of neglect: these colored the way I would forever recall the months in Leningrad and they underlay what became my deep love of old Russia.

At the end of our stay in Leningrad we were given permission to take the Trans-Siberian train to Irkutsk, a beautiful city on the Angara River deep in Siberia. Irkutsk was, of course, a city to which many nineteenth century Russian intellectuals and political dissidents had been exiled. Set within the vast Siberian taiga, Irkutsk projected a kind of intellectual honesty that was difficult to find in Moscow. Its old buildings and narrow streets were redolent of a long past age, when being a dissident did not mean certain execution or a death camp.

Our stay in Irkutsk allowed me to spend time at the Historical Museum and its collection of bronze objects from unknown Siberian burials from the Bronze and early Iron Ages. At that museum I also became acquainted with a type of carved stone known as a deer stone from the late Bronze Age. I had read about deer stones and knew that they represented a major Mongolian tradition from the early first millennium BCE. This decorated stone indicated quite clearly that the motif of the recumbent stag was most certainly Siberian in origin (I. 8). The stone at the Historical Museum made me realize that possibly much of the material I should be seeking was in Mongolia; but that country was still quite closed to foreigners.



I. 8. Detail of carving on the so-called Ivolga deer stone. Irkutsk Historical Museum. (Drawing: L.-M. Kara).

Irkutsk also gave us the opportunity to travel out to Lake Baikal, a magnificent rift lake in the middle of Siberia and the largest body of fresh water in the world. For me, Baikal's magic was enhanced by the fact that up to then it had been merely a large, seemingly unreachable spot on the map. Our experience traveling there and being there gave us only a superficial taste of the Siberian taiga, but it became embedded in my imagination—its pine and birch forests, its remoteness from the world we had known—and it served to whet my appetite for further exploration. Lest it sound too idyllic, I should also say that our stay in Irkutsk and its surrounding land reminded us again that we were being constantly watched; but Anna and Davina charmed people everywhere we went (including the pleasant young minder to whom we had been assigned) and took the edge off my general uneasiness.

From Irkutsk we made our way by train and plane back through what were still rarely visited cities in Central Asia and the Caucasus: Samarkand, Tashkent, Bukhara, and Tblisi. Along the way, our plane out of Bukhara experienced engine trouble and was forced to land at a "closed" city on the Caspian Sea. There we sat for hours at a small resort on the shore of the sea. It was easy to understand why that city was off-limits to foreigners: the whole area was bristling with warplanes facing south…presumably the direction of danger. Then back to Leningrad, via beautiful Kyiv[11], and then home and to the need to integrate all we had seen and experienced. That period in the Soviet Union had been immensely fruitful for me and, I believe, a positive time for our girls. But it also allowed my former husband and me to realize that we were moving far apart in our interests and desires. We finally understood—sadly but wisely—that we would have to continue our lives in separate directions.

Through the work I was able to complete during that academic stay in the Soviet Union and through subsequent slow, careful research, I gradually reinvented my academic self. As I look back at the notebooks of Russian by which I forced myself to expand my knowledge of that language, and at the notes and bibliographies I was almost compulsively accumulating, I see an emerging concern with

11 Then known as Kiev.

what I came to call symbolizing structures in the art of the early nomads. The individual motifs—birds, wings, beaks, coiled animals, and horned or antlered animals—seemed to carry less importance in themselves than in their relationships one to the other, and those relationships were dialectical in force. I could see that as interconnected elements, they were the keys to understanding the significance of a deep artistic tradition and its cultural transformation through the Bronze and Early Iron Ages. And somewhere in the center of that visual puzzle was the figure of a female, at once source and arbiter of human fate.

While paying my academic dues to Chinese art history through teaching, publications, and conferences, I simultaneously began to develop a reputation as one working in a field at once unfamiliar and fascinating. I began to have the impression that anything I might do in nomadic traditions would raise my visibility with potential colleagues around the world. Hence, I participated in several conferences here and in Europe where I became acquainted with many of the scholars hitherto known to me only by their work. By then, also, I was certain that the materials that would assist me in understanding the origins and evolution of the nomadic tradition were embedded in the land itself—that is, in rock art and surface monuments and in their relationship to a larger landscape. However, at that time, Western archaeologists were unable to visit, let alone work in Siberia; and neither I nor any other Westerner knew about the great wealth of materials in Mongolia—far more extensive than anything I imagined. All I could do, it seemed, was to wait for some chance, any chance, to get into that distant world and see its landscape, archaeology, and art for myself.

Approaching Mongolia: first steps

The prospect began to change in the 1980s, at a time when the Soviet Union and Mongolia were beginning to open cautiously to Western visitors. Because of my increasing familiarity with pre-modern North Asia, my husband[12] and I were invited to lead one of the earliest American tours into Siberia and Mongolia, in 1985. Gary was to be the point person in charge of all the logistics. I was to be the trip "expert," theoretically ready with information and lectures at any time (if only our tour members were interested!). Leading tours would ordinarily be the last thing I would want to do. Nonetheless, the chance to go to Mongolia and to return to Siberia was not to be ignored. The itinerary was extensive. Beginning in Moscow we flew to Tashkent and from there to Bukhara, Samarkand, and Khiva, before taking the train to Irkutsk. From there we flew down to Ulaanbaatar. During the subsequent days in Mongolia, we visited sites such as Karakorum, the former capital of the Mongolian Empire, and the Flaming Cliffs in the Gobi Desert. Now, of course, those places are all standard tourist fare, but in 1985, the trip was an eye-opener. Entering Mongolia was as if one had rolled back one or two centuries into the past—an experience affirmed by the fact that all trains going between the Soviet Union and Mongolia had to stop at the border to have their wheel beds changed from one gauge to

12 Gary Tepfer and I were married in 1981. He would become my project photographer and great intellectual companion.

another. When we finally arrived in Ulaanbaatar, the capitol of Mongolia, we found a rustic town where horsemen and their herds dominated the streets and elk roamed in the hotel's miserable gardens. The main airport in the capital was a tiny pink building, designed in an old Russian-Soviet style.[13]

The experience with the tour company absolutely confirmed my intuition that I would not be a good tour guide, but it did reaffirm my conviction that my intellectual search would have to take me somewhere in Mongolia, most probably to the Altai Mountains, where Mongolia abuts Russian Altai and Tuvy. The tour was also a major lesson in the complexities of leading a group of tourists in the Soviet Union at that time, and of navigating visa problems and puffed-up officials. With this trip I began to develop what would be essential in our future travels: the ability to operate on the balls of my feet, so to speak: to be both flexible and imaginative (and to learn to control my temper).

This ability was tested during the last few days of our travels. Because of a travel glitch between Ulaanbaatar and Irkutsk, we ended by missing our flight out of Siberia to Moscow; and that delay certainly meant we would miss our flight out of the country and overstay our visas. Nowadays that kind of problem might be annoying at most. In those days, however, it was cause for major worries for everyone. Our principal "minder" in Irkutsk couldn't handle the fact that we would seriously overstay our visas. As the one Russian speaker accompanying the trip, I had to take charge of this mess, but I was insistent that the travel authorities and the hotel where we were supposed to be staying had to make the necessary adjustments. Our poor hotel clerk was desperate to get us out of his hair and out of Irkutsk. I will never forget hearing him try to bribe an apparently "responsible" travel agent by saying, "Sasha, please, help me and I'll let you use my red car!" Well, I don't know if Sasha ever got to use that red car, but we did get out of Irkutsk, flown on a Soviet military plane through the closed city of Omsk. Once in Moscow, we were ushered out of that city just as quickly as the authorities could make it happen.

That first experience in Mongolia was followed in 1987 by an invitation to participate in the International Congress of Mongolists in Ulaanbaatar. I wasn't quite sure why I was invited to the Congress, but I assumed that the organizers were a bit desperate to enlarge the guest list beyond the usual Soviet scholarly contingent. In fact, the invitation was probably precipitated by the fact that by then I had published a few articles that touched on the early nomadic art of Mongolia. The meeting was illuminating on many levels, but perhaps the most important experience was my new acquaintance with a few Soviet scholars from Novosibirsk. These included researchers with whose publications I had become familiar and who had worked extensively in either Siberia or Mongolia. I suspect that I went through the meeting with the expression of one slightly agog: here I was finally encountering many of the scholars from whose research I had learned so much or others with whose research I had begun to take issue.

13 That airport has now been impressively rebuilt with all kinds of tourist amenities; and the pink airport sits like a quaint, tiny museum near the thoroughly modern new building.

The Congress took place during a period leading up to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. On several evenings I visited with one Russian scholar from the Institute of Archaeology in Novosibirsk. He wanted to speak of what was happening, of the possible end to the period of extended Stalinism under the rule of Brezhnev and his successors. True to a tradition I recognized from my earlier Leningrad stay, my friend would talk only out of the hotel, in a park, where there would be no chance of being overheard. During our conversations, I explained my earnest desire to get to Siberia and to see for myself the world that had given rise to the early nomads. He urged me to write to one of his colleagues, Vladimir D. Kubarev, in the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography in Novosibirsk. That individual, my friend promised, was the only senior person from the Institute then working in the Altai Republic, and he might be interested in assisting me to get there. I eagerly took Kubarev's name and contact information, seeing here an opportunity to act on my desire to break out of the confines of libraries, museums, and large cities and to see the physical world from which the nomadic tradition had emerged about 3000 years ago.

Earlier in this narrative I said that through much of my early career I was moving backward through life, making moves but without the knowledge of how to make choices. At this point in my development, and particularly after the Congress in 1987, I began to move forward deliberately, sensing that there would be an opening for work in the field, in the Altai, and with real challenges to solve.

II. 1. Looking east up the Barburgazy River, Chuya Steppe, Altai Republic. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

II.

Approaching Mongolia: The Russian Altai

When I returned to Oregon from the International Congress in Ulaanbaatar, I immediately wrote to Vladimir Kubarev, received an answer, and established communication with him in which we explored mutual interests. This led to an invitation in 1989 to join him in Novosibirsk and travel down to the Altai Mountains to see a rock art complex, Kalbak-Tash, he was then documenting. That happened as planned, but with far more adventures involving visas and travel than I can relate here. Let me just say that the trip from Moscow to Novosibirsk in the dead of night and on an Aeroflot plane of dubious reliability was one of the first steps in my training to trust to fate and forge ahead.

The subsequent trip down to the Altai was yet a further adventure as well as a lesson on how to comport myself in that unfamiliar land. We were four in the party: Kubarev (also known as Volodja), a young researcher from the Institute in Novosibirsk, our driver, and myself—all Russian speaking men (no English) and me. Mostly I just listened to the conversation, trying to orient myself in this society; but as the hours passed, I began to wonder whether these gentlemen ever needed to "see a man about a horse." After suffering in silence for too long a time, I asked my companions if we couldn't have a rest stop… at which point the car came to a screeching halt and everyone jumped out, rushing in different directions. So, in that way I found out that they, also, were human.

Our goal was the far southeastern end of what was then called the Gorno-Altai Autonomous Region, or more simply stated, the Altai region and not very autonomous at all. More specifically, we were heading for the Kosh Agach *ob'last*, at the very border with Mongolia. At that time, the highway (as it was euphemistically called) was a treacherous road, poorly paved or even unpaved, with constant unexpected bumps and potholes. All along the way and most particularly when we reached the mountainous region, the roadside was lined with Russian crosses, flowers, and steering wheels commemorating the many individuals who had not made their destination safely. At times, indeed, the hairpin turns and drop-offs were terrifying. I just kept reminding myself that our driver—a most genial person—was said to have been the Institute Director's personal driver and that therefore we were in good hands. Only later did I find out that he had one small fault—a great weakness for vodka, which doesn't necessarily enhance one's driving skills. That was also, I later gathered, why he was driving us and not the director.

The highway took us out of Novosibirsk, and south through the heavily wooded landscape typical of South Siberia. Along the way we went through tiny villages where wooden houses decorated with fantastic carved filigree seemed to be sinking into the ground, lost in a sea of potato plants and giant sun flowers. Our road had us cross Biysk, a beautiful old city on the banks of the Biya River not far from its confluence with the Katun. Biysk had been founded in 1708 by Tsar Peter the Great to serve as a fortress against Dzungar intruders from Mongolia. Later in the century it evolved into a major way station for trade out of Russia and down into Mongolia and China. In the Soviet period, Biysk become a military outpost closed to foreigners. For that reason, as we drove through the city, I had to hide on the floor of the car in order not to be seen by the inquiring eyes of military police.

Beyond the city and across the Katun, the landscape first broadened into green, fertile valleys, and then these valleys slowly narrowed, and the view began to shift into the distinctive mountainous landscape of the Altai. Forests thinned, and the mountains slowly revealed their rocky contours and precipitous drops. Finally, as we reached the point where the Katun is joined by the Chuya flowing from close to the border with Mongolia, we could glimpse in the adjoining valleys rows of old stone mounds, the burials of early nomads and their Turkic successors. Observing these changes, I was increasingly filled with the sensation that I was finally reaching a critical stage of my still-uncertain journey.

II. 2 View over Turkic period enclosures with stones lines (balbal) running to the east. Kosh Agach region, Altai Republic. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

We set up our camp—my first camp ever in Siberia, I could not help but note to myself—on the shore of the Chuya River east of its confluence with the Katun. As an "honored" guest, I was given a sleeping bag, my own tent—that was fine—and a cot; but that was not fine. The cot had me sleeping about 18" above the ground, so that I was frozen both below and above. My new friends, of course, could not comprehend why I would prefer to put my sleeping bag on a carpet on the ground, nor would they allow me to sit on a rock, indicating that this could lead to certain medical problems for women; so, I got my first taste of the position of women in old Russia, and I spent most of my time in camp standing. Fundamentally, I froze throughout that visit discovering just how cold Siberia can get even in September.

II. 3 Burial mound and standing stones. Early Iron Age. Bashadar, Altai Republic. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

On the other hand, Kubarev was most generous in showing me many of the rich monuments and complexes in that part of the Altai, including the great burial grounds of Bashadar (II. 3) and Tuekta (II. 4). Until that trip, these Late Bronze and Early Iron Age burials had been available to me only in Soviet publications. Despite their importance in the history of the early nomadic world, these cemeteries were still virtually unknown in the West.

II. 4 View over the cemetery at Tuekta, including the three ruined "royal" burials. Early Iron Age. Ongudai region, Altai Republic. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

That trip in 1989 changed my perception of the early nomadic world in many ways; or rather it greatly deepened my understanding. The landscape had the most immediate impact on me. In the more northern region of Kosh Agach, we were frequently greeted by views out to snow-covered mountains; and in the southeastern region, close to the Mongolian border, the almost treeless, mountain steppe was magisterial in its beauty. I began to understand that there was scant possibility here for agriculture and the settled society that agriculture supports. The landscape, its dry and rugged mountains and extensive steppe had necessarily spawned pastoral nomadism, probably as early as the Bronze Age.

The second way in which my perception changed was no less profound. I knew that the great cemeteries of Bashadar, Tuekta, and Pazyryk[1] had been plundered in antiquity: that not long after the burials were closed, robbers penetrated through the stone mounds and log roofing of the burial chambers to seize precious metals and anything else of monetary value. Nonetheless, I was stunned to see how these great sites had been excavated by Soviet scientists; or perhaps it would be more accurate to say, the way in which they had been bulldozed in the name of science. For that was, in fact, the preferred Soviet method for quickly demolishing the large stone burial mounds of the early nomadic period. Of course, when the excavators were finished with uncovering the mound and digging down into the wooden chamber to retrieve whatever grave goods remained, they took what was left in the name of science and left the broken mounds and eviscerated burials to the fate of nature. The havoc that remains to this day is still visible at Tuekta (II. 4) and Pazyryk (II. 5). Where there had been large, harmonious mounds now exist mountains of debris lightly covered by weeds and shrubs.

1 I'm including here comments about Pazyryk even though it wasn't until my second trip into the Altai, with Gary on the team, that we were able to get there.

II. 5 Bulldozed burials in the Pazyryk cemetery. Late first millennium BCE. Altai Republic. Ulagan region. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

It became clear that too often excavation techniques in the Soviet world were focused on one thing, and one thing only: to get the material culture out of the ground, with any concern for stratigraphy be damned. Over that season and the succeeding seasons in the Russian Altai, I began to recognize that if I were to work with my Russian colleagues in the future, we would have to reach an understanding about the handling of archaeological sites and materials, as well as of rock art.

But I am moving ahead of the 1989 field experience. That trip was truly one of almost completely new understandings. Of course, I had seen bad black and white photographs of surface archaeology in various Russian language publications, but that material was basically unknown to Western scholars. The old images did not prepare me for the beauty and power of much of this material in the landscape. This was particularly true of the standing stones that dotted the steppe.

II. 6 Large standing stone ("Anton's stela") in a rectangular frame. Bronze Age. Chuya Steppe, Russian Altai. In the background are mountains at the border with Mongolia. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Standing stones are just that: large, quarried stones that have been set into the earth. In some cases, the stones are relatively small, but in other cases, they are extremely large with an above ground height balanced by at least one-third more length underground. These stones appear individually or in groups of four or five, some still standing, some half fallen, others buried in the ground. In many cases, a rectangular frame around the base of the stones is still visible (II. 6). On most of the stones there are no engraved or pecked marks, thus giving no clue of their date. The source of these huge stones and the way they were raised has hardly ever been considered.

The standing stones are, of course, different from the deer stones I mentioned earlier; those are famously marked by the stylized images of stags. By contrast, the large stones in the Chuya steppe suggested that deer stones were rooted in a considerably earlier history of raising monumental stelae. I was puzzled by the fact that despite the impressive size of these old, undecorated stones, they had not hitherto been considered in scientific literature. This was an issue I would ultimately examine closely in the Mongolian Altai, where I found standing stones to be among the most interesting of the ancient surface monuments. As to their locations in the landscape, I sensed there was significance in the stones' directional orientation and in their relationships to the larger landscape, but it would be one or two more years before that became clearer.

II. 7 Standing stone, seen from the west. Height approx. 6 ft. Bronze Age. Chuya Steppe, over the Barburgazy River. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

The most important experience in this visit to the Russian Altai was my introduction to Siberian rock art. We had stopped and visited several small sites on the way down to the Chuya steppe, but Kalbak-Tash was the focus of our journey. Kalbak-Tash is a relatively small complex of rock art along the Chuya River above its confluence with the north-flowing Katun (II. 8).

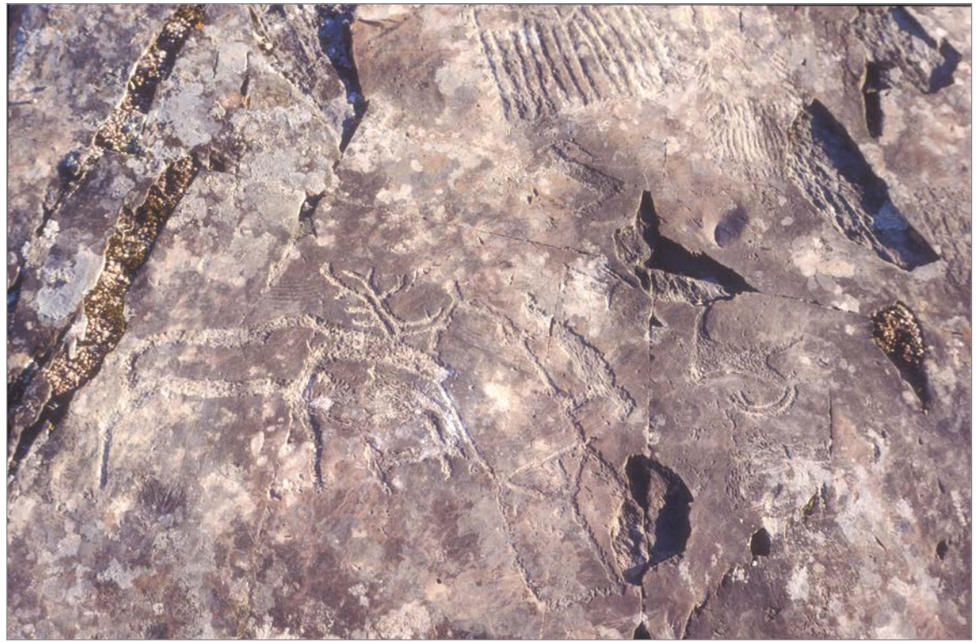
II. 8 The ridge of Kalbak-Tash (center) dropping down to the Chuya River. Altai Republic. View to the east. The river can be glimpsed in the far right-center. (Photo: E. J-T)

Despite its relatively small size, Kalbak Tash is one of the most interesting complexes in the Russian Altai, with imagery that represents the best Bronze Age rock art of the Altai-Sayan region. The site takes the form of a long ridge snaking down to the right bank of the river, effectively cutting the terraces on that bank above and below. Perhaps Kalbak-Tash served in the ancient past as a natural barrier, forcing wild animals to descend from the ridge above down to the river where hunters would lie in wait; or perhaps there was a higher belief linking the elk represented ubiquitously at Kalbak-Tash and the river. For whatever reason, the ridge had become an unexpectedly rich complex of rock art.

The pictorial wealth at Kalbak-Tash opened a new horizon for me: images from the Bronze Age complete with complex narrative scenes of people hunting, herding, and driving their caravans of loaded yaks. Whereas earlier my acquaintance with the art of the early nomads was divided into stylized warriors, riders, and animals ("animal style"), Kalbak-Tash presented a whole new sense of naturalism and the narrative exploitation of space. However, the most striking element in the Kalbak-Tash repertory was a number of curious figures with small heads and raised hands (II.9). On each image, the representation of her pubis made clear her female aspect, and her regular appearance underlying or crossed by the naturalistic figures of elk and aurochs seemed to indicate that their being was tied to hers (II. 10). I dubbed her a bird-woman based on her

triangular head, her clawed hands, her skirt resembling the feathers of a large raptor, and the fringe of feathers around her torso. As I was later to understand, the style in which the adjacent animals were rendered indicated an early Bronze Age date. The fact that the bird-women almost always underlay the large animals indicated, in turn, that this figure was earlier. I did not fully realize it then, but the relative overlay of elements in a pictorial plane would become critical to my ability to tease apart the chronological layers of the rock art we would document in Mongolia. As I gradually learned more about rock art and Siberian ethnography, the figure of the bird-woman would become of central importance in my research.

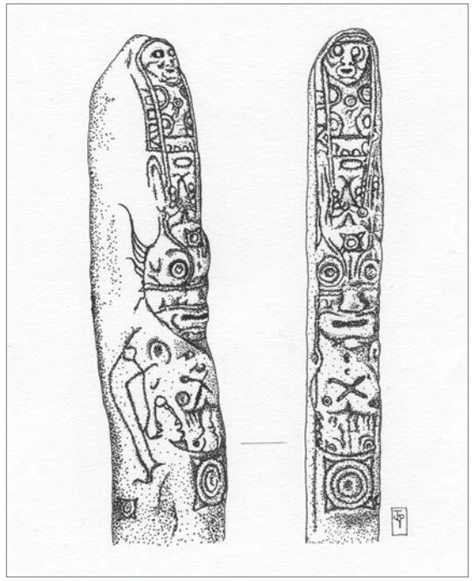
II. 9 Drawing of a bird-woman. Early Bronze Age. Kalbak-Tash. Kosh Agach Region, Altai Republic. (Drawing: L-M. Kara.)



II. 10 Panel with simplified bird woman crossed by an elk, and two more partial bird women above. The surface has been cleaned of lichen, leaving behind white spots and the scattered marks of a steel brush. Kalbak-Tash. (Photo: E. J-T)

Several years earlier, Kubarev had begun to record the site in black and white drawings. He invited me to join him in this project, writing the text for the images and helping to publish the volume in the West.[2] This was the beginning of a far more important education than I then recognized. Seeing the pecked images in their natural context—on a surface alone or with other images, and with a specific orientation—awakened me to several essential factors in the recording, analysis, and publication of rock art. It seemed certain that there had to be an ancient significance in the relationship between the strange bird woman and the naturalistic elk and aurochs; and that the rich imagery here, on this ridge, and nowhere else in the Chuya River basin underscored the importance of the interconnection of imagery and the larger landscape.

I had not thought very much about the methodology used by both European and Russian archeologists to record their rock art sites. At that time, it involved cleaning the surface and then photographing or more often rubbing the imagery, a process that invariably left ink on the stone surface. In that first acquaintance with Kalbak-Tash, I realized that black and white silhouettes ("drawings") of discrete elements ignored the information embedded in the physical and pictorial context. Moreover, I began to understand the potential loss of information depending on how any panel was prepared for documentation. If it had been simply brushed free of dirt, then the image was relatively intact. But when the surface has been scraped of lichen and even cleaned with a metal brush, then the damage to the surface is irreparable. Although lichen may obscure an image, the plant has worked its roots into the stone and when it is removed, the surface begins to crumble. In addition, unless one changes the ambient environment (moisture, adjacent plants, atmospheric dust), the lichen will just grow back. Working then at Kalbak-Tash, where the damage done by earlier investigators to the extraordinary panels was so evident in the form of wire-brush scratches and whole parts of images falling away, I realized that if I were to do further work with rock art, with or without Russian colleagues, I would have to establish a definite protocol: no scraping, no rubbing, and no destruction of the lichen. Also, of course, there could be no walking on the panels. But of that more, later.



II. 11 Massive stone found lying on the mound of a Tagar period burial. Shira, Khakassia. 290 x 80 x 25cm. (Drawing: L.-M. Kara)

2 The volume became part of the series, *Répertoire des Pétroglyphes d'Asie Centrale*, published by the Mission Archéologique Française en Asie Centrale: Kubarev and Jacobson, *Sibérie du Sud 3: Kalbak-Tash I (République de L'Altai)*, 1996).

In the first years of our joint project in the Altai, it was not possible for me to transfer large sums of money to Novosibirsk; it thus became necessary for me or another person to courier the funds every winter to Kubarev, since he was responsible for provisioning the field team. In winter of 1990 I returned to Siberia for two purposes: to carry the funding we would need for the subsequent season in the field[3] and to go up to Khakassia, to visit the museum collections of Abakan and Minusinsk. That was another major step in my education, for there I became acquainted with the huge carved monoliths and slabs associated with the South Siberian Aneolithic and Early Bronze Age cultures of the third-second millennia BCE (II. 11). The massive stones had once stood in the open steppe, facing the east. Within the museums of Abakan and Minusinsk, they were arranged in much more imaginative fashion: either set among potted plants or, in one case, arranged as if they were musk oxen, in a circle and facing out. Observing this, again, aroused my concern for the location of surface archaeology within space and the way the material form and the surrounding context were interconnected visually and symbolically. These great stones would subsequently figure in my investigation of syncretic animal-human beings in the Bronze Age, but they also added to my concern with recording accurately the location of worked stones in space.

In subsequent field seasons with Kubarev (1991, 1992, 1993), my husband Gary joined us as my field photographer, and we continued to work further to the southeast, within the Chuya steppe and closer to the Mongolian border. Here rock art continued to hold our attention, but most of it occurred only in small concentrations. On the other hand, this part of the Russian Altai introduced me to several surface monuments beyond the massive standing stones, and sometimes of monumental size. These structures are ritual or burial in purpose, some megalithic in form, and all at that time unfamiliar to Western scholars. The most impressive such monuments are known in Mongolian as *khirgisuur* (or *khirigsuur*) and in Russian as *khereksur*. They are composed of a large central mound surrounded by a round or square wall or frame (II. 12). Rays aligned (more or less) with the points of the compass often extend from the central mound to the surrounding wall; and the whole is composed (as are all the monuments in this part of the world) of piled stones.

3 Here I should point out that the money transferred in 1990 was not used until 1991: Kubarev became quite ill in the spring of 1990 and our project had to be placed temporarily on hold.

II. 12 Khirgisuur along the Yustyd River at the eastern edge of Chuya Steppe. In the background the triangular ridge is called Genghis Khan's Oven. The mountains just beyond are in Mongolia. (Photo: E.J-T)

Frequently the khirgisuur are accompanied by a variety of standing stones, stone burial mounds, and round altars, all dating over a period of several thousand years; and as I was to realize later in Mongolia, they are often set along rivers or in a steppe where they echo the surrounding mountains. Altogether the form of the khirgisuur and its location seem to indicate an invocation of order both on this earth and in the larger cosmos. Set within the vast expanse of the Chuya steppe, these khirgisuur are extraordinary in their variety: round or squared, with up to sixteen rays like the points of a compass.

I had previously known about these monuments from a variety of muddy photographs in Soviet publications. Seeing them there, in the steppe, was a totally different experience. Their size and elegance seemed to contradict any assertion of a primitive status, and their distribution across the huge plain suggested a level of habitation that was hardly apparent in the present. As individual types and in combination with other monuments, khirgisuur would years later become a major part of my focus in Mongolia. What was important here is that these were the first khirgisuur I had seen, and I was seeing them in an ideal environment: open steppe surrounded by distant mountains.

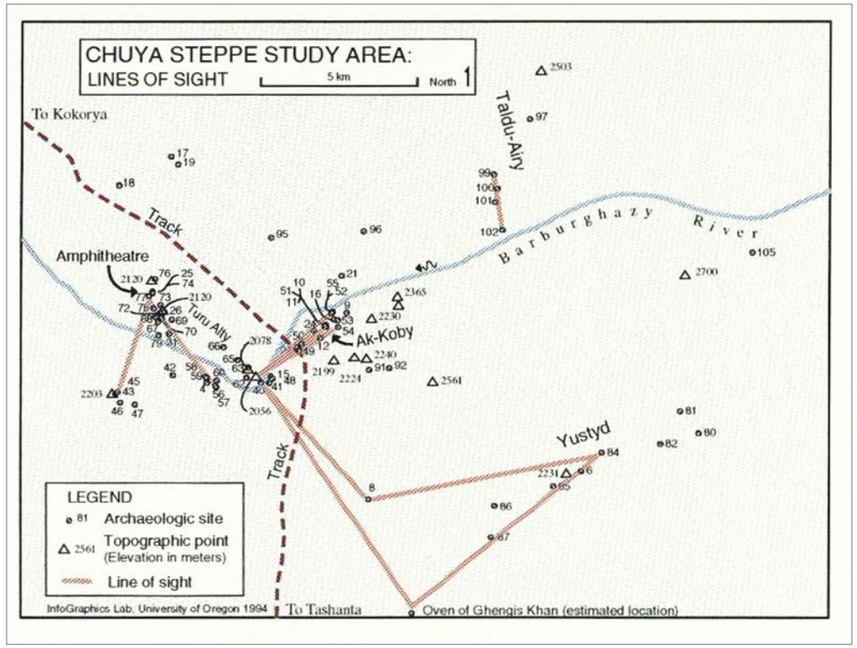
II. 13 Standing stone on Talduairy: one of several tracing a line down to the Bar-Burgazy River. View here is to the east. Kosh Agach Region, Altai Republic. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

It was also evident that the landscape in this south-most part of the Russian Altai is very similar to that we would find in Mongolia on the other side of the border: greener, perhaps, and less vast and harsh, but a similarly broad steppe bisected by fast flowing rivers and rimmed on the horizon by high, snow-crested mountains. The character of the geography forced me to be more attentive to questions of directionality and view. I noticed, for example, that there were regular patterns in the relationships between surface monuments and significant features in the landscape. Standing stones were consistently arranged with their taller narrow side facing to the east. In several cases, a series of standing stones created a kind of procession from the upper slope down to the river below (II. 13). As I moved about and recorded this material, I began to sense that these patterns might indicate significant aspects of early belief systems. This impression was only intensified by the relationship of early Iron Age burials and small rows of stones referred to as *balbal* (II.14). These, also, insisted on an orientation to the east but with the reaffirmation of a central axis in the mound. The khirgisuur reaffirmed the singularity of the whole, but with greater insistence: rays pointing to the east, north, west, and south, all arranged around a central mound, or axis.

II. 14 Burial mounds and rows of balbal extending to the east. Early Iron Age. Maltalu, Kosh Agach Region, Altai Republic. (Photo: E. J-T)

In 1992 my interest in the visual interconnection of monuments and landscape—or more precisely lines of sight—made me realize that I had to find a way—and someone—to help me explore and express those relationships. In that year, back at the University, I had the good fortune to become acquainted with a young cartographer, Jim Meacham, in the InfoGraphics Lab at the University of Oregon. I began to consult with him about how I might proceed with my desire to analyze monuments, locations, and landscape features. It happened that at this period geopositioning instruments were moving out of a military monopoly and becoming available for civilian use. Fortuitously, in 1992 and through the intercession of an editor of the trade journal, *Geo Info Systems*, I received the gift of two GPS Garmin instruments, one for myself and one as a gift to the Institute of Archaeology in Novosibirsk. This was an early and very clunky geographic locational instrument; and it required an obscene number of batteries to work. Moreover, within the Altai Mountains reception was uncertain and the ground accuracy was good for only above thirty meters.

Nonetheless, the Garmin became a significant addition to my Altai work. In the field I would ascertain the locations of monuments and bring the data back to Jim in the lab. He and his colleague, David Cutting, used this data to develop plots, and we combined this with Gary's photographs of view sheds. The resulting maps were rough by our later standards, but that is not to be wondered at. Because we were working right at an international border, in the early 1990s there were still no reliable maps available to non-military investigators. We knew where we were, but we did not yet know how that location looked within the larger geophysical region.



II. 15 Our early map of lines of sight (view sheds) in the Chuya steppe. The amphitheater in center left is seen in II. 17. The lines of sight below and to the right of the amphitheater begin at a massive standing stone (II. 7) with lines of sight east-northeast to the concentration of archaeology on Ak-Koby and southeast to the open steppe centered by a massive khirgisuur.

To get to some meaningful visualization of our *place* we had to integrate our GPS data, the indications we could glean from simple tourist maps, on-site observations, and photographs. The result was admittedly crude but suggestive: we began to see larger possibilities for analyzing archaeology and the contextual landscape; and we began, also, to publish our findings.[4] I will return to the ramifications of our heavy Garmin in a later chapter, but for now I should say that my early foray into mapping archaeology and landscape would prove decisive for our later work in Mongolia. Unfortunately, my Russian colleague was not interested in this approach to archaeology—nor, indeed, was the Institute—so the twice gifted Garmin must have ended lying in some drawer, unused.

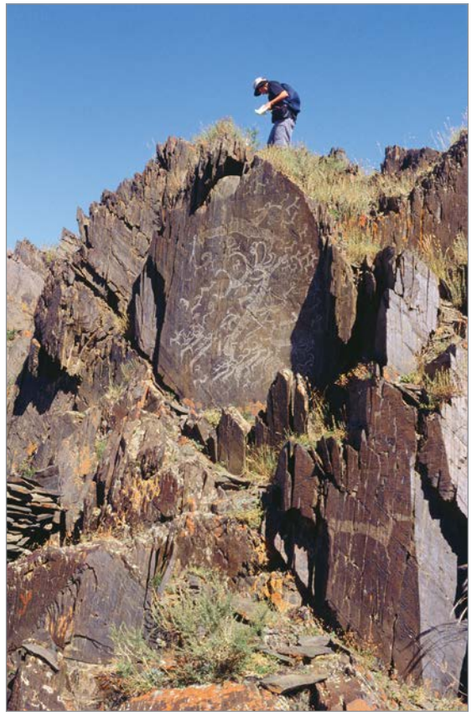
4 Jacobson, Meacham, and Cutting 1994; Jacobson and Meacham 1998.

II. 16 Ridge of Turu-Alty with two unidentified mounds. The snow-covered mountains in the background are those of the Chikhachevyn Nuuru in northwestern Mongolia. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

As a result of our field seasons in the Russian Altai, Kubarev and I published a full report on the Kalbak-Tash complex (1995), and I began to publish a series of articles exploring topics in the study of rock art, surface monuments, and landscape. While working in the Chuya steppe, Gary and I found that in at least two cases the locations of rock art and monument complexes had distinctive acoustic properties. The most striking instance was at the south end of Turu-Alty, a long ridge within the Chuya steppe meandering from south to north and marked by repeated concentrations of rock art and heavy mounds (II. 16). Gary and I spent much of the field seasons of 1992 and 1993 documenting and recording the archaeology there. In the process we discovered quite by accident that a large amphitheater-like bowl opening to the south on the southern end of Turu-Alty (II. 17) had remarkable acoustic qualities: quiet voices at the base of the bowl could be heard distinctly at the top. Moreover, that lower part of the bowl was marked by several groups of large ritual standing stones in various stages of toppling.

II. 17 View of the amphitheater of Turu-Alty, looking southwest. Standing stones are visible in the lower center, and at center right can be seen the peaked ridge with the panel of stags (II. 18). (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

At the very top of the bowl is a large vertical rock face marked by the images of stylized stags (II. 18). That amphitheater and one other we documented within the Chuya steppe (Zhalgyz-Töbö) made me reflect on the theory advanced by the Soviet archaeologist Michael Gryaznov; he proposed that the great heroic epics of Central Asia emerged in the late Bronze Age within the region of South Siberia. These epics were tales of considerable length and intended for chanted declamation before a community. With its many ritual structures, rock art, and acoustic properties, Turu-Alty suggested what might have been the locus of social gatherings in the late Bronze and early Iron Ages, a place where early versions of heroic tales could be declaimed.



II. 18 Panel decorated with stag images at the top of the Turu-Alty ridge. These images had been cleaned, chalked, and outlined in red lipstick (!) by earlier observers, all so they could photograph the images more easily. It is obvious that such impacts on the stone surface are ultimately very destructive, and they degrade the images for later researchers. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

I published our findings in a now defunct Soviet publication in 1994. Although the work accomplished there has received the attention only of specialists, my research represented yet several more stages in a growing understanding of what one might call the shape and texture of prehistoric cultures within their lands. In the case of Turu-Alty, I had to work out a comprehensive system for surveying and documenting the ridge and its archaeology, and I had to understand both within the larger physical context of the Chuya steppe and its surrounding mountains. It became clear that the development of a conceptual model of the larger physical and cultural context could be the basis for tracing the ebb and flow of cultures in the past. In short, I had to make a transition from my formation as an art historian working within the context of museums, libraries, and rich textual traditions to someone with much greater understanding of archaeological method and geography. In the end, I believe, the combination of art historical training, my acquaintance with the archaeology of North and Central Asia, and direct field experience served me well. It would be of considerable assistance as we moved into the more complex arena of the Mongolian Altai. But at that time, many of the questions I was asking of the archaeology and landscape were not being considered by others. In that regard, I believe, I was forging a new path, very much encouraged by my work with Jim and Gary.

A few words about living conditions during our fieldwork in the Russian Altai might help to give the flavor of our experience. Those conditions were, to say the least, primitive. We had use of a small car and a large Institute of Archaeology military truck. With that we would transport our own gear and the field gear: the large kitchen tent, gasoline in drums, and whatever food we could get. We lived in tents and used the communal tent for meals and for gathering during bad weather. Each year we took along someone to cook for the team—usually a friend of

Volodya's or a young student at the Institute. With only one exception, each of our cooks prepared food that was tasty and attractive. One of these cooks, Olga, became a dear and lasting friend, but she was a bit more elaborate in her food preparation than Volodya liked: we watched him freeze up in horror as he contemplated the rapidly decreasing store of food that was intended to last a whole season. His complaining prompted Olga to attach a tiny scrap of paper at the entrance to the tent reading (in Russian, of course): "If you have any complaints, write them here." Volodya did not find that very funny. Olga had a creative, eccentric daughter, Katya, who came with us that year. She spent her time not with archaeology, but with writing poetry. One night we were all roused by shouts from the big camp tent. Katya had fallen asleep while writing, and her candle had burned down to the table before being extinguished. Nothing major was lost, but we had to be more careful after that.

