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**Picture on the cover:**

*Skalne poslikave v Hekimdere pri vasi Çiçekli v okrožju İkizdere v provinciji Rize v Turčiji / Pitture rupestri a Hekimdere, vicino al villaggio di Çiçekli, nel distretto di İkizdere della provincia di Rize in Turchia / Hekimdere Rock Depictions near the village of Çiçekli in the İkizdere district of the Rize province in Türkiye (foto/photo: Okay Pekşen, 2022).*

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## A NEW ROCK ART AREA IN ANATOLIA: HEKIMDERE ROCK DEPICTIONS

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### *ABSTRACT*

*With the permission and support of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Türkiye, we conducted surveys for the first time in Rize. These surveys identified highly important rock depictions. Until now, depictions on rock made using painting methods have not been encountered in the Black Sea region. Painted rock arts are quite rare in Anatolia. The Hekimdere petroglyphs hold great significance for Anatolian history, as they represent a first in the region. The objective of this study is to provide a detailed introduction to the Hekimdere rock depictions, showcasing their similarities to Anatolian, Caucasian and Asian petroglyphs.*

*Key words: Anatolia, Türkiye, Rize, Ancient History, Rock Painting, Petroglyphs*

## UNA NUOVA AREA DI ARTE RUPESTRE IN ANATOLIA: LE Pitture rupestri di HEKIMDERE

### *SINTESI*

*Con il permesso e il sostegno del Ministero della Cultura e del Turismo della Turchia, abbiamo condotto per la prima volta delle indagini a Rize. Questi sopralluoghi hanno permesso di individuare dei dipinti su roccia di grande importanza. Finora, nella regione del Mar Nero non erano mai state rilevate raffigurazioni su roccia realizzate con metodi pittorici. Inoltre i dipinti su roccia sono piuttosto rari in Anatolia. I petroglifi di Hekimdere hanno un grande significato per la storia dell'Anatolia, poiché rappresentano una novità assoluta nella regione. L'obiettivo di questo studio è fornire un'introduzione dettagliata ai dipinti su roccia di Hekimdere, mostrando le loro somiglianze con i petroglifi e dipinti su roccia Anatolici, Caucasici e Asiatici.*

*Parole chiave: Anatolia, Turchia, Rize, storia antica, dipinti su roccia, petroglifi*

## INTRODUCTION

Petroglyphs (rock art), as silent witnesses of history, serve as “coded memories” and enduring efforts of societies to achieve immortality. They represent humanity’s endeavor to pass down its life, culture, beliefs, and relationship with the world and the divine from one generation to the next (McDonald & Clayton, 2016, 2 ff.). Petroglyphs, created through various methods, have been observed in numerous regions worldwide since prehistoric times. They can be considered visual representations of humanity’s attempts to classify individuals as good or bad, friend or foe, or protector, interpreting nature subjectively. In this regard, it is evident that every society forms a unique national culture by amalgamating archetypes derived from natural elements. Petroglyphs are the finest and oldest manifestations of expressing this national culture through distinctive depictions. They represent thousands of years of “unwritten means of communication”.

Although we regard petroglyphs as “unwritten means of communication”, identifying and dating them, even with modern techniques, remains highly challenging.

Some Anatolian rock art (petroglyphs) containing deciphered “Runic” inscriptions of Central Asian type have been associated with Central Asia. In Türkiye, examples such as Esatlı (Ordu-Mesudiye), Geyiklitepe (Kars-Kağızman), Dilli (Erzincan-Kemaliye), Güdül (Ankara), Bakırtepe (Artvin-Yusufeli) have Central Asian type “runic” inscriptions as well as depictions. These deciphered Central Asian “runic” inscriptions are of great importance for the dating and interpretation of rock art (Aytekin, 1999; Saltaoğlu, 2020).