In those years we could not just go into a store in Novosibirsk and pick up whatever we would need…mainly because the food items were not there. Instead, we would stop in the open-air markets of villages along the way to the Altai, buying whatever vegetables might be available. Usually that was only potatoes, cabbage, and carrots, and those became our main staples in the field. Once we arrived in the main settlement of the Chuya steppe, Kosh Agach, and if we were lucky, the only bakery in that whole region would be open and would have dark bread. Then we would buy several dozen loaves and they would last for the season. One year, I recall, Russia cut off electricity to the Altai Republic, apparently because of some political tit-for-tat. As a result, the region had no electricity to make bread and we had to make do with old loaves from Novosibirsk. I believe that we were able to buy extra bread from local herders, and we always had coarse Russian pasta. Meat was a real problem. At times we could buy mutton from local herders, but we depended primarily on Russian tinned pork. One year we ran out of that, too, and went into the only "store" in Kosh Agach—a small kiosk, really—to see what was available. The only meat-like substance for sale was in a tin labeled "Kukumaria", a concoction, it turned out, of chopped sea cucumbers in rice. I confess that the first time we tried it, I completely choked, it was so disgusting. So, I managed without so-called meat for the rest of the season.

Completely lacking from our diet, of course, was anything like fresh fruit. Gary and I foraged for frost-ripened gooseberries, wherever we could find them. One year—I believe it was 1993—we stayed in the steppe until late in the season, when snow was already beginning to descend onto the lower slopes of the mountains. On the way north back to Novosibirsk, we ended up snowed-in for two days at a camp we had made on the forested flanks of the South Chuya Ridge. That turned out to be a good thing: since there was no archaeology there to worry about, we spent the days hunting for and gorging on the wonderful local berries (a kind of lingonberry) gleaming red from under the snow. But even those berries were not sufficient to satisfy our need for fresh food. Further on our road home, we stopped to make another camp for the night in a very

wet and cold field north of the city of Gorno-Altai. I think we were rather desperate for vegetables, because Gary and Gleb, Volodya's son, snuck into an adjoining field and stole a bunch of carrots for our dinner. These, of course, were not your beautiful carrots such as one buys in an American grocery store. They were big, coarse, ugly things, certainly intended for horses…but they helped to satisfy our craving for vegetables.

As I look back at those early field seasons in the Russian Altai and at two related trips during that period back to Russia and deep into Siberia, I realize that they prepared me for the far more challenging work we would have in Mongolia. The Russian Altai accustomed us to difficult weather and work conditions (rain, snow, cold, and mosquitoes). As we became acquainted with the people of that region—the native Altaitsi and Kazakhs—we began to understand something of their traditional nomadic culture but also how it had been greatly damaged by years of Soviet domination.

I always had the suspicion that Kubarev took me on as expedition partner because he—like so many other Russian archaeologists—needed a source of funding and a connection to the "outside world." That is certainly the way our collaboration began. I recognized that when Kubarev suggested a working partnership to complete the volume on Kalbak-Tash and to pursue further investigations, he had in mind a relationship the Russians described as "scientific tourism." Translated that means that the foreign visitor would support the project financially. In turn, that visitor would receive the benefit of a mention in any publication resulting from the project and would earn something like bragging rights for having been involved in an archaeological project in such a remote part of the world.

However, being a scientific tourist was not the way I conceived of my role. I was more than willing to provide the funding, but I was also committed to learning and doing. In 1993, I had been awarded the Maude I. Kerns Chair in the University of Oregon's Department of Art History. That position gave me generous funding for research, among other things, and I could decide how to allocate it; and in those days a little bit of funding went very far in support of a Siberian expedition. Perhaps to Kubarev's surprise, I took the work we were doing seriously and made those several field seasons into a kind of personal boot camp in Altai archaeology. As a result, during those initial years with Kubarev in the Russian Altai, I learned something of the complexities of working with an international team where the only common language (then, and later in Mongolia) was Russian; and where the person holding the purse strings (me) and thus a considerable share of the project's direction was a woman.

Those were, perhaps, the hard lessons. More importantly, I began to develop systems for surveying, documenting, and analyzing major concentrations of rock art and surface monuments within the landscape. It would take years of working in Mongolia for me to feel confident in what I had undertaken and where I wished to go with my experience. In other words, the naiveté with which I had entered the Altai project was slowly replaced by a greater sophistication and self-confidence and by more far-ranging questions about prehistory.

In those early years of my Altai life, by far the most important milestone was the completion and publication of my first book, *The Deer Goddess of Ancient Siberia* (1993). The title of that book is certainly unusual, and this is how it came about. Supported by a NEH Grant for Individual Research, I had ventured to put to paper the theories I had been developing to explain the centrality of the stag image in early nomadic art and the relationship between the stag images and bird-women at Kalbak-Tash. At that time, of course, I was depending almost entirely on the research I had conducted in Russian and Soviet sources and on my early experience in the Russian Altai. I tried out my proposed title—I do not recall what it was, but it certainly was very academic and boring—on my friend and colleague, Kate Nicholson, but she would have none of it. Kate said I had to have something more exciting, more "sexy." And that is how I ended with the Deer Goddess.

In fact, the title was appropriate, within the confines of my knowledge at that time. But the sub-title—*A Study in the Ecology of Belief*—was even more appropriate. In this book I set out to develop an approach to prehistoric belief systems for which there are no textual sources. By looking at the way in which specific motifs occurred and were rearranged and re-formed over time and space, I hoped to understand the emergence of symbolizing structures and their meanings. I also wanted to introduce Western readers to a vast cultural landscape and to major scholarly contributions to the study of prehistory—contributions that were largely unavailable to non-Russian readers. Indeed, I had to take on that task, since otherwise no one would understand the sources for my conceptualizations. In that effort I believe I was successful; and I was also pleased with the results of that book. Of course, over the subsequent years I realized the need to reconsider some of my theories in light of the extraordinary materials we gathered in Mongolia. The result of that reconsideration was the far more sophisticated study I published in 2015, *The Hunter, the Stag, and the Mother of Animals* (Oxford University Press). But one last note on this matter: the *Deer Goddess* became sought after and quickly sold out of its printing. To my amazement, the price for the book on Amazon soared, at one point reaching $1400. I never saw anything of those sums in the way of royalties, but I eventually discovered the reason for the *Deer Goddess's* considerable success. It apparently became the book of choice for every shaman, witch, and mystic in Great Britain. So much for academic success…and sexy titles.

One other significant event happened in those years—still in the order of serendipity rather than considered plan. In 1992–93, I was asked by IREX to host the first Mongolian archaeologist to visit the United States. The resulting friendship with D. Tseveendorj, professor of archaeology at the Mongolian Academy of Sciences' Institute of Archaeology, became for many years the basis of a fruitful collaboration. Tseveendorj joined Kubarev, Gary, and me in the Russian Altai in 1993. During our field season he confirmed what we had already observed: that the wealth of surface monuments and rock art seemed to expand exponentially as we got closer to the Mongolian border. Tseveendorj also pointed out that the Mongolian side was, archaeologically speaking, almost a blank slate: there had been very little archaeological survey and documentation in the Mongolian Altai.

At that time there were no other foreigners working in Bayan Ölgiy aimag, the region of Mongolia just on the other side of the Russian border. As a result of our conversations with Tseveendorj, and despite the formidable obstacles Gary and I (as Americans) would face in traveling to Bayan Ölgiy, we conceived a plan to shift our focus to the Mongolian side of the border. (We tried to cross the border in 1993, but the Russian border guards at Tashanta stopped us cold.) Thanks to Tseveendorj's invitation, we agreed that the following year, 1994, Gary and I, with Tseveendorj and his assistant, would meet Kubarev and the Russian team in Olgiy, the capital of Bayan Ölgiy. From there we would undertake a survey of archaeology in the high mountain-steppe. Our primary focus would be the identification and documentation of major rock art sites in Bayan Ölgiy and northern Uvs aimags. Our division of practical responsibilities was as follows: I would provide the funding, Kubarev would provide the logistical support (i.e., truck, car, gasoline, camp gear, and food), and Tseveendorj would take care of all the necessary permissions—and there were many. We dubbed our project, the Joint Mongolian-American-Russian Project, Altay. Theoretically at least, where we surveyed, how we functioned in the field, and how we published our findings would be decided by consensus. That is, in fact, pretty much the way things went, at least for the first few years of our collaborative work. In the last several years, things became a bit more complicated, but of that more later.

II. 19 View of the Chuya Steppe at the edge of Mongolia, looking south. Altai Republic. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

The recording we did at Kalbak-Tash and the further survey and documentation of rock art in the Chuya steppe gave me a thorough grounding in analyzing process, styles, and subjects, and in developing a method of documentation that did not impact the rock art. The study I did of Turu-Alty prepared me for considering the relationship of archaeology to the geophysical context. Those years of work in the Russian Altai gave me the opportunity to become well acquainted with relevant research and scholarship, primarily in Russian.

Our time in the Chuya steppe also afforded me extensive familiarity with surface monuments of the Bronze Age, early Iron Age, and Turkic periods: to be able to identify typologies but also seek out the differences between like monuments. I found that the attention to detail I had learned in my studies with Father Vanderstappen was applicable to my study of both rock art and surface monuments. The collaboration I undertook with Jim Meacham spurred on my deep interest in the relationship between artistic expression and the experience of space. It led to a much greater understanding of geography and geology, and their relationship to human experience. Perhaps most important was that I learned to ask questions about those relationships and to feel out their implications for understanding the cultural depth of the stone materials. Collaborating with Gary, a professional photographer, offered the opportunity to give visual form to academic ideas and to allow me to present those ideas more concretely than would have been possible with words alone. While the Altai field experience seemed to my colleagues back home to be a radical shift away from my earlier studies, it allowed me to take what I had learned in traditional art history and extend it to hitherto unfamiliar problems. In short, in the Altai work I discovered a field of studies from which I ultimately derived enormous pleasure and energy. It permitted me to work with a close colleague, in the open air, in a mountainous and uninhabited setting. It pushed me to develop analytical techniques and intellectual concepts that challenged existing models. And it demanded a vastly more integrated approach than I had earlier known in my work based in museums and libraries.

III. 1. Upper Oigor basin, at the boundary between Mongolia and Russia. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

III.

The First Mongolian Project: Discovering

Most students of rock art, West or East, come to their interests from archaeology or anthropology and not from art history.[1] They are primarily interested in relating representations in rock art to scientifically datable materials; for such researchers, rock art is simply an adjunct to the data they consider more secure, i.e., less subjectively approached. Until about twenty years ago, this approach was reflected in an emphasis on image typologies, published primarily through silhouetted drawings. This approach was affirmed by the lack of interest in publishing rock art imagery in anything but black and white illustrations. In the Soviet Union and Mongolia, where fine reproductions were the rare exception, the analysis of human or animal imagery became elaborated into what might best be described as lists of classes and types, related—if possible—to excavated materials. The result was a view of rock art that was heavily tilted towards archaeological considerations, such as the naming and dating of cultures.

As I look back at my own preparation for the Mongolian phase of my life, I realize that my studies in art history served me well, allowing me to look beyond the scientific boundaries imposed by archaeological study. At the same time, my immersion in both Soviet and Western archaeological approaches and my need to understand not simply subject but also method added a material solidity to my art historical eye and mind. As I embarked on the investigation of Altai rock art, I was prepared to consider petroglyphic traditions as both subjective expression and material data. I am convinced that my observations became far more multi-faceted and substantial than would have been the case had I only applied the approaches of art history. Certainly, the knowledge I acquired from the discipline of archaeology, particularly within Eurasia, has given greater depth to my conclusions.

The evolution in my understanding of approach and theory was slow, convoluted, and often haphazard: an organic process, where one new insight prodded the re-evaluation of others, ultimately changing the whole. But before I try to describe that process and some of its results (in Chapter V), I need to stress that as much as I thought I knew about rock art in the Western world or about that of the former Soviet Union, my knowledge was based primarily in book learning rather than direct experience. I had

1 In saying that, I do not mean to ignore those who become passionate about rock art for very personal reasons. Such investigators do exist, but generally they pursue their own interests and do not contribute to the scientific knowledge of this material.

only the vaguest sense of how the material in its physical reality—its very *stone*—could convey something about the lives and concerns of anonymous artists from thousands of years ago. After years of study and working in the field, I began to realize that the pictorial expression, the rock to which it was bound, and the larger physical context had intersecting lives of their own. Applying this insight took me well beyond the usual archaeological and art historical approaches of subject, style, and cultural identification. Over time, the Altai material taught me how to work dialectically between the imagery, the rock, the immediate physical context, and the extended environment.

Background to the project: making it work

I MENTIONED THAT DURING OUR 1993 season in the Chuya steppe, Tseveendorj, Kubarev, and I conceived the *Mongolian–American–Russian Project, Altay.*[2] This project would offer us a means of continuing our research on rock art, but within the Mongolian Altai, a vast region that was almost uninvestigated. A contract for our collaboration was executed and signed between the University of Oregon and Tseveendorj's Institution of Archaeology in Ulaanbaatar. This gave us the official imprimatur we needed for working in Mongolia. Our *Joint MAR Project*, as we came to call it for short, would last for ten years (1994–2004), followed by a second project, the *Mongolian Altai Inventory Project* (2005–2010), involving myself, Jim Meacham, Gary, and several Kazakh colleagues. But that part of the story will have to wait for later.

The pattern we developed for the Joint MAR project was established with our first season, in 1994. The details of how we undertook and carried out our work say something about the complexities of the collaboration we had undertaken. Since my research funds were the foundation of the project, I had to advance money to Volodja during the year so that he could secure a field truck from the Institute, gather the provisions, and claim the gasoline that would allow the Russians to get down to Mongolia and back. However, in the early years of the project, as the Soviet Union came apart, it was not possible to send money to Siberia, so from the beginning I developed a process of couriering the funding myself. I usually planned a trip to Russia in mid-winter when I had a break in my academic schedule. Obviously, this was not the best season to travel into that cold region but doing so would give Volodja enough time to make the necessary preparations. So, from our big trunk I pulled out the old fur-lined coat originally bought for my year in Moscow and depended on that for warmth.

2 *Altay* is the Russian transliteration for the same word, *Altai*.

III. 2 Field team, 2002. From left: Gary, Volodya, Tseveendorj, Nicolai the truck river, Olga our field cook, myself, and Gunchinsuren; Igor in the front. Tsagaan Gol. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Those winter trips out to Novosibirsk were not just about carrying funding. We also used the time together to prepare strategically for the following field season: deciding where we would work, how much time we should spend at each concentration, and the scientific problems that we had to address. Thus, the anticipation of seeing the project develop meant that on some levels I looked forward to my mid-winter forays into Siberia. Those trips also gave me an opportunity, as I earlier mentioned, to travel to other Siberian cities, such as Abakan and Minusinsk, to see museum collections that were relevant to my rapidly expanding knowledge of Siberian archaeology.

I carried the money in cash in a money belt securely around my waist. I cannot say that I enjoyed the process of being a money mule that had to go deep into Russia. The

preparation for these trips always filled me with apprehension as well as anticipation. Thirty years ago, there were three main airports in Moscow: one to arrive at from Europe, and two to leave from for other parts of the Soviet Union. I would usually fly to Russia through Germany, arriving at Sheremetyeva Airport in Moscow after more than twenty-four hours of long flights and sitting in waiting rooms. Having landed at Sheremetyeva, I had even more hours waiting in the passport control line, in a dark and dingy underground space. Once liberated from that blend of tedium and terror, I would rush to get a "taxi" to go to the other side of Moscow to the next airport, Vnukovo, where I would get a midnight flight (yes, they were always at midnight) to Novosibirsk. I say "taxi", because frankly one could never be confident of the vehicles or their drivers waiting at the airport entrance—official or not, driver or thug. I ended by scrutinizing the drivers and their cars as if I had some superior wisdom…which I didn't. Although I had moments of fear during some of those long excursions, most went well and most of my drivers were friendly enough (although on one trip, my pleasant driver, a Chechen as I recall, explained to me how much he hated Jews.)

The long drive out to the next airport was not the end of my sense of vague terror. Vnukovo is now an international airport, but in those days, it was small, remote, and utterly unprepossessing. I usually had hours to wait in what was then a filthy, dark waiting room, with a toilet so dirty that if I had to use it, I would leave my bags with a new acquaintance in the waiting hall and make a quick run for the lavatory. There was a kind of snack bar adjacent to the waiting room, but it featured only bad *sosiski*, thin sausages the contents of which were of disputable origin. But it was food of a kind, and it would have to see me through until we arrived in Novosibirsk at about 6 a.m.

Since I am trying to convey a sense of how difficult the early years of our project were, I should say something about the flight itself to Siberia. I am not sure why they were always scheduled to leave at about midnight, but I expect it was so that passengers could not see the Urals and western Siberia, with their installations of major factories and military bases. The planes were usually old enough so that they inspired little confidence in this passenger: the seats often collapsed, the seat belts were non-existent, and the so-called flight attendants were unprofessional in the extreme.

Despite these causes for trepidation, I arrived at my destination as scheduled every time, except once. In 1994, while carrying the funding to Novosibirsk in the dead of winter, our plane had to make an emergency landing in Kemerovo, a city to the east of Novosibirsk. Once on the ground, we all made a rush through a brutal winter storm to the airport waiting room. The hall was jammed with passengers in heavy winter coats who had been trying to get to other parts of Siberia but whose flights had also been diverted because of bad weather. They and their massive bundles and disgruntled expressions filled every inch of the old wooden benches crowding the waiting room. I searched for a long while until I finally found a small corner of a bench beside a

pleasant young lady who was also heading for Novosibirsk. That was a stroke of luck since we could watch each other's bags over the following several hours and as each of us had to make our way to the filthy outdoor latrine. My young friend was much savvier than I. She managed to find out that there would be no flights to Novosibirsk for that day; so, she got two tickets for us on a train to that city in the late afternoon. I don't recall when I arrived there, but when I called Volodja to tell him what had happened and that I was in the city, he was surprised… having figured that I was not coming at all. Later courier trips were a little less stressful, and finally, as Russia entered the international economic world, it became possible for me to transfer the money electronically.

For a variety of political reasons, getting to our work destination, Bayan Ölgiy, proved to be more complicated than we had anticipated. Tashanta in the Kosh Agach region of Russian Altai had been a main crossing for merchants and travelers between Russia and Mongolia for several hundred years; but in the 1990s it was still impossible for Americans to cross the border at that point. For Gary and me, getting out to far western Mongolia had to be through Ulaanbaatar (Ulan Bator), meaning that our travel from Oregon was not east but west, through China or South Korea to Mongolia. Over the years, we found that the Korean connection was by far the better and more pleasant of the two.

At the beginning of our project in Bayan Ölgiy, Ulaanbaatar was a formidable entry point. When I had first visited that city in 1985, a huge statue of Stalin graced the front of the National Library; by the time I went back in 1987, the statue had been removed and was lying unceremoniously behind the library. When we returned in 1994, all traces of the bronze Stalin had disappeared, measuring the extent to which the previous Sovietization of Mongolia had been rolled back. In those early years of our travel to Mongolia, the city was still a rough concentration of chaotic streets and ger (yurt) camps around a very Soviet center. Elk still came down from the hills and roamed in the southern part of the city (where we always stayed, in a cheap hotel), horses and driven cattle were more common along the boulevards and streets than were automobiles, and bands of feral dogs were a major menace. Most of that has now changed: the elk have entirely disappeared, the city streets are now choked with high end muscle cars and bracketed with pretentious apartment and business structures, the dogs are seen only in the ger districts or at the edges of the city. Streets are more rationalized, and sidewalks do not require the pedestrian's vigilance to such a degree as in the early years; but when I was there last in 2016, there was still an echo of the chaos of our early entrances into the city.

Another challenge facing us was securing a seat on one of the two flights a week from Ulaanbaatar out to Ölgiy. Success here required diligent friends in significant places: the sister of a pilot, for example, or a person of relatively high rank within the government. In this regard we benefitted from Tseveendorj's ties, or from the persistence of our friends, Enkhbat and Tuya. Ticket offices—such as they were—were difficult to find and often closed when they should have been open. That, too, changed

radically within the next ten years, but by that time the challenge lay in getting tickets at all. Great numbers of tourists had begun to travel out to the Altai for trekking and mountaineering; and on our return flights, we were often crowded out by students from western regions coming back to the city for the beginning of the university year.

In those days, all foreigners had to register with the police within seventy-two hours of entry into the country. That process required sitting for hours in crowded halls just to submit the necessary documents, only to be told to wait or to come back at another time. We also had to register with the U.S. Embassy, but that was a more pleasant experience and gave me at least some sense of security that if anything happened to us in the field, the Embassy could find us. (That, of course, was a ridiculous notion, since Bayan Ölgiy is so large and there was no infrastructure that could support such a search….).

Every season, Tseveendorj would bring his own assistant: one of his colleagues from the Institute or one of his sons, Ochirkhuyag or Purevdorj. These last individuals added considerable pleasure to the trip for both my husband and me.[3] After we had met Tseveendorj and his assistant and had taken care of all the details for our trip, we would fly out to Ölgiy, in the far west, where we would meet Kubarev, his assistants (his son, Gleb, or Igor, a colleague from his institute), our cook, our truck driver, and the truck full of gasoline and supplies driven down from Novosibirsk.

At that time the planes out to the west were old Soviet Antonov 24s. Since their fuel capacity was limited, we had to land for refueling at some town in the Khanghai Mountains—Mörön or Tsetseleg, for example. And since the planes were habitually overloaded, climbing out of the valleys where we had landed was nerve-racking. I recall leaving Tsetseleg one year and being horrified as we laboriously lifted from the runway and slowly, painfully contoured around the nearby hills to clear the surrounding ridges. Our precarious flight contrasted sharply with what we could see below: quiet flocks of sheep and goats, yaks and horses peacefully moving across the slopes, and concentrations of ancient standing stones and mounds—so confidently (it seemed to me) well grounded. But up we slowly climbed, and the heavy plane would finally level out, leaving behind the green slopes of the Khanghai and heading west over an increasingly desolate, desiccated landscape broken by saline lakes around which there was no sign of greenery. It was always a relief to finally see the snow-covered peaks of the Altai in the distance, the greener landscape along Khovd Gol, and the deep valley into which we descended to get to Ölgiy.

Once in Ölgiy, we met with our Russian colleagues who had come over the border at Tashanta, the easternmost settlement in Russian Altai. In the early years of the project, that meeting was always tentative: our Russian team might have been delayed at the border, or we were delayed getting into Olgiy. If we arrived but our team had not, we would pick up our bags and walk into town (there were then no taxis) to cool our heels at the local hotel. This hotel was then a very primitive affair with irregular electricity and water and furnished with imaginatively slung beds. In later years, as more tourists came to Ölgiy to go into the mountains, the central hotel got spruced up, and a more "modern" version was built on another square. The only problem with the second hotel, we found, was that it was right next to a local hall used for weddings and all manner of celebratory gatherings, with music blasted out over the surrounding area until the small hours of the morning. If we were lucky, however, our meeting with the Russians went without a hitch. Since we again had to register with the local police, we would repair for the night to a camp Volodja and the others had established on Khovd Gol just above Ölgiy. Then, while Volodja, the truck driver, and Ochirkhuyag went into town for more provisions, Tseveendorj accompanied us to the police station where again we had to wait among crowds of herders or local townspeople seeking permissions of all sorts. Usually, we could complete this part of the process fairly quickly (thanks to Tseveendorj) and leave for the field the next morning. In later years, that whole stop-over in Ölgiy was shortened and the repeated visitations to official offices became unnecessary.

Aside from the often-surly officials, the people we encountered in Ölgiy were almost invariably hospitable and open. When we first began to go there, Ölgiy was a very small and sleepy town, with one section of a paved street leading into a center of shops and empty lots. It did have, however, an impressive theater building, but that was never open when we were there; and there was a central square where people would walk and visit and across which goats were always roaming, heading to any greenery they could find. This town was, in other words, like a Central Asian version of an old western town, but minus the gun slingers. The population, like that throughout much of Bayan Ölgiy, was predominantly Kazakh, descendants of Islamic populations that had fled into mountainous Mongolia to escape the social policies of Communist China earlier in the 20th century.

3 Ochirkhuyag, especially, became a dear friend over the following years.

III. 3 Irbistu valley in the South Chuya Ridge, site of a major rock art site. Kosh Agach region. The smokey atmosphere visible here was due to huge dust storms in Kazakhstan, just to the west. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

I have recounted the process of getting from Ulaanbaatar to Ölgiy as it usually happened, but in that part of the world there could always be unexpected kinks in the process. In 2002 we arrived in Ulaanbaatar to learn that there was a cholera outbreak in the west and that Bayan Ölgiy was closed to all but local inhabitants. With funding for the season committed and our Russian colleagues loaded to come down to meet us, we found ourselves having to make some rapid changes in our schedule. Consulting with Tseveendorj and by phone with Volodja, we decided to head back into the Russian Altai for a survey down into Kosh Agach, a region just over the border from our two big sites in Bayan Ölgiy. Gary and I took care of getting visas from the Russian Embassy in Ulaanbaatar, Tseveendorj took care of getting train tickets for a route from Ulaanbaatar to Irkutsk and from there to Novosibirsk; and within two days our summer field work was quite changed. I can't claim to enjoy such major shifts in a carefully worked out schedule, but I was gratified to find that we were all flexible.

Although that field season turned out very differently from what we had planned, it was extremely useful and productive. We spent several days surveying and recording a fine petroglyphic site called Irbistu, located in the South Chuya Ridge (III. 3). Our principal objective in going to the Kosh Agach region, however, was to see the site of Kalgut, located on the Ukok Plateau just over the mountain ridge from our complexes (III. 4). Kalgut had been surveyed by a Russian team and published as a major site of Paleolithic rock art. It was thus a potentially important site in relationship to one of our rock art complexes, Aral Tolgoi.[4]

III. 4 View to Kalgut river and the petroglyphic site just above; taken from the base of Tavan Bogd and looking west. Ukok plateau. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Initial surveys: finding the rock art

We were among the first foreigners to work in northwestern Mongolia, but not the very first. During the 1960s, Mongolian and Russian researchers had surveyed for Paleolithic materials in the southern administrative regions (*sum*) of Bayan Ölgiy and along Khovd Gol in the region of the main town, Ölgiy. In that survey, A. P. Okladnikov and his colleagues had noted indications of Paleolithic activity, but they did not carry the investigation further. In 1989–90, the Mongolian researchers D. Bayar and D. Erdenebaatar surveyed the eastern region of Bayan Ölgiy for surface monuments and

4 Together with Gleb Kubarev, I published a notice of Irbistu in 2003 (*INORA* No. 36), but otherwise that very interesting and extensive petroglyphic complex has not been published. The Kalgut site was published by Molodin and Cheremisin in 1999. The number of images there is quite limited, but a few do appear to be very archaic, comparable to what we have found at Aral Tolgoi and Baga Oigor.

rock art sites. Their most important contribution from that survey was the documentation of approximately ninety Turkic image stones, most in the eastern half of the aimag. They also made note of several concentrations of rock art. One, which they identified as a small concentration on Tsagaan Salaa in the Oigor drainage, would prove to be a key location for our work. As we were to discover, that "small concentration" was just the outer edge of one of the largest rock art complexes in North Asia.

III. 5 Squall approaching/asking directions. Valley of Tsagaan Gol. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

We decided to devote our first field season, 1994, to a survey over a wide area of northwestern Mongolia, including the mountainous region of Bayan Ölgiy and northern Uvs aimags. The purpose of our survey was to identify major concentrations of rock art to which we could then, in subsequent field seasons, devote focused documentation and analysis. Since no one had yet undertaken a comprehensive survey of the rock art of this region, it was essentially a blank slate. For that reason, when we began our search, we were almost flying blind: not certain exactly where to look, or what we would find, or whether it would have any scientific value. Throughout our initial search we depended on the observations and directions of local herders, huddling with them over poor maps in the middle of a stony landscape. We frequently found that the sites they knew were too small for extended work, but without their helpful instructions we would have wasted far more time wandering over the vast moraines of the valleys.

III. 6 Limestone ridge in the Oigor basin. The "rotten" character of the stone is visible in the crevices, sharp layers, and crushed sections. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Other than the notes from Bayar and Erdenebaatar and suggestions of local herders, we did have two good indicators of where we should look. The first was the character of the bedrock itself: lots of it and hard. Experience in the Altai Republic had taught us that rock art would be found in high mountainous regions and only where there was good, solid rock in the form of outcrops or cliffs. This meant that we would avoid searching all the small ridge tops over the valleys through which we traveled. The rock in those sites tends to be what I call "rotten": worn and weathered by millennia of wind and cold, the broken edges a disaster for bare hands or feet (III. 6).

III. 7 Section of a panel with a Bronze Age hunter, several fine animals, and a large, clumsy animal executed much later. The grey matrix of the rock is visible where the surface has spalled. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

In the Altai, the best rock for petroglyphs is a hard sandstone known as metagraywacke. This stone characterizes the great outcrops across the largest and highest valleys. Its coloration, or what is often called its patina, varies from warm rosy-red to grey-green to a dark, dirty brown. In most cases that coloration is characteristic of only the topmost layer of the stone. Its tonality is dependent on a combination of factors: the mineral content of the stone, ambient dust, and moisture from adjacent grasses and plants. Beneath that topmost layer, the stone is almost always a dull grey (III. 7).

The other primary stone on which can be found rock art is granitic, always in the form of boulders that have been transported from higher, originally volcanic regions. As a rule, this kind of stone does not hold rock art well. The upper layers of the stone tend to slough off, taking with them whole images or even compositions (III. 8). For the most part, we encountered decorated granitic boulders only along the high mountain moraines where they had been deposited, millennia ago, by glacial action.

III. 8 Granitic boulder demonstrating how the upper, weathered surface has sloughed off, leaving only incomplete images of a late Bronze Age composition. Khatugiin Gol. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

The second good indicator of rock art proved to be the location of small, winter dwellings in the higher elevations. These are modest structures made of logs, planks, mud, and wattle, together with snug enclosures for animals. They are invariably found on terraces or in draws protected from the fierce wind and cold that flow down from the high mountains on the west. From experience we learned that the rock walls and boulders around these winter dwellings were frequently covered with pecked and engraved images from the Bronze and Iron Ages (III. 9). In other words, the protected terraces had been used for winter habitation since herders first began to move into the higher pastures. We cannot be certain of the nature of the structures of that much earlier age, but it is probable that they were portable dwellings such as we see carried on the backs of yaks beginning in the mid-second millennium BCE; these were almost certainly the precursors to the modern ger or yurt.

III. 9 Winter dwelling and animal shelters. Paths behind the shelter indicate the routes large animals take to reach the higher pastures. In this case, the cliff walls just behind the dwelling are covered with petroglyphs from the late Bronze and early Iron ages. Valley of Khar Yamaa. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

With these two primary indicators in mind—good rock and winter dwellings—we undertook our initial survey. The process we adopted that first year involved driving as far as possible up the large, high valleys and talking to local herders and border guards—to anyone who might have seen rock art on the slopes. From them we received several suggestions; but with one major exception, which I will discuss later, most of the sites turned out to be small and inconsequential. Thanks to Tseveendorj, we did know about a concentration of rock art on a high ridge in the mountain range known as Togtokhin shil in northern Uvs aimag. However, our brief survey of that site indicated several problems: first, it was too remote from the region that interested us most (the high Altai in westernmost Bayan Ölgiy); second, the material appeared to date primarily to the early Iron Age, and we were hoping to find older rock art. Finally, the site was too limited in size to support more than one season of work.

When we first left Olgiy to begin our survey, we headed northwest to the long valley of Khar Yamaa Gol (Black Camel River). The route took us up the Sogoogiin Gol valley, treacherous with marsh and quicksand, where the road—such as it was—had us alternately meandering through thickets of willows or higher up, over impossibly rocky tracks. Crossing one river (the Bor-burgazny Gol) was at that time a challenge, its swift water and unstable boulders requiring focus, speed, and luck. (The river has since diminished in size and velocity, sometimes reduced to a trickle.) On reaching the valley of Khar Yamaa, we had to navigate rough, narrow tracks used by the flocks and loaded camels of herders. Beginning at a point beyond which we could not drive, we undertook a foot survey, working from above to below. In the process we found a great wealth of rock art, distributed in concentrations along the left bank of the river.[5]

While working in the Khar Yamaa valley, we were also introduced to some of the wilder aspects of the region: the glimpse of a pair of snow leopards, animals once endemic to the Altai mountains but now almost disappeared; and a meeting with two young boys who had just captured an eagle from its nest.

III. 10 Hunter looking into the valley of Khar Yamaa. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

We did not stay in the Khar Yamaa valley for more than a few days, since our primary goal was to survey to the west, up the valleys of Ikh and Baga Oigor. We drove all the way up the Ikh Oigor, to the very base of Tavan Bogd, struck by the stark beauty of the mountains but also impressed that despite the quantity of rock, little of it was suitable for petroglyphs. Indeed, we found many wonderful wildflowers but no concentrations of rock art to speak of.

5 We did not return to Khar Yamaa valley during the rest of our first project. In the second project, however, we did return there to record surface archaeology. At that time, I was also able to record some unusually fine images and panels in the valley. As of this year, a thorough survey of that valley's rock art remains to be undertaken.

III. 11 Yak in the high valley of Ikh Oigor, peaks of Tavan Bogd in the background. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Gary, Gleb, and Ochir climbed to the top of one of the five ridges of Tavan Bogd to get a good, 360' view, and found themselves on the boundary between Mongolia and Russia (I. 1).

Through Tseveendorj, we knew that several years earlier the Institute archaeologists Bayar and Erdenebaatar had noted the appearance of rock art on a slope above the Baga Oigor tributary, the Tsagaan Salaa. By getting general directions from local herders and wending our way over a monstrous pass, we made our way down into that valley and the indicated location. In III. 12 you can see what the slopes looked like from a distance: long rows of rocky terraces defined by bedrock and studded with boulders; in other words: from a distance, nothing too promising. That initial impression was quickly contradicted. On climbing the slope, we found ourselves in a veritable gallery of rock art with panels on all sides covered with imagery of people, their flocks, and wild animals, much of it executed in deep, now darkened pecking.

III. 12 View across the mouth of Tsagaan Salaa north to the sections TS II and IV. We ended our initial survey of the complex in the center left, where a green apron separates what we came to call TS II (on the left) and TS IV (on the right). (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

This hillside astounded us with the variety and excellence of its rock art. We began to work over the slope, from below to above and from our point of entry moving south to where the Tsagaan Salaa opens into the Baga Oigor valley. What we had assumed would be a limited number of images quickly showed itself to be a mother lode: an amazing number of excellent panels, the styles and subjects of which indicated a range of time from well before the Bronze Age to the Turkic Period. And it clearly did not end when we reached the point of land at the valley's opening (III. 12). We realized then that we would have to return, that we had found a true complex. What we didn't know at that time was how extensive it was—how this complex would end up stretching approximately 20 km down the Baga Oigor valley and up the slopes on the north side of the valley (III. 13). That was a part of our gradual discovery as we worked over the Baga Oigor complex over the next several years.[6]

6 We subsequently discovered that there were also concentrations of rock art on the right bank of the river, up the north-facing slopes. We did not work over these with detail, noting instead the location of the material and listing it in our project as RBBO—the Right Bank of the Baga Oigor. Perhaps someday some enterprising researcher will go back to those concentrations and document them carefully.

III. 13 View down the Baga Oigor valley. The complex extends over all the slopes on the left down to the low ridge visible before the bluish mountains in the distance. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Through our experience driving up the Khar Yamaa and Oigor valleys, we had a good initiation into the challenges of moving through that landscape, especially with our first car. This was Volodja's personal vehicle, a small Russian Fiat of a nice red color but of no impressive size or weight and certainly not intended for the Altai terrain. Fortunately, we did have a large Russian military truck that was able to pull us out of several troubling situations, one of which we encountered on our survey up to Uvs aimag. To reach our destination, the mountain uplift south of Uvs Nuur, we had to cross the swift Bökhmörön Gol dividing Bayan Ölgiy from Uvs. Driven by Volodja, our little red car headed bravely into the full stream, only to have its wheels wedge firmly between boulders. The truck made it across just fine; so, between a major pull from the truck and a huge lift and push from the rest of us, we managed to get the car up and out. That experience was a bit rattling for everyone, especially Volodja. Then and there we decided that we would have to purchase a true field vehicle (an OAZ—a Russian jeep) for the subsequent seasons. It would be funded by my resources and kept and maintained by Volodja, in Novosibirsk.

The Baga Oigor complex (then and for many years referred to by the cumbersome title, Tsagaan Gol-Baga Oigor complex) monopolized much of our attention for the following ten years. The other major complex, that of Upper Tsagaan Gol, was even larger, extending along the upper valley floor of Tsagaan Gol (the White River) up to Tavan Bogd, the glaciated ridge marking the boundary between Mongolia and Russia. We learned about the rock art of Tsagaan Gol from a local herder, who said that he had seen large images of stags at the base of the sacred mountain Shiveet Khairkhan. That certainly intrigued us but getting to and then up the valley was a huge problem.

To descend into the Tsagaan Gol valley, we had to head south from the Oigor drainage, climb a huge moraine, and then descend a long and steep decline…at that time, all on treacherous tracks. Our exploratory trip there was on a cold and unpleasant day, and our first view of the Tsagaan Gol was not encouraging. When we descended into the valley we were on the left (north) bank of the river, but we recognized that the track up that bank was impassable. To get upriver to the putative stag images, we would have to cross the white and swollen river to the other side. We sat there for a while, wondering how to proceed, when along the opposite bank came a train of camels heavily loaded with wild grass (III. 14). We watched as the camel driver, on his horse, carefully led the camels down over the bank to a designated crossing, the animals moving with all the careful dignity of which they are capable. The water went up, up….to their bellies, but they continued moving majestically across, each carrying up to several hundred kilograms of hay. Subsequent conversation with the camel driver convinced us that we, also, could cross. The truck went first. As we followed in our car, we saw the water coming up to the very floor of the OAZ, but then it stopped, and we made it to the other side without needing a tow.

III. 14 Camels loaded with hay, crossing Tsagaan Gol, white with glacial silt. In the far background is our still unknown destination, the sacred mountain Shiveet Khairkhan. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

These camels are the two humped Bactrians, capable of carrying a prodigious load, up to 300 kg (III. 15). In winter their hair is long and luxurious, and their feet are capable of navigating snow, rock, and fast streams. I never ceased to be amazed by these animals. Traditionally known as "ships of the desert," they were the basis of the development of the Silk Road through the deserts and mountains of Central Asia, from China to the West. Until quite recently the Bactrians were used for carrying all manner of cargo including household belongings and children when herders

moved to new pastures. Now, unfortunately, the understanding of these temperamental beasts and the knowledge of how to harness them is disappearing as people have turned more to heavy trucks.

Before heading up the miserable track on the south side of the river, we stopped at a ger, ever after known as the "ger of the drunken Kazakh." Tseveendorj went in to inquire about the existence of rock art in the upper valley and disappeared for a very long time. He finally came out, with his host, both obviously very jolly; and hence the name of our benefactor who did give us more if slightly uncertain directions to the panel of stags. As we continued up the valley, the "tracks" became almost impassable to see, let alone navigate, and the distance to our intended site was several km away. Volodja was finally so frustrated by the roadbed, such as it was, that he would go no further; but Tseveendorj and his son, Ochirkhuyag, and Gary and I were very curious to find the panel of stag images. We were able to persuade Volodja to make camp in the lee of a small hill so we could walk up to our destination on the eastern foot of Shiveet Khairkhan. The walk was long and arduous, but all along the route, among the boulders of the large moraine, we kept finding remarkable images, some of an extraordinary quality.[7]

III.15 Bactrian camels loaded with hay. Tsagaan Gol valley. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

7 I discuss one of these fine boulders in Chapter V.

Finally, on a long outcrop known as Khar Chuluut, just east of Shiveet Khairkhan, we indeed found a large if badly damaged panel covered with the images of stylized stags: not great images, but large and certainly dating to the early Iron Age (III. 16). Almost every other surface on that outcrop was covered with images, some constituting large compositions and all pointing to a period in the Bronze or early Iron Ages. This discovery, together with a further rapid survey up the valley and on our way down, made clear that here again we had found a major complex of both rock art and surface monuments. At that point, in 1995, we did not know just how large it was, that it would end up stretching approximately 25 km along the valley floor, up to the base of the highest mountains and up adjoining slopes, and that it would require years for its documentation. Much later, during the field work for our second project, we would become aware of the wealth of surface monuments in the lower and middle river valley.

III. 16 Detail of a long panel on Khar Chuluut, covered with figures of stylized stags. Early Iron Age. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Our third major complex, that of Aral Tolgoi, is much smaller than either of the other two, but in some ways, it is the most distinctive. The rock art there is entirely contained on a single hill that rises abruptly at the end of a great valley defined by two large lakes, known together as the Great Lakes. The remarkable aspect of Aral Tolgoi's rock

art is that most of it can be dated between approximately 12,000 and 8,000 years before the present, making this the largest open-air concentration of imagery from the late Pleistocene and early-middle Holocene yet identified in North Asia. In size, variety of imagery, and preservation, Aral Tolgoi vastly surpasses the site of Kalgut (III. 4) on the Ukok Plateau.

Finding this site was, also, a remarkable story of intentional direction and plain luck. It happened like this. In 1996, while working at the Baga Oigor complex, a group of Border Guards came by to ascertain if our presence there was legitimate. When Tseveendorj explained the purpose of our project, the guards told us about a concentration of rock art just west of the great lake, Khoton Nuur. So, later in the season, we decided to see if we could find it. Getting there was complicated, as was getting anywhere in that region given the lack of roads and the mountainous terrain. We had to head back to Ulaankhus, then over a high pass to Tsengel', and then down to Khovd Gol, from where we found our way to the two lakes, Khurgan and Khoton Nuur. The road around the second lake, Khoton Nuur, was more than miserable; and to make matters worse we were hit by a blinding snowstorm, …this in August, it must be remembered. But it was too late to go back, and so we persevered up the north side of the lake to a point where our passage was blocked by a river (the Tsagaan Us). By that point we were experienced river crossers: we knew to block up the floor of the jeep with cardboard, put everything up on the seats, send the truck ahead, and then plow through the river, trying not to lose speed.

III. 17 Terrace with Turkic memorial structures in front of a rocky ridge, on which there were no petroglyphs. View west to the mountains at the boundary with north China. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Reaching the other side, we found ourselves on a terrace over which were spread out several Turkic memorial structures backed by an enticing rocky ridge (III. 17). Certain that this must be the place, Gary and I raced up the slope and looked and

looked….and found nothing. Even though everything about the place—the location, the rocky outcrops—seemed like it should be the hill we were seeking, this was clearly a dead end. But by then the day was getting late, and we had to turn back. Now on the south side of the plain, we made our way east, and found ourselves on a broad terrace bordered on the south by a clear river and forested slopes building up to the boundary with China and on the north by an unprepossessing rocky hill (III. 18).

III. 18 View east toward Aral Tolgoi, the low hill in the center of the image. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

I'll admit that by then we were tired and discouraged, so most of us spent some time looking at the monuments there on the plain, all dating to the early Iron Age and Turkic period. Gary took off up the hill, wanting more exercise but also curious as to what he would find. In a few minutes, I heard him shout, "Esther, come here!" Up I went, and sure enough Gary had found the concentration of rock art about which the border guards had spoken. This was not just any old concentration, however: it was immediately apparent that the imagery was among the oldest we had yet seen in our field work and indeed, as we would discover, the largest concentration of Paleolithic and Mesolithic imagery in North Asia. The others were also impressed, and we decided to add this site to the other two for future survey and documentation.

It should be clear by now that the first and most exciting phase of our field work was the discovery itself—of large concentrations of rock art, even if we did not yet understand the full significance of their imagery. But by the end of our first two field seasons, we were all stunned by the amount of material we had identified and by the fact that almost none of it was even known, let alone documented.

Perhaps you are thinking something like this: that is all very interesting, but…. so what? All you have found are a bunch of pecked and engraved images. The answer to that question is simple and important. These images document the lives of cultures in the heart of Eurasia over several thousand years. They are a pictorial text in a region where no written record existed until the fifth century

CE. Taken as a whole, the materials from these complexes offered me the opportunity to recover a deep past. Over the years and integrated into my growing understanding of the geology and paleoenvironment of northwestern Mongolia, the rock pecked images allowed me to explore the anatomy of deep time.

III. 19 Panel with bell-shaped figure, auroch with interior young, and female elk. TS II. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

There is one other aspect of our discoveries that I would like to relate. Earlier I referred to my first book, *The Deer Goddess of Ancient Siberia*, in which I postulated that the ancient belief system of mountainous North Asia was centered on a female figure, a source of life and death. I associated her with horned and antlered animals and large birds. I traced her evolution from a strange, semi-zoomorphic being in the pre-Bronze Age of Siberia down to her incarnation as a woman in the early Iron Age. Of course, when I proposed this transformation, I based my hypothesis on a limited range of material: what I had been able to glean from old Russian publications of Siberian archaeology, particularly that from present-day Khakassia; from publications related to Altai rock art; and what I had seen and learned at Kalbak-Tash. As we surveyed and

documented the rock art complexes in the Mongolian Altai, I kept my eyes open and my mind flexible, looking to see what elements if any would corroborate or invalidate my hypotheses.

Working in the Baga Oigor complex, we found quite a few images that held my attention. They were all variations on a faceless, horned, and bell-shaped figure (III. 19). Many seemed associated with female animals, sometimes represented with small animals within their bodies. One large panel, discovered by Jim in 2007 when he joined us in the field, included a large bell-shaped figure, horned and faceless, which appears to be giving birth (III. 20). This figure is also being approached by wild animals…almost like a transposition into ancient Siberian terms of the story of the Holy Family in the manger approached by animals.

III. 20 Bell-shaped figure giving birth, approached by animals. TS V. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

In the Baga Oigor complex alone we found about fifteen such figures, and more at other sites such as Khar Yamaa. Obviously, I found this very intriguing, but there were many other images at this complex and in Tsagaan Gol that made me believe I was truly on the track of an amazing story, one that I had foreseen in my *Deer Goddess,* if only in outline. One day when I was working at the boundary between BO II and BO III, recording some truly archaic images (including mammoths), Gary was on the terrace above. I heard him shout for me to get up

there fast (as if any rock art imagery were going to run away…), and I did and found myself astounded at Gary's find. There on the back of the terrace was a huge boulder covered with images of people hunting wild animals (III. 21).

III. 21 Boulder dubbed "Birthing Women Rock," East Ritual Site, BO II. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

The images that stopped me cold were clustered in the upper left of the south-facing surface (III. 22). They included several stylized elk and several birthing women, posed as if they were somehow associated with the animals. At first, I could not help but think that Gary had played some trick on me…but that, of course, was not possible. What I was seeing here was a major corroboration of the hypotheses embedded in the *Deer Goddess*.

III. 22 Detail of Birthing Women Rock, showing eight elk and three birthing women. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

The discoveries I have briefly described above were multiplied hundreds of times over the ten-plus years we worked in the large rock art complexes. They included not only many other panels that supported my understanding of the ecology of ancient Siberian beliefs, but also imagery that simply knocked us over by the excellence of its execution and the beauty of its style. Perhaps you can understand when I say that at the end of almost every day of work, Gary and I felt overwhelmed by amazement and pleasure at what we had found; and I felt as if my understanding was expanding by quantum leaps, as if my ability to articulate a great story, written in imagery, was growing beyond any bounds I had ever imagined. I will try to clarify this process, and my response, in the chapters below.

Throughout the duration of the Joint MAR project, our team numbered between eight and ten individuals including myself, Tseveendorj, Kubarev, Gary, and our young assistants. In addition, we always had a cook and a truck driver, our favorites being Olga Kadikov, and Nicolai. We especially valued the presence of Olga, not only for her ability to make a feast out of the simplest of ingredients, but also because of her calm, intelligent presence. For me the company of another woman on this very male expedition was a great boon. Nicolai, both capable and always willing to try new adventures, was an individual of invariably good humor. That counted for a lot during this project, especially in the last years when tensions could sometimes run high.

III. 23 A typical track in the mountains. Moraine in the Tsagaan Gol valley. Our field vehicle is on the left, our field truck on the right.

As in the Altai Republic, travel was a huge challenge, but in somewhat different ways. Our Russian team always brought several large barrels of gasoline in the truck, but we would need much more for our in-aimag travel and for the Russians' return to Novosibirsk. In the early years, the only place to get gasoline was in Ölgiy, and even there we frequently found it was heavily rationed. At that time Mongolia was totally dependent on Russia for gasoline; and when that country decided to punish Mongolia for some real or

imagined infraction, the gas trucks would disappear from the highway leading down from Tashanta into Mongolia. Over succeeding years, that situation improved, and gasoline "stations" began to spring up at odd places. These stations, or depots, were not what one would expect in the States. They usually consisted of a rusted old tank set up on a wooden frame or half buried in gravel, and from which the "attendant" would siphon the gasoline or, more often, pump it by hand with the help of our younger team members. We quickly learned the location of these depots and planned our routes with them in mind. I recall one fuel depot on the Godon Gol run by a formidable woman named Rosa. Her system for keeping track of the amount we were pumping was the use of small stones—one for each liter—placed on top of her tank.

III. 24 Truck crossing the Khar Salaa, Tsagaan Gol complex. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Sometimes the tracks we followed from one valley to another were reasonable; at other times they were somewhere between bad and horrible. They were made even more interesting by the frequent need to cross streams, some of a serious flow and always paved with loose boulders. In those circumstances, we especially appreciated the ability of Nicolai to plow the truck through and then to pull us, if necessary. I should point out that we were not the only people to have difficulty with the rivers and roads. It was not uncommon to see a driver waiting patiently on the bank of a river while a rider cautiously picked out a good route for the driver to follow. Woe to those—like one of our own—who grew impatient with the rider's caution and rushed ahead into the current. That sort of impetuousness never ended well: when Volodja tried that trick crossing Khovd Gol, he ended by essentially drowning the car. But it is not only the non-

natives who would have trouble with river crossings, especially when the rivers were white with glacial silt. Even the herders would occasionally misjudge river crossings, especially in those rivers that were opaque and turbulent (III. 25).

III. 25 In driving his father's truck through the river, Boldsukh missed the right path and ended in a hole. Another herder used his old truck to pull Boldsukh's onto the shore; and Boldsukh spent several days taking apart the engine, spreading it on the terrace to dry, and then reassembling it. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

In the first phase of our work, the organization and process of our field work resembled that of a typical Soviet field project. Although the size of our group was small relative to what one usually finds with archaeological teams of an international character, the number required the use of a large and heavy camp tent for the kitchen and dining. However, because our team was on the low end of the Institute of Archaeology's priorities, the tent we were given was battered, to say the least. It was useful, of course, except in a strong wind, when it tended to flap like a bat out of hell or even to unceremoniously collapse. For that reason, we would pitch it beside the heavy truck and tie it to the vehicle. In that way we had a good windbreak and tent support, but the set-up necessitated that the truck remained unused if we were working in other sites within any complex.

Each field season we concentrated on perhaps two complexes. Ideally, we would be able to establish one camp for each complex and then work out of that location. Getting the right place was not always easy. The decision on camping sites was one of the first lessons I had in the challenges of working with an international team. The Russians liked to

be in an enclosed and protective place. The Mongols like to be able to see out in all directions. Gary and I were concerned about the proximity of good water, as well as relative protection from the wind. In fact, all the streams and rivers looked clean, but because of the constant presence of animals, we had to boil everything we drank. And, of course, we needed to have a location that offered the opportunity to put up our privy, or what we euphemistically referred to as the "pink tent" (which it was). Finally, the location had to allow for our several individual tents in addition to the large camp tent. Taking all these concerns into mind was my first lesson in adjudicating between the strongly stated views within a group of male colleagues…. but we learned to make it work.

III. 26 Camp on Tsagaan Gol, 1996. From left: Gary, Ochirkhuyag, myself, Gleb, Nicolai, Tseveendorj, Volodja, and Volodja's wife, Tamara, who functioned as our cook that year. That season we had much snowy weather, as is obvious in the view of the background ridge. The large sagging tent was our camp tent.

The herders in the valleys got to know us very quickly and enjoyed stopping by to look at our strange encampments and maybe have a cup of tea. Besides these friends, we would occasionally have unexpected visitors, as can be seen in III. 27. That season we did not realize that the site we chose for our camp on a stream known as Nariin Salaa was an occasional camp site for one of our herder friends. One day we returned from our work on the slopes to find that Eileen had put his ger up in the middle of our camp site, and his yaks had settled down, too. Our tent, by the way, is the small orange one on the right side of the photograph. At night we went to sleep to the sounds of the yaks quietly grunting to each other.

III. 27 Camp on Nariin Salaa, Baga Oigor valley. In the center is our friend's ger, and just to the left of the ger is our very sagging large camp tent. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Over the course of our first project, we must have had approximately forty different camps, including those we made on the road back to Ölgiy at the end of the field season. Each camp had its own advantages and disadvantages, and some were particularly comfortable. On several years we made a camp on the shore of Khar Salaa (III. 28), one of the two main tributaries to the upper Tsagaan Gol. It was perhaps more open to the wind than would have been desired, but it did offer ready access to water and to a large stretch of the complex on both sides of the river.

III. 28 Camp on the Khar Salaa, upper Tsagaan Gol complex. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

On two other field seasons in the Tsagaan Gol complex, we made our camp in a somewhat protected basin on the left bank (north side) of the river, surrounding a small lake (III. 29). Above our camp was a herder's winter dwelling, abandoned for the summer months except for a resident cat who was clearly in charge of rodent petrol. To everyone's delight, this cat took to coming down to visit our camp for milk and Olga's attentions. We named her Koshka (Russian for cat) and enjoyed her daily appearances. We all thought that Koshka was quite lovable until one day we watched her snatch a snipe, a bird almost larger than herself, and carry it back uphill to her kittens in the dwelling.

III. 29 Camp on the left bank of Tsagaan Salaa around a small pond. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

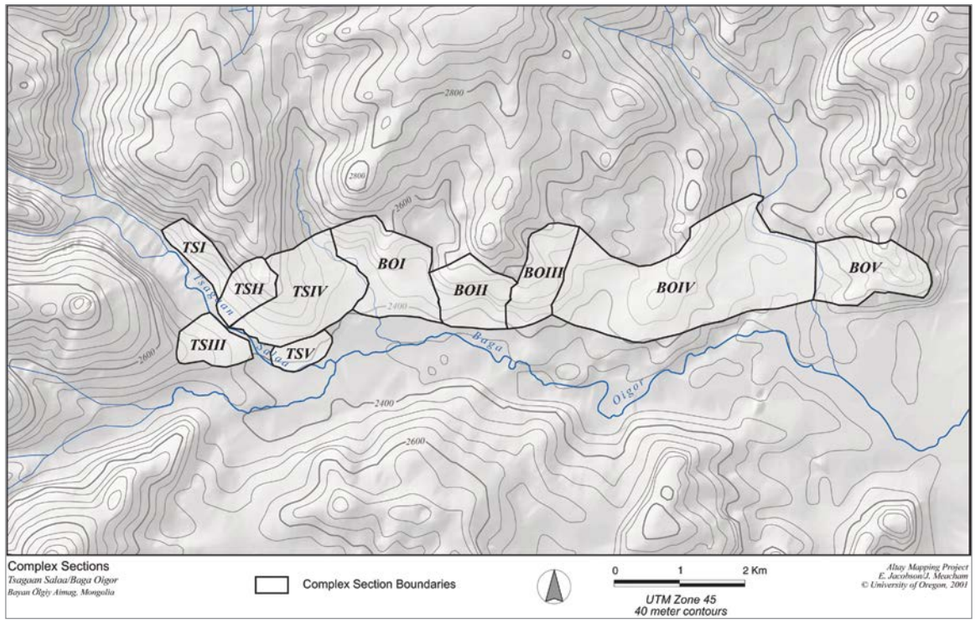
Koshka's existence in that challenging environment was not, as we found, unusual. It seems that the herders in these mountains frequently keep cats to work rodent patrol. These are often left behind in the winter dwellings to fend for themselves when their owners move away for a few months. I recall several times when we stopped to look for rock art near a winter dwelling, only to be hailed by a cat coming down to say hello. We saw plenty of dogs, also, but they were usually with their masters; and if they were abandoned (and they frequently were) it was because they could not keep up. Too often the dogs turn up three-legged, the aftermath of being caught in a wolf trap. Sadly, they are not able to fend for themselves as do cats, and they ultimately succumb to hunger, cold, and wolves.

III. 30 Our camp cook Olga and I, with Koshka, the cat that came out of a winter hut near our tents and adopted us for the season. Upper Tsagaan Gol. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Wolves. They deserve a mention here, too. We saw quite a few of them, all very wild, as we drove through the valleys. The local herders are no more friendly toward wolves than are any other stock-breeding people in the world, and they certainly have no compunction in shooting them whenever they can. The Kazakhs, also, have an unfortunate tradition of capturing them from their dens when they are young, keeping them as captive animals until they are grown, and then killing them for their pelts. It is strange that such traditions coexist with beliefs in the wolf as a totem: for the Mongols, it is the belief that Genghis Khan was the offspring of a blue wolf; and the Ashina Turks (distant ancestors of the Kazakhs), believed that they were the result of the mating of a young boy with a wolf that had ten sons, the leader of whom was Ashina.

III. 31 Visiting with a young, captive wolf brought into our camp by local herders. In the background, on the right, is visible the flimsy camp tent we used in the first two years, until the Institute in Novosibirsk gave us something a little more substantial. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Our acquaintance with Kazakh herders and their families in the Baga Oigor valley essentially shaped our experience of working in the field. The Baga Oigor complex taught me how to look, see, and record; similarly, the Mongolian Kazakh world in that valley introduced us into the herders' existence in this remote part of North Asia. One might say that it set a kind of standard against which we could compare and measure all our subsequent experiences. Given that, our succeeding years in the Tsagaan Gol valley, inhabited by a few Kazakhs but mainly by Uriankhai, created a major new stage in our learning.



IV. 1 Map of complex sections. TS refers to the Tsagaan Salaa river and BO refers to the Baga Oigor.

IV.

The First Project: The Spatial Documentation of the Material

To understand the scope of the project we undertook in Bayan Ölgiy, try to imagine this: a museum the size of a Louvre or National Gallery or Metropolitan that has been lost, hidden from view for thousands of years but with all its original artwork. Some pieces may have fallen, others may be damaged by rodents or insects, all are covered with dust; but they are still more or less in their original places. Also imagine that the holdings of any of these long-lost museums reflect many cultures over several thousand years. The researchers who rediscovered such a museum would have to determine the size and layout of the building. They would have to document what materials are in the rooms and how those rooms are arranged in relationship to each other and to the whole building. Those so fortunate as to discover such a lost treasure would also want to work out the periods and cultures to which the paintings and sculptures belonged. And they would want to try to distinguish between true masterpieces and the more pedestrian yet still informative examples of each genre.

Now, transfer that conception to the two large rock art complexes of the Baga Oigor and Tsagaan Gol valleys. Neither of these complexes were known to any but local herders or to occasional researchers such as Bayar and Erdenebaatar. With that parallel in mind, you can begin to imagine that in both cases (but also in the case of the smaller complexes of Khar Yamaa, Khöltsöötiin Gol, and Aral Tolgoi), we found ourselves addressing what seemed at times an overwhelming task. The first challenge was how to describe these complexes spatially, especially since in the early years of our project there were no maps or satellite views that would allow us to see the detailed geography of the valleys in question. The second task was to work out a process that allowed us to locate and later re-locate all the panels, considered individually or as part of small concentrations of rock art, and then to create visualizations of the layout of the panels within the larger landscape. Yet another project was to document this material in such a manner that others could study and even enjoy it vicariously, but to do so without harming the rock or its imagery. Another major challenge—one that has now kept me working for several decades—has been to analyze the imagery as cultural documentation but to also distinguish the artistic masterpieces within the immense body of imagery. Beyond that,

there is the challenge of sharing with others the pure expressive value of so much of this long-lost material.

From the beginning of our project, we recognized that we had different interests and methodologies. In fact, throughout the period of our first project, our team was divided into two halves—not deliberately, but because of differing approaches, physical abilities, and rhythms of work. Our Russian and Mongolian colleagues did some survey work on their own, particularly in the complex of Baga Oigor. Most importantly, they took responsibility for the major task of copying imagery through drawings and for the transformation of those drawings into publishable form. Kubarev took the lead in this endeavor, with impressive results. In this frequently painstaking undertaking, he and Tseveendorj were supported by their own assistants. They were not interested in determining the geolocation of the rock art panels or in the challenge of the overall mapping of the complexes.

In some respects, the team's effective division of labor was useful. In others, however, it was not wise. Because of Kubarev's aversion to clearly fixing the location of decorated panels, it became difficult to coordinate what they were recording with their methods, and what we were recording with ours. The challenge was increased by Kubarev's frequent willingness to extract individual images from a larger panel. Because I wanted to create a reliable data base for finding all significant panels and to publish any complex in a coherent form, I tried to coordinate their drawings and our photographic and GPS documentation. That worked fairly well in the Baga Oigor complex; but it became much more difficult in the case of the spatially more complicated Tsagaan Gol complex. Despite the small size of the Aral Tolgoi rock art concentration, it was almost impossible for me to match disparate drawings with larger sections.

In general, Kubarev, Tseveendorj, and their assistants tended to take the car to the point in any complex where they were recording rock pecked imagery. Gary and I wanted more freedom to re-photograph and re-survey, so we usually moved on foot with our cameras, our note pads, and my GPS. This system allowed us to range more rapidly up and across slopes. My immediate concern was to identify the images and panels, noting pertinent details (subject matter, manner of execution, condition of the image(s), orientation of the panel, and tentative period or dating). Gary would always document the panels, in color and black and white, using both 35 mm and 120 m film. On many occasions, I would ask him to photograph the immediate context of the panel (i.e., the terrace or cliff on which it was located) and the view shed. The determination of the panel's geolocation was an essential part of this basic documentation.

Clearly, our interests dovetailed with those of my colleagues as far as the discovery of new material went; but in most other respects, we worked much more efficiently when we did not try to combine forces. It is also true that Gary and I were generally more agile in climbing, so we tended to move faster and cover greater territory. Thus, my colleagues preferred to work on their own and at their own pace throughout most of our project. We would share information in the evening, when we reconvened over dinner, but for the most part they remained quite uninterested in the mapping aspect of our project, either of the valley or of the complex. That was unfortunate since the mapping of place and imagery ultimately proved to be of considerable value in analyzing each complex as a cultural whole. This information also underlay our ability to develop the successful nomination of these petroglyphic complexes for World Heritage status.

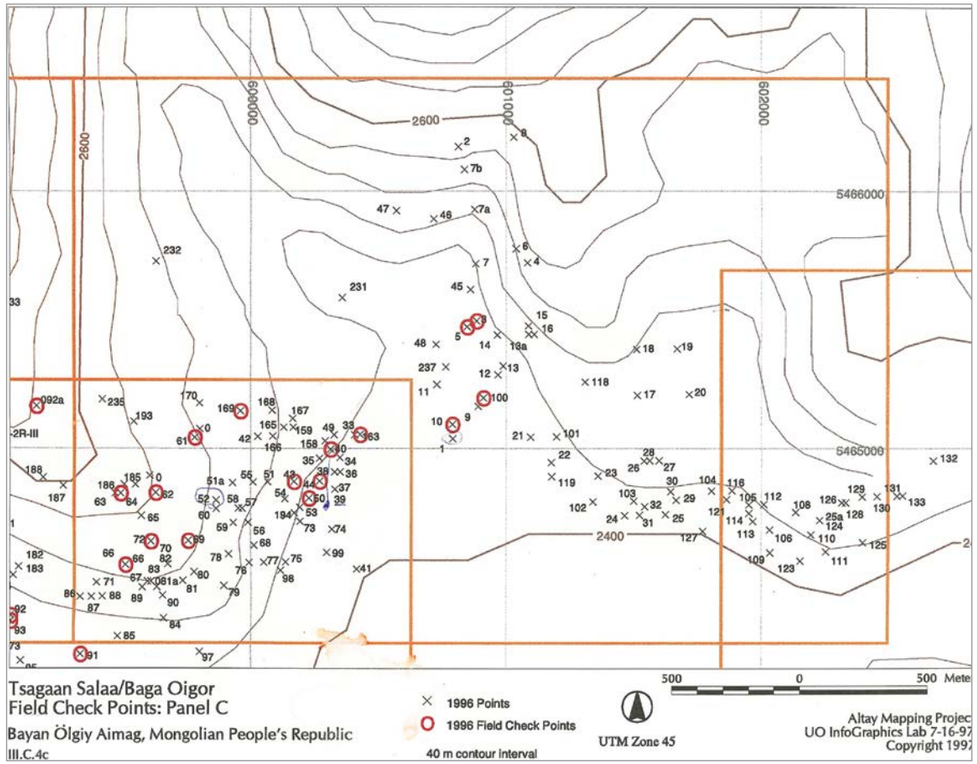
When we first began to work in Bayan Ölgiy, maps of the region were minimal and very poor. In addition to one official map (IV. 2), there was a tourist map that was more attractive in color but with no more information. In fact, at that time we did not know there were some highly detailed maps of the region; but since this was a border zone, those maps were strictly "secret." Our challenge was to create a geographical context within which we could locate the decorated panels, individually and as concentrations. That required building maps that indicated approximate location within the landscape, elevation, and contour.

IV. 2 Section of an official map of Bayan Ölgiy in 1994, showing rivers, towns, and some routes in our study region.

I have described the development of our mapping elsewhere and here will repeat only the details that will help to give a sense of the intellectual challenge we were facing.[1] Working with Jim Meacham back at the University's InfoGraphics Lab, we began the process of creating mapping that would accurately convey the complex within the region and the distribution of materials within those complexes. During our first project, Jim joined us in the field for two seasons (1997, 2004), and during those periods we became far more sophisticated in the mapping process.

Since we really developed our process through the documentation of the Baga Oigor complex, I'll use that as an example of the work we did in the field and how we then developed it with Jim and his colleagues back at the University. As Gary and I worked over each slope, I recorded the locational data for groups of decorated panels, or for what Jim and I came to call "petroglyphic nodes." Associated with each set of locational data was a notation of individual panels and several photographs of both the panels and their viewshed. An early example of the results of this mapping is visible in IV. 3. What you see is a section at the far eastern end of the of Baga Oigor complex. This is BO IV–V, plotted with GIS ARC/INFO, and ArcView software (ESRI). The numbers correspond to specific panels or small concentrations of imagery, and the points are distinguished as to whether they were taken in 1995 or 1996. The contour lines also convey information regarding the slopes over which the rock art was distributed. In that and other maps, we were attempting to develop a display of the relative location of decorated panels as we were refining the mapping of contours and elevation. The result of this slow building of both the data base and the map is visible in IV.7, created in 2001. By then, we had consolidated our individual points into groups (study points), the parts of which were all tracked in our data base.

1 Fuller detailing of the mapping and associated data base can be found in two other sources: Jacobson, Kubarev, and Tseveendorj 2001: Vol. II; and Jacobson-Tepfer, Meacham, and Tepfer 2010.



IV. 3 Map showing field check points as we were developing a larger contextual map.

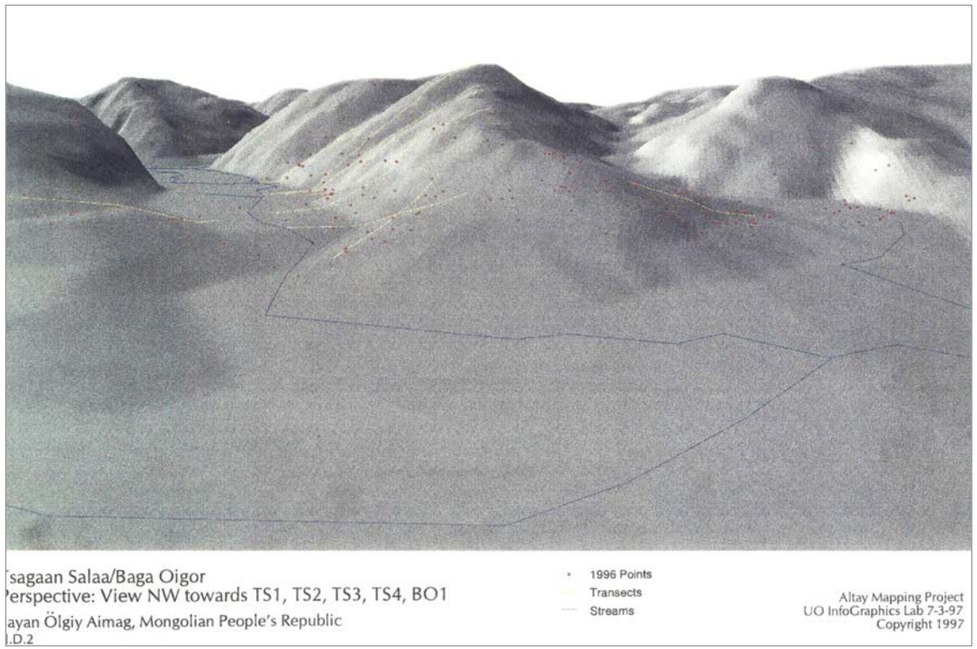
Over several years of survey of the Baga Oigor complex we were able to determine where the concentration of rock art began and where it ended. Altogether it extended approximately 20 km. down the Tsagaan Salaa and Baga Oigor rivers on their left banks and for approximately 40 m up the south and east facing slopes. There were, in addition, related sections on the right banks of the rivers including, most importantly, TS III and V. With a spatial extension that great, we all realized that we had to divide the complex into meaningful sections. Our solution was to follow the natural gullies that fell from above to below and effectively separated one section from the next. The result was not ideal, in part because the size of the sections on the map in IV. 1 does not necessarily correspond to the wealth of imagery included in its boundaries. For example, TS I is relatively small but very rich in decorated panels; and BO IV is the largest section but the least populated by decorated panels.

As we became more comfortable with the material on the ground, we gradually developed a detailed database for the mapping effort. For every documented single image or integrated composition, that database included the following:

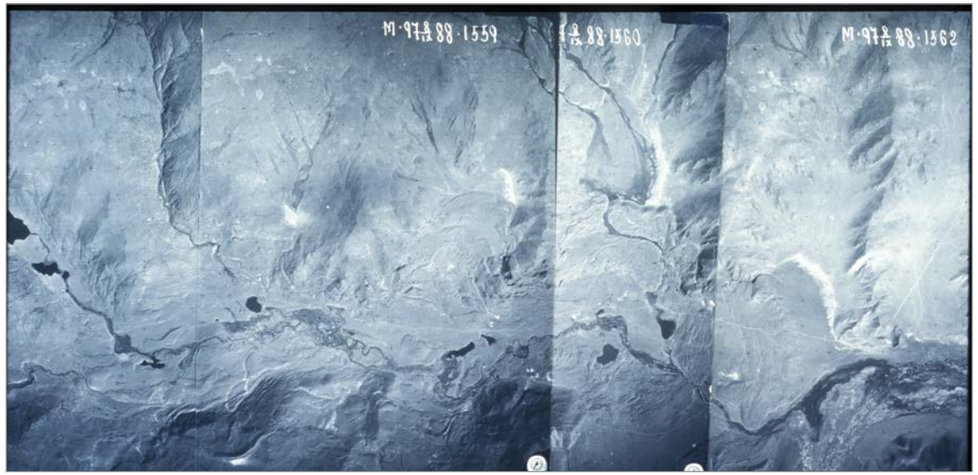
- site point ID
- the point matter identified by section, year of documentation, rock substrate, subject, style, and provisional cultural horizon.
- photo documentation (year/slide/negative number), and any other necessary notes regarding surface and technique.

To distinguish the finest decorated panels, we gave them a particular designation (*key image*) and were able to map that category, also. Details in my field notes, added to the visual display provided by the GIS mapping and our extensive photographic documentation resulted in a detailed model of the complex in its physical reality.

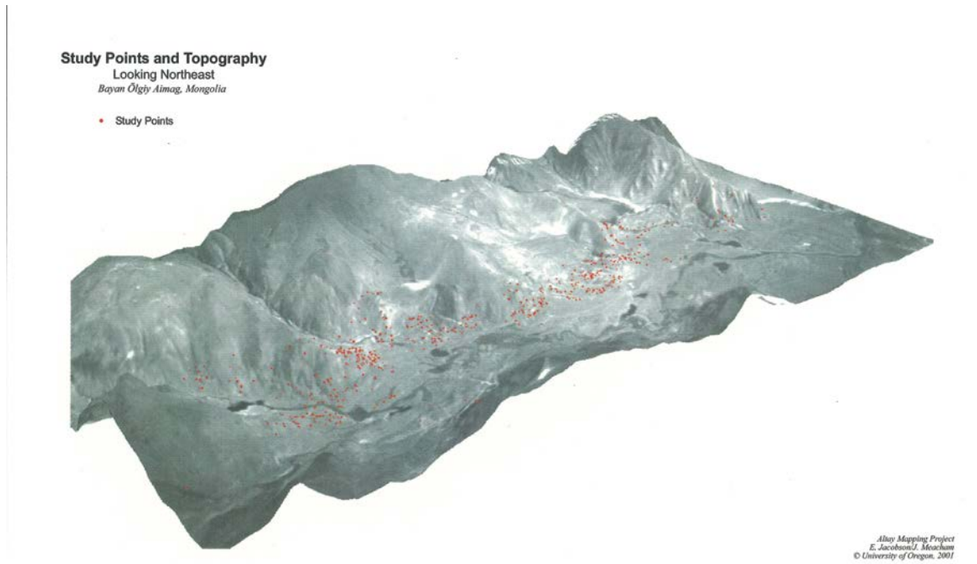
From the time we began to work in the Baga Oigor valley, we were eager to try to visualize the location of imagery within the landscape. In the absence of sophisticated maps, our tools for representing that landscape were quite primitive and were based on what were still early tools for building maps using computerized programs (IV. 4). In about 1995, I believe, I acquired a whole set of what had been top secret Russian aerial photographs of the Bayan Ölgiy border region (IV. 5). This was a godsend in several respects: the photographs allowed us to clearly see the topography of the region and then to warp the images and drape our study points on the resulting picture (IV. 6).



IV. 4 Simulated perspectival view of the Tsagaan Salaa sections.



IV. 5 Sections of Russian aerial photographs inclusive of the Baga Oigor complex.

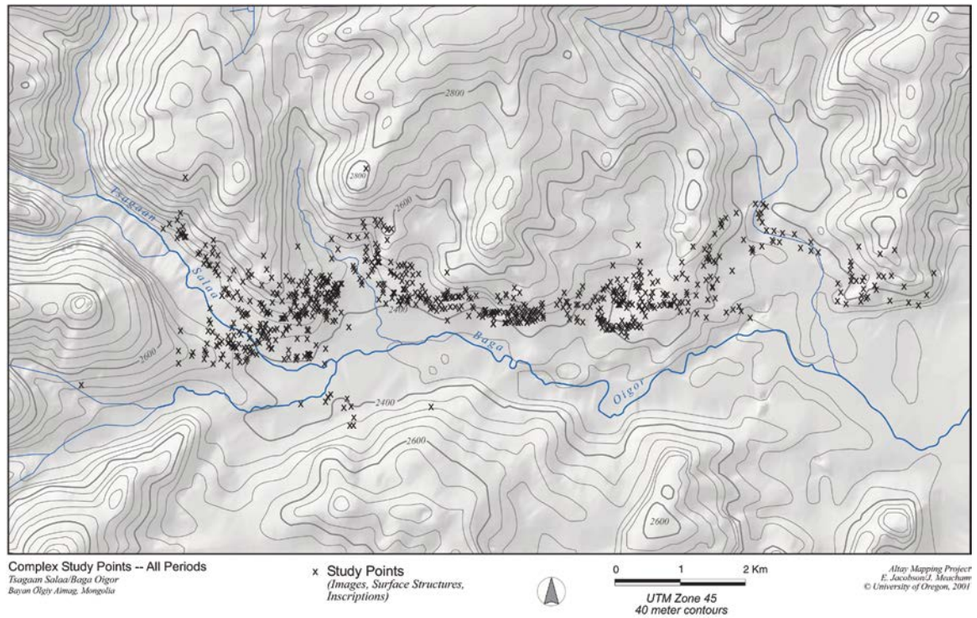


IV. 6 Study points for the Baga Oigor complex, draped over a photo collage of the topography.

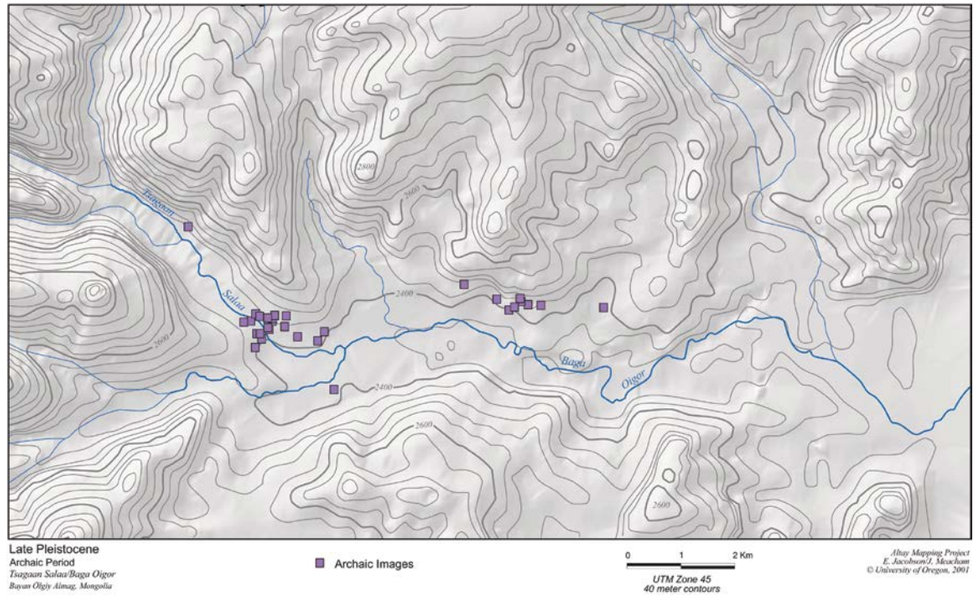
With every image and panel for which we established a data point, I also provisionally

assigned a period date based on subject matter and style. As I became more experienced in analyzing the materials, and as my knowledge of the larger arena of North Asian and Central Asian rock art expanded, I came to feel increasingly confident of my dating, although I am still always re-examining my conclusions.

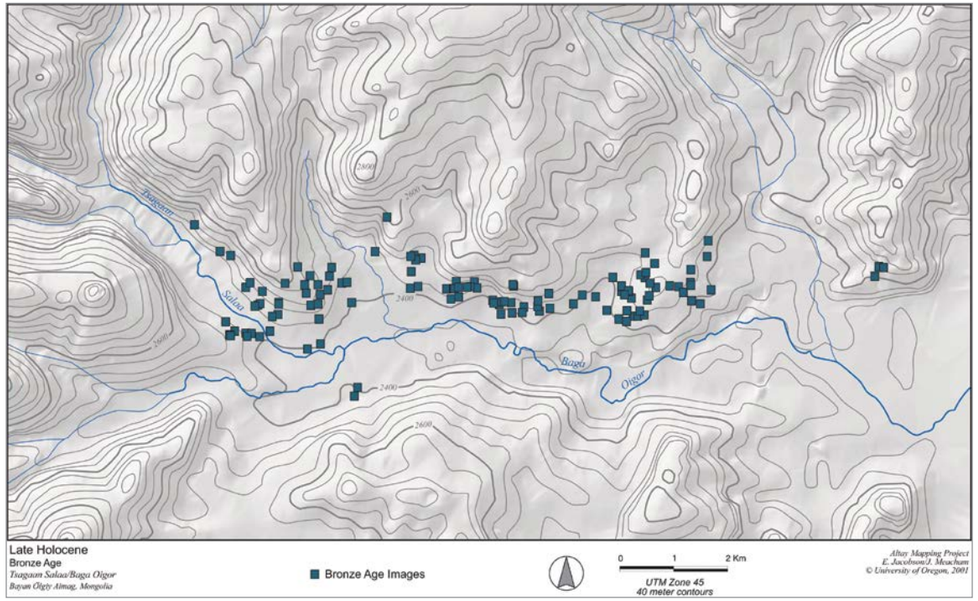
Unless one is as interested in cartographic display as are Jim and I, more detail about mapping may not be terribly compelling. But I should point to two major advantages that we gained after years of on-the-ground documentation at Baga Oigor and in-lab mapping. With the detailing of subject, style, and probable period for each composition, we were able to map imagery according to general periods: Archaic (Pre-Bronze Age), Bronze Age, late Bronze Age, and early Iron Age). In this manner we could recreate, within the mapping, the gradual shift of human activity up the slopes. Combining that elevation change, subject, and style, it was possible to propose how those variations may have corresponded to shifts in the way people used the landscape in specific cultural periods. For example, our mapping of archaic imagery (IV. 8) suggested a pattern of habitation along the rivers when people depended on hunting, fishing, and gathering. Imagery datable to the Bronze and Iron Ages reflected the advent of critical cultural changes—such as caravanning and the adoption of horse riding—that gradually took the inhabitants of the valley higher on the slopes (IV. 9).



IV. 7 Map of all points in the Baga Oigor complex, showing their distribution relative to elevation and contour.



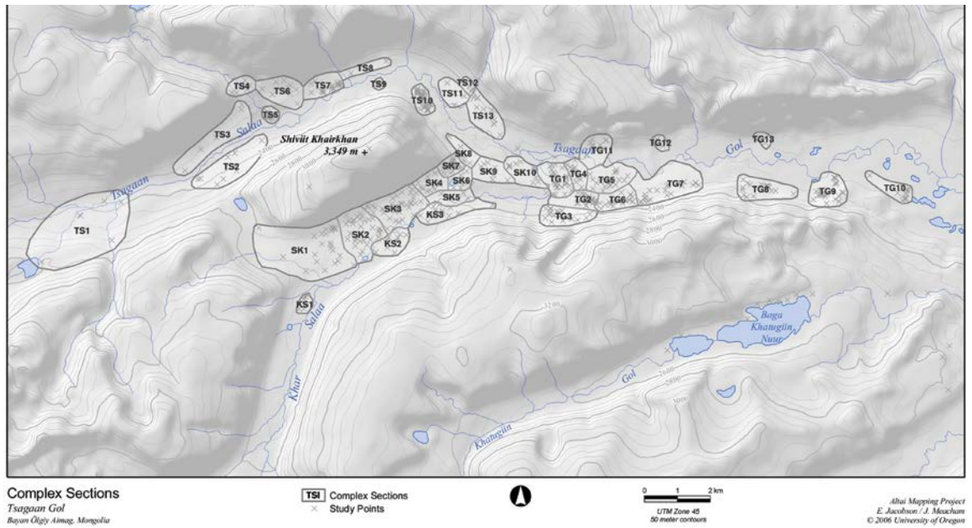
IV. 8 Location of imagery datable to the late Pleistocene (Archaic Period).



IV. 9 Location of imagery datable to the Bronze Age.

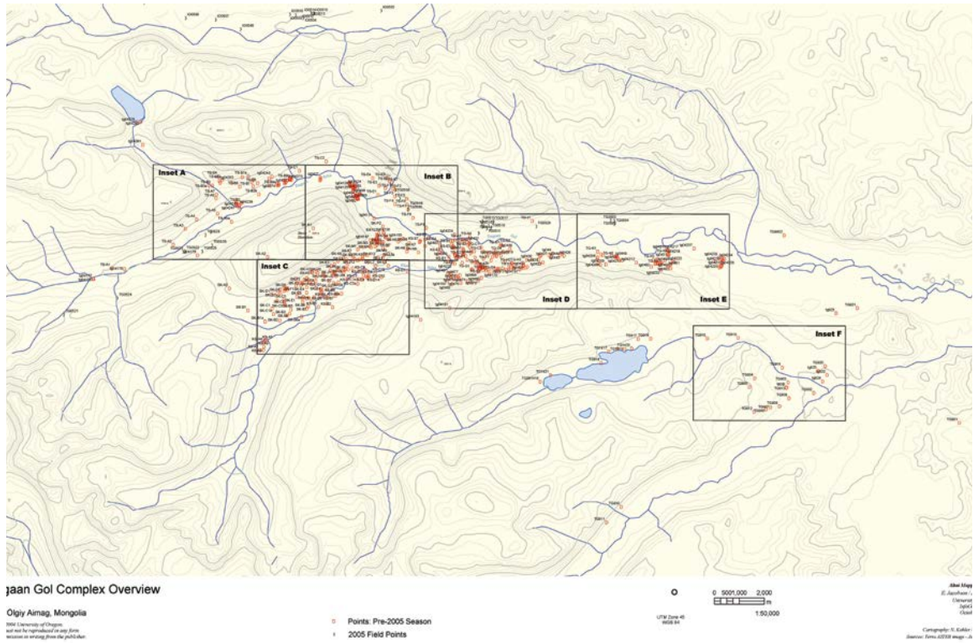
I believe that at the time we began to develop our system of mapping, the results were the first instances of applying geolocational data to the recording and analysis of such large rock art complexes. In any case, we could not find any instructive precedent when we started, and so our progress was fitful and required constant correction. It can be said that we cut our mapping teeth on the Baga Oigor complex, finding out where our process was successful and where it needed to be revised. During those years we were finally able to acquire (first somewhat surreptitiously, then later without trouble) detailed Soviet maps of the border region and their Mongolian counterparts. With these resources we could rectify our location of the complexes, their elevations, and contours and begin to develop an accurate map of our study region.

We developed a similar mapping process for the very extensive complex of Tsagaan Gol; but by the time we were working there, we realized that there were certain problems in the way we had numbered study points that had to be corrected. For one thing, the topography of the upper Tsagaan Gol complex is much more complicated than that of the Baga Oigor valley, involving a central mountain, valley side walls, several streams, and confluences (IV. 10). Moreover, the sheer number of images in the complex and their erratic appearance on boulders and bedrock made it difficult to keep the material ordered in memory. The mapping that we developed was thus helpful not just in allowing me to visualize concentrations in relationship to the lay of the land, but also in allowing me to re-locate, from one year to the next, specific images and panels that had to be re-photographed or otherwise more carefully documented. Our system ultimately allowed us to display the whole complex, with map data coordinated with photographs and drawings.



IV. 10 Map of the sections of the upper Tsagaan Gol complex.

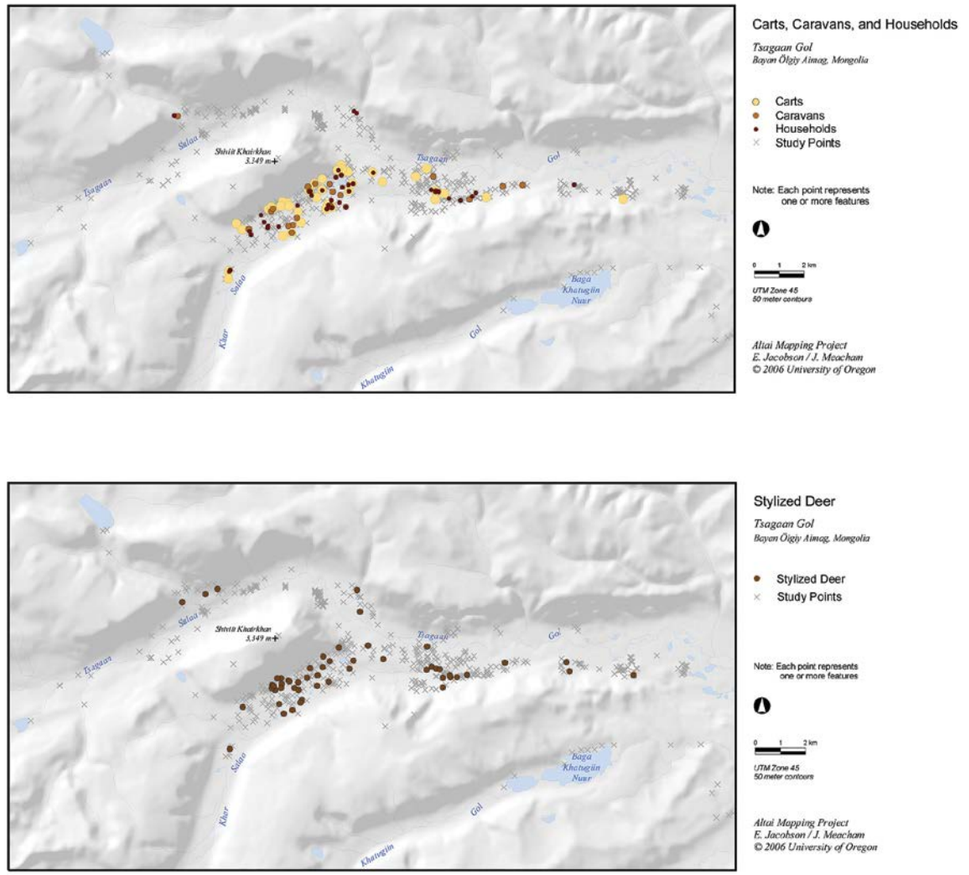
Within the complex of Upper Tsagaan Gol, rock art appeared on large outcrops and boulders within the valleys proper, as well as on slopes and discrete terraces. In addition, the concentrations of imagery and a great array of surface monuments encircled the sacred mountain Shiveet Khairkhan at the center of the complex. As a result, Jim and I decided to divide the complex into sections depending on a specific physical feature: SK for sections on the slopes of Shiveet Khairkhan, KS for concentrations on the right bank of the stream Khar Salaa, TS for complexes on either side of the upper stream, Tsagaan Salaa, and TG for all those locations on either side of the main river Tsagaan Gol. We were then able to lay out the plots of each section for magnification and clarified location. While I was successful in convincing my colleagues to accept the section divisions in Baga Oigor, I was never able to convince them to think about Tsagaan Gol in terms of enumerated sections and points.



IV. 11 Overview of complex sections within the upper Tsagaan Gol complex, including that of the tributary, Khatugiin Gol.

One other aspect of our process should be mentioned here: the thematic mapping supported by our database. When Jim first suggested this kind of mapping, casually saying that it would be interesting to know where all the bulls appear in the Baga Oigor complex, my first reaction was…Oh, no, Jim, there are bulls everywhere! But thinking about the possibilities offered by thematic maps—the possibility of making visual the distribution of one motif across different periods through shifts in the stylistic treatment and pictorial context of the motif—led me to realize the potential importance of thematic mapping and to work with Jim on developing such maps.

In the case of the Tsagaan Gol complex, we identified only a few images that might be dated earlier than the Bronze Age. Moreover, the physical geography of the complex did not lend itself to the kind of neat correlation between imagery and elevation that one sees in the Baga Oigor complex. However, thematic mapping did give us some interesting information that would have been difficult to derive from on-the-ground observation. Images of carts, caravans, and households—the quintessential indicators of the emergence of pastoralism and the summer movement of Bronze Age herders up into the high valleys—suggested that the main pathway was up the Khar Salaa valley (IV. 12, above). Similarly, those who seem to have carried the sign of a particular stylized stag as a mark of self-identity, seem also to have spread up that valley and only rarely up the Tsagaan Salaa (IV. 12, below); or, at least, as they moved up the valleys, they were more inclined to linger in the Khar Salaa than in the Tsagaan Salaa. This is probably because the Khar Salaa valley is broader, richer in pasture (IV. 13), and perhaps more protected from the strong winds coming down from Tavan Bogd, at the head of Tsagaan Salaa (IV. 14).



IV. 12 a, 12b Two examples of thematic mapping in the Tsagaan Gol complex.

IV. 13 Upper Khar Salaa valley, with its rich pasture, abundant water, and relative protection offered by the ridge of Tsagaan Khairkhan Uul. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

IV. 14 View west up Tsagaan Salaa to Tavan Bogd. Upper Tsagaan Gol complex. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

We followed the same process for the documentation of Aral Tolgoi, which has the greatest concentration of pre-Bronze age imagery of any complex in the Altai region. All the rock art at Aral Tolgoi is located on low, weathered outcrops, of which there are approximately thirty. On the one hand, the small size of that complex made the process of documentation and mapping much easier. On the other hand, many of the ancient animal images are so worn by time that it became difficult for me to match my colleagues' drawings with specific outcrops. Although I also developed identification points for the rock art of Khar Yamaa and Khöltsöötiin Gol, we never completed any mapping of those valleys. I think that we had our hands (and minds) full enough with Baga Oigor, Tsagaan Gol, and Aral Tolgoi. It remains for others to work on those other complexes, both extremely rich in pictorial materials from the pre-Bronze Age, the Bronze Age, and Iron Age.

I WANT TO REITERATE THE SIGNIFICANCE for the whole project of the mapping undertaken and developed with Jim's collaboration. It all began with our attempts to use that clunky GPS in the Altai Republic and the way in which those attempts made us think about monuments within their larger physical environment. The steady development of our efforts over a period of twenty years was a considerable educational process for me, but one from which I derived enormous intellectual stimulation. The increasingly sophisticated character of our mapping made a major difference in what we were able to accomplish.

We worked as a team on this project for ten years, 1994 – 2004. Following four years in the Russian Altai, these ten were especially exciting, filled as they were with discovery of materials that no one seemed to know except for local herders and an occasional passing researcher. For me, the later years of the project carried the stimulation that came with deepening knowledge and with a greater sense of the significance of what we were recording and how we were doing it. During the last three years, however, the tensions within our team became more palpable. Such friction is not unusual in any group of professionals, and especially in an international group working under challenging conditions, where three distinct cultures must merge into a working whole, and where there was no common language except Russian. Keeping those considerations in mind helped me overlook increasingly annoying dissonances in our relationships. Having level-headed, steady Olga with us, also, was a great boon.

But the fact was, all was not well in that late phase of our work together. Volodja was almost certainly beginning to be affected by the brain tumor that killed him within a few years. Tseveendorj was also having physical problems, exacerbated by the challenges of camp life and the remoteness of our locations. Tensions came to a head in 2003, but we agreed to add one more season, 2004, to complete our documentation of Tsagaan Gol. I regret that what was once a cordial relationship between Kubarev, Tseveendorj, and myself ended as it did: cool, each of us ready to see the project come to completion, each of us wanting to proceed on our own. On the other hand, it is remarkable that we

kept this collaboration going as long as we did, given all the personal and professional differences we brought to the project.

Most satisfying to me is the fact that our thorough documentation of Baga Oigor, Tsagaan Gol, and Aral Tolgoi supported the Mongolian government's proposal of the three complexes as a serial World Heritage property. This proposal was accepted in 2010 and inscribed as *Petroglyphic Complexes of the Mongolian Altai*. That success and my undertaking in the next phase of our work, the Mongolian Altai Inventory Project, have allowed me to feel that whatever problems we encountered in our first project, what we accomplished as an international team was remarkable. That recognition is what should crown our efforts.

V. 1 Ibex on lichen covered bedrock. Bronze Age. Khar Yamaa. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

v.

Reading Rock Art

When I have tried to explain that the focus of our first Mongolian project was rock art, I have often been answered with an expression somewhere between puzzlement and skepticism. At times, I have even thought that my place on the ladder of my acquaintance's estimation has gone down a rung or two.[1] After all, most people, even educated Westerners, do not associate rock with art and cannot think of any museum exhibition they have attended that helps them sort out that term. Rock is, of course, just that: an obdurate material usually encountered as a boulder or an outcrop. It's the stuff we stumble over, an obstacle to be avoided, or a tasteful addition to a garden. By itself, most people regard rock as lifeless and of no particular interest. To them reference to the visual arts conjures something quite different, like painting, prints, architecture, or sculpture. True, sculpture often involves rock, but in that case the material has been wrested from the earth; it is no longer what we call living stone.

The art I set out to study in the Altai Mountains is petroglyphic—that is, it involves marks or imagery engraved into or pecked out of the rock surface. As time went on, the focus of my attention expanded, however, from the image itself to its immediate and larger context. I became fascinated by the fact that just as the imagery is changing in patina and material integrity, so also the rock on which the imagery is pecked is continually shifting in substance and appearance. Whether boulder or bedrock, that solid material is constantly worked on by geological forces inherent in the earth and the atmosphere. This rock is, in a real sense, living; over millennia it ages and profoundly modifies the very imagery that had been pecked into its surface. While the imagery of the rock art speaks of the time of culture, written in the space of several thousand years, the rock itself speaks of deep time and timeless forces. During my years in the Altai, I came to believe that the three dimensions together—the imagery, the rock substrate, and the larger geophysical world—must be considered together if we are to understand the expressive and cultural value of the pictorial record.

As an expressive medium, petroglyphic rock art is one of the oldest and most widespread artistic traditions. It can be found wherever there is sufficient and good rock for engraving or pecking. But few people understand (or even care about) its ubiquity and antiquity for one simple reason: it is a tradition associated with prehistory and with indigenous people. It is, in a word, inherently "primitive." I find this description of rock art in general, and of Altai rock art in

1 These moments remind me of the young student who once signed up for my course on Rock Art and walked out in disgust after the first 15 minutes. She had been certain that she had signed up for a study of rock music.

particular offensive, just as I find the efforts on the part of many scholars to explain rock art in terms of primitive institutions: shamanism, for example, or totemism, or drug induced psychotic states.[2] In addition, rock art cannot be referred to any known artists and does not lend itself to commodification. In one region imagery may take the form of abstract elements without any clear subject reference. Elsewhere, the imagery may depict what appear to be spirit figures or scenes of hunting or herding or any number of identifiable animals and activities. With all these traditions, however, there are no written texts by which they could be illuminated. They *are* the texts, and my challenge was to learn to read them.

Here I cannot attempt to explain the Altai tradition of rock art in all its richness of detail and reference, but I can share something of the process I went through to come to my understandings.[3] But first let me explain what I knew about rock art when I began the inquiry that led me to Mongolia. Briefly stated: not much. I was familiar with the well-known pictographic imagery from the U.S. Southwest; and through Gary's interests in British Columbia, I had become familiar with some of the remarkable petroglyphs from that region. I was not yet familiar with the rich tradition of abstract motifs scattered across my own state of Oregon. But as I searched through Russian materials for clues to the origins of the art of the Scythians and especially that of the stag motif, I was continually led to rock art imagery, primarily that of Siberia, northern China, and northern Central Asia. As I said earlier, this material was then available only in scattered and poorly published Russian articles and books.

In those years, the Russian preferred method of recording rock art was through rubbings or tracings that would then be translated into black silhouettes. As a result, the imagery was extracted from the tones and textures of its geologic context and, most frequently from its pictorial whole. No less regrettable, the stone surfaces were routinely scrubbed by the researcher—too often with a metal brush—to free it from dirt and lichen. The result was a "cleaned" surface but one left stained with ink from the rubbing process. At the time I undertook my research into North Asian rock art, there were only two publications on the rock art of Mongolia, and they both typified the approach of using rubbings to make drawings and of reducing motifs to image types.[4]

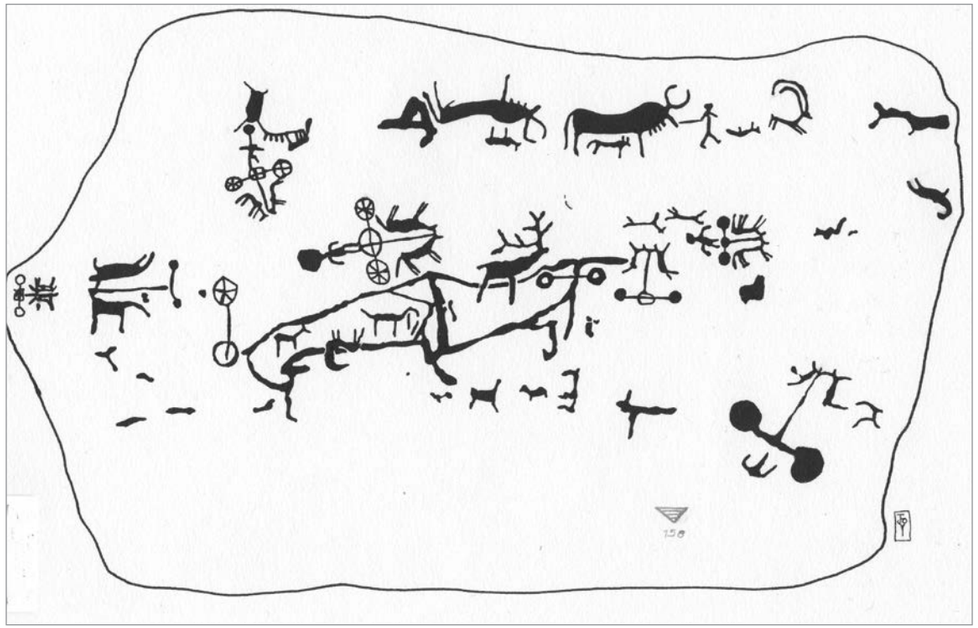
When I first began to look at the recorded imagery published by leading Russian researchers such as Okladnikov and his colleagues, I did not yet know how to interrogate the imagery. My response was typical of that of other researchers: What is the subject matter? Can we discern a particular style? What has been its accepted dating? At that time, within the scholarly field, there existed

2 These are all frequently induced explanations, often advanced by leading scholars in the field. These have gained so much credibility, I believe, because critics don't want to take the trouble to look more deeply into rock art as text.

3 I have developed a broad and well-illustrated understanding of the Altai rock art tradition in my publication *The Life of Two Valleys in the Bronze Age* (2019).

4 Both were by A. P. Okladnikov and both were published in the early 1980s. One concerned the imagery found along the Chuluut Gol in north-central Mongolia, and the other gathered imagery from Khovd aimag, in western Mongolia.

a general base line for dating the major image types by using subject matter and style. It was only after I was able to examine closely the rock pecked imagery of Kalbak-Tash and several other complexes in the Altai Republic[5] that I began to understand the problems inherent in traditional approaches to the replication of imagery and to the interpretation of subject matter. It became increasingly clear that many traditional interpretations were not only wide of the mark, but they were also a distraction from considering the imagery as a visual text, from which could be teased out the life of its ancient makers.



V. 2 Drawing of vehicles, a stag, and small animals. Yelangash. (After: Okladnikov et al. 1979, pl. 34).

The drawing of a surface from Yelangash (V. 2) offers an example of how the traditional rendering of rock art and the interpretation of imagery exclude certain information. To one interested in Central and North Asian prehistory, the images of the wheeled vehicles are fascinating. Everything we now know indicates that these vehicles appeared in the Altai region in the latter second millennium BCE, brought by a cattle herding people from Western Siberia. Based on datable excavated materials, the large, stylized stag in the center is associated with the first half of the first millennium BCE. The figure leading the yaks seems to belong to another subject: the appearance of herding in the mountains in the mid to late second millennium BCE. But since pecked rock art images should reveal relative dating by their gradual discoloration and the manner of their execution, the uniform black and white makes

5 Other complexes we studied and recorded in the region of the Chuya steppe include Turu-Alty, Zalghiz-Töpö, Cheganka, and Yelangash.

it impossible to tell which elements were earlier, which were later, which were pecked with a fine stone, which with a heavier instrument. It is even difficult to discern the sequence of overlaid images, as in the case of the paired wheels "over"(?) the stag's neck. The absence of any signs of the stone's aging—its cracking, the growth of lichen, or even its scouring by ancient glaciers—removes information that not only informs the dating of the imagery, but also tells us about the paleoenvironment of the surface.

Traditionally the wheeled vehicles seen here have been referred to as "chariots," which are technically light structures dependent on two spoked wheels and intended to be driven at high speeds. The problem here is that the imagery does not support that interpretation. Several of the vehicles in the Yelangash panel are equipped with the solid wheels of a slow cart. Some vehicles have neither horses nor drivers; and in one case, the driver is displayed as if he were a bird or dead. As for the figures with large heads, these were traditionally referred to as having shamanic powers, the headdress being understood as a visual reference to a particular mushroom, *Amanita muscaria*, theoretically used by shamans to enter a trance state.[6] Lacking any sense of the stone itself, of the pecking technique, or of the relative discoloration of the pecked surfaces, it is impossible to know from the drawing what relationship, if any, exists between the disparate elements.

The Yelangash surface reflects just some of the issues I began to explore as we set out to identify and document the rock art of northwestern Mongolia. I found that I had to set aside all traditional interpretations of subject matter and reassess individual elements within their larger pictorial contexts and in relationship to all others we were documenting. This process of analysis evolved into a dialectical approach within which I constantly compared and re-considered individual elements and styles. My methodology became, in a real sense, organic, with one tentative conclusion checked against and potentially modified by a growing array of comparative materials. It was supported by the way we embedded each surface within an expanding data base involving subject matter, style, execution, and the condition of the stone's surface. Fortunately, I honed an ability to recall specific panels and identify useful comparisons, even across very different complexes.

When I began my study of Altai rock art, I tried to follow the established tradition of using excavation archaeology as a measure for determining date. By that I mean that excavated materials, such as weapons, utensils, and items of clothing, could theoretically be used to propose the dating for similar elements in rock art imagery. The problem here is that while there had been several major excavations of late Bronze and early Iron Age burials in the Altai Republic, most had been badly plundered in antiquity. This was true, also, of the most important burial in Tuvy (Arzhan 1). The great, intact burial of Arzhan 2 had not yet been excavated.[7] To make matters more difficult, there had been no excavations of any significance in

6 The assumption here is that there were shamans back in that period and that they acted like shamans of today. One who is interested in these questions might look at some of my earlier publications.

7 Arzhan 1 was published by Gryaznov in 1980, Arzhan 2 by Chugunov, Parzinger, and Nagler in 2010.

all northwestern Mongolia and certainly nothing that could be dated to the Bronze Age, the period that most interested me.

I had to find other ways of bringing clarity to the dating of motifs or compositions, and one way was through the details of subject matter. In fact, the Altai-Sayan tradition of rock art is deeply naturalistic—one might also say pictorial—from the most archaic levels (Paleolithic) through the Bronze, Iron, and Turkic periods. However mannered the depiction, it is easy to distinguish between ibex and argali, yaks and aurochs, water birds and ostriches. Similarly, I found that the representations of bows and quivers were just as descriptive as that of daggers, and that one could see in the representational differences varied stages in the transformation of culture. I realize that this sounds a little vague, but I'll try to demonstrate some of these considerations in the examples below.

I had always been interested in process, and processes involved in the making of images became a major element in my study. Our documentation of such archaic sites as Aral Tolgoi and our location of images of mammoths and archaic aurochs in the Baga Oigor complex taught me to pay close attention to execution. To summarize what I found, the earliest imagery—that dating to the late Pleistocene and early through mid-Holocene (c. 12,000 to 7,000 years before the present)—were executed in rough, deep contours, made with the direct blows of a heavy stone. With the onset of the pre-Bronze Age (c. 5,500 years before the present) and then the Bronze Age (c. 4,500 years before the present), the execution of imagery became more refined: silhouettes were used instead of contours, the greater sensitivity of the pecking indicated an indirect method,[8] and fine engraving was frequently used. By the mid to late Bronze Age (c. 3,200 – 2,800 years before the present), pecked execution was frequently fine and dense, indicating the use of a metallic instrument.

Yet another measure of time and dating was literally staring me in the face, but it took me some time to recognize and develop this approach. Different animals depend upon different vegetation regimes. Mammoths and rhinoceros, for example, were dependent on dry, harsh vegetation. Ostriches, also, required a rough steppe vegetation, in contrast to water birds and cranes. Aurochs—those massive, long disappeared cattle—required open grassland, as did the archaic wild horse. Elk, on the other hand, then as now, require at least some forest cover for browse and where they can retreat at times of heavy snow. In other words, animals must eat, but not all animals eat the same thing; and climate as a determinant of vegetation is a significant constraint on animal populations and thus on human activities.

Fortunately, in the late 1980's there began to emerge studies of lakebed sedimentation in the region of South Siberia and northern Mongolia, as well as studies relating to glacial advance and retreat. By consulting this material, and most particularly that concerned with vegetation history, it was possible to triangulate several measures drawn from both the rock art and the paleoenvironment: what animals were represented and on what

8 With an indirect method of pecking, the artisan holds the pecking tool in one hand and the hammer tool in the other. This method allows for much more control and hence for much more finely executed images.

vegetation did they depend? What would be the environment predicted by that vegetation prehistory? How would those environmental factors affect human activities such as hunting and herding? Since the valleys where we were working were carved by glaciers, what information can we find about the retreat of glaciers from the valleys and the valleys' subsequent revegetation? In integrating the information about vegetation, animals, and potential human activities, I began to make cultural and environmental sense of the huge variety of materials we were documenting. I will confess, also, to finding the science of the paleoenvironment and that of geology fascinating. It helped me think more deeply about the life reflected in the thousands of pecked compositions we were recording.

Without trying to outline prehistoric cultures in the Altai, let me give some examples of specific compositions and of how they became, for me, full texts elaborating the world of the ancient hunters and herders. These surfaces do not all tell the same story, and they refer to different temporal levels from long before the Bronze Age through the late Bronze Age. I confess that I use here compositions that became especially important to me, either because of the beauty of their imagery and execution or because of the wealth of geologic information they revealed, or just because they reflect a complex, rich text about life in a much earlier period. They offer good examples of how I learned to unpack the stories embedded in the imagery and their rock.

V. 3. Inverted images of a bear and archaic horse on a toppled boulder. TS V. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

In one of our last field seasons surveying the Baga Oigor complex, we identified a badly damaged boulder (V. 3) at a point near where the small Tsagaan Salaa enters the plain of the larger Baga Oigor valley. The boulder had evidently been tumbled from some point up-river and ended here, inverted. The stony floor of the river plain is here still marked by a ripple pattern, reflecting the ancient presence of moving water over a long period of time. We noticed that other boulders in the same vicinity had been smoothed as if by the presence of hard running water.

As can be seen in the image of the boulder, two animals had been pecked on the surface. One is a large bear, of the type now known as an East Siberian brown bear (*Ursus arctos collaris)*, and the other is the wild horse referred to variously as *Equus caballus*—the ancestor of Przewalski's horse—or the Mongolian *takhi*. Both animals were executed in now deeply worn, rough contours and are presented in static, stacked profiles. Given the vegetation on which these animals depended—the bear requiring forest and riparian zones as well as some open steppe, and the horse being an animal of the open steppe—I realized that the images had to have been executed at a transitional period, when those environments were both available.[9] That period would have been early in the Holocene. At that time, steppe vegetation still dominated the valley floor, but forest had begun to cover the mountain slopes and rivers supported rich riparian growth. The heavy, roughly contoured animals, their static poses, and their appearance together on the boulder indicated a very early date, perhaps around 10,000 – 9,000 years before the present.

But where did the boulder come from and why did it land here, inverted, on the upper edge of the river plain? We had found a concentration of archaic imagery higher up the side valley of Tsagaan Salaa. Like these images, those represented static, profile figures executed in heavy contours, but unlike the bear and the horse, they were not so worn. Like a detective piecing together many clues at the scene of a crime, I reasoned that this boulder had probably once been part of that archaic concentration higher on the side valley. In the process of being washed and tumbled down into the plain of Baga Oigor, the bear-horse boulder became worn and fractured. But what caused the violent movement of water that displaced, rolled, and toppled the bear-horse boulder down into the larger valley? This question led me to look much more closely at the valleys as seen in satellite imagery and in terms of the advance and retreat of the glaciers that had carved out these valleys. Lineation of the Tsagaan Salaa valley walls, the clear indication that two small lakes within the valley are remnants of what had been a much larger body of water, and the distribution of rocky debris at the mouth of Tsagaan Salaa as it enters the Baga Oigor valley allowed me to conclude that the displacement of the bear-horse boulder reflected a period of violent geologic change. In the deep past, but after the retreat of glaciers from the lower valley of Tsagaan Salaa, this boulder had existed with the other archaic imagery on the edge

9 The environment of this part of Bayan Ölgiy is presently without forest or significant riparian zones.

of a large lake, formed as a result of a glacier-made dam at the mouth of Tsagaan Salaa. At some point—probably in the early Holocene—that dam broke, the lakes flooded out in a violent surge, engulfing the bear-horse boulder, and carrying it down to its present resting place, inverted and increasingly worn.[10]

I admit this is a rather long story about only two images, but the bear-horse stone inspired me to see a whole boulder as a kind of visual text, and how that larger text reveals something of the life of the hunters and foragers who then lived along the banks of these mountain rivers. There is, in fact, much more to that text, but for now I ask you to look at another set of images that reveals yet another rich tale.

Earlier I described our discovery of the petroglyphic complex of Tsagaan Gol, and of how Gary and I, Tseveendorj and Ochirkhuyag decided to walk up the valley to find the large stag images described to us by our rather inebriated friend at the crossing of the Tsagaan Gol. Because the track up the valley was so bad, we had decided to make camp in the lee of a protective hill; and we left the others to rest there while the four of us went further to the west. The path we set for ourselves was over a huge moraine covered as far as the eye could see with boulders.

Walking up the moraine required attention to our footing, and so we went much of the way peering down on the rocky ground. Suddenly, however, Gary and I stumbled upon a large boulder of a beautiful reddish coloration (V. 4). Looking closely, we realized it was covered with exquisitely pecked small animals—about 70 in all—including fleeing ibex of different sizes, and dogs. These rushing animals are bracketed by two groups of hunters drawing large, composite bows and two figures leaning on staffs (V. 5). My reading of this remarkable boulder is that it is the representation of a battue, but so reminiscent of a such a scene from a Persian painting that I dubbed the stone the Persian Hunt.[11]

10 This story reveals only part of the violent reshaping of the Baga Oigor valley in the early Holocene. There is another, clearly visible site of a cataclysmic flood in Baga Oigor IV. I have discussed both these events in my small publication, *The Anatomy of Deep Time* (2020).

11 For more description and images of this remarkable boulder, see *The Life of Two Valleys in the Bronze Age*, Chapter VI.

V. 4 Boulder covered with images of hunters and fleeing animals. Bronze Age. TG_H3. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

The style of the figures and their long composite bows point to the middle Bronze Age, about 3,500 years before the present. The presence of this boulder here, within a vast moraine, speaks of some hunter who long ago was perhaps inspired by the rich coloration of the stone to peck out a composition that is as artistic as many a well-known painting of a hunt. But a further part of the story told by the Persian Hunt has to do with the wealth of animal life in the valley at that time and the manner of hunting. Whoever was responsible for the boulder was a true artist, but forever anonymous. And that is one of the beautiful aspects of rock art. This boulder seems to embody the central aspect of true art, that it should reflect pleasure in the simple fact of doing and not necessarily of showing. The artist of this boulder executed his composition and left his boulder in the center of a vast, stony field. I like to think that few people will ever find this stone again (although I am sure that I still could.)

V. 5 Detail of boulder seen in V. 4.

There is a panel on bedrock from Baga Oigor IV to which I have always been drawn, even though it is quite damaged (V. 6). Or perhaps because it has been so impacted by time, it tells a story far beyond the pictorial details of the composition. The central image is of a fine bull, the fringe on its neck indicating the heavy hair of a yak. Its horns have been decorated, as if indicating an animal of particular significance. From its nose extends a lead, but the diminutive person who once held it has virtually disappeared. Behind the tail of the large intact bull can be seen the lower body of a human figure, but his upper body has disappeared in the spalling of the rock surface.

Aside from cracks and lichen growth, the body of the bull is still quite intact, revealing the dense, controlled pecking with which it was executed. That kind of pecking crushes the stone's surface, and under certain environmental conditions, the surface simply falls away. This process is visible in the area delineating another animal under the fine bull. There all that remains is a ghostly form revealing the dull grey of the matrix. Several other animals are partially visible, suggesting that this was once a large scene featuring the driving of two bulls and other animals.

I suspect that many people would wonder how I could be so interested in this damaged surface. I would have to answer that it is precisely the way in which the processes of geologic time are revealed here: the sense that a once beautifully rendered composition is disappearing, the stone disintegrating into its constituent grains of sand. The very dullness of the stone matrix reveals by contrast the rich brown patina that at one time spread over the whole surface, bringing a warm luster to what must have been a nondescript grey. The lichens reveal the power of that vegetation to slowly break up the stone surface, so that whole chunks begin to fall to the ground. On the one hand, the panel reveals life in the Bronze Age and the vision and artistry of an unknown individual. On the other hand, it reveals the many ages of the composition: the clarity of the original images and the refinement of the pecking of the whole; the deepening of the patina with the passing of time; and, finally, the disintegration of the whole surface.

V. 6 Damaged representation of bulls and figures. Bronze Age. BO IV. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

I have mentioned on several occasions that from the time of our work in the Chuya steppe I became aware of the frequent significance of orientation and view shed. Not all panels, of course, face in any noteworthy direction, but many do. The large panel with stylized deer images above the amphitheater at Turu Alty (II. 18) must have been located there because of the geological features of that place. Within our Mongolian complexes,

we often found terraces where there was a definite unifying element in the nature of the panels and in their orientation; those on what we called the West Ritual Site in Baga Oigor complex are a case in point. The orientation of what I have called the Birthing Women panel (III. 22), also seemed significant. Or, perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the boulder's orientation to the river and to the snowy ridge of Taldagiin Ikh Uul may well have influenced the selection of that surface for that large panel.

V. 7 Ledge with three elk images. Tsagaan Gol, TS_E7. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

On the other hand, in many other cases there seems to have been no rhyme or reason for the placement of a pecked surface except for the opportunity offered by a flat, fine surface. The boulder I described above as the Persian Hunt is a perfect example of how location may be meaningless. But there are other occasions where the curious placement of a panel calls attention to itself, forcing the researcher to ask what was in the mind of the artist when he located his images there. Those we found on a high ledge above Tsagaan Gol are a case in point.

During our 2000 field season, Gary and I decided to find the source of a spring falling from high above the valley floor. Our search entailed climbing a steep and rocky slope, well above the level at which petroglyphs ordinarily end. At the point where the stream fell in a small waterfall, we reached a ledge dominated by a surface of crumbling bedrock (V. 7). What remained of the surface was characterized by a warm, reddish brown coloration, and over it was spread the images of three elk: two males in the front and a female behind. Finding images at this elevation, and on this broken ledge, astonished us; but the quality of the imagery was even

more astonishing. Someone had executed all the images with firm, dense pecking (V. 8). The elongated bodies, antlers, and sharply upcut hips reflect a style we can date firmly to the early first millennium BCE, at a point marking the transition from the Bronze to Iron ages. The variation of the patina from the original white to a deepened, brownish tone also indicates that the images were executed about 2,700 years ago. The most powerful indicator of that date is the way the hips of the animals are articulated as if in imitation of the cast bronze or carved wood and bone images found in excavations of that period. The reference for the artist of these beautiful images was certainly a carved or cast prototype and not the natural animal. Here, on this surface, the relationship of pecked imagery to datable material objects is immediate and significant.

V. 8 Detail from V. 7: two male elk. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

These images raise many questions about conceptual models, imagination, and intention on the part of ancient artists. Their location here, on this high ledge, astounded me then and continues to nag me now. Whoever did these fine images clearly had no intention of displaying his talents to others, since few others would ever be interested in climbing up to this place, this high on the slope. Since the images are on a horizontal surface, there is no significance in their orientation. My only conclusion is that the very challenge of piercing the question of location forces one to seek the mind of that distant artist, even if in vain.

The preceding images give some idea of how I developed my analytical approach to rock art, using information from art history, archaeology, geology, and the paleoclimate. I realize that talking about these approaches may seem overly technical, but almost every panel required some concentrated analysis, even in cases where the execution was not impressive. If I had a lifetime, I would go through all the imagery of our complexes and subject each as much as possible to such an analysis; but I know that I could not finish, and that in the process of analysis I might lose my ability to express the beauty I found in so many panels. Because that is finally what animated my long exploration of this material. I wanted to find the nexus of elements in each image or panel that seemed to spring from the creative vision of an unknown and long disappeared artist, but I wanted to do so without weighing the image down with academic verbiage. I think I finally achieved that in speaking about the image in V. 9. At the end of my little book, *The Anatomy of Deep Time*, I tried to sum up the way this image exemplified Altai rock art as part of a living, changing world:

V. 9 Ibex. Bronze Age. Tsagaan Gol. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

…At the eastern base of Shiveet Khairkhan, on a massive stone outcrop, an unknown artist in the late Bronze Age pecked out a fine ibex on a vertical surface. In his rendition, the artist captured the powerful grace of the wild animal, the size of its horns, and the ease with which the caprid carries that weight. Its front legs have been almost completely lost, but its hind legs indicate that the animal was meant to be seen in motion. Just as its posture indicates change in space (and thus in time), so the caprid's patina indicates process: we see the ibex as its coat seems to slide from a dirty light gray to a rich brown. In other words, the images take us back to that point in time, about 3,000 years ago, when the original white of the crushed surface had begun to darken and shift to a color that would help to indicate its Bronze Age date.

However, change in patina is hardly the only process visible here. The deep brown gouge in front of the ibex and the scrape and stutter visible above the animal testify to the ancient passing of glaciers and their crushing up against the mountain's rock wall. The difference between the rich and varied hue of the stone surface and the dead gray of the stone matrix also measures the slow interaction of the stone's mineral character, ambient humidity, surface bacterial growth, and dust falling on the basic stone, and leading over thousands of years to the lovely, warm colored patina and the almost lacquer-like surface texture. Those changes are not all, of course. Before our eyes, the stone itself is disintegrating, its hardened surface spalling and whole chunks of matter breaking from the matrix. Finally, to add to that process of dissolution, lichen has taken root in cracks and crevices; it will continue to spread, weakening the surface and adding to the breakdown of the stone.

What we see here so decisively is the process of stone's inevitable dissolution, the eons-long disintegration of hard bedrock. Of course, the stone itself had already gone through a long process of coming-into-being: from its earliest form as sediment to its maturity as solid stone and now to what one can only think of as its old age, its slow coming apart and return to an ultimate state of pebbled matter. Within this transformation, lasting over thousands—no, millions—of years, the lovely caprid has taken its place, moving for an eternity across its slowly disappearing world.

The little ibex is an example of the rich textual layers embedded in any one image or panel of rock art. In this case, those layers refer to earth, the rock, and their transformations over time, as well as the simple beauty with which the animal was executed. But that beauty lies as much in the interaction of the original form with the deteriorating stone as it does in the simple figure. This, of course, was never foreseen or intended by the artist, but that is precisely the way in which time transforms any work of art in the eye of the beholder. Just as we look at a painting by Rembrandt with an imagination and eyes quite different from that of the artist's contemporaries, and just as we read an old text with attention to the transformation of meaning in individual words, so our ibex image is not quite the same as that pecked out by the artist. On one level, of course, it is, but on another it has acquired a depth that only the working of atmospheric and earth forces could confer.

V. 10 Figures with spears and bows surrounding a small bear or boar. Bronze Age. Baga Oigor IV. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

If the text carried by the little ibex is relatively easy to pull apart, that of many other panels is far more complicated, indicating a narrative energy that is more than just "hunt," "battle," or "caravanning scene." In the scene in V. 10, for example, the vitality with which the figures move and turn around the object of their hunt—a small bear or, perhaps, a boar—is riveting. So, also, is the variety of their weapons and even of their headdresses. Clearly there is here being recalled, or recreated, an event that takes us back in time, into the life of a Bronze Age hunter in the Altai. We are forced to ask whether the small human figure on the cleared surface on the left belonged to the original scene (I tend to doubt it) or was rather the embellishment of some later artist who decided to add his gesture to the earlier narrative. And if that were the case, it is useful to muse on what was in the mind of the artist of the later figure.

At the same time, the larger physical world intrudes on the hunt. The stone's surface is deeply scraped and gouged by ancient glaciers, and a large chunk of the original stone has been knocked out. The varied patina of the stone's surface, also, refers to the processes of time: the effect of atmospheric moisture, dust, and the millennial long process of minerals percolating to the stone's surface. Here the narrative scene is richer than that associated with the ibex and even more multi-layered. And precisely there lies the beauty of the scene and the complexity of its text.

VI. 1 Round khirgisuur with sacrificial altars. Dood Khalga. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

VI.

The Second Project: Mapping Archaeology and Landscape

Surveying for rock art concentrations during our first Mongolia project, I noticed the extensive number of surface monuments in our study area. On the terraces above or below the decorated panels, at passes, and along the broad valleys, we saw mounds and stones like some I had seen in the Altai Republic, but with more variations and in many valleys much denser in number. In addition to the mounds, khirgisuur, standing stones, and Turkic image stones with which I was already familiar, I noted other monument types of an entirely unfamiliar aspect. My curiosity was aroused. I felt certain that the rock art panels could not be separated from the mounds and altars and standing stones studding the valleys and terraces. Up to that point, however, archaeologists excavating burials and ritual altars across the Altai and Mongolian steppe completely ignored nearby rock art as if there were no connection between the surface monuments and the pictorial record. Working in the rock art complexes of Bayan Ölgiy, I realized that with my interests in prehistoric rock art, I could not ignore the surface monuments in the same region. The two traditions had to be drawn together if we are to reconstruct that ancient world.

As we moved about our study area, I began to ascertain the locational data of these monuments and to note their numbers, sizes, and interrelationships. I asked Gary to photograph this material, always so that the association with a physical context was clear; and I enlisted Jim's collaboration in adding this material to our expanding GIS database. In the early years of our Mongolian project, I was not yet certain how I would use this material, but I realized that we had to take the mapping of such monuments more seriously. These were the roots of our second project, the Mongolian Altai Inventory Project, focused on the identification, documentation, and mapping of surface monuments and involving my close working relationship with Jim Meacham and the University's InfoGraphics Lab. The results of our collaboration included the publication of *Archaeology and Landscape in the Mongolian Altai: An Atlas* (2010). This book was honored in that year by the Association of American Geographers with the Globe Book Prize, and with an honorable mention for the best-published atlas in 2010, by the Cartography and Geographic Information Society (CaGIS).

I expect that most people reading this will wonder why anyone would be so interested in piles of boulders or undecorated standing stones. So, before I describe the character and process of our project, let me

quickly clarify what I mean by surface monuments and try to suggest why they became so compelling.[1] The oldest monuments in our study region are massive mounds, such as appear in VI. 2. They are sometimes alone on high terraces or passes, and sometimes in rows along the terraces over rivers. We do not know if they were actual burials since these monuments have never attracted the attention of excavation archaeologists. It is possible that they are simply mounds of stone built up over a body placed directly on the ground, a tradition that still exists in another form among modern Altai Kazakhs. Of one thing I am certain: the isolation of the heavy mounds from other monuments and the frequently massive and rough character of their stones suggest that they represent the earliest monuments in this region, going back to the early Bronze Age.

VI. 2 Heavy mound on a high terrace. To its right is another, smaller mound against which has been placed a large, stone slab. Bronze Age. Baga Oigor III. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

A second group of monuments are what I have called elaborated mounds (VI. 3). These usually appear in groups on the terraces over rivers. Their stones are smaller, more carefully matched than in the case of the heavy mounds, and they are always multi-colored and convey a careful sense of design. These mounds, also, have not been excavated, but for several reasons I date them to the mid-Bronze Age. Perhaps of the same or slightly later date are mounds with a toothed circumference, others with a collared circumference, and keyhole-shaped mounds. These last are unusual in our region.[2]

VI. 3 Elaborated mound, Bilüügiin Gol. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

The earliest certain burial monuments include a simple form known as "four-cornered mound" (VI. 4), dating to the late Bronze Age. This mound is flat; excavations in both the Mongolian and Russian Altai indicate that the four-cornered mounds are rudimentary burials with few or no grave goods. These structures occur singly or by two or a few more, and they may appear on high slopes or on broad terraces. Their interest lies partly in the variety of corner stones used, indicating deliberate choice on the part of those who constructed these burials, and partly on the clear concern with a significant viewshed.

1 What I offer here is admittedly a very summarized version of a much larger story. For those who are interested in a longer and more careful consideration, see either our *Atlas*, or better yet, my forthcoming study *Monumental Archaeology in the Mongolian Altai*. When we first published the *Atlas*, another atlas of Bayan Ölgiy archaeology had just come out even though we did not know about it until later. That atlas, in Mongolian, is quite different from ours and approaches the material almost completely through the enumeration of typologies, by administrative regions. See Türbat et al. 2009.

2 Examples of these materials can be found in The Mongolian Altai Inventory . This website ncludes more than 2,500 images and metadata pertaining to archaeology and landscape in the Mongolian Altai, including the great variety of mounds. This digital resource is part of the University of Oregon's Digital Collection (https://oregondigital.org/sets/maic)

VI. 4 One of two four-cornered mounds at the northeast end of Tsagaan Asgat. In this case, one of the corner stones has been displaced. View to the north. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

By contrast to the simplicity of the four-cornered mound burials, the stone mounds of the nomads of the late Bronze and early Iron Ages mark the interment of the dead within log chambers, as if in subterranean dwellings (VI. 5). Within our Altai region, these burials are usually associated with the Pazyryk culture of the mid to late first millennium before our era. They are well known from extensive excavations within the Russian Altai, like those at the sites of Pazyryk. Within the chambers the dead were typically accompanied by carefully laid out grave goods and sacrificed horses, and sometimes by other family members. Occasionally, the furnishings have been quite lavish, including objects of bronze, gold, fur, felt, and finely carved wood. For the most part, however, these burials were already plundered in antiquity. Their mounds are often accompanied by one or more rows of small standing stones (balbal) extending to the east, and by small black and white altars on the west side of the mound. The burials occur in rows running from north to south; these groups must refer to family burials or to those of a specific lineage. For all these reasons, the early nomadic burials are the easiest to recognize from the surface and to date.

VI .5 Burial mound with line of small stones (balbal) leading to the east. Early Iron Age. Godon Gol. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

There is another but earlier Bronze Age monument that signifies the death of an individual, but it takes the form of a stone setting on the surface of the earth. Each setting most certainly represents the house in which the dead would live in the next world (VI. 6). For this reason, it is more appropriate to refer to it as a virtual dwelling. These settings occur singly or in carefully organized groups numbering even up to several tens. Each of these surface features differs one from the other by the nature of the stonework and the spatial design, but they all include an entrance and exit on the east and west sides, a circular hearth, and the division of the inner space into (usually) two rooms. Virtual dwellings are often accompanied by long lines of stones that extend down to a river or up to a ridge. These probably refer to the path the dead would take in his or her other journey to the land of the ancestors.

VI. 6 Virtual dwelling, mid-Bronze Age. Khar Chuluutyn Gol. The circular structure in center-right is the virtual hearth. View from the west. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

The monument most familiar to specialists in Mongolian and Altai archaeology is called a *khirgisuur*, or sometimes a *khirigsuur*, or even by the Russian name, *khereksur* (VI. 1, 7). However it is called, the khirgisuur is only occasionally a true burial. Just as frequently it appears to have been a cenotaph: a ritual structure marking the death of an individual whose body must have been laid to rest elsewhere. The khirgisuur is composed of a central round mound and a square or round frame. Within the Altai region, there are frequently rays or radiae between the central mound and the frame, and round sacrificial altars outside the frame on the north, west, and south sides. Khirgisuur may appear individually or in groups spread out over a broad plain. They may be small or large; and like virtual dwellings, they may demonstrate considerable variation in their stonework. Khirgisuur occur across an extensive region, including the Russian, Chinese, and Mongolian Altai, the southern Sayan Mountains in Tuvy, and eastward into the central Mongolian aimags where they may be quite large and complex. For several reasons, the dating of the khirgisuur to the late Bronze Age is secure despite the absence of actual burials.

VI. 7 Khirgisuur with four rays and circular altars. View to the north. Lower Sagsay Gol. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

This is a very brief run-through of most kinds of mound structures, but there are also variations on another monument type, the standing stone. The standing stone is exactly that: a large stele set into the ground up to about one third of its total length. These stones occur individually or within a group of two to four set in a row from north to south (VI. 8). Originally the stones were always set within a squared frame, and on the east side there were also several circular altars of river stones. In the intervening millennia, the frames and altars have almost always been broken by the trampling feet of animals, some of which have clearly used the stones as rubbing posts. In some cases, the stones have been marked with the clan signs of later nomadic herders in the region. One of the very interesting aspects of standing stones is the nature of their locations. They often appear on hidden ridges or terraces where they would not be seen by any casual passersby. In that respect, the standing stones seem to convey a kind of individual purpose or an individual relationship with the physical landscape around.

VI. 8 Standing stones in intact frame on a hidden terrace. H. approximately 1.5 m. The circular altars on the east are broken. View to southwest. Chigirtein Nuur. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

The direct descendants of the Bronze Age standing stones are called deer stones (VI. 9), so named because of the images of stags with which the most famous stones are decorated. In fact, the ornamentation of deer stones, especially within the Altai region, is quite varied. Because of their often-impressive size and decoration, and the possibility of dating the realia with which they are ornamented, deer stones have garnered the most attention of all Mongolian surface monuments and have been at the center of the sharpest disagreements regarding date and cultural significance. Many archaeologists believe that the deer stones should be grouped together with khirgisuur in what is often referred to as the DSK complex. For several reasons, I do not accept that association in time and culture. The explanation for this is complicated, so here I will simply propose that deer stones belong to the late Bronze and early Iron ages and should be associated with the emergence of horse dependent herders in the Altai.

VI. 9 Deer stones viewed from the north. Late Bronze or early Iron Age. Tsagaan Asga. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

The last of the important surface monuments we documented are from the Turkic period (seventh-eighth centuries of our era). These include image stones, false image stones, squared altars (also called enclosures), and long lines of small stones (balbal) leading to the east (VI. 10). The Turkic material is extremely interesting, reflecting a well-documented historical period. In that respect, it is possible to be more confident regarding the dating and purpose of these monuments. They mark the end of a long tradition of stone monuments, one that goes back to the Bronze Age and is rooted in an ancient tradition of ritual constructions and a preoccupation with the indication of directionality.

VI. 10 Two of four image stones on the east side of their enclosures and facing east. Turkic Period. The lines of balbal extend for approximately 180 m. Myangan khonkhor. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

The Turkic material exemplifies very clearly an aspect of all the surface monuments we documented in our study area—as aspect that increasingly demanded my attention. True image stones represent male figures, dressed in a kind of belted jacket and carrying a cup in one hand and holding a dagger with the other (VI. II). They are always associated with a stone enclosure, or ritual mound, and they face east. In VI. 10, you can see how the image stones stand in front of their enclosures, while the long line of balbal emphasize the importance of the easterly direction. East from this group lies the great lake, Khurgan Nuur. Even false image stones (VI.12)[3] face east, as if looking out over their ancient clan lands. In their posture and gestures, the image stones reaffirm that directionality: in their right hands they hold an offering cup in front of their chests, as if acknowledging the power of some deity in the east. In fact, the focus on the east—the direction of the rising sun and the sign of new life—recurs in most of the monument typologies we have recorded, beginning in the Bronze Age. Then and now, this recognition underlays a major part of my concern with the location of monuments within a physical landscape and with the ascertaining of viewsheds. (It is curious that despite the insistent reference to directionality and viewshed, those who have considered Altai archaeology have generally ignored those dimensions of meaning.)

3 By "false image stone" I refer to a simple stone or to a rudimentary stone figure set up on the east side of an enclosure as if it were a true image stone. In fact, I believe, in terms of meaning the carving of the stone makes no difference: both types, uncarved and carved, were set up to honor a particular individual who had died but whose body was laid elsewhere.

VI. 11 Image stone from the group of four seen in VI. 10. H. 1.12 m. Turkic Period. Myangan khonkhor. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

VI. 12 Enclosure, one of four, with a false image stone and a row of balbal extending 210 m. to the east. Turkic Period. Valley of Mogoitiin Gol. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

These, then, are the surface monuments we set out to discover and document within our study area. With a fuller discussion, it would be possible to demonstrate not only the distinct typologies but also their variations. I would be able to point out that beyond the monument type (which is the point at which most researchers end their description), striking variations in design and stonework allow us to begin to perceive the original intention behind the monument and thus the mark of an individual hand. Whether that intention refers to the person memorialized or, much more likely, to the person or persons responsible for the actual construction of the monument is perhaps immaterial. It is important, however, in helping us to break through the anonymity and homogenization of archaeology to consider individual expression. My experience of this material, in the field, encouraged me to consider the sheer variety within each typology. I wanted to understand more fully the significance of the physical settings, the near and the far, for these monuments as typologies and as individual construction. But enough; at this point it might be more interesting to speak of how we searched for and found the monuments beyond the valleys in which we were investigating rock art.

During the second project, our field team was stripped down to a bare minimum: Gary and I working together with our Kazakh driver and cook. In 2006, Jim accompanied us into the field, but for the most part our work together took place back at the InfoGraphics Lab. Because of their considerable knowledge of our study region, two of our friends in Ölgiy—Ayatkhan Atai, and his brother, Dagys Atai—became essential contributors to the project. Perhaps because of the small size of our crew, it was a relief to turn from the complexities of our rock art project and its larger team to the recording of surface monuments with just a few colleagues. Each year we also included a cook to help with our meals.

The first challenge in undertaking our second project, in 2005, was to put order into the process we would use for survey and documentation of new materials. How would we go about finding the material, since most of the surface archaeology in our study region had at that time been neither noted nor documented? We knew, also, that the sheer number of individual monuments was enormous; the challenge became to find a responsible way of grouping them. We had to develop several approaches, and they had to offer the greatest efficiency to our search given the limited period in the field every year. We did develop these approaches, but opportunity constantly offered yet other paths to our explorations, and we took them.

The most rational approach was to explore systematically all the long valleys leading up to the higher mountains and to pay particular attention to large terraces along and over the rivers. My reasoning was that these valleys, like the long valleys of Sogoogiin Gol, Khar Yamaa, Baga Oigor, Tsagaan Gol, and those of the Great Lakes, served as routes taken by ancient hunters and herders to reach the richer summer pastures and habitat of higher elevations. It would be probable, I surmised, that these

valleys might be particularly rich in surface monuments. Over that field season and through 2008, we surveyed all the larger valleys with which we were not yet familiar and those of their smaller tributaries.[4] With the benefit of our intrepid driver, Dagys, we made our way far off the well-known routes through the region, in the process discovering scores of monuments. I became more keenly aware of the region as valley and upland, and of the interconnections of valley routes to the higher mountains and passes over into the taiga zone of Siberia and west into the deserts of Central Asia. I also began to understand why some valleys were rich in monuments and others were not.

VI. 13 View over valley of Bor-Bugasny Gol with its mounds and khirgisuur. In the mid-ground is a border guard station. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Let me give you some examples of our trajectory and its results. In leaving the sum center, Ulaanhuus, archaeologists and tourists alike head up the valley of Sogoogiin Gol to access the valleys of Khar Yamaa and Oigor leading to the high ridge at the boundary with Russia. In 2005, we decided to turn to the north off the Sogoogiin valley and drive through a narrow opening in the hills into the side valley of Bor-Bugasny Gol (VI. 13). We found ourselves in a beautiful, green valley studded with khirgisuur and other mounds. Having documented that material, we continued up to the northwest, towards the boundary with Russia, and continued to find occasional mounds or other structures, but nothing significant. This was when I began to understand more fully the relationship between the function of valleys in prehistory and the appearance of monuments. In a sense,

4 These included the valleys of Bilüügiin Gol and its tributaries, to the north; those of Bor-Bugasny Gol and its tributaries to the northwest; the tributaries to Tsagaan Salaa, above Baga Oigor; and the high river valleys west of Aral Tolgoi and the Great Lakes.

the higher valleys above Bor-Bugasny Gol were too narrow to encourage the long-term habitation or the claiming of pasture such as seems to have been a cultural dynamic in the nearby valley of Khar Yamaa. In other words, finding little or nothing was also a way of beginning to understand the relationship of monuments to the land.

In another case, we were heading up Sagsay Gol (meaning that we were heading south, toward the boundary with northern China). Noticing a good number of elaborated mounds along the left (west) bank of the river, we decided to move higher on the long plain that descended from the mountains on the west, toward the opening of a small side valley. Our hunch that we would find many more monuments was correct: in that area, called Mortyn Am, were scattered many mounds made of massive stones (VI.14). Given their rough construction and their number, my surmise is that they belong to the earliest group of mounds in this region, those I have termed "heavy mounds."

VI. 14 View north over Zoost Ereg and a terrace covered with heavy mounds. Mortyn Am. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

One of our the most fruitful surveys took us up Sagsay Gol to its southern-most tributaries, where we could poke into myriad valleys dotted with Turkic antiquities or Bronze Age mounds and khirgisuur. A region that had seemed to be remote and thinly populated by monuments gradually became filled by the traces of ancient cultures. As I recorded the Turkic monuments, I had some pangs of regret that by making them known they would more easily fall prey to the intrusions of excavation archaeologists and antiquity thieves. This fear was exacerbated by the fact that Turkic image stones are eminently moveable, and at least one of the finest from our study area was illicitly seized by archaeologists and "donated" to a museum in Ulaanbaatar. I've not resolved this conflict, but Jim and I did agree not to publish the precise locational data of Turkic image stones.

VI. 15 View over Turgen Gol, tributary to the upper Sagsay Gol. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

This moving and looking was the most obvious way of finding new concentrations of monuments, but we realized that with such an approach our vantage was limited: we could see only what was visible from the roadbed. So, we continued a tradition Gary and I had begun when looking for rock art. Wherever there seemed that an elevated point would offer us an expanded vantage, we would climb as high as possible to look around and down. What we would discover was frequently eye-opening: standing stones far above the valley floor and out of the view of passersby; heavy mounds on high ridges, overlooking the valley floor; or old circles of heavy stones perched on ridges where their location could have served no practical purpose (VI. 16).

VI. 16 Stone circle ("Great Circle"). TS IV, Baga Oigor Complex. View east down Baga Oigor Gol. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Some of the most intriguing discoveries came in that manner. For example, when we climbed high above Khöltsöötin Gol, we came upon several heavy mounds. Sitting on top of one was a huge boulder that had evidently rolled down from the ridge above. Another boulder lay nearby (VI. 17), most probably the result of the same rock fall. We felt in the presence of an ancient drama, one that had to have happened long ago but well after the construction of the mound in the early Bronze Age. It was also in that valley, and from a height, that we first saw a round khirigsuur near the confluence of the river and a side stream (VI. 18). That view and my experience with several other khirgisuur, indicated to me that the location here—at the confluence of streams—must have been a significant aspect of that monument type.

VI. 17 Old mound onto which has toppled a boulder from the ridge above. Below is the Khöltsöötiin Gol and, barely visible, our camp. View to the east. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

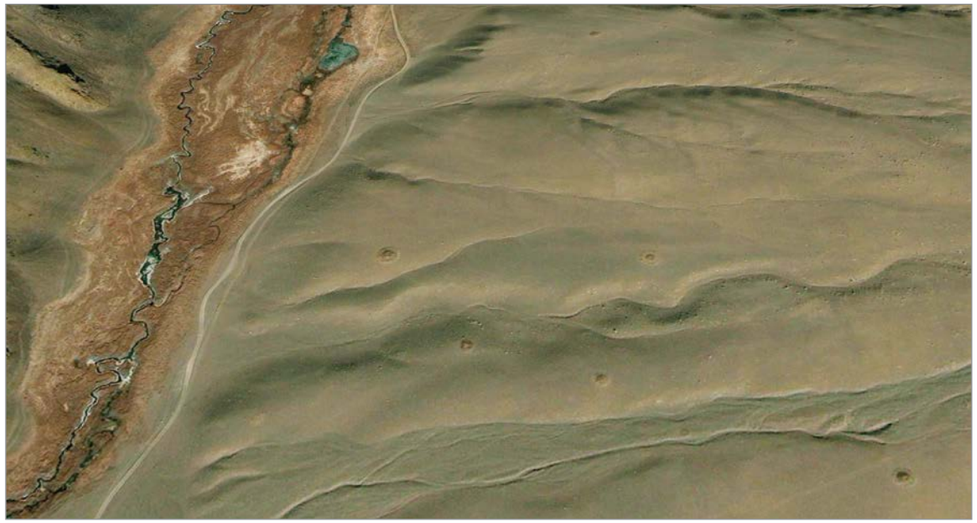
VI. 18 View down onto a round khirgisuur (near center) at the confluence of Khöltsöotiin Gol and another stream. In the background is visible the sacred mountain Tsengel' Khairkhan in clouds. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

The more often we were able to climb to high places where there would be a vantage out to a broad valley or a river or, best yet, to a confluence of rivers, the more we realized the significance of the relationship of monument to viewshed and to direction. This was true when we climbed a high slope overlooking the confluence of Godon Gol and Khovd Gol and found several monuments, including two four-cornered mounds and an elaborated mound (VI. 19). It became especially clear when we climbed the east face of Shiveet Khairkhan and found an ancient circle overlooking the confluence of the White (Tsagaan) and the Black (Khar) streams (VI. 20)

VI. 19 View from a high terrace over the confluence of Godon and Khovd Gol. In the foreground is a four-cornered mound, one of several monuments in this high, remote place. Kulunda. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

VI. 20 Muted circle on high terrace, east face of Shiveet Khaikhan. View to east, over confluence of Khar Salaa and Tsagaan Salaa and further flow of Tsagaan Gol. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Back in Oregon, where I spent the academic year teaching and putting order into the growing amount of data we had amassed during the previous field seasons, I took to using Google Earth to get a larger picture of the whole region. It became apparent that with patience and careful looking, I could see clusters of monuments that were otherwise not visible from our tracks. The satellite view of Bilüügiin Gol alerted me to the existence of large mounds on the terrace high above the left bank of the river (VI. 21). This was how we discovered the elaborated mounds at that location (e.g. VI. 3). In this manner, also, I was alerted to the scores of heavy mounds scattered on the alluvial fans descending into the Khovd valley above that river's confluence with Sagsay Gol (VI. 22) and the way we could confirm the mounds on the alluvial fan descending from Mortyn Am (VI. 23).



V. 21 Enlargement of satellite view of the left bank of Bilüügiin Gol. The elaborated mounds are visible as large dots across the upper terrace. Google Earth.

VI. 22 Mounds scattered over an alluvial fan opening into the valley of Khovd Gol near the river's confluence with Sagsay Gol. Google Earth.

VI. 23 Mounds on alluvial fan descending from Mortyn Am toward Sagsay Gol. Compare the photograph in VI. 14. Google Earth.

Since I first began to scrutinize the images from Google Earth, they have become much sharper, the detail much more finely grained. As a result, I can now see detail that in earlier images was quite unsatisfactory, or even complexes that then

were much less visible in the satellite image. For example, the largest khirgisuur in the valley of Mogoitiin Gol (VI. 25) were pale when I first looked for them in 2019; today the Landsat//Copernicus is much sharper (VI. 24). If I were to redo this project now, I realize that I could make far more use of this resource and with good results.

VI. 24 Satellite imagery of the valley of Mogoitiin Gol with khirgisuur. Google Earth.

VI. 25 Large khirgisuur in the valley of Mogoitiin Gol., seen in the satellite image above. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

VI. 26 Section of working map for 2007 field season, with written and tagged reminders of what we needed to confirm or survey.

As a result of these three approaches to surveying for as-yet unknown monuments, we developed a system of planning in advance of the following season, noting on our draft maps the regions we wished to survey and the ridges or high terraces we wanted to check. I took to marking up a map of our study area, with written and tagged reminders to myself of our trajectory in the vehicle and on foot. Working in this manner—with maps, imagery, and the data base Jim and I were developing during the winter months—absolutely sharpened my understanding of the whole region: of how it was configured in terms of drainages and with reference to the best routes from lower elevations to higher ones and to passes over the Tavan Bogd ridge. This perspective underlay the organization of the *Atlas* we published in 2010: the division of the region into its major river drainages, where they originated in the high elevations at the boundaries of Bayan Ölgiy, Russian Altai, and China, and their descent and convergence in the main river, the Khovd. In all cases, I was ultimately interested in the convergence of physical routes and the indications in these routes of an ancient human presence.

In earlier years, we had often felt overwhelmed by the abundance of our finds after hours of recording rock art. Surveying for surface monuments, we again experienced a great sense of wonder face to face

with the quantity of surface monuments that slowly revealed themselves in the valleys and along the terraces of our region. As we discovered more monuments and considered the ways in which they related to their immediate and larger physical contexts, it was as if the years that separated us from that ancient period were simply rolling back, revealing traces of the intentions of nameless hunters and herders who moved into and through the mountains. Idiosyncratic aspects of stonework and design challenged our human tendency to homogenize purpose and form, so that it became difficult to reduce to a single monument type like structures where each conveyed some personal sense of taste. The locations of monuments seemed to reveal values that animated the society with which they could be associated. Standing stones isolated on ridges, heavy mounds overlooking a vast valley, ritual circles on high terraces: the relationships between monument, place, and viewshed offered narratives of ancient life far more compelling than what we find in the usual archaeological report. In a similar manner, whether artistically executed or not, the individualization of Turkic image stones momentarily opened a window into the past, compelling us to acknowledge that unknown person in whose honor the stone had been raised.

VI. 27 Camp on Khovd Gol before Sagsay sum. 2008.

Before bringing this account of our second project to a close, I should say something about our living arrangements during the second project and the road conditions

(!) in that part of Mongolia. Since we were a very small group, it was not difficult to find secluded places, by water, where we could camp in privacy. The details of our camp were also much simpler than with the Russian team. In the beginning, our camp tent (if one can call it that) was a small pink thing that we took to calling "Jinagul's Palace". As flimsy as it was, it provided protection while we ate, even in terrible weather; and the food produced by our Kazakh cooks (Jinagul at first, and then Gulmirei) was always delicious and attractive. In other years we had a more substantial gathering tent, but our seating involved mats, not tables and chairs. Sometimes the physical setting looked green and comfortable (VI. 27), but in those cases the mosquitoes were horrendous, and we lived our camp life in head nets so as not to be eaten alive. In fact, during the last few years of our projects we had to pay particular attention to the appearance of insects at our camping sites. We attribute this change to several factors. In the early years of the Joint MAR project, we were working consistently at higher elevations and during the much colder weeks of August. In our later project, we planned for earlier seasons when the weather was better, but the bugs were worse. In addition to this, the local herders' increasing tendency to divert streams onto what had been dry plains coincided with the warmer temperatures of climate change to create marshy regions conducive to the explosion of bug populations.

VI. 28 Living with mosquitoes along Khovd Gol. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

By the time we undertook our second project in 2005, gasoline was much more dependable in Olgiy and even available in a few places in the countryside. The tracks, or rudimentary roads, were also generally better until we tried to go off to side valleys. At times I chose to walk, not trusting the stability of some of the bridges we had to cross. Although we avoided most road troubles, we did have some problems. On one stretch of road on the south side of the Great Lakes, we ended in what was nothing less than quick mud. It took all of us working, building up the "roadbed" with boulders and using logs to pry our OAZ out of the mud. We finally succeeded in getting unstuck, and everyone was a good sport about the situation, but the mosquitoes were not kind!

VI. 29 Back country bridge. Tsagaan Us. (Photo: E. J-T)

VI. 30 Digging out. Sumdairagiin Gol. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Our field seasons ended in 2008, but I was able to return to Mongolia on two later trips, including one out to the Altai. Effectively, however, our mapping project was continued at home, at my desk and in Jim's lab. From this second project and supported in part by a National Endowment for the Humanities grant, we created the *Mongolian Altai Inventory Collection*, an on-line resource within the University of Oregon's Knight Library Digital Collections. Together with several colleagues from the InfoGraphics Lab and especially with the design talents of Alethea Steingisser, we published *Archaeology and Landscape in the Mongolian Altai: An Atlas* (ESRI 2010).[5] That endeavor was well-received; like the on-line resource, it has been a major resource for others around the world. Beyond that we have been able to explore separate topics, individually and together, in articles and books. For Gary, the Mongolia experience was the source of endless photographic creativity. For me, one final collaborative venture was my close involvement in crafting yet another Mongolian proposal for a UNESCO Natural and Cultural Heritage Property, *Highlands of the Mongolian Altai*. As of this writing, the status of that proposal has not been determined.

5 The *Mongolian Altai Inventory Collection* can be found at https://oregondigital.org/sets/maic.

VII. 1 Five horsemen heading into the mountains for hunting. Upper Tsagaan Gol. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

VII.

Life in the Valleys

In the following pages, I want to speak about some of the remarkable people we came to know during our time in the Altai region and a little about their ways of life. I confess that I approach this discussion with some trepidation. I am neither an anthropologist nor an ethnographer, and I have no grand theory of human culture that could apply here. My command of Russian—the language we used in camp and with older members of the herding community—was quite good, but my knowledge of Mongolian was thin and of Kazakh almost non-existent. On the other hand, Gary and I kept our eyes and minds open as we encountered people very different from ourselves, people who live primarily by semi-nomadic herding in a remote and harsh region of the world. Their lives and those of their animals became a major part of our Altai experience. While we were struck by the challenges imposed by the environment, we were also deeply impressed by the strength and grace with which the mountain herders met those challenges. That grace manifested itself in the hospitality with which they received us and by the beauty of the traditional arts with which they surrounded themselves. It was also revealed in the way they encountered loss and gain throughout the year.

Beyond fond memories, one other concern drives the following discussion. The more than two decades during which we observed life in the Altai Mountains can be set against our increasing awareness—and that of the larger world—of climate change and the way it would profoundly alter our ways of life. My early, rather rosy-hued view of life in that remote region was slowly darkened by a greater sense of reality, in which a particular herding way of life was being inexorably reshaped by melting glaciers, disappearing snow fields, and drying steppe. We could not escape the signs of trouble in the streams that disappeared from one year to the next, or in the loss of the natural grasses that provided a major source of winter sustenance for the animals. Searching for eagles soaring above us made us aware of their plummeting numbers. We found ourselves praying that the same fate would not happen to the lammergeier or cinereous vultures wheeling over the cliffs. The increasing importance of tourism in the lives of the herders, reflected in camel and horse treks instead of animal husbandry, made totally clear the significance of the combined changes. This, then, is the other concern that drives this account: my desire to record a disappearing culture in a remote and magnificent part of the world.

The Altai Mountains serve as a boundary between the physical worlds of North Asia, where the rivers flow east or north, and Central Asia where rivers flow west and northwest. This division also effectively separates Mongolia's steppe and taiga zone from that of the Altai Republic and Kazakhstan. Over the millennia, many ethnic groups have sought both

pasture and refuge in the high alpine region, often fleeing from the military expansions of empire-seeking peoples coming out of Mongolia, China, and Russia. At present, the three major ethnic groups native to the Altai region are the Altaitsi (Altai), the Kazakhs, and the Mongolian Uriankhai, sometimes referred to as Tuvyns. The Kazakhs are part of the large Turkic population that inhabit modern day Kazakhstan. The Altaitsi and Uriankhai are the remnants of people with ancient and complex ethnic roots in the forest zone of North Asia.

While working in the Russian Altai, we encountered and became friendly with many local people, both Russians and Altai. In that far southeastern end of the Altai Republic, there were even a few Kazakh herders; but the most contact we then had with Kazakhs was through watching the steady stream of heavily laden trucks driving west across the Chuya steppe out of Mongolia. These were Mongolian Kazakhs who were being lured back to Kazakhstan by government offers of pasture and jobs. This, of course, was the period when the Soviet Union was breaking up and many Kazakhs wished to return to their native land. Their route took them up the Chuya highway to Ongudai; but how these heavily laden, frequently rickety looking vehicles went from there over the high mountains into Kazakhstan is not clear to me.

We spoke to some of the families who stopped in the steppe to rest—parents, children, animals, and even the family eagles spilling out of the crammed trucks. Of course, we do not know if they found what they sought in Kazakhstan. We would later hear from Kazakhs in Bayan Ölgiy that the promise of a new life was not often realized: the pasture in Kazakhstan was inferior to that in western Mongolia[1] and life in Kazakhstan had become deeply Russified—in customs, in daily life, and in government. Even language was not the same: the Mongolian Kazakhs had managed to maintain a much purer native language, and their way of life had not been contaminated by the demands of a Sovietized and Russified government.

VII. 2 Kazakh herder and his camels. Baga Oigor valley. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

1 Rumor had it that the land being offered to in-coming Kazakhs had been contaminated with radioactivity from nuclear testing.

At least for the Kazakhs whom we met in the Altai Republic, there was the promise of a new and better life at the end of their long journey back to their homeland. For the native Altaitsi people, life was far from ideal. The Altaitsi are a Turkic people, closely related by language and history to the Mongolian Uriankhai and Tuvyns. Over the last 2000 years the region now known as the Altai Republic came under the rule of a succession of states expanding out of Mongolia, including the Xiongnu, the Naiman Khanate, and the Mongol Empire, before being absorbed into the Qing Empire of China. In the mid-19th century, the region's fate shifted yet again as it was taken into the Russian Empire. It remained under Russian control until 1922 when it was named the Oyrot Autonomous Oblast as part of the Soviet Union. In 1948 the region was again renamed as the Gorno-Altai Autonomous Oblast, which is the way I first knew it. So it remained until 1992, when with the breaking up of the Soviet Union the region became the Altai Republic within the larger Russian Federation.

In our travels about the Altai Republic, we could not help but see how the forced collectivization of the native population had dealt a terrible blow to their traditional way of life. Instead of moving through their land, with their animals, according to traditional routes, the Altaitsi had been forced to settle into small and usually squalid villages. From these they would take their animals out for summer pasture, but their home base remained the settlements. In fact, the destruction of Altaitsi traditions had begun long before the emergence of the Soviet Union. Ever since Russians had come into the region in the eighteenth century, bringing with them both Russian Orthodoxy and imperial domination, native life had degenerated. Their traditional shamanic and Lamaistic religious beliefs had been forcibly repressed in the name of asserting Marxist-Leninist values. Their distinctive cultural traditions were further crushed by the Soviet determination to shrink any nationalistic identity. It is also impossible to ignore the destruction caused by the Russianized educational system and the alcohol introduced through Russian traditions. Of course, we occasionally met educated Altaitsi who had managed to remain relatively free of Russian contamination, but they were exceptions; and too frequently, they had survived by seeming to accept the Soviet "line." When I first went into the region, school children were not being taught their own language, only Russian. It was only later in the early '90s, when the Soviet Union began to fall apart and the Altai Republic began to assert a bit more independence, that the teaching of the Altai language again became a part of the school curriculum.

VII. 3 Altar on which lies a slab covered with symbols referring to shamanic traditions: the shaman, below, with his drum; and his steed, the stag, above. This altar and slab were probably constructed at some time in the nineteenth or early twentieth century. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

From what I subsequently observed in the Altai Republic and over the next twenty years, the Altaitsi have continued to resent and even resist Russian interference in their cultural traditions. It shows up not only in the struggle to reaffirm traditional linguistic norms, but also in their desire to revive traditional religious beliefs centered on the figure of the shaman. The tension, here, between modern Russian nationalism and traditional Altai beliefs is well represented by an event of the early 1990s that became famous in the West: the discovery by Russian archaeologists of the so-called Ice Princess in a frozen burial on the Ukok Plateau. With an elevation of approximately 2,500 m, this plateau abuts the west side of the Tavan Bogd massif. Like Mongolia's Bayan Ölgiy on the eastern slopes of the mountain range, the Ukok is rich in archaeology of the early Iron Age. Because of the lens of permafrost that covered the Ukok burials, archaeologists have occasionally excavated frozen or partially frozen burials. Between 1990 and 1995, a team of Russian archaeologists from the Institute of Archaeology in Novosibirsk excavated several early Iron Age burials, including that of a young woman.[2] She had been laid in her log chamber with a variety of burial goods, and outside the chamber had been sacrificed six horses. Although the burial could not be called rich by comparison to others from the same and earlier periods in the Altai and Sayan

2 Natalya Polos'mak of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, Russian Academy of Sciences, Siberian Section, was the principal excavator.

regions, the excavators referred to her as a Princess; and through much skillful publicity, she and her burial and the archeologists involved quickly became well known far beyond the Ukok and Russia.

When the archaeologists whisked the body and its burial goods out of the Altai Republic and back to Novosibirsk, there developed a major crisis between the Altai Republic and Russia. As far as the people of the Altai were concerned, the Princess was their ancestor, and her burial should never have been disturbed. The government of the Altai Republic insisted that her body and the finest burial goods had to come back to her home. Their argument was reinforced by the near disaster that met the helicopter ferrying the frozen body and the Russian archaeologists back to Novosibirsk; and as if that were not warning enough, a subsequent earthquake caused considerable damage in the Kosh Agach region. For the Altai people, this was a sign that the spirits were extremely displeased. The upshot of a long and complicated story is that the Princess was never returned, and Russian archaeologists were banned from further excavation work in the Altai Republic, at least for a few years. Fortunately, our project had by then moved into Mongolia, so we were not affected by that political scandal. The whole saga, however, reminded me that whether the Princess was, genetically speaking, an ancestor, what mattered was what the Altaitsi believed.

While we did get to know some Altaitsi while working in the Chuya steppe, the relationship remained distant and constrained. Because we were working with Russians, I always felt a little complicit in the degraded condition of Altai life. What struck me most was the poverty of the settlements and the apparent ravages of alcoholism. While in some yurts of the Kazakh population we could observe beautiful examples of their traditional household arts (such as felt work and wood carvings), in the few Altai dwellings we visited such marks of intact traditions were lacking. I think I was most strongly affected by my meeting in 1996 with the director of the Historical Museum in Gorno-Altai. This woman (of whom I only recall her Russian name and patronymic, Vera Mikhailovna) was an Altaika and had to deal with much of the fallout from the Russian seizure of the frozen body from Ukok. Vera Mikhailovna was a woman of education and considerable dignity. When we spoke of the Ukok incident she clearly seethed; and she insisted that the body of the young woman had to be returned to the Altai Republic. It was not, of course. It still resides as an exhibition in the museum of the Institute of Archaeology in Novosibirsk. All that ever came back to the Altai Republic were some small furnishings from the burial.

In Bayan Ölgiy, our experience with the native population was very different, and for several reasons. On the one hand, because of the long-range nature of our projects in Bayan Ölgiy, we were able to get to know many people—primarily herders, but also townspeople—and in some cases to know them well. On the other hand, both the Kazakhs and the Uriankhai enjoy still relatively intact ethnic cultures. We never had the impression that their individual traditions were being constrained by political currents from Ulaanbaatar.

VII. 4 A gathering of Kazakhs in the upper Baga Oigor drainage to celebrate the birthday of an elderly woman, her feet visible at the right. Her son, Kokenai, is the tall man sitting on the right with a group of children. He and many of the other men wear the beautifully embroidered hats of the Kazakhs, while several of the more elderly men, standing, wear elaborate, fur-lined head gear and heavy black robes secured by silver belts. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

The Kazakhs of Bayan Ölgiy represent the people who had fled across the mountain ridge to escape Russian and Chinese incursions into Central Asia in the 19th and 20th centuries. Originally the population had lived their nomadic, pastoral way of life on the western slopes of the Tian Shan and Altai ranges. As one of the Turkic peoples who inhabited Central Asia long before the expansion of the Mongol Empire, the Kazakhs began to accept Islam as their religion in the eighth century. However, with the increasing assertion of Russian hegemony under Catherine the Great in the 18th century, there was intense pressure against the Islamic faith and for the adoption of Russian Orthodoxy. In the 19th century, Tsarist armies pushed the Kazakhs of the Semireche region into neighboring countries, including Bayan Ölgiy in Mongolia. At present, Kazakhs make up most of the native population of Bayan Ölgiy (approximately 88%) and a smaller but significant part of the population of Khovd aimag, to the south.

The subject of religious beliefs in Bayan Ölgiy is rather complex. Mongolian Kazakhs are nominally Muslims, but fairly relaxed in their observation. When we began to work in Bayan Ölgiy, signs of that religion were few and far between except in habits of dress and food. During the period of Soviet domination, Islam was relatively invisible, especially within Kazakhstan, the homeland of the Mongolian Kazakhs. With the end

of the Soviet period, Islam began to enjoy a considerable resurgence in Bayan Ölgiy aimag—a situation supported by funding from Turkey for schools and the building of mosques. At this point it is possible to see small mosques in most little towns as well as in Ölgiy and Khovd, and there has been a concerted effort to send young people to Islamic schools both within the western aimags and abroad. Despite this upsurge of religious observation, however, the form of Islam seen in Mongolia lacks the intensity of other Central Asian Muslim populations. Many (but not all) observe certain religious laws, such as the prohibition against alcohol, smoking, and the consumption of pork.[3] In our experience, the Kazakhs enjoyed fermented mare's milk but not strong alcohol, and I don't recall seeing any herders in our two valleys smoking. Adult Kazakh men and women cover their heads, and women always dress modestly.

VII. 5 Kazakh tomb in the form of a miniature mosque in front of the walls of a more traditional cemetery. Baga Khakh nuur. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

The situation with the Uriankhai is rather different. Beginning in 1936 and intensifying under the Soviet-backed rule of the Mongolian leader, Choibalsan, the tradition of Tibetan Buddhism then dominant in Mongolia was brutally repressed, and ancient traditions of shamanism were strongly discouraged. That has now changed. Buddhism is once again allowed even if it is not regularly practiced in the remote regions of Mongolia, and shamanism is also practiced, but quietly. Within our experience, it

3 I should point out that pork would not ordinarily be consumed in this part of the world since the farming of pigs is not possible in a semi-nomadic, herding society.

seemed that religion was not a major concern with the Uriankhai, but we did observe constant indications of a traditional belief in indwelling spirits of the natural world: in other words, of a kind of syncretic Lamaistic tradition. This tradition most visibly appeared in standing stones and in *oboo*, ritual structures evoking blessings from the indwelling spirits of the mountains, springs, or streams. In the Altai Mountains, oboo take the form of piles of stones crowned with tree branches and sometimes surrounded by carefully arranged stones (VII. 6). Among the Uriankhai, drinking is certainly allowed, though most of the herders we knew limited it to the mildly alcoholic koumiss.

VII. 6 Oboo. Upper Tsagaan Gol valley. View to Tavan Bogd on the west. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

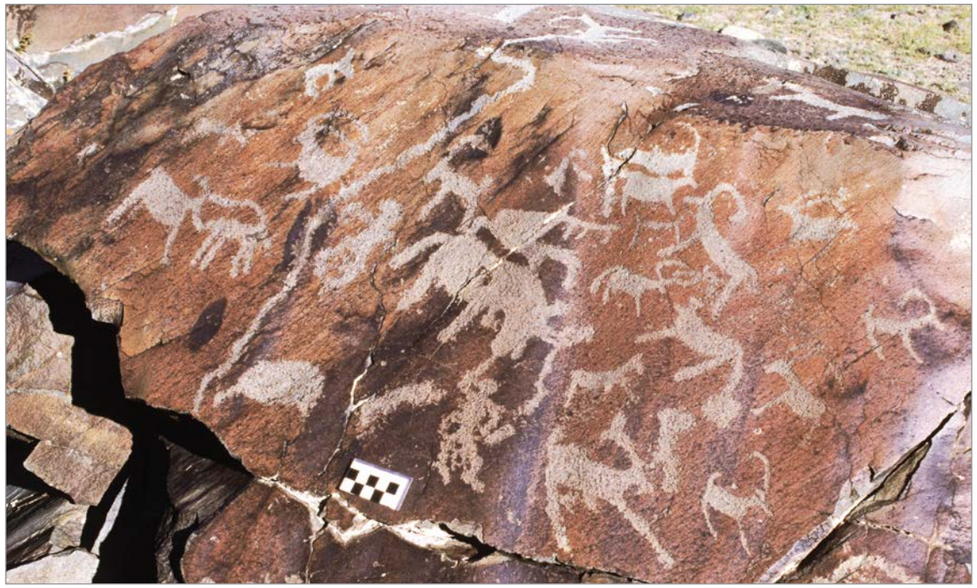
In lifestyles, also, it seemed to us that the Uriankhai have greater freedom than do the Kazakhs; or perhaps one should say that they seem to lead their lives with fewer social strictures. Because of the weather, of course, everyone tends to cover their arms and legs, and that certainly goes for the Uriankhai women. But they do not need

to cover their heads, and the young women would often be seen riding horses, something that was unusual with Kazakh girls. Distinctions between the two ethnic groups are also visible in their formal dress. Kazakh men wear long, heavy black coats that are closed over their waist and secured with a belt of silver plaques. Males wear colorfully embroidered caps for everyday head covering (VII. 4). More formal head coverings are quite impressive, involving a fur-lined, red fabric hat with large ear flaps that can be tied down under the wearer's chin. By contrast, Uriankhai men and women wear colorful Mongolian robes called *deel*, and adult males wear a variety of head coverings including a traditional hat that is crowned with a small turret (VII. 7). This headdress is often worn on ceremonial occasions, as by wrestlers at a wrestling match.

VII. 7 Five Uriankhai friends in the Tsagaan Gol valley. Four are wearing traditional Mongolian robes (deel), and three wear traditional hats. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

A few words about the dwellings of Kazakhs and Uriankhai would be useful. Referred to in Mongolia as a *ger* but known in the West as a yurt, this portable dwelling may have been developed thousands of years ago, when herders and hunters first began seasonally moving into new pastures. In Bronze Age rock art of the Mongolian Altai, we have found many panels showing families leading yaks loaded with household goods. Frequently the loads carried by the animals have long poles protruding, suggesting the parts of

a collapsible dwelling (VII. 8). The Kazakh ger is virtually the same as that of the Uriankhai, but with a few distinctive differences: it tends to be taller and is more colorful in its interior decoration. Beyond that, however, the construction of both ger is the same, as are the processes of its raising and lowering and the organization of interior space.



VII. 8 Scene centered on a yak carrying parts of the family ger. Bronze Age. Picture Rock, Khar Chuluut. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

VII. 9 Raising the ger, I. Here the four distinctive parts of the ger structure are visible: the latticed wall, the roof ribs terminating in a circular crown, and the door and door frame. The eagle visible in the right foreground is the sign of a Kazakh household. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

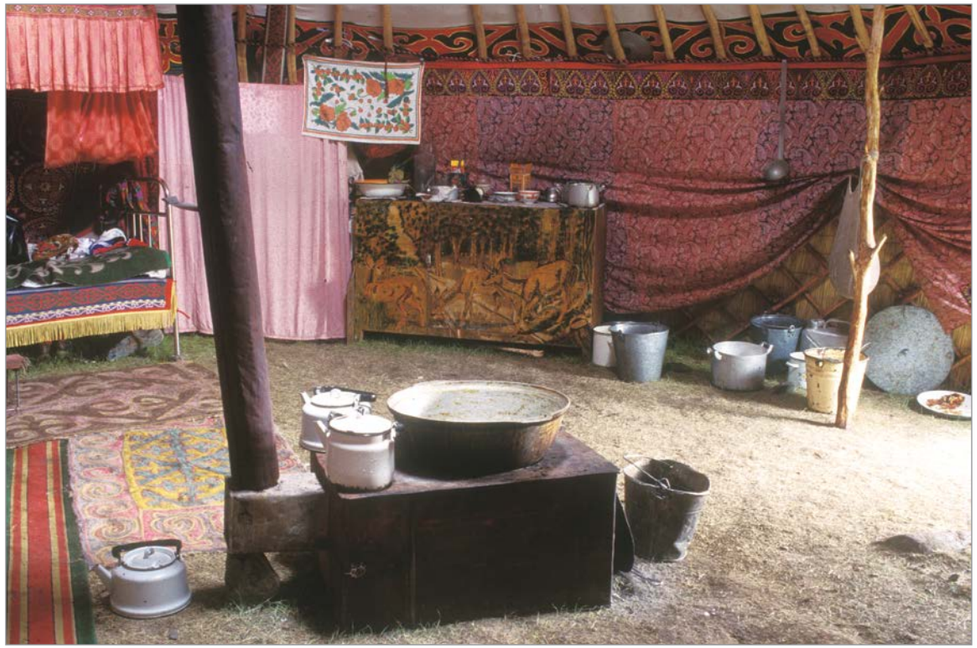
The basic elements of the ger include a latticed encircling wall of light and flexible pieces of wood that can be stretched open and then collapsed for portability. That wall is broken on the south or east by a threshold and a door, often colorfully painted. From the latticed wall are raised the ribs, the upper ends of which are fixed into a circular frame that forms the top-most smoke hole. This basic frame is then covered by two flexible layers of felt and canvas. For the Kazakhs the interior layer would most often be colorful in its patterns; the outer layer would traditionally have been made of felt but now the herders prefer canvas. The basic structure of the ger is remarkably sturdy, practical, and comfortable. The skirt of the outer covering can be raised to allow for more circulation of air, or it can be weighted down with heavy stones to stabilize the dwelling in the case of a strong wind. Despite this precaution, however, it is not unknown for a ger to be blown down or even rolled away in the event of a gale.

VII. 10 Raising the ger, II. The first layer of colorful fabric is being stretched over the ger structure. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

VII. 11 Raising the ger, III. Here the outer wall has been covered with protective canvas, and canvas is being stretched over the roof. A separate flap over the smoke hole can be opened or closed with a rope. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

VII. 12 Derbet friends from Tögtokhtiin Shil in front of their ger. Note its construction is wider and lower than that of the Kazakh ger. This region, in Uvs aimag, lies within a partially forested zone. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Whether Kazakh or Mongol, the ger would almost always be oriented with the opening to the east or south, and the interiors would be generally arranged similarly. At the center is located the hearth, composed of a metal fire box and the stovepipe that extends up through the smoke hole. Both culturally and physically, this is the most important part of the dwelling (VII. 13).



VII. 13 Interior of a Kazakh ger, with the centrally placed stove and stove pipe. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

On immediately entering the ger, along the right wall are usually arranged the pots for cooking, and a variety of meats or animal bladders drying; but the most important element is the large skin filled with fermenting mares' milk (VII. 14). A long paddle extending from the skin allows anyone entering or leaving to give a turn to the milk to aid its process of fermentation.

VII. 14 Interior of a Kazakh ger: the wall section just to the right of the entrance. In the center is visible the large animal skin with fermenting mares' milk. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Further to the right will be a set of shelves on which are stored dishware and other kitchen related materials, and then beds alternating with the trunks into which are returned all the small objects and fabrics for the family's next nomadizing (VII. 15). Finally, along the south side of the ger closest to the entrance is the equipment related to riding and herding, as well as the stand for the family eagle or falcon.

VII. 15 Interior of a Kazakh ger. Note food set out on the cloth, the multi-colored and richly designed felt rugs, and the group of photographs on the ger wall. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

The images in VII. 14, 15, and 16 reflect the decorative warmth of a typical Kazakh ger. Virtually all the felt carpets and embroidery are executed by the women of the household, with a superb visual detailing. The women are responsible for the elaborate, finished products of embroidery and felting, while the small white cloths with large embroidery (VII. 15) represent the practice piece work executed by young girls.

VII. 16 Interior of a ger at Saipulda's summer encampment. The group photograph hanging above the bed includes a photograph of some of the woman of the Saipulda family together with Esther. The tufts hanging above the bed are feathers of the large eagle-owl, Bubo bubo. They are intended to protect the sleeping children. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

The interior arrangement of Uriankhai ger is virtually the same, the floor is also covered with thick felt rugs, and photographs of family and ancestors decorate the walls. Otherwise, however, the fabrics reflect a very different sensibility than those of the Kazakhs who follow the Islamic tradition of non-representational design. Within the Uriankhai dwellings—either summer ger or winter dwellings (VII. 17)—figurative representations are preferred, often of a style reflecting Mongol history or Buddhist tales. In the ger of both ethnic groups, there are no high tables such as we know in the west. The women sit on stools and work on small boards balanced on their knees, or at very low tables, which can also be used for eating. Except for the very old, stools are used in place of chairs. In both the Kazakh and Uriankhai dwellings, the beds are occupied by the senior members of the family and the young children (several together in one bed). Young men and women typically sleep wrapped in heavy robes on the thick rugs covering the floor.

In a very real sense, the ger reflects the order found in a Buddhist mandala with its symbolic treatment of appropriate relationships and balance. The north side of the interior, facing to the south, is traditionally

the position of the master of the household; in this respect it reflects the same concern for hierarchy and directionality that one finds in a Chinese imperial palace or in a Buddhist *thangka*. The order of people sitting around the table preserves a similar pattern: the master of the household will be on the side facing the opening to the ger and the other males in the household would take their adjacent positions in relationship to their importance and age. As often as not, the mistress of the household would sit back from the table with the small children and girls. We noted one major exception to that rule in the Saipulda household, where Saipulda's wife sat directly on her husband's left, clearly enjoying a position of honor (VII. 70).

VII. 17 The walls of the winter dwelling of the Mantai family, within the Upper Tsagaan Gol, are partially covered with photographs of family and friends. The large photographs directly behind Mantai's head were taken by Gary and were treasured by the Mantai clan. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

When we were entertained in a Kazakh ger, it was clear that there were sensitive issues of hierarchy to be resolved—one of them relating to my position as a leader of the project team but also (awkwardly) as a woman. If our Mongolian colleague, Tsevendorj, was with us (as he almost always was during our first project), he was seated directly to the master's right and then I was placed to the right of Tseveendorj, with Gary to my right. Since Volodja was obviously uncomfortable in this situation, he either

didn't accompany us or he sat to the back, on the right side. In some cases, there was some amusing jockeying around, trying to decide where I should be placed: clearly, I posed a bit of a problem. For the most part, however, it all worked out well. Our hosts' ideas of hierarchy remained relatively intact, and my *amour-propre* (!) was left relatively un-bruised.

In VII. 15–17 are visible the photographs with which all the herders of the region like to decorate the interior of their dwellings. These photographic displays speak to each family's sense of its own history, of the need to reaffirm connections of blood and friendship where the usual modern means of making those connections—telephones, internet—were then lacking. Within this tradition, Gary's photographs gradually became deeply integrated. Indeed, after many years working in the large valleys, we got used to seeing his photographs, sometimes including us, as a part of the herders' wall decoration. In many ways those photographs became a part of the fabric of life in our study region, their imagery reaffirming our temporary integration into the herders' lives. From the beginning of our work in the region, we found that people liked to have photographs of themselves and of their clan: clearly, for these people the Muslim prohibition against graven images was recognized in the breach.

The ger are used for dwellings only in the better months of late spring through early fall. The winter is so cold that herders retreat either to the small towns at lower elevations or to small, solid dwellings ("winter dwellings") located on protected terraces in the mountains (VII. 18). These structures are built with logs and heated by the central fire box. Mud, animal dung, old scraps of felt, and tufts of hide and fur are used to chink the cracks. The interior walls are then covered with carpets or fabric hangings, making a snug and comfortable interior (VI. 17).

VII. 18 Small winter dwelling in the back of a protected terrace. A low animal pen is visible in the foreground, fronted by piles of drying kizakh (animal droppings). A path taken by the large animals to get to the upper pastures is visible in the center back. BO IV. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

VII. 19 An animal pen, with opening to the south and a large enclosure. In the pen can be seen piles of carefully spaded kizakh drying for winter fuel. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Once it was realized that our team included a very good photographer, capable of returning both small and large images, herders would turn up at our camp for a photo shoot, and often in their best clothing. And even though we would not get any copies of the photographs back to them until the following year, they were quite content to wait for the results; we took to saying that the service was slow, but the quality was outstanding. I think that our friends recognized the quality of Gary's photographs, as opposed to the polaroid images that passing tourists sometimes provided. Year after year we made a great effort to get the photos back to the families, even if it meant going far off our planned route. As a result, over time we would frequently see several of Gary's large images hung on the walls of ger or people would tell us that they had seen the photographs. In the obvious importance to them of family ties and the memories of those ties, our Kazakh and Uriankhai friends were no different from anyone else. The photographs seemed also to play a role in our integration into their lives. This is well exemplified by a story recounted by a Uriankhai friend in the Tsagaan Gol valley. One summer, he told us that a Kazakh herder from further north in the Shetya Oigor valley had ridden down several weeks earlier trying to locate a wandering yak. On entering our friend's ger, the Kazakh recognized Gary's photographs hanging on the ger wall, and they quickly realized they had several connecting links…namely, us.

In most cases, people came to see us in our camp, and sometimes in considerable numbers. I will not deny that at times the coming and going became a problem. Gary and I would work so hard during the morning and afternoon, climbing, locating, and documenting rock art panels up and down the adjoining slopes, that I would really look forward to stretching out in our tent and having a siesta after a late lunch. Too often, however, I would be awoken by a flurry of giggles at the entrance to our tent and look up to see several of our young friends fascinated by what I was doing and by the interior of our "ger."

One issue always interested me, but developing an understanding was dependent on observation rather than verbal confirmation. This was the issue of death among the herders and its aftermath: where the body of the dead would be deposed, and with what rituals. With my clumsy linguistic skills, I did not feel comfortable inquiring about this subject with either our Kazakh or Uriankhai friends. We did keep our eyes open, however. From all we could see, the burial traditions of the Kazakhs involved cemeteries, where the body of the deceased was laid directly on the ground and then covered with dirt and stones (VII. 20). In some cases, the mound would be enclosed in a small wooden structure; and in recent times, that structure has sometimes become more elaborate, resembling the beautiful mausoleums I have observed in Kirghizstan and Kazakhstan (VII. 5). For the most part, however, these burials are very simple. Over time, with the constant freezing and drying of the environment and with the activity of small rodents and wild animals, the bodies disintegrate, as do the mounds, and finally little is left to mark the burial. In this respect, of course, the tradition seems to be rooted in ancient mortuary traditions of the region.

VII. 20 Traditional Kazakh burials. Khar Yamaa. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

The situation with Uriankhai mortuary practices is more elusive. As far as we could tell, there are no cemeteries and no burials recognizable as such. My suspicion is that here, as was the case among the ancient Altai Türks, bodies are laid to rest on the high terraces and ledges of the mountains: in effect, they are accorded a kind of sky burial. It is quite easy to understand why one does not find bones and other remains along the ridges: the dry environment and the activities of small animals quickly cause the disintegration of the body; and larger animals as well as the ubiquitous large lammergeier and vultures carry off the remaining bones.

Despite these differences, in many ways Kazakhs and Uriankhai share elements of a common lifestyle, one shaped by their dependency on animals and on the rhythm of animal lives. During the socialist period in Mongolia, Mongolians were subjected to significant constraints in herd size in the name of collectivization and government control. Since the end of socialism, all Mongolians—including Kazakhs and Uriankhai in the Altai Region—have been able to increase their herd numbers and move into expanded pastures. As a result, some herders have become wealthy men, having seized access to high pasture for their enlarged flocks. Unfortunately, the negative side of this new freedom is a marked degradation of high mountain pastures, the destruction of riparian areas, and the concomitant loss of wild animal and bird populations. In other words, even Altai herders are running up against the limits of the natural world's ability to repair itself.

The traditional, even ancient pattern of nomadizing in Mongolia involved long trajectories over the land across the four seasons, so that animals did not deplete the vegetation. Even though there are some

indications in Bronze Age petroglyphs of conflict over pasture, in the modern period there has generally existed a tradition of respecting the pasture grounds of others. During the time of Soviet socialism in Mongolia, herding populations were more constrained in their traditional patterns of movement, and people became tied to governmental centers for required education and political activities. The positive aspect of that more constrained movement is that the young people received an education, at least on a primary level, and medical care was more accessible. When we first began to work in Bayan Ölgiy, we would encounter the gathering of children in the early fall for their trip into the local administrative center where they would attend boarding school for a period of several weeks at a time. Because of a range of social and economic changes in the herding society, I am not certain the tradition of boarding schools has continued in the same way. At the beginning of our work in the region, most of the schools we saw in the small sum centers were in dilapidated condition, but in recent years they were being fixed up: windows repaired, walls painted.

VII. 21 Goats and sheep grazing over a rocky hillside. Oigor drainage. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

The animals traditionally herded include sheep and goats, yak (or cattle, in lower elevations), horses, and camels. Most herding families live in the mountains at all times of the year, although they move from higher to lower elevations when the weather changes in the fall. Others, usually older folks, may settle for the winter and spring in small towns (*bag*) or in the larger *sum* centers, and then return to the higher elevations for new pasture. In those cases, their animals are maintained in the mountains by younger members of the family. It interested us to realize that winter dwellings were not necessarily in the lower valleys. This is in part because inversion at the lower elevations brings bitter cold, and because the large animals—yaks and horses—can continue to pasture high up, where the wind blows the

snow off the grassland. Both types of animals tolerate the extreme cold and wind and can defend themselves from wolves. The small animals, by contrast, must be herded during the day and then returned to the walled pens at night. During the months when all the animals begin to wean their young, they are herded into the ger encampment at night, for milking but also for protection. Wolves remain a problem in these mountains, hence every encampment has many guard dogs and "scare-wolves"; but whether the latter work, I am not sure. The camels in the high valleys offer another and interesting pattern. During the winter they simply move down to the lower valley, and then in the spring return up the valley to the vicinity of their herders' encampment (VII. 22).

VII. 22 Bactrian camels moving up the Khar Salaa valley. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

The penning of the animals—and especially of the small animals in all seasons—serves a purpose beyond protection. In this part of the world, dried animal droppings (which we called *kizakh,* using the Altai word) are used for fuel. These are collected from the precincts of the encampment; but the greatest number are gathered from the enclosed pens after the winter months. In spring, when the small animals can be released from the protective structures, the herder families cut up the packed droppings from the floor and arrange them neatly in stacks to dry over the summer. These piles of drying manure are visible in VII. 19 and are a ubiquitous sign of an encampment. Kizakh is the only real fuel in that high country. Wood is not an option; and contrary to a common assumption, the burning kizakh smells sweet, if at all.

In that part of the world where we were privileged to work, far from any modern life, people seem to move at a leisurely pace, by which I mean that they are not checking time

or cell phones or rushing off to appointments here and there. But it was clear to us that they all worked very hard, with a sense of tasks that had to be addressed within a certain period. This is particularly intense during late spring and summer. After the deep cold of the winter has passed, the herders return to their high pastures so that the animals can begin to regain the fat they have lost during the winter. That is the period for shearing the animals, a job that requires community collaboration. Summer is consumed by the milking of sheep, goats, yaks, and horses, and for preparing the cheeses that will take the herders through the winters. It is also the time for gathering wild onions and berries, hunting small fur animals, for preparing hides, fleece, and felts, and for repairing the fabrics covering the ger. In the fall, the households move down to their lower dwellings, with all their animals. The slaughtering of animals takes place then when the meats can be frozen in the open air or in protected partitions of the winter dwellings. During the dark and cold days of winter, the herder families attend to their penned animals which will give birth late in that period, the felting of new coverings, the repair of ropes, saddles, and other essential gear, and the embroidering of materials for the ger. Spring brings the return of the herders and their animals to higher elevations.

VII. 23 A Derbet woman curing new hides with milk. Toghtokhin shil, Uvs aimag. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Except for the very little children, everyone in the family shares in the tasks of the household; in that environment, one sees no shirkers. In general, the men work with the animals and the women maintain the household; but those divisions are not fixed,

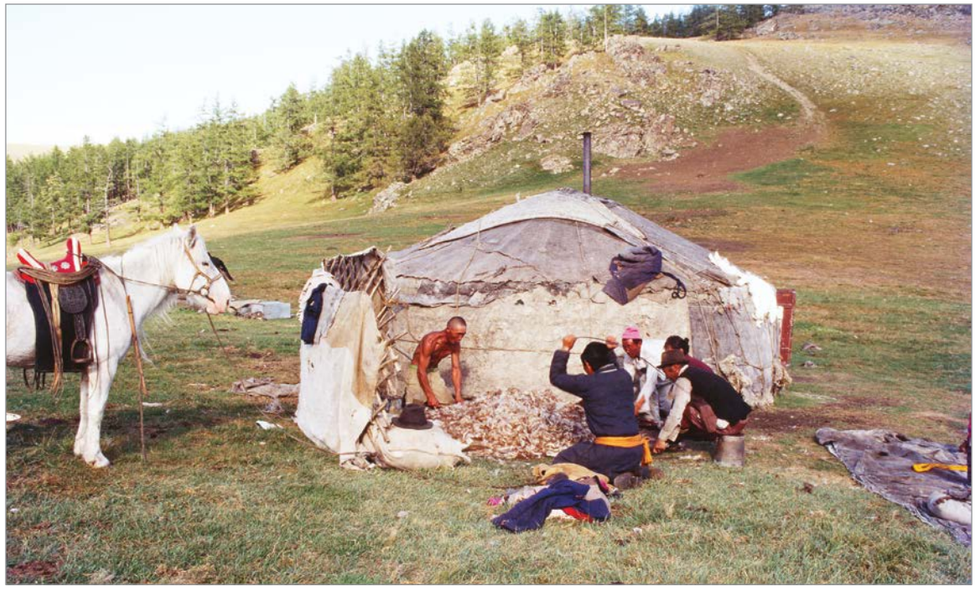
and men and women cross over any division by gender to assist others. The adult men were responsible for all aspects of the basic husbandry of the animals, as well as for the slaughter of animals in the autumn and their preparation for winter food. They take the lead in the heavy process of raising and repairing the ger. The men help the women with the milking, and many seemed even to lend a hand with the small children. For the most part, however, the young girls care for the infants and babies, and the older women organize food preparation at all levels. They oversee a major part of the milking, the preparation of the essential cheeses for winter consumption, and, of course, the making of fabrics and felts for the ger. Both men and women collaborate in the hard job of cleaning fleece and preparing felt. The younger people learn these tasks by watching the adults and sometimes by participating.

The process of milking the animals requires the whole family's collaboration. This is particularly true during that short period in the summer, after the mares have weaned their foals but during the time when their milk is still plentiful and the weather propitious for making koumiss. During that time, the mares have to be milked twice a day. They are tethered, their foals are brought to their side to bring down their milk, and then unceremoniously set aside and the milking proceeds. In thinking about this process, it is useful to remember that Mongolian horses are not gentle old mares; it is more accurate to describe them as spirited animals.

VII. 24 Gathering the horses for milking at the celebration of Naadam at Mantai's camp. On the left is Saraa directing the process; and in the foreground is Saraa and Batsukh's first son, Turrö. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

In this part of the world and for thousands of years, sheep have been the most important herd animal. This is not simply because they are a source of meat and milk; more important, perhaps, is their fleece which provides the felt used for everything from the covering of gers to the covering of floors, to saddle blankets and articles of clothing. The methods for making felt used by different cultural groups across Eurasia vary considerably, but they all have certain steps in common. We had the opportunity to observe the process used by Bayan Ölgiy Kazakhs and Uriankhai. In both cases, the method is similar. The major differences lie in the end products—that is, the designs with which they work their floor coverings and saddle blankets. The goats and sheep are shorn in the late spring; unfortunately, this usually occurred before we arrived at our field work. We were able, however, to see the tremendous work that went into preparing the essential felt carpets and horse blankets that have been used by Altai herders for several thousand years.

The first part of the felt making process involves beating the fleece to dislodge all the debris embedded in the animals' coats and to loosen the tangled fibers. This part is usually done by men; it is difficult and time-consuming. The next step in the preparation of the fleece involves its washing and drying in the open air. The process is then moved into the ger and involves considerable collaborative work. The women begin by again beating and twisting the wool to soften and pull out its tangles. They then spread it out evenly on a rectangular reed mat, moisten it, and roll and tie the mat. Then several people together roll the whole cylinder, putting pressure on it to tighten the tangled sheep hairs. (In other places the roll is pulled by horses over the ground to get the same effect.) That process is repeated until the wool has become a tightly solid felt, which is then dried outside. During the winter months, the felt will be dyed, cut into sections for the appliqued patterns of the rugs that so brighten the homes of both Kazakh and Mongol ger and winter dwellings. Those decorative traditions are another topic altogether; suffice to say here that in general, the patterns favored traditionally by Mongols, including Uriankhai, are geometric, while those preferred by Kazakhs are more organic in shape. It is interesting that the Kazakh patterns are almost identical to the patterns found on fabric remains from Altai burials of the first millennium BCE.

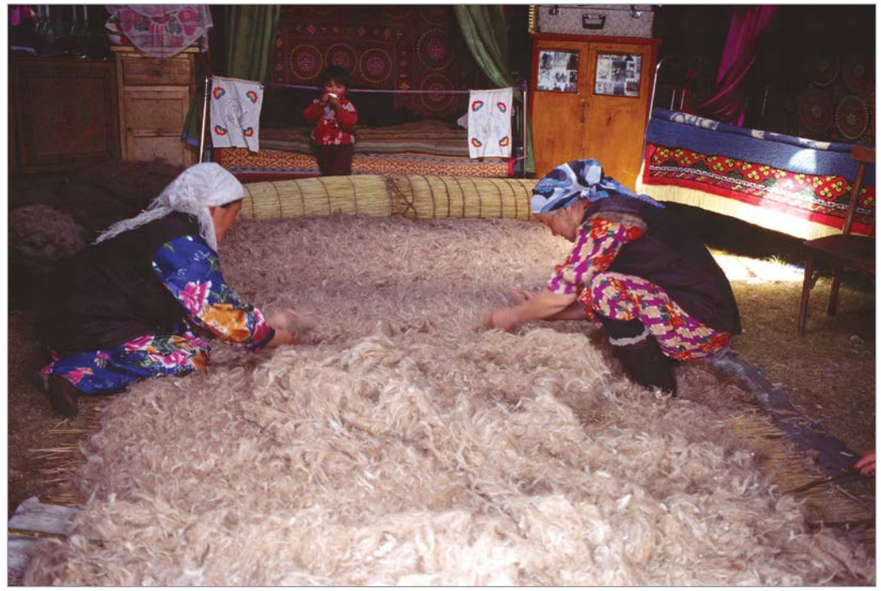


VII. 25 Beating the newly shorn fleece. This process took place at the encampment of Derbet friends in the forested Togtokhiin Shil of Uvs aimag. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

VII. 26 The sheep fleece has been washed in a nearby stream and laid out to dry. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

The following series of photographs follows the process of felt making, in this case within the Saipulda camp:

VII. 27 Women pulling the fleece with sticks to loosen and draw out the fibers. In the background, on the bed, are large bundles of washed fleece still to be worked. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)



VII. 28 Spreading the pulled fleece evenly on reed mats.
(Photo: Gary Tepfer)

VII. 29 Moistening the fleece so that the fibers will ultimately shrink up tight.
(Photo: Gary Tepfer)

VII. 30 Rolling the moistened fleece within the reed mat and letting it sit for some time.
(Photo: Gary Tepfer)

VII. 31 The roll un-done and the fleece partially felted. It will then be remoistened and the process of rolling and drying repeated. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

VII. 32 Here the partially felted material has been remoistened, re-rolled, and bound. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

VII. 33 The rolled and bound felt is then put under pressure—here by human effort, but in some places by horses dragging the roll over the ground. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

VII. 34 The finished felt has been laid out on the ground for drying. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

In the series of images above, taken of the Saipulda family working their fleece into felt, the process is quite summarized. In fact, the stretching, laying out, and rolling of the fleece takes a great deal of time, and the moistening, rolling, and pressuring of the emerging felt is repeated several times. The final stage, of course, will take place later, during the winter months, when the felt is cut, dyed, and sewn together to make the colorful hangings and carpets visible in the ger interior. The felt that would be used to cover the ger would be left, of course, in its plain, undyed state. Nowadays, however, herders use canvas instead of felt for the outer covering of the ger and use the felt for the interior carpets, saddle blankets, and other objects. Traditionally the dyes used were plant based, but in the modern period they have been replaced by mineral dyes, traded up from China.

The herding of small animals is done either by young boys or by an older person on horseback and with one or more dogs. The yaks and horses do not need to be herded: they go out and up to the higher meadows on their own and return on their own for milking or when bad weather is approaching. The camels wander at will, but they always return to their own camps. In our experience, it was the young girls who searched the slopes for wild onions, berries, and rose-hips. In short, the life of the Altai herders does not allow for any who will not contribute time and energy to maintaining family life. We were constantly

impressed by the fact that families with several children were better off than those with none or only one or two. Families with healthy daughters could depend on extra assistance in the ger. Ordinarily, when the girls marry, they leave to join the families of their husbands; but in some cases, as in that of Mantai's daughter, Hansuren, it seems as if she and her husband will join her family's extended encampment.

VII. 35 Mantai's four children: (from left) Batsukh, Namsuren, Bolorsukh, and Hansuren. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

We also noted that many Uriankhai girls were choosing to go into town, or even into Ulaanbaatar, to train as teachers or in some other profession, although that can change if the parents need assistance. At one point, Hansuren was studying herbalism in Ulaanbaatar, but marriage seems to have brought that to an end. Tungaa, the daughter of another friend in Tsagaan Gol, Olonbayar, had been studying law in Ulaanbaatar, but when we last saw her in 2007, she had returned to the family encampment to help her unwell mother.

Among Kazakh families in the countryside, it was more common for girls to remain with their parents until they marry, at which point they become integrated into their husbands' families. Families with many healthy sons were fortunate; they had the manpower to handle larger herds, and with their wives and children they would enlarge the encampment. On the other hand, large families, especially those with many sons, face the problem of dividing the herds and pasture at the passing of the parents. With the advent of some access to modern medicine, families (especially among the Kazakhs), are growing larger, with increasingly large herds within a fragile landscape. Moving through the valleys, which at first glance seem so empty, one would not realize that in this vast land there is an ever-expanding population. As we were quickly to find out, each Kazakh ger could represent not only adults of several generations but also many children—often up to eight per family. Thus, three ger on a distant hillside could represent a considerable number of people and several hundred animals.

VII. 36 Ger in the early morning hours. Belkudyk. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Among both the Kazakhs and Uriankhai, the children learn how to handle animals by observing and participating in all related activities. They are taught that all the animals, especially the large ones, must be treated with considerable respect. Men take their little children up on horseback from the time they are very little, and by the time they are eight or nine they are herding flocks independently, on horseback. The young ride bareback so that if they are thrown from the horse or fall, they will not be entangled in the saddle and stirrups. At a certain age, they shift to the full saddle.

VII. 37 Khenkhuu and his small son. Upper Tsagaan Gol. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

VII. 38 Two Bactrian camels in the Tsagaan Gol valley. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Bactrian camels offer a special case. These animals are large and can be nasty tempered. Although they are powerful workers—adults can carry up to 300 kg—they don't like to be told what to do and, as we often heard, they scream a lot when irritated. It takes a special skill to handle them, both their loading and their riding. Among our acquaintances in the Baga Oigor drainage, one man was particularly esteemed as a skillful camel handler. Kokenei taught his children how to work with these animals and even to ride them with confidence (VII. 39).

VII. 39 Kokenei, his four sons, and one of their camels. Baga Oigor valley. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

The Kazakhs in Bayan Ölgiy are famous for their use of eagles and falcons for hunting. This tradition goes back at least to the Altai Türks of about 1000 years ago. From that period date images of falconers in Altai rock art, like those vividly represented in Chinese paintings of Central Asian tribute bearers. In recent years, what was once a means of hunting has become, also, an economic issue: Mongolia's raptor birds have been highly prized and bought by hunters from as far away as Saudi Arabia at prices up to $25,000. Bayan Ölgiy has also established an annual eagle festival, which attracts tourists from many countries.

VII. 40 Two young boys in the Khar Yamaa valley who had just taken a young eagle from its nest. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Among our Kazakh acquaintances, many owned eagles or falcons and used them for hunting small fur animals, foxes, or even wolves. I realize that this sounds quite romantic, but over the years working in valleys settled by Kazakhs, we became rather troubled by the practice. We encountered the tradition in our first year of work in Bayan Ölgiy, and in the first leg of our survey for rock art in the valley of Khar Yamaa Gol. Two young boys walked into our camp carrying a young eagle wrapped in a cloth (VII. 40). They had just come down from the cliffs above where they had seized the bird, a female, from her nest.

The most desired eagles are females, because they will become larger than the males and thus more powerful hunters. We realized then that the capture of this young eagle meant one more bird taken from the breeding population; and that would be true for all the eagles taken in that region. We were also troubled by the way in which the birds were kept captive, always attached to some person, or to a mount except when being used for the hunt. We could not help but note that in the time we were working in the Altai, the large raptor population plummeted. In all fairness, this was probably due only in part to the taking of eagles and falcons; it was also the result of the destruction of the pastures by overgrazing, and the overhunting of the eagles' favorite food, marmots, for meat and fur. Unlike the Kazakhs, the Uriankhai do not use birds for hunting.

VII. 41 Kimkhran and his three-year old eagle. Baga Oigor valley. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

On one occasion, Kazakh friends insisted on gifting me with a fox skin. This was a mark of honor, I realized, since fox fur is greatly valued for winter headwear. My problem, however, was two-fold: I could not see myself ever needing to use such a fur in the moderate winters of Oregon; and imagining the response of my vegetarian, vehemently non-fur wearing friends, made me cringe. Nonetheless, I accepted the gift graciously, I hope, and later that night gave it to Olga, our cook. Living through the cold winters of

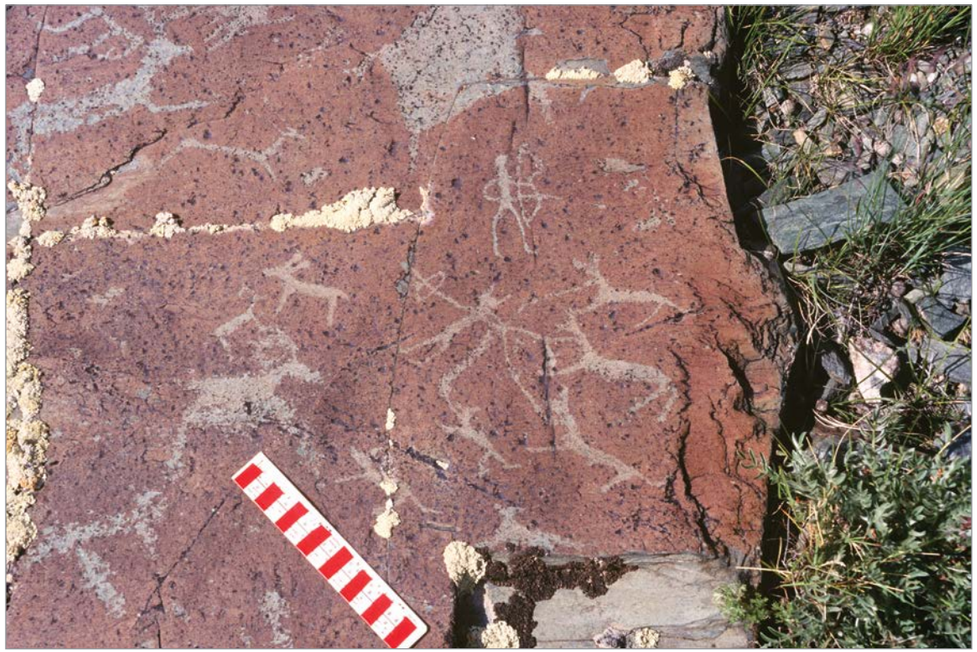
Siberia, she could certainly use it. Not related to eagle hunting but within the category of problematic gifts: some Uriankhai friends wanted me to take home a rather large pair of ibex horns. In that case, I begged my friends to keep it for themselves. It was hard for me to imagine how I would get that memento through San Francisco customs!

VII. 42 Barchuk and his freshly killed marmots. Baga Oigor valley. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Rock art from the Bronze and early Iron Ages, and even that from the Turkic period, indicates that hunting was central to life in the Altai mountains. Bear, horses, elk, aurochs, argali, and ibex were all taken for meat, horns, and skins. Wolves, foxes, and smaller animals must have been taken regularly, even if those hunts were not represented in rock art. In the present, radical changes in the environment together with overhunting have reduced the major prey animals to wolves, foxes, and marmots. The last are valued for their fine fur and, by Mongols (not by Kazakhs), for their meat. However, even here, in the case of a rodent skin, international economics have a regional impact: the Japanese demand for marmot fur for winter accessories has caused that animal to be so overhunted in Mongolia that in several of the years we were working in the Altai, the number of marmots a hunter could take was sharply limited. Unfortunately, that restriction was too often honored in the breach. In our early years of working in Bayan Ölgiy, it seemed as if we could see marmots sunning themselves across any slope and hear their cries of warning. With the passing of time, that experience became increasingly infrequent.

VII. 43 Kazakh hunters wearing wolf and fox head disguises. Baga Oigor valley. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

In many places in the mountains, we would come across great piles of horns of mountain argali (*Ovis ammon*). These are the largest of all wild sheep, with mature rams weighing up to 700 lbs. The horns were probably discarded by hunters who were interested only in the considerable amount of meat on those impressive animals. Sadly, argali as well as ibex have been almost wiped out in their mountain territory. This may be due as much to hunting expeditions mounted by foreigners as to hunting by local inhabitants. The Europeans and Japanese, of course, use the most advanced hunting equipment. Local hunters use old fashioned shotguns and stealth. Some hunters we met wore wolf and fox heads (VII. 43). They said that the animal skins fooled their prey, but I am rather skeptical. My suspicion is that they were following a tradition that existed as early as the Bronze Age, when humans wore animal skins to hunt larger prey (VII. 44).



VII. 44 Two hunters, one wearing an animal skin on his head, with dogs. Late Bronze Age. BO I. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

In the earlier years of our first project, we usually worked from late July through late August, and sometimes into September. That timing allowed us to observe the packing up of the herders' camps, the loading of their camels, and the beginning of their migration down to lower pastures for the fall months. The caravan would ordinarily be headed up by the camels carrying the collapsed ger and all the household goods, including baskets of children. The herds of animals would then follow: first the sheep and goats, since they had to be managed the whole way, especially if the route meant crossing a river. The larger animals—the horses and yaks—would follow along at their own pace. From high perches on the hillsides where we were working, we could watch many of these caravans. Those views transported me back in time and into the very rock pecked images from the Bronze Age that lay before us on the outcrops (VII. 45). Some of the most vivid caravans we encountered were in Uvs aimag, along the Teel and Shiber rivers. In that region, the people were Derbet Mongols and were still following traditional customs of nomadizing (VII. 46–49).

VII.45 Image of a family caravan, with children carried in a basket on the back of a yak. Late Bronze Age. BO II. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

VII. 46 Tsednee and his wife packing a camel with their chests of clothing. Teel Gol, Uvs. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

VII. 47 Rider leading loaded camels across Shiber Gol. Uvs aimag. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

In the Bronze Age, yaks were the primary beasts of burden, but now within the Altai region, Bactrian camels have that role. They carry all the heavy family goods: all parts of the ger, the furniture, clothing, and other bulky items. They are usually the first in line of departure from the old encampment, followed by the rest of the animals and family members, on horseback or on foot.

VII. 48 Sheep crossing Shiber Gol. Uvs aimag. The sheep and goats don't go voluntarily into the water. A herder must toss one of the bolder goats into the river, and then the others all follow. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

VII. 49 A Derbet herder, his little girl, and his son with their camel caravan. The young boy was not more than nine years old but was already an important part of the family's work force. Shiber Gol. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Children too young to ride their own horse will be carried by an adult or loaded in baskets carried by camels. This, also, is a tradition we can see in rock art all the way back to the Bronze Age, when the beasts of burden were yaks, not camels (VII. 45).

VII. 50 Children in a basket carried by a young camel, together with the folded siding of a ger. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

VII. 51 This basket, with baby, will be hoisted onto the other side of the camel pictured in VII. 50. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

VII. 52 Part of the loaded caravan belonging to Tsednee and his family. Women, on foot or on horseback, frequently lead the camel caravan. This same tradition, of women leading the caravans, is represented in rock art from as early as 3400 years ago. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Over the years we worked in Bayan Ölgiy, we observed that increasing numbers of herders were using old Russian trucks instead of camels, the reasoning apparently being that one can load more into one truck than onto a camel, and ordinarily the truck doesn't complain. This is well exemplified by the loaded truck driven by one of the more impetuous Songubai brothers (VII. 53). One day, while in our camp on Nariin Salaa, we heard the approach of a very noisy vehicle and looked up to see an old blue truck literally flying over the hill in front of our camp before screeching to a stop: the Songubai clan had come to bid us farewell as it moved to its autumn encampment. This was both amusing and heart-warming. But we could not help but regret the gradual loss of the use of camels: the trucks "swallow" gasoline and tear up this fragile land.

VII. 53 Part of the Songubai family with their loaded truck, moving down to autumn pastures. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

To nourish their animals, the herders depend on the wild grasses of the mountain steppe. The smaller animals are herded across the slopes, as they are quite capable of moving over the outcrops and finding grass along the edges of the boulders. The horses and yaks move freely up to higher levels, where they can graze on tundra vegetation. The problem here is that with the larger herds of animals grazing at higher elevations, that tundra growth is being disastrously damaged. The last time we were in the upper Tsagaan Gol valley, the arctic birch had been fundamentally stripped by the yaks, but also by sheep and goats.

VII. 54 Yaks in the Baga Oigor valley. Bad weather has caused the animals to descend to the valley floor. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

We frequently had the opportunity of observing the annual cutting of wild grasses. The first time we directly encountered harvesters was in 1996 when we had a camp on the left bank of the upper Tsagaan Gol. One morning we saw five horsemen carrying long scythes, reminding this art historian of a scene from the apocalypse (VII.55).

VII. 55 Uriankhai preparing to cut wild grass. Upper Tsagaan Gol. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Of course, they were nothing of the sort: simply riders heading for a terrace above the river that was covered with naturally growing grasses. These would be cut with the long scythes (VII. 56), gathered, loaded onto camels, and taken to the winter dwellings. There the grass would be spread out within an enclosed area and dried for winter animal feed. Sometimes the camels drafted to carry the hay would scream to indicate their displeasure, or they would pass their time eating what was being piled on their backs (VII. 57)

VII. 56 Cutting hay with long scythes. Upper Tsagaan Gol. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

VII. 57 Camel snacking on its load of hay. Khar Salaa valley. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Our desire to observe the haying more closely led to a fine adventure. That same year, standing near our camp on the left bank of the tributary Tsagaan Salaa, Gary and I were wondering how we could get over that rushing, frigid, glacial river to work on the far side. At that moment, we saw a group of riders approaching, obviously intending to cross the river to cut the grass on the terrace on the far side. Some of the older men suggested that we accompany them on their horses; we could work on the rich archaeology on that terrace while they did their haying. However, because the river was in flood, they worried that the horses could lose their footing. So, we crossed in a group, but with the camels placed upstream so that they—with their greater weight and surer footing—would break the current. We arrived safely, of course, and our friends proceeded to spend the next few hours cutting grass while Gary and I worked on the Turkic monuments scattered across the terrace. At the end of the afternoon, we all gathered around one of their fine camels for a final photo shoot (VII. 58).

VII. 58 Gary and I together with some of our Uriankhai friends who had been cutting hay under the north slope of Shiveet Khairkhan. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Getting acquainted

From the beginning of our work in Bayan Ölgiy as well as in the time we had in Uvs aimg, we got to know many people, both Kazakh and Mongol (Derbet and Uriankhai). It would be impossible to tell of them all or of the ways in which we became acquainted with them. Moreover, time has softened my memories of many of them, but not all. Here I would like to speak of a few individuals and families who became especially important to our experience in the Altai.

This is the way the initial introductions would take place. First a rider would spot us from a great distance and come into camp to find out who we were and what we were doing there. Satisfied that we meant no trouble to their lives, within a few days they would return with family members: children, wives, grandparents; or they would ride into camp with some of their fellow herders or hunters. I think I have said that we became especially sought out because Gary liked to photograph them as individuals and as groups. They, in turn, seemed to enjoy being photographed, especially when they came to realize that we would always return the following year with pictures.

VII. 59 Friends examining their photographs, taken the previous summer. Baga Oigor valley. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

VII. 60 Uriankhai friends from the Khar Salaa valley. They came into our camp, dressed in their best, for pictures. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

One young couple with whom we became acquainted, Madat and Jhanibek, were more modern than many: they zipped around the countryside on a motorcycle, occasionally seeking us out as we worked on the slopes above the valley (VII. 61). There was something especially delightful about these two people, hailing us from the road to descend for a visit.

VII. 61 Madat and Jhanibek. Valley of Tsagaan Salaa. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Many of our visitors were memorable, either because of the force of their personalities or because of their age and the fact that they had survived challenging lives for so many years. One of the older visitors was a man of more than 80 years who lived at the top of the Tsagaan Salaa valley. Every season we worked in the Baga Oigor complex, he would ride sedately into camp, his chest covered with medals that reflected his participation in Mongolian battles against the Japanese during the 1940s and the various awards he had received over the years for his excellence as a herder. The old man would slip carefully off his horse and slowly walk around, gazing at everything politely but with great curiosity. When he determined it was time to leave, he maneuvered his horse over to the side of a boulder, carefully climbed on the boulder and then mounted and followed by his big black dog, rode slowly and sedately away. It was only after a few such visits that we realized the old man's dog liked to steal our toothpaste.

In that part of the world, 80 is extremely old, but the old man was not the only elderly person in the valley. There were also twin brothers, the Songubai (VII. 62), who were 80 years old and remarkably vigorous. We became quite friendly with one of them (the person who wanted to gift me with a fox fur). He had four sons, all strong and seemingly healthy. When we visited them, however, I had the impression of a complicated family, with boys who were headstrong and young wives who were resentful. By contrast, the families of our Kazakh friends Saipulda, Kokenai, and Eileen projected a remarkable sense of shared collective effort.

VII. 62 Twin brothers Songubai. Upper Tsagaan Salaa. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

And, indeed, a world in which human lives are entirely dependent on the well-being of one's herds requires collaboration from everyone, children, young people, and adults. We were constantly impressed by the responsibilities assumed even by the very young. The girls would take charge of the younger children, even of the infants. At an early age, the boys were already out on horseback herding the animals up to high pastures for long days at a time. We who come from a society in which children seem too often to have "nothing to do", we looked at that degree of shared work with something approaching awe. We were not able to discern the familiar problems of our affluent society, such as eating disorders or gratuitous delinquency or the self-indulgences we see ubiquitously in our world. At the same time, the young seemed to enjoy their lives as much as the happiest children in our society. The fact that they are necessary to the survival of the household seemed to give them confidence and a sense of belonging. Observing the responsibility thrust onto the very young impressed us as an enviable alternative to what we experience within our own world.

VII. 63 Young herders. I came on these boys in the Tygyd valley where they were herding about 150 sheep and goats. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

In 1998, we became acquainted with a man named Shoshin (VII. 64). He was a doctor in Ölgiy who every summer took his family and some animals up to the Oigor valley for what they always called "fresh air." Shoshin had three beautiful boys, including twins, and two daughters; he and his wife were, in other words, well on their way to having a typically large family, but these children would have greater educational opportunities than the other Kazakh children in the mountain valleys.

VII. 64 The Shoshin family, with five children including one pair of twins. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

In the year we met Shoshin, the preparations for our field work and several awful snarls in our travel had left me with a slightly elevated blood pressure. Meeting Dr. Shoshin gave me a chance to check my blood pressure there in the field; the good doctor pronounced me in fine shape.

VII. 65 Dr. Shoshin and his patient. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Looking at all our friends within the two long valleys over a period of many years, it was clear that the old man with the toothpaste-loving dog and the Songubai twins were indeed very old; more often men and women died before sixty-five. Most people seemed to be strong and healthy, until one year they weren't, and then they did not linger. Perhaps that reflects the result of a challenging lifestyle and environmental conditions that would certainly weed out unhealthy individuals. Even early in our years in the valleys, I realized that I was often the oldest person, but also one of the healthier. This embarrassed me: that I should be running around the world in good health while so many there in the mountains were struggling to keep going. So, Gary agreed with me that for all our friends who would ask my age, I would shave 10 years off…but that still put me "ahead" of many of the herders.

Occasionally we would see a very old and enfeebled person tucked away in a bed at the side of the ger; but that was rare. Presumably once people could no longer stay active, they would quickly falter and die. But it is also true that among the Kazakhs we noticed a striking number of young children with problems of mental retardation or with physical deformations of arms or legs. We don't know the causes of this, of course, but it seemed possible that it might have been related to inbreeding and/or to problems at the time of birthing. After all, childbirth happened almost always in the ger with the new mother hopefully attended by other,

experienced women; but in the event of an emergency, there were no ambulances and no midwife center or hospital to retreat to. And many of the Kazakh women looked as if multiple births did not help their health.

I am speaking here specifically about the Kazakh population in our valleys, but much of the same applies to the Uriankhai as well. However, there are two big differences between the two groups (and I confess this is not a scientific observation): among the Uriankhai, family size is smaller and among the children we did not see the incidents of what appears to be inbreeding evident among the Kazakhs. This may be due in part to the extreme care taken by all Mongolian groups (including Uriankhai) to avoid marriage between relations.

VII. 66 Another set of identical twins from the Baga Oigor valley, these full of good energy. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

One other aspect of the Kazakh society struck us forcefully: the regular appearance of twins. Within the Baga Oigor valley community alone, in addition to the Songubai brothers whom I have already mentioned, we counted four sets of twins, at least three of which were identical. Earlier I mentioned the Shoshin twins. But there were others, also, including the two mischievous boys in VII. 66 and a new set of twins within the Kokenei household (VII. 67)

VII. 67 And yet another set of twins from the Kokenai family in the Oigor region. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

On many occasions our Kazakh friends would invite us to visit them in their summer encampments. These were usually much higher than where we were camping and entailed some planning of both time and gasoline. We would arrange these visitation days so we could visit one or two families or even a whole clan in a distant pasture. Invariably we were royally hosted in true Kazakh fashion, with *airak* (koumiss), dried cheeses, fried breads with plenty of *kaimak*—an amazingly delicious and rich yak butter. Since the herders in the mountains do not slaughter their animals until the fall, we would rarely have meat; that would happen only on special feast days or holidays. Then we would be offered a great platter of mutton, cooked until it was falling apart, utterly delicious, and eaten carefully with our hands.

One of the great pleasures, for me at least, was the display with which our Kazakh friends would set out their hospitality, with a grace that complimented the beauty of the ger interiors. The Kazakh traditions of weaving, embroidery, and felt making come out of the long history of Central Asian decorative arts. A similar richness of color and design are reflected in the tiles on architecture or in the jewel-like coloration of miniature paintings from regions such as present-day Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. The Kazakh sense of bright colors, textures, and abstract design made for ger interiors that positively glowed. The

women's ubiquitous head coverings, also, as well as the men's simple caps were no less colorful. In a world that was frequently dark, cold, and forbidding, the color of a ger interior created visual warmth that was often matched by the family's hospitality. Within these elaborated interiors, an especially effective element was the woven straps that the family would thread up through the wooden ribs of the ger, creating trails of color in a variety of directions (VII. 68). But even in the storing of their trunks and folded bedding, there was a remarkable sense of design and color.

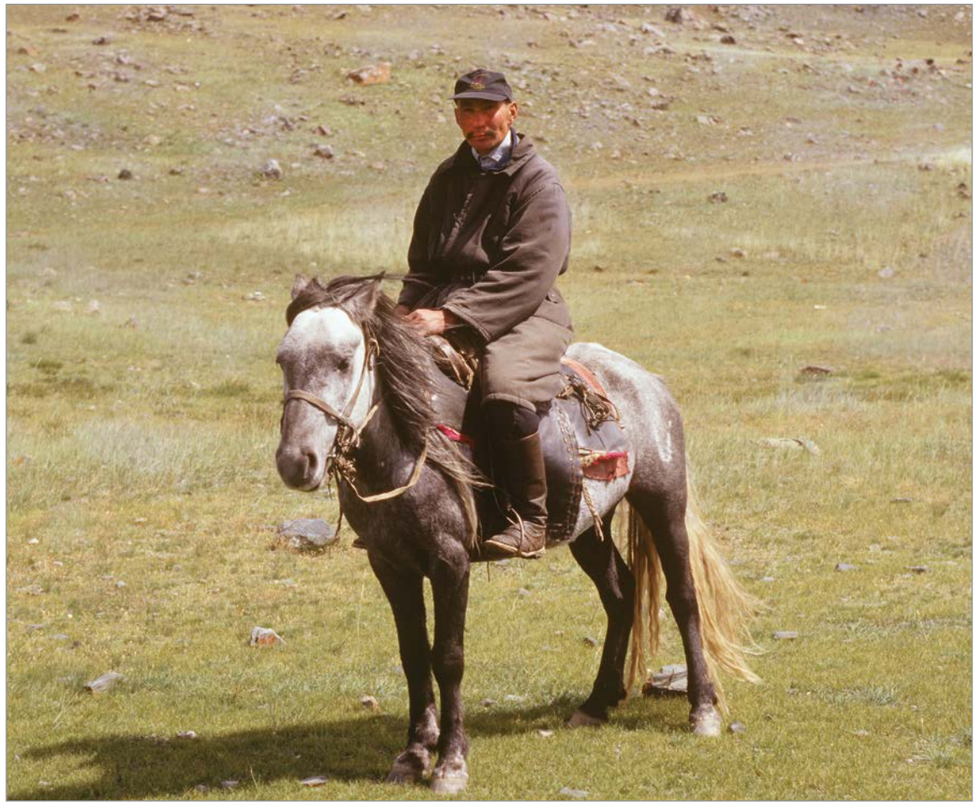
VII. 68 Decorative hangings of yak hair and sections of embroidered bands wound between the ger ribs. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

There were a few Kazakh families with whom we became especially friendly. One was that of Saipulda, a man we first met at a gathering of children for their departure to school. Saipulda's clan had its summer pasture in a high basin above Shetya Oigor, very close to the Chinese border. They were clearly well off, with many handsome yaks, horses, and the usual large complement of sheep and goats.

VII. 69 The family of Saipulda, in the upper Shetya Oigor valley. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

VII. 70 Saipulda's wife was justifiably proud of her excellent koumiss, which she offered in the traditional fashion: pouring from a raised ladle so that all could see the beauty of the fermented milk. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Saipulda and his wife had five sons and several daughters as well as daughters-in-law and an ever-increasing number of grandchildren. They were by many measures a well-off family, constituting a small community living on the high plateau at the Chinese border. We were struck by the unusual degree of respect and even affection the Saipuldas had for each other, and with the way in which Saipulda honored his wife in front of visitors. I was also impressed by the elegance and cleanliness throughout their ger, this in a world where there is neither running hot water nor labor-saving machines.



VII. 71 Kokenai. Baga Oigor drainage. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

In addition to the Saipulda clan, we became friendly with a remarkable person, Kokenei (VII.71), and his large family. I mentioned that we came to call Kokenei the "camel man," with great affection: he, like Saipulda, possessed a marked dignity and grace as well as a mastery of the dying art of camel handling. One of the first people we ever met in that valley, in 1994, was Kokenei's oldest daughter, riding a Bactrian camel with the ease and confidence of a steppe princess. Her name was

Aigul, and at that time she was perhaps ten years old, but she clearly had been taught, as were all the Kokenei children, how to handle camels (VII. 72). Year after year we watched Aigul grow into a young woman, until she finally left to marry a man in Kazakhstan, where—we heard—she became a teacher. In that respect Aigul represented one of the ways in which young people could find their way up in the world: Kazakhstan represented a much richer country with far more opportunity. How Aigul's experience worked out in the long run, we do not know. I have frequently thought how extraordinary it would be if we could meet Aigul again…

VII. 72 Aigul, daughter of Kokenei. Baga Oigor valley. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Within the Oigor Gol drainage, there were other Kazakh families with whom we became acquainted. All were large, and all were dependent on the health and strength of their sons. The boys, after all, were the ones who would carry on the lineage and maintain the herds of animals. They would bring their wives into the household, while the girls would marry out and frequently end in a distant valley, destined to a life centered on child rearing and maintaining the household. The center of the household, however, was always the parents. If one or both became sick or injured, existence became much more challenging. In one ger in the Oigor valley we met a man whose wife had apparently lost the use of her legs. She was a young and beautiful woman; but doomed to

almost total dependency on her clearly loving husband, she would become a burden to the household rather than an essential help. This meeting left us both troubled, acutely aware of the fragility of life in this remote region of the world. In my memory, her husband has always remained "the kind man."

During the period of socialism, all the children were sent into towns for at least a few years of study, returning only at special holidays and in the late spring and summer months. With the end of socialism in the early 1990s, this situation changed and in different ways. Children of poorer families were less often sent to schools, and indeed, many of the community schools simply ceased to exist. On the other hand, with the advent of Turkish funding and a renewed interest in the Muslim faith, we began to see religious schools (madrassa) and small mosques even in small sum centers. With that influx of outside support, a lucky few young men and women began to get a good education, one that even prepared them to move into the larger, urbanized Mongolian cities or even abroad. An even more fortunate few would be sent to study in Kazakhstan or Turkey. In this way, we found, the Kazakhs had a kind of lifeline out of poverty that was not to be found among the Uriankhai. On the other hand, young Kazakhs were no longer learning the Mongolian language. We could not help but wonder how the loss of a common national language and of the most educated and energetic young people would ultimately affect the life of the family and its herding existence. That loss together with the destruction of the environment suggested the encroachment of a troubling future.

Over the years we returned to the Baga Oigor valley, we rarely experienced any unpleasant encounter. However, in our first year we were camping one night in the Khar Yamaa valley in the only place we could find for all our tents. During the night a small band of drunken young Kazakhs came aggressively on our campsite wanting to know what we were doing there. Fortunately, one of our assistants—Ochikhuyag—had been trained as a police office, but he also had the personality and demeanor of a peacemaker. That situation ended quietly.

In all the years we worked in the field, I recall only one uncomfortable experience. One day I was resurveying a broad slope above the Baga Oigor valley. Usually, I would be able to see someone coming from a distance and gauge whether I should retreat into a less visible location or not. In this case, I did not see the young horseman until it was too late. He indicated an interest in something other than scientific research. I put an end to that by a well-placed rock hurled against his horse's flank: off galloped the young man, and I continued my work. Other than that little incident, our relations with the local herders were calm. Since someone was always in camp—Olga our cook or Nicolai our driver—we had no worries about things disappearing. True, a wrench that Nicolai had left on the bumper of his truck walked away, and the old man's dog stole our toothpaste. But those were not serious losses.

Since the population of Bayan Ölgiy is primarily Kazakh, we had regular encounters with other Kazakhs outside the valleys of the Oigor basin. There was one encounter the memory of which always makes me

smile. In 2005, during our second project, we were heading south along the Sagsay Gol toward a site that sounded extremely interesting. It was the time of *naadam* in Bayan Ölgiy—the festival that happens every summer all over Mongolia and features contests in the manly arts of archery, wrestling, and horse racing. Naadam also offers a fine opportunity for people to come together and eat, socialize, barter, and just enjoy a break from their herding labors. We heard there was to be a naadam festival south of the *sum* center of Altai. Since the location was along the way to our destination on the upper Sagsay, we headed there and enjoyed walking around, watching the events, and trying not to be too conspicuous, even though there were certainly no other foreigners at the festival.

It seems, however, that one gentleman of some importance, quite indignant and red in the face, decided we had to explain ourselves: what were we doing there and what kind of permission did we have? Since our friend, guide, and driver, Bayanda, had already disappeared into the ger of one of his acquaintances, we were left on our own; and since I was the one with more language capabilities than Gary, the angry gentleman decided that I had to explain our purpose. Fortunately, in the gathering crowd there was a young girl with a slight smattering of English who took it upon herself to be our guide and "translator." She explained that this important gentleman was "the Minister of Rocks," which probably meant that he was somehow involved with environmental protection. The Minister, obviously quite incensed, insisted that I step aside with him and our translator. I wish I had a photograph of the ensuing scene: the Minister and I face to face, my young translator right at my side, valiantly trying to handle the language. Forming a tight circle around us, were about eight young boys on horseback, with the heads of both the boys and their horses leaning in to listen intently to the discussion. It was all I could do to keep from laughing, but I controlled myself and tried to explain who we were and why we were there. Somehow, with the help of my young friend, I assuaged the Minister's anger and turned to the proven sign of good intent: taking his picture…of him alone, his family, and his horses! We were true to our word: the next summer Dagys helped us find the Minister's summer encampment and the man himself at the west end of Chigirtein Nuur. That, of course, led to airak and eating and yet more photography as a sign of our friendship.

Despite the more elaborate celebrations in Ulaanbaatar, Olgiy, and even Tsengel, the best naadam we ever had in Mongolia took place in the upper Tsagaan Gol, with all our Uriankhai friends from that upper valley. Visiting, eating, and drinking koumiss marked the day, and instead of contests in archery, riding, and wrestling, the primary competition involved the children in a tug-o-war (VII. 73).

VII. 73 Naadam, upper Tsagaan Gol: children playing tug-of-war. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

In 2008, we were trying to find a crossover route between Chigirtein Gol and Tsagaan Asgatyn Gol without having to make a huge loop to the north. With our skillful driver, Dagys, at the wheel of his OAZ, we headed north on a barely visible track above Khoit Bardam Gol and then west around the high lake Khar Nuur. At that point our track dwindled away into a sea of tundra, forcing us to stop. Gary and Dagys walked down to a distant ger to ask directions. They were told to just continue northwest to a locale known as Uzyn Asha. I think I have rarely been as nervous as during that drive: our vehicle had to negotiate the soft earth above melting permafrost, sliding from one unseen boulder to another, with no end in sight and certainly no sign of any help for a stranded vehicle. In the meantime, our sweet cook, the wife of Dagys, was having a meltdown: too many mosquitoes, too much stress in our travel.

Our route finally opened onto a broad basin of tundra at the edge of which was the large encampment of an obviously well-off household (VII. 74). This was the summer pasture of a remarkable man, Dakei Akkazy (VII. 75) and his four married sons. Akkazy was large and powerfully built, obviously proud of his flocks and his family. He was also the holder of a coveted national recognition as Herder of the Year. Our time there at Uzyn Asha was short, but the impression it left on me was clear. Akkazy had brought his hundreds of animals (sheep, goats, yak, horses, and a few camels) up to this high pasture from his winter habitation to the east, near Buyant. In coming up to this high basin, Akkazy had found unusually rich pasture, seemingly unlimited in extent. His only concern here were wolves, which helped to explain the many dogs in the encampment and the care with which the family enclosed their small animals at night. But it was not hard

to see here another example of a situation we found throughout mountainous Bayan Ölgiy: in expanding their flocks to enlarge the family's wealth, the herders were going ever higher into fragile pasture, and in the process hastening its ultimate ruin.

VII. 74 Morning at Akkazy's encampment. The furrowed ground indicates that under the tundra growth is melting permafrost. Uzyn Asha. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

VII. 75 Akkazy and his oldest son, Oskar, joined us for morning tea above his encampment. Uzyn Asha. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

For many years of our travels to Ölgiy one of the first people we would encounter was Darkhen. A physically strong man with a vigorous personality, Darkhen was responsible for directing the planes in and out of the small airstrip at Olgiy. In the past he had served in the Russian Air Force in Kazakhstan and thus knew both aircraft and Russian very well. Darkhen was one of those people you can meet in any corner of the world who impress one as self-confident and competent. He was also very friendly and seemed to take a special shine to me. Year after year, Darkhen was our official "greeter" and "sender-off" at the Ölgiy airport. On several occasions, he helped us through some awkward moments: braving the chaotic lines at the airport, helping us drag our baggage to check-in through a mass of pushing students trying to get seats on the plane back to Ulaanbaatar for the university year. Within a primitive system and physical setup, it was a great relief to see Darkhen. His presence somehow assured me that immediate problems could be solved but that, also, our Altai world was not really changing too fast. I confess that when we stopped going back to Olgiy, I felt guilty that I could not explain to Darkhen our permanent absence.

There were several other Kazakh Mongols who enriched our experiences and our scientific projects in Bayan Ölgiy. The most important such individual was Ayatkhan Atai. Atai was an expert mountaineer and one of the guiding visionaries in the development of the Altai Tavan Bogd National Park and in the Mongol Altai Nuruu Protected Area. Quiet and undemonstrative, Atai seemed to have believed that our project to inventory surface archaeology was serious and useful. As a result, he guided us to many places and monuments that we would otherwise never have known about or seen. It was he, also, who connected us with his brother Dagys, who became our excellent driver and guide.

Atai struck me as a man caught between the life of a herder in Bayan Ölgiy and that of an educated, more worldly individual. As a committed mountaineer, he had climbed all the Tavan Bogd peaks, as well as the highest peak in the Russian Altai, Belukha, in addition to peaks in the Tien Shan and Pamir. Atai seemed to know all the valleys and rivers of Bayan Ölgiy, as if they were part of his personal landscape, and he was deeply committed to the preservation of both the natural and cultural heritage of the region.

Among the remarkable monuments to which Atai sent us were several Turkic image stones, which we would never have found otherwise, and which had not up to then ever been reported. One was a beautifully carved figure at the far end of a large complex of archaeology along Khovd Gol. When we finally found the stone, the late afternoon sun picked out the fine detail of his hair, clothing, hands, and implements (VII. 76). The silence with which the figure stood before a broken altar, a libation cup in his right hand, his left touching his sword, and his steady gaze toward the east were enough to silence us for a moment, drawing us back into a world of 1200 years ago.

VII. 76 Image stone. Turkic period. Khovd Gol. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

I have already mentioned these image stones, but I should add something more here. They are found throughout the mountains and valleys of the Sayan and Altai regions and beyond into Central Asia. Dating from the sixth through the ninth centuries, they commemorate unknown Ashina Türks who lived and died in these mountains. Throughout much of the range where they have been found and particularly in the former Soviet lands, these figures have been broken and plowed under or pulled from their original sites to be placed in museums or simply discarded. Some of the images are beautifully rendered while many others are admittedly crude, but all derive a certain power from their settings.

In the Sayan and Altai regions, these image stones are always male, they are always found within or just on the east side of a stone altar. Each faces the east and raises a cup to his chest, as if he were making an offering to an unseen deity. With his left hand each figure grasps the hilt of a sword hanging from his belt.

When we first undertook our projects in the Altai Mountains, I was not particularly interested in Turkic image stones: they belonged to an historical period much later than the Bronze and early Iron Ages that interested me. However, as I became focused on the interconnection of monuments and landscape, and as we began to record an increasing number of the stones, my intellectual curiosity was aroused. This interest was impelled, also, by the recognition that some image stones were being pulled up and transported elsewhere: to schools, to a local museum in Ölgiy, and even (most unfortunately) to Ulaanbaatar, where they all ended up looking either at a blank wall or in the wrong direction, far distant from their clan lands. Turkic image stones in our study area had been extensively documented by two Mongolian archaeologists, but those they had recorded were either well known or located in the eastern half of the aimag. Throughout our years surveying for rock art and surface monuments, we had repeatedly come upon image stones that had not been recorded; so, I decided to note and document as many as I could. In this endeavor, Dagys was a great resource: as he had driven about the countryside for years, he had noted stones that had not been recorded. He took us to a number that involved some very risky driving, but each such find felt like a worthwhile achievement, as if we had documented yet another point in Bayan Ölgiy's ancient cultural history.

VII. 77 Pass southwest of Chigirtein Nuur, looking to the mountains at the Chinese border and the basin of Elt Gol. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Among the image stones to which Atai directed us, the most remarkable were in the valley of Elt Gol, a small river that flows south out of Songiintyn Uul to the Chinese border. For me, their significance lay not so much in the excellence of their carving as in the beauty of their hidden valley. To get there we had to find our way around Chigirtein Nuur (past the encampment of the Minister of Rocks), and then up and over a high pass, where we came into a very different landscape: lush grass, scattered forests, intense green (VII. 77). The further we descended toward the Chinese border, the heavier became the vegetation of tall grasses, sedges, and wildflowers. Trying to find the image stones was a considerable challenge, but after long searching over a terrible track we came upon a beautiful side valley, covered with grass and flowers. Within this mass of almost impenetrable vegetation, we could see three stones: one standing, one leaning, and one fallen (VII. 78). Within their setting, they were certainly among the most beautiful stones we had yet seen. But the mosquitoes and black flies were also unbearable. It was all I could do to convince the others to stay through the night so we could photograph them in morning light. That evening we climbed a high ridge to get away from the bugs, and the next morning we left as soon as it was possible (VII. 80).

VII. 78 Three image stones, standing and fallen. On the right is a single figure, and in the center-left are visible a standing grey stone and (not visible) a fallen white stone. Elt Gol drainage. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

VII. 79 Two of the three image stones, another view. Elt Gol drainage. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

VII. 80 Esther and Merei trying to escape the bugs. The view here is to the much drier landscape in the northeast. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Yet another lover of Turkic archaeology was Batarzhav, an educator and administrator from Ulaan Khus sum (VII. 81). Despite his name, Batarzhav was a Kazakh, with an amateur's interest in the Turkic image stones that dot Bayan Ölgiy. In his professional life, Batarzhav was an official, but his passion was his own Turkic tradition, and especially the Turkic image stones of his region. With his guidance, we were able to locate and document many images that had not been reported by earlier researchers as well as several stones that were simply sinking into the earth and oblivion.

VII. 81 Batarzhav and a Turkic figure in the valley of Sogoogiin Gol. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

I HAVE SPOKEN AT LENGTH ABOUT SOME of our friends in the Kazakh community, and especially of those in the Oigor and Sogoogiin Gol valleys. Now I want to return to our Uriankhai friends in Tsagaan Gol. When we first went into that valley to survey for rock art, it seemed to be deserted. Because of the long and high nature of the Tsagaan Gol valley, the herders were at that time much higher in the valley with their flocks. One day early in our 1996 season, Gary and I were working on the documentation of the rich rock art of Khar Chuluut, a low, rocky ridge in the middle valley. We were distracted by the advance of a caravan of Bactrian camels carrying the belongings of a large family. When they came up to our location, we were able to engage them on a somewhat primitive level and found out that they were Uriankhai who had traveled from north-central Mongolia back to what they considered their homeland, the Tsagaan Gol valley. And this is where they intended to settle and stay. In the years that followed we would come to know this group of herders and many other Uriankhai (or, as we then called them, Tuvyns).

VII. 82 Our camp on the right bank of Tsagaan Gol, 1996. It was here that we first met Mantai. Our cook tent is the grey, sodden structure second from the right. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

But the real introduction to this group of herders was through a man named Mantai. In that same year, we had set up camp on the edge of the river where old moraines on the south and west sides protected us (somewhat) from the cold winds that came down from the passes to the west. The weather that year was cold and wet, and our camp was often a soggy retreat constantly threatened by snow (VII. 82). One particularly unpleasant evening, some of us were sitting in the cook tent (itself a clammy structure, constantly threatening to collapse) when we heard the splashing of a horse crossing the river, announcing an approaching rider. Within seconds, the door of the tent was pushed open, and a tall, thin man dressed in a silk *deel* entered. He was wet and obviously very cold, so we offered him some of the tea we were enjoying and something to eat.

VII. 83 Mantai in 2008, the last year we saw him. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

True to the manners of these herders, our unexpected guest refused the food but accepted the tea with alacrity. We quickly learned that his name was Mantai and that he was returning from a long journey on horseback to accompany his daughter to Ölgiy from where she was going to fly to Ulaanbaator to study to be a naturopath. To appreciate the efforts of Mantai and his daughter, it should be remembered that our location was approximately 120 km. from Olgiy and getting there involved crossing the Khovd (no bridge), the Sagsay (with a bridge), and riding over several mountain passes. The trip down to Olgiy went well, apparently, and his daughter was able to board her plane. But on the return, Mantai ran into cold rain; hence his realization that he might find some brief respite in our camp. Nonetheless, after some talk and tea drinking, Mantai departed to ride further in the wet darkness up the valley to his ger encampment.

As brief as was our initial meeting with Mantai, it was the foundation of a friendship Gary and I were able to develop over many years. By the standards of Mongolian herders, Mantai was an educated man. He had worked with Russians in central Mongolia and through that association had acquired both a smattering of Russian and considerable knowledge of and interest in the larger world. He had also developed an unspecified lung problem from working in the Russian-run mines. Mantai, his wife Shubun, his two sons Batsukh and Boldsukh,

and his daughters Namsuren and Hansuren, had a summer encampment quite high in the valley, along a stream known as Dydyg, and a winter encampment where another stream, the Tydyg, joins the upper Tsagaan Gol (Tsagaan Salaa) from the north.

VII. 84 Mantai and his then young sons, Batsukh and Boldsukh. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Mantai was a wiry, strong man but his extreme thinness reflected his earlier illness. He said that he and his family returned to the Tsagaan Gol valley for the water that came from springs at the base of Shiveet Khairkhan. I don't know if that water really did have some special curative powers, but to us it seemed clean and pure, and very thirst quenching. Mantai had an impressive awareness of the world beyond Mongolia, and he even tried to stay current on news brought to the valley through a small, black and white television on which he could pick up programs broadcast from Kazakhstan. Unlike his Kazakh neighbors in the Oigor valley, Mantai enjoyed the clear mare's milk known as *arkhi* as well as Mongolian vodka when he could get it. He had a remarkable ability to ride his horse at a good clip even while he was quite in his cups. Gary and I have a vivid memory of watching Mantai canter across the upper valley, swaying in his saddle, his horse completely confident of where and how to go. We always said that Mantai could ride better drunk than most people could sober. He was a dear man and a good friend. Sadly, sometime before our last return to the upper valley in 2012, Mantai succumbed to the disease that had claimed him in the mines.

One incident remains bound in my memory to Mantai's younger son, Boldsukh.

He was a person of uncommon gentleness and was developing into a fine herder; but he also seemed prone to small disasters. Boldsukh was the one whose truck foundered in a hole when he was crossing the Tsagaan Salaa; but he was also the one who carefully, over a three-day period, disassembled the engine, dried all the parts, and reassembled it so that the truck was quite drivable. An incident I recall most particularly associated with Boldsukh had to do with horse riding. Ordinarily we did not use horses in our work. Mongolian animals are rather feisty creatures and trying to use them as we moved up and down the slopes would have entailed the responsibility of constantly having to secure them. We had seen more than a few young men or women racing down the valley, trying to recapture their disobedient horses. Moreover, being on a horse put us too far above the material we had to document and analyze.

One day, however, when we were visiting Mantai's encampment, Boldsukh invited us and Olga for a horse ride high up onto the slopes of Tavan Bogd…not for work, just for pleasure. All went well until Olga's horse bolted, ran into mine, which promptly reared up, and I went over hard onto a large outcrop. I had been carrying my GPS Garmin over my chest, and the impact of the instrument on my ribs cracked three. Beyond that, the pain I was experiencing was so bad that Gary was afraid I had broken a hip or a femur. Poor Boldsukh! He did not know what to do: there are no mountain rescue teams to call, no emergency helicopters available, and there was no way I would be able to get back up on a horse…nor did I have any desire to do so. There was nothing to be done but for Boldsukh to take our horses and for me to try to hobble back down the mountain, leaning heavily on Gary and with the encouragement of Olga. Fortunately, with forced movement, my mobility slowly increased, and we were able to creep down a distance of perhaps three kilometers to Mantai's encampment. Once there, I was helped into the ger, itself warmed by a hot hearth. Resting on one of the cots, I gradually became filled with a great feeling of calm and well-being: the sound of voices outside, the heat in the ger, and the steady rhythm of Tseveendorj's snoring as he lay on the floor, sleeping off too much vodka!

There is a sequel to this tale. Dear Olga believed firmly in an old Siberian cure for whatever might ail a person. This is a concoction made from soaking gauze strips in petrified bat dung (*mummio*), which she insisted on wrapping around my chest cavity to alleviate the pain from the broken ribs. I'm not at all certain that the curative powers of bat dung are recognized in modern medicine, but I so appreciated Olga's attentiveness that I willed myself into some degree of improvement over the next few days. Of course, I had to live with broken ribs for the rest of the season, but they eventually healed. The deep bruising of my body did not disappear for years. So, who knows? Perhaps mummio was the secret to my recuperation.

Our visits with local inhabitants in the Tsagaan Gol valley happened in a variety of ways, some accidental, some planned. Frequently herders out looking after their flocks or heading up or down the valley would stop in our camp for tea and a short visit. In times of bad weather, those visits in our camp or in their encampments could be longer and

involve more substantive discussions. In 2000, the weather was especially unpleasant and occasioned several non-workdays. On Gary's birthday (August 12), we woke to a heavy, cold rain with snow falling on the surrounding ridges. Since it was too unpleasant to work, we decided to spend the day visiting Mantai's encampment. With Tseveendorj, we drove up the Tsagaan Salaa to a point opposite the Dydyg Gol flowing down from a small turquoise lake called Khölgöl, and there we were met by Mantai's sons and horses to ferry us over the river. The river was heavy and white, flowing up to the horses' bellies. We spent the next several hours at Mantai's encampment, drinking milk tea (black tea mixed with yak butter) and eating *bourzak* (small fried breads) with *kaimak*, and a variety of dried cheeses. These foods are the same as those we would find in a Kazakh household, but surrounded by the warmth of Mantai's family they tasted especially good. On August 13, we again woke to rain, snow, and cold. On that day, Olonbayar, his youngest son, and Mantai and his two sons came for a visit. On that occasion, Olonbayar brought marmot meat to Tseveendorj, and Mantai brought us all mutton. In general, Kazakhs do not like marmot meat, but Mongols do, perhaps because of its rich fat.

On both visits with the families of Mantai and Olonbayar, assisted by Tseveendorj, we had wide-ranging conversations, which I will try to summarize in the next few pages, quoting from my notes:

Mantai had two sons, Batsukh and Boldsukh (Bora). As is typical in the families of herders, the sons will stay with the family to help with the animals. As they marry, their wives will join the family and the encampment will grow accordingly. That kind of collaboration is essential as parents get older and need more assistance both within the ger and in maintaining their herds.

Mantai also had two daughters, but here the pattern is rather different: the girls are sent off to study and frequently become teachers in the aimag schools. The oldest daughter, Hansuren, was studying naturopathy in Ulaanbaatar. This focus developed from her interest in the medicinal value of plants that she gathers in the mountains. The second daughter, Namsuren, had not yet left the home, perhaps because she suffered from a thyroid problem that has afflicted many inhabitants of the Altai. The herders believe that this affliction is the result of Chinese nuclear testing in western Xinjiang province. [In fact, many people living in western Mongolia have been diagnosed with thyroid problems, most likely because of the nuclear contamination brought down in the water from the glaciers separating Mongolia from northern China.] Namsuren was a lovely young woman with the face and quiet manner of a Bodhisattva…which is what we ended by calling her to ourselves. In the years that we worked there, we saw that Hansuren married a Tuvyn from Buyant and moved away from her family, while Namsuren stayed. We wondered if her sickness would preclude her marrying, in which case she would remain with the family.

VII. 85 Mantai's summer encampment, upper Tsagaan Gol. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Within Mantai's encampment were five families, all related through Shubun, Mantai's wife. One of Shubun's relatives, a man named Oktiabr'—in recognition of the Soviet Revolution—was educated in electrical engineering in the Soviet Union. As a result, Oktiabr' had a good and responsible job in the sum center of Tsengel. He was a pleasant, intelligent individual whom we frequently enjoyed meeting as he rode up the valley to Mantai's place. It was through Oktiabr' and Shubun's brother, Bat-Zhargal, that we learned the names given geographic locales by the Uriankhai in Tsagaan Gol.

VII. 86 Olonbayar and Malchin Tsmotai. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Olonbayar and his wife, Malchin Tsmotai (VII. 86), were well-off herders who had been honored by the Mongolian government as Herders of the Year. They had several hundred head of sheep and goats, many yaks and horses, and several camels. Mantai and Shubun were not so wealthy, but they, also, had many animals. The two men seem to have shared a particular respect in the valley. Both were blessed with strong sons and daughters; but in the winter of 2012, Olonbayar's oldest and most capable son, Oniam-Ochir (VII. 87), was killed in a winter hunting accident… Such a loss, of course, is devastating at any time, but especially in a situation when the person who has died was to take the place of the father within an environment where one is utterly dependent on the physical well-being of one's offspring. When we last saw Olonbayar, his wife had died, and he seemed quite aged, almost broken. By then, Mantai had died, his wife Shubun was ailing, and their sons Batsukh (VII. 88) and Boldsukh were the leaders of the family encampment. Both sons had married and were growing beautiful families of their own.

VII. 87 Oniam-Ochir dressed in the robe and belt indicating his status as a national archery champion. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Like the Kazakhs of Baga Oigor, the Uriankhai of Tsagaan Gol move two or three times a year. In the summer months they take their flocks up to the higher elevations where their encampments are portable ger. In autumn they move down to lower elevations where they live in snug wooden houses nestled up against the cliffs; these sites also serve as spring dwellings. Many herders have lower, winter dwellings or they simply move down into a bag or sum center, leaving their animals in the mountains in the charge of sons.

VII. 88 Batsukh, Mantai's oldest son, his wife Saraa, and their son Turrö, in winter. Upper Tsagaan Gol. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

The fleece from the sheep and the hair from goats are annually sold either to traveling traders or it is taken down into Olgiy. In the early fall the animals intended for market are driven down into Olgiy. The animals the herders intend to keep for their own food are slaughtered in the fall, cleaned, and then hung in the dry, cold air where the meat is preserved until it is needed. Each family spends the summer months milking their sheep, goats, and yaks to make the cheese and butter that will last them through the winter. Horses are milked for airakh, or koumiss. Once a year, the Uriankhai in the Tsagaan Gol valley, send a truck down into Olgiy to buy about 500 kilos of flour per family. They also buy tea and sugar in the towns, but the rest of their food comes from the milk and meat of their animals.

For this reason, meat is rarely eaten before the cold months. Similarly, although the herders buy light clothing and canvas for the ger in the towns or from traveling traders, they are dependent on sheep wool for their felted mats, covers, and ger coverings, and on yak hair for making ropes. As in the Kazakh households, the Uriankhai spend much of the dark period of winter sewing, weaving, making felt carpets, and preparing ropes and other materials from yak hair. Although this is basically women's work, we saw many men who participate in those activities, just as they also helped around the hearth.

VII. 89 A visit with traveling traders, 1994. Uvs aimag. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

According to Mantai, at that time within Tsengel sum—the administrative region inclusive of the Tsagaan Gol valley—the population was 80% Kazakh and 20% Uriankhai (Tuvyn). Within the upper Tsagaan Gol, however, there were only two extended Kazakh families; they lived at the far end of Khar Salaa valley right under the glaciers of Tsagaan Khairkhan Uul and Rashaany Ikh Uul (VI.90). We also became friendly with these families, led by a man named Amman, who was temporarily the "superintendent" of the valley for the *bag* administration. Both Mantai and Olonbayar said that the Uriankhai and Kazakhs in the valley got along well, but intermarriage between the two groups was unusual and not encouraged.

On a particularly wet day in 2001 we headed up the Khar Salaa valley to visit Amman and his family. The marshy, tundra-like terrain made the 12 km trip in a vehicle hard and long (1 ¼ hrs. each way). In this encampment there are also a few Uriankhai families living together with the Kazakhs, and there seemed to be a real collaboration between the two groups. While we were there, several young Uriankhai from the valley arrived to help shear the sheep. Amman says that during the winter, his horses and yaks pasture on the high slopes above Khar Salaa. At that time, he had about 300 sheep and goats, which in winter descend with the family to their winter dwelling lower on the Khar Salaa. His three camels take themselves down the Tsagaan Gol valley and return, on their own, in the spring.

VII. 90 Kazakh encampment, far end of Khar Salaa. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Both Mantai's and Olonbayar's families had been in the valley for several generations, but before that their places of origin were unclear. Early in the 1930s, many of the Uriankhai inhabitants of the region had fled with their flocks into Russian Kazakhstan to avoid the repressive regime of Khorloogiin Choibalsan (b. 1895; in office 1929–1952), a man sometimes referred to as the Mongolian Stalin. There, however, they also faced forced collectivization and ethnic repression and subsequently fled into the Chinese Altai. The advent of communism in China again created severe ethnic pressures for both the Kazakhs and Uriankhai, and many moved east again, over the mountains into Bayan Ölgiy. Others came to the valley, as I mentioned earlier, from the Khentii Mountains in northcentral Mongolia; presumably these people had originated, also, in the Altai.

VII. 91 Small oboo, with stone tower and branches decorated with cloth strips. View east down Tsagaan Gol. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

We asked Mantai about contemporary religious beliefs among the Uriankhai. He answered briefly that some people were still drawn to shamanism, especially in times of sickness. Before 1936 there was a lamasery further down the valley (perhaps at the present bag of Tsagaast Nuur), but it was destroyed during the repression of Buddhism under Choibalsan's administration. The ubiquitous oboo along ridges and at passes, frequently festooned with new strips of cloth or sticks, suggest that the belief in indwelling spirits of the natural world is still widespread, whether it reflects a more organized religious tradition or not (VII. 91). So, also, the boulders and walls one sees about the valley (as elsewhere throughout the countryside) crowned with the heads of animals intimate an ancient belief: the animal heads are given back to the spirit world so that the spirits, in turn, will increase the herders' flocks (VII. 92).

VII. 92 Large boulder on which have been placed the heads of horses, sheep, and goats. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

During our time in the Tsagaan Gol valley, we liked to climb up the steep sidewalls to get a view of the whole extent of the valley up to Tavan Bogd. One Sunday in 2001, after our weekly sauna, lunch, and a long rest, Gary and I crossed the Khar Salaa and headed up the steep slopes on the south side of the valley. Climbing up through small willow growth to the high slope, we reached an elevation of 2580 m. From the top spread out a full view of the upper river valley, the south slope of Shiveet Khairkhan, and the high mountains of Tavan Bogd (VII. 93).

VII. 93 View of the Khar Salaa valley and beyond to Tavan Bogd. The river valley clearly reflects the path of ancient glaciers. On the right is the long western slope of Shiveet Khairkhan. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

The most memorable such adventure also occurred in that field season and involved climbing to the top of Shiveet Khairkhan. Ordinarily that mountaintop is off-limits to anyone from outside the valley community. Just as the mountain is considered sacred, so also it was prohibited to hunt the flock of more than one hundred ibex that lived there at that time. I think that because of Mantai's generosity, we were "grandfathered" into the valley population, at least for that day. And this was a long day. Gary, Igor Sliusurenko (our Russian assistant), Olga, Tseveendorj, and I left our camp at about 8:30 a.m. to meet Mantai and members of his family at the far western end of Shiveet Khairkhan at about 11 a.m. Together we made an offering to the spirit of the mountain by drinking a small amount of airakh, and then headed up, all of us on foot except for Tseveendorj, who rode like a Mongolian prince on a very strong steed.

VII. 94 Climbing the western slope of Shiveet Khairkhan. Igor is on the left, and Olga and I are behind. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Shiveet Khairkhan turned out to be a steep climb, and we spread out over the slope, our paces reflecting our varied strengths. From the western approach, the mountain has three false summits involving a long hike over a rocky and precipitous trail, and beyond a slow trudge over a long slope of tundra vegetation. At the top of that rise, Mantai, Boldsukh, and Mantai's young nephew stopped to prepare a meal of *khorkhog*.

VII. 95 Mantai preparing khorkhog. In the background is visible the upper stream of Tsagaan Salaa, the upper tributary of Tsagaan Gol. This river flows down from the largest glacier on Tavan Bogd, the Potanin. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

The rest of us continued to trudge up to the long, sloping summit, itself covered with bizarre jutting slabs of stone, and presenting a weird landscape suggesting eons of snow, glacier, and wind (VII. 96). The elevation at the large oboo at the top of the mountain is 3349 m. The chaotic stone slabs and the distant views were stunning: to the west spread out the ridge of Tavan Bogd and to the north the slope of Shiveet Khairkhan fell precipitously into the deep canyon of Tsagaan Salaa.

VII. 96 View over the rocky summit of Shiveet Khairkhan, looking west to Tavan Bogd. The large glacier in the center-right is the Potanin. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

We spent several hours wandering around the rocky wilderness of the mountaintop, and then descended to the terrace where we had left Mantai and the others. By then we were very hungry and the *khorkhog* was ready. This is a traditional dish of mutton cooked on hot rocks in a cauldron. In our case, Mantai prepared it using a large metal container in which he and Boldsukh put red hot rocks topped by chunks of mutton seasoned with wild onions and salt. Most Westerners turn their noses up at mutton, but fresh and clean and cooked in this fashion, it is delicious. The meal was a perfect finish to the spectacular views; but as we ate, we saw how the clouds were rising over the mountains, becoming ever more threatening. By 7 p.m., when we headed down the mountain, a steady cold rain had begun to descend, and by the time we got back to camp we were all soaked. In fact, this rain was the beginning of what would be five days of rain, snow, and cold during which time we were able to accomplish little in terms of sustained work. We could not help but think that the gods were not pleased we had intruded on their sacred mountain.

VII. 97 On Shiveet Khairkhan. From the left: Gary, Boldsukh, Esther, Tseveendorj, Mantai, Olga, and Mantai's young nephew. Igor is reclining in the front. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

In 2007, we returned to Tsagaan Gol to work on surface archaeology, but Gary and I very much wanted to see Mantai and his family once again. Dagys was concerned that it would be hard to get out of the valley with the rivers in flood; it would mean crossing the river and navigating through a nasty, marshy patch on the left bank. Somehow, we made contact with Mantai's family and they urged us to come up to see them at the top of the valley. In my field book for that date, July 25, I noted:

"Cool, overcast, more weather on the way… we're to go up to Mantai's for an overnight, on horseback. Am I crazy, or what? … The long horse ride and crossing the Tsagaan Salaa on horseback is not to my liking. I promised Davina not to take any wild chances…"

Nonetheless, we prevailed on Dagys and went up to the camp of Rinchen, Mantai's brother-in-law, where we visited until Mantai arrived on his stallion, crossing the raging river as if it were a simple stream and bringing kaimak and koumiss for Gary and me, koumiss for Dagys. In my field book I noted:

> *We got caught up on news then…. Batsukh and Saraa have a little girl, Hansuren has married a very good Urianghai from Buyant…a man with good parents and 3 or 4 brothers. It sounds like a good family and as if Hansuren is very happy. Mantai seems to have thrived (in good part because of the tourist trade, I think). He has an*

OAZ, new ger for Hansuren, and a generator and refrigerator in his winter house. In that house he has 4 rooms, and one he rents out to winter tourists. Mantai doesn't seem to be worried about the lack of a hay harvest this year. He has, now, about 800 sheep and goats, 14 yaks, and 40 horses. This year he also bought two "young" camels—one 9 and the other 13. They can work well until 25-30 years old. Shubun… is well.…Mantai and his family contrast with the situation of Olonbayar. His beloved oldest son, a fine herdsman and hunter and a national archery champion, was killed the previous January in an avalanche. He and a friend had gone out to bring the yak closer in…the snow was too high…and they saw two foxes. The son shot one, but the shot set off an avalanche, which took him down…

We went down to see Olonbayar. He was a gracious host and his wife was obviously happy to see us. But she is clearly very ill. The two daughters seem to be doing most of the work in the yurt. One, Tungaa, is studying law in UB.…

That evening, Shubun and her daughters made booz[4] ("the best I've ever had"). The next day, we went with Namsuren and her husband further up the slope about 3 kms to a high, flower covered ridge, where we could see the whole Potanin glacier and four of the five largest peaks of Tavan Bogd (VII. 98). There we had a lunch of mutton, borzak, and yogurt before descending to the ger and meeting Dagys for our return down the mountain.

VII. 98 Our lunch spot above Mantai's encampment, view of the glaciers on Tavan Bogd. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

4 Booz is the Mongolian version of a meat-filled dumpling.

Seeing the family again, noting how Mantai's sons had grown to be responsible men, the ones who really managed the extensive herds of the encampment and fathers of their own growing families, made us acutely aware of the passing of time and of the finality of our farewells.

Looking back over my field books for 2007, I found notes that spoke vividly to what we saw in our last years in the Altai. On the night we stayed at Rinchen's encampment I spoke with Dagys about his impressions of the life we were finding in the upper Tsagaan Gol. He related to me that even Rinchen says there are too many animals for the available pasture. He and his five yurts have a total of 1,500 head of sheep and goats alone, and that doesn't include horses, yak, and camels. Rumor had it that the Park[5] authorities were saying that after this year (2007), yurts cannot be placed within the Park boundaries. This year, not only Rinchen but Mantai, Bat Zhargal, and Tserendash are all up within the Park itself. It was clearly visible to us that the animals had eaten down the grass and flowers from this high area, and that the yaks and goats were destroying the covering of arctic birch. Whole stretches of it were eaten down to bare twigs and looked as if dead. According to Rinchen, all medicinal plants have disappeared in this high region. Apparently, the people here refuse to acknowledge their part in the destruction of this amazing area. In my notes I added: looking at the state of the pasture, the huge size of the flocks, and the fact that they are pasturing animals up close to the glaciers…. all suggests the collapse of an ancient lifestyle within the next few decades, if not sooner.

We returned briefly to the upper valley in 2008 and at that time I made the following notes in my field journal:

…coming back up (the Tsagaan Gol) valley was good, but also (for me) very troubling. The valley is much drier than we have ever seen it. Where we were used to see grass and flowers…brown, brown. Didn't see anyone, either, but there are lots of new structures, testimony to expanding families and, possibly, to winter tourism. Our "pond" where we had our kitten friend (Koshka) is dried up, and there seems to be no water in the stream that comes down beside the beautiful "flying wolves" and stag panels. The first good water we found was at the Tygyd…that stream is still lovely and clear and cold, and there are some wildflowers… Gary is very happy to be back in the mountains. I am, too, but maybe feeling less real pleasure: the drought even up here is so pronounced…and the sight of a lone rider, at the base of Shiveet Khairkhan, leading a camel loaded with firewood…taken from that fragmentary forest on the north side of the mountain….says it all: wood to keep the tourists happy, everyone moved up too high in the valley with flocks too large. Can't help but feel that we are looking at "the end of time," or certainly at the end of a world that was rooted in the Bronze Age. ….

5 The Park is the Mongolian Altai Tavan Bogd Park, part of a projected transboundary protected zone.

In these pages I have tried to record some of the memorable experiences Gary and I had with friends we met along our way: Derbet, Kazakh, and Uriankhai. Throughout our time in Bayan Ölgiy, we found ourselves admiring and even feeling affection for so many of the people we met, women as well as men, children, and adults. Ending our projects meant leaving our friends, most certainly forever. The real loss came in the last years of our work in the Baga Oigor and Tsagaan Gol valleys when we returned and learned that dear friends had died: Saipulda and his brother and, most sadly, Kokenei; and Mantai with whom we had developed a sense of family connection. No doubt many others have long since passed, but we are left with shared, keen memories of those extraordinary seasons in the two large valleys.

VIII. 1 Running horse. Bronze Age. Tsagaan Gol. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

VIII.

Looking Back, Moving On

Long before I began this manuscript, I puzzled what to call it. "Autobiography" seemed more ambitious than what I envisioned and promised more delving into my own personal life than I cared to undertake. "Chronicle" would be incorrect since the events and experiences I wished to relate would not be in temporal order. As an account based on personal reminiscences, "memoir" was closer to what I wanted to say; but that word had a kind of discomforting pretension. Moreover, I had once read that a memoir was in many ways an elegy for one's past; and that perspective did not seem right. Even though I find myself thinking about our experiences in the Altai, sometimes with nostalgia, those memories remain vital and the source of pleasure, hardly the stuff of a personal elegy. In the end, perhaps the only word that fits what I wanted to write and what I have ended by writing is "account"—an account of my intellectual coming of age in the Mongolian Altai and of the extraordinary pleasure conferred by that experience.

These chapters have given me an opportunity to reconsider the trajectory of my life, to see where I began and where I ended, and to assess the value of what those years have held. I realize that my experience first in the Soviet Union and then in our projects in the Altai challenged me in ways I could never have imagined when I first began to study the art of the ancient nomads. At that time, I had no idea where this simple interest in the ancient nomadic world would take me. Overcoming my fears of venturing into an unknown and in some ways hostile land was a major first step. Once committed to field work in the Altai Mountains, organizing the projects and working within an international team forced me to think about problems I could have avoided if I had chosen another area of research. Taking the huge amount of material, gathered over twenty field seasons, and turning it into something useful for others: that has presented me with a sense of responsibility, but one that has also brought me great satisfaction.

I did not anticipate the challenges that would come from working with an international team and in a foreign language. Within the few years we surveyed in the Russian Altai, I began to understand the profound extent to which different languages carry with them greatly varying psychological responses to the same conditions. It is not simply the linguistic differences, of course, and the stubborn problems of communicating in a foreign language. More importantly, those linguistic differences reflect vastly different cultural backgrounds, varied assumptions based on deeply rooted experience, and starkly different understandings of gender and role. In both projects, the harsh conditions in which we lived and worked

added to the other challenges facing collegial relationships, but the first project was the most challenging in terms of language and culture. From the beginning of our collaborative projects in the Altai, I began to learn the pitfalls of head-on disagreement and generally managed to avoid that…but not completely: at the end of our first project in Mongolia (2004), it was no longer possible to ignore major differences in approach to the monuments, our work, our relative authority, and our publications.

These complexities were not unique to my relationships with our Russian and Mongolian colleagues. Even with Gary, we had to attend to the character of our interactions and learn to think about the way we handled basic communication. When one is trying to work collaboratively across a steep slope covered with vivid rock imagery but hampered by blowing snow, rain, and wind, patience can wear thin. But we were motivated to persevere by our mutual affection and by the joy of working together in a great adventure. With my colleagues, however, and most particularly with my Russian colleagues, that challenge was of a different order. Language and traditions of communication did not support the kind of negotiating techniques that Gary and I gradually learned, and with good success.

Within the first project, there was another major *gorilla* in the room—one that we could not discuss or "negotiate," but one that peered around the corner at the point of every major decision, especially those relating to the publication of our material. That gorilla (and I apologize for using that reference, since I have nothing against gorillas….) was the simple fact that I, a female, was working within an all-male team; and that I ended up the de facto lead person on that team and the lead author/editor of our joint publications. Over the years with that project, I learned very acutely how men don't like what they call "pushy women," i.e., those who are focused on a significant goal. With our second project, when I was also the lead researcher and author, we had no similar problems. Working with Gary and Jim, in the field or in the lab, was the source of tremendous intellectual stimulation. And my relationships with our driver/guides, most particularly with Dagys, were, I believe, collaborative and excellent.

When I look back at the published results of our work in the Altai, I feel considerable satisfaction that our collaborative work was worthwhile, that it has born fruit that will benefit future generations. This is true, also, of the assistance I have given the Mongolian government in the development of three proposals for UNESCO World Heritage Sites. As I said, one—relating directly to the great petroglyphic complexes we identified and documented—was accepted in 2010. A second, accepted in 2015, was not related to the Altai, but rather to Burkhan Khaldun and its surrounding sacred landscapes, in Khentii and Tuv aimags. The third, focused on the High Altai as a Cultural Landscape, is presently being considered by the appropriate bodies in UNESCO. For my work to preserve Mongolian heritage, in 2016 President Elbegdorj awarded me the Kublai Khan Gold Medal, the highest honor offered by the Mongolian Academy of Sciences.

VIII. 2 Oigor Gol in its flow past Kök Khötel, a small community visible in the center-right on the far side of the river. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

So much satisfaction I have derived from my Altai work… but none of this would have been possible, certainly not in the way I did it, without Gary. For those projects, in that remote and harsh land, I needed a true "mountain man", a person of uncommon stamina and common sense, but also someone with the eye and skills of an artist. In Gary I found that combination: a man who is totally comfortable in the rough conditions of the mountains, someone who prefers physical and intellectual challenges to a life of ease. I absolutely needed a superb photographer; without Gary I could not have afforded to hire such a person. Gary and I matched each other in the desire for discovery, in the willingness to go out yet again to try to re-find that one beautiful panel we had spied in the rain and to re-photograph it and its context in all lights; and in our intense pleasure in the power of that mountainous world. I needed someone who would take delight, with me, in the opportunity to become acquainted with people whose lives were so very different from our own. In short, Gary was an essential underpinning for what became an immense, multi-year adventure. And to be frank, he was also my bag man, my mountain doctor, my confidant and best friend when things got tough. I think you could say that I was very lucky.

Before I bring this account to a close, I need to acknowledge, again, our observation of the effects of global climate change on an area and people we came to know and love. As in other high-altitude regions of the world, the snow and ice fields of the Altai Mountains are being disproportionately impacted by warming temperatures. Less snowfall, more rapid melting of that precious resource, and the visible recession of glaciers up mountain slopes: these are all signs of a future natural and human disaster. The most immediate results, even to our eyes, appeared in the degradation of the high tundra and pastures

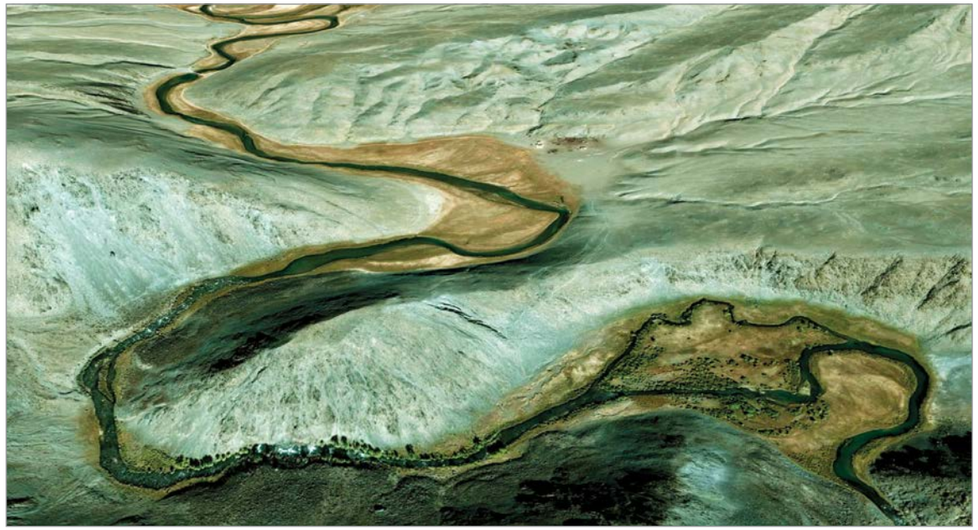
on which wild and domesticated animals depend. Much more treacherous, however, is the loss of river outflow in all directions. The Altai Mountains rise at the center of Eurasia, and their streams are a major lifeline into north China, Kazakhstan, and western Siberia. The whole of northwestern Mongolia is directly dependent on Khovd Gol, also flowing off Tavan Bogd. As temperatures rise and glaciers melt, a huge region covering Russia, Kazakhstan, China, and Mongolia will be deeply affected. I cannot minimize our concern here: for the world of our herder friends, for the world of the future. In this respect, this account is more than that; it is also an elegy for a disappearing way of life.

There is one last story I want to share before bringing this account to a close:

VIII. 3 Enclosed valley below Kök Khötöl. At the center of the photograph, like a large dike, is the escarpment blocking the river's flow. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

Swollen by the waters of the Baga and Shetya tributaries, Ikh Oigor flows through a tight canyon on the north side of the ridge Karaul Tarkhaty. Emerging from that narrow stretch, it is joined by Khar Yamaa to become Oigor Gol, a serpentine river flowing through its flood plain to the southeast (VIII. 2). As it passes the administrative center of Kök Khötöl, the Oigor approaches a deep canyon through which it will flow for approximately eight kilometers before emerging as the Sogoogiin Gol.

Just below Kök Khötöl, the river flows into a small, enclosed valley (VIII. 3) before abruptly twisting around an escarpment, first to the west and then east again and into a valley enclosed on all sides by high ridges (VIII. 5).



VIII. 4 The Oigor's flow through the enclosed valley, around the escarpment, and into a hidden valley, and then out again through a narrow canyon visible in the lower right corner. Google Earth.

VIII. 5 View over the escarpment and into the hidden valley. The river flows through the valley and disappears in the canyon in the upper center of the image, emerging approximately eight km to the southeast as the Sogoogiin Gol. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

In 2008, returning to Olgiy at the end of our field work, we stopped for our last camp in the enclosed valley below Kök Khötöl. Taking advantage of several hours before evening, Gary and I decided to explore the little valley to see where the river went. It was not possible, however, to follow the stream: the canyon into which it flowed was too narrow. So, we found an animal trail and climbed the escarpment to its ridge. Looking down we were astounded to see a hidden valley, green and lovely within the stony walls of the surrounding canyon, water flowing in several streams before joining again to snake back into a deep defile (VIII. 5). We walked along the top of the escarpment, peering down from several angles; but evening was coming, the light was fading, and we returned to camp. Early the following morning we left for our last trek into Ölgiy and our return home.

The following year I returned to Bayan Ölgiy with several Mongolian colleagues. Our purpose was to confirm details of management and location for the nomination we were preparing for the UNESCO World Heritage Site, "Petroglyphic Complexes of the Mongolian Altai". Our work completed, we were heading back to Ölgiy, so I suggested that we make our last camp in that same enclosed valley below Kök Khötöl. That evening I went out alone, wanting to see the hidden valley again, if only from the top of the escarpment and if only to confirm its reality. When I got there, seeing the valley as lovely as before, I decided to go down a steep animal trail to get into the valley itself. I confess to being rather nervous about doing this alone: the trail was steep, and if anything were to happen to me, nobody would be able to hear me call. But the desire to be in the valley rather than just look at it overcame my caution, and I started down, choosing my footing with great care. As I reached the floor of the green valley, I looked back to be sure I would find my return trail. To my amazement I saw a tall young rider coming down on a large white horse with the flowing mane of a stallion. The rider was as surprised as was I. We greeted each other and I stepped off the trail to let him pass; but when I returned to the track and looked to see where he had gone, he was already disappearing into the canyon at the far end of the valley—like an apparition, a dream. I watched and walked to the edge of the stream and then turned back to climb the trail and return to camp.

I've always wondered if that rider was real: he appeared so suddenly and disappeared so completely, within a valley where there were few signs of a human presence. Whether or not I dreamed this (and I am sure I did not…), with hindsight the experience emerges in my mind as a metaphor for the journey I had taken into worlds distant from that of my childhood. The valley had beckoned to me just as had another, yet unknown, world. My desire to reach that valley caused me to overcome uncertainty and fear, just as so much earlier my yearning for something different pulled me out of what could have been the comfortable life of a desk-bound academic.

Early in this account I spoke of my university studies in the art and culture of China, India, and Central Asia. Some people have thought that in turning away from the life of a Sinologist, I lost ground or even wasted time. That is not at all the case. Those years spent laboring over literary Chinese or trudging in imagination along the Silk Road were priceless components of my education. Throughout the succeeding years of field work and its related research, I had constant reason to consult the intellectual discipline I acquired from those early studies involving brushwork and the experience of space. In the field, confronted by the immensity of the Altai valleys and mountains, I was able to hone my understanding of human experience in a larger landscape. At the same time, I found myself increasingly looking for the hand of the artist or the sensibility of the builder. With time, my passion became the re-vitalization of an ancient world through its creative expression and within its own physical space.

It would be impossible for me to describe the importance of the Altai years for both Gary and me. That extended time stamped both of us forever, in the best of ways. On a more personal level, I feel that I finally found myself, the person I had always wanted to be without knowing where I was going or how I would get there. Looking back on the long trajectory of my life, I truly believe that there was a purpose to my early figurative wandering through China and Central Asia. Like an ancient traveler in an unknown land, I was trying to find my way, and I finally did.

VIII. 6 Riders and dogs crossing the upper Tsagaan Gol; waters in flood from the melting glaciers on Tavan Bogd. (Photo: Gary Tepfer)

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