However, dating unwritten examples created in vastly different periods and using diverse methods presents significant complexity and difficulty. The presence of layered depictions in the same area across different periods further complicates matters. Given the limitations of modern dating methods, dating suggestions often rely on comparisons with related settlements or similar archaeological finds. In this regard, the “Hekimdere”, the focus of this article, have been assessed through a comparison method alongside the dating of nearby settlements, as applying modern dating techniques is infeasible. The depictions of horses, horsemen, and the tree of life at Hekimdere exhibit striking similarities with Asian-Anatolian rock depictions (petroglyphs) in both subject matter and form. Furthermore, these depictions are among the benevolent and protective archetypes prevalent in Central Asian communities. Given their commonality in Asian-Anatolian rock depictions and their placement along known migration routes, it is plausible that they are linked to Central Asian societies. Across the geographic expanse of these migration routes, spanning from Mongolia to Anatolia, Azerbaijan, Iran, and even Eastern Europe, numerous areas have been identified and continue to be discovered (Baxşeliyev, 2003; Cəfərzadə, 1999; Faracova, 2009; Ganbold, 2022; Harut‘yunyan, 2022; Maksudov, 2019, 141–149; Martinov, 2013; Ranov, 2001, 122–151; Rogozhinskiy, 2011; Seyidov, 2017; Tashbayeva, 2001; Tokhatyan, 2015, 184–204). As the migration from Asia to Anatolia and Europe occurred over different periods and involved various tribes, it is reasonable to assume that rock paintings also varied in terms of technique and age (Fig. 1–2).

The Hekimdere, the focus of this article, contribute a new addition to the Anatolian rock depictions already identified in provinces such as Ankara, Artvin, Ardahan, Erzincan, Erzurum, Hakkari, Izmir, Kars, Ordu, and Van. They stand out as unique due to their location and construction methods. Situated within the borders of Rize province, İkizdere district, on the Anzer Plateau in modern Türkiye, these rock arts lie south of the Black Sea and northeast of Anatolia, spanning between 40°20'–41°20' north parallels. The Rize Mountains, running parallel to the Black Sea and merging with the Caucasus Mountains in the east, create a closed basin in the region. Originating from the North Anatolian Mountains, whose highest peaks reach 4,000 meters, numerous rivers carve deep valleys. Consequently, settlements have historically been established on valley floors, sloping plains, or plateaus more conducive to agriculture (Baltacı, 2010, 25). The Hekimdere, in particular, are situated in one of the significant valleys extending towards the passes connecting the Black Sea to the eastern and interior regions of Anatolia. The region's climate, characterized by cool summers, mild winters, and rainy seasons, fosters dense and lush natural vegetation (Atalay, 2011; DOKAP, 2016, 2–4; Güner et al., 1987, 269).

To propose dating suggestions for the Hekimdere depictions, it is pertinent to consider the broader history of Northeastern Anatolia. The pre-written history of societies in eastern Anatolia is extensive and significant. Anatolia has been inhabited since the Paleolithic Age. The first known settlements in the Eastern Black Sea region include Koskarlı Cave (also known as Kalanima Dere Cave), which is associated with the Pre-Neolithic period and located in Trabzon (Düzköy, 2019). Koskarlı Cave is reported to contain the first Pre-Neolithic lithic artifacts found in the Eastern Black Sea region. Although it is currently the only such site discovered and further confirmation is needed, Koskarlı Cave holds significant importance for understanding the Black Sea's prehistoric chronology. Aside from Koskarlı Cave, the generally accepted view is that the first systematic settlements in the region belong to the Chalcolithic Age (Calışkan Akgül & Dinçer, 2021; Harmankaya & Tanındı, 1996; Kökten, 1947, 223–235). During this period, the interaction between hunting and animal husbandry societies from the Caucasus and Anatolia led to the emergence of similar lifestyles in northeastern Anatolia (Çığdem & Topaloğlu, 2018, 413 ff.; Erkmen & Altunkaynak, 2019, 171–188; Frangipane, 2017, 33; Işıkli, 2011, 230–233; Sagona & Sagona, 2000, 55 ff.). Towards the end of the fourth millennium BC, a new culture emerged in eastern Anatolia through migration movements. This culture, known as "Karaz", "Kura-Aras", "Trialeti", or "Early Trans-Caucasian Culture", significantly altered the prevailing societal structures, leading to advancements and diversification in agriculture and agricultural tools. During this period of complex socio-economic development, eastern and northern Anatolia engaged in commercial and cultural exchanges (Amiran, 1952, 89 ff.; Frangipane, 2001, 2; Frangipane et al., 2001, 105 ff.; 2009, 16–22; Palmieri et al., 1999, 147).

Despite the Northern Anatolian Mountains acting as a barrier, the Eastern Black Sea region was influenced by this culture during the Late Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Ages.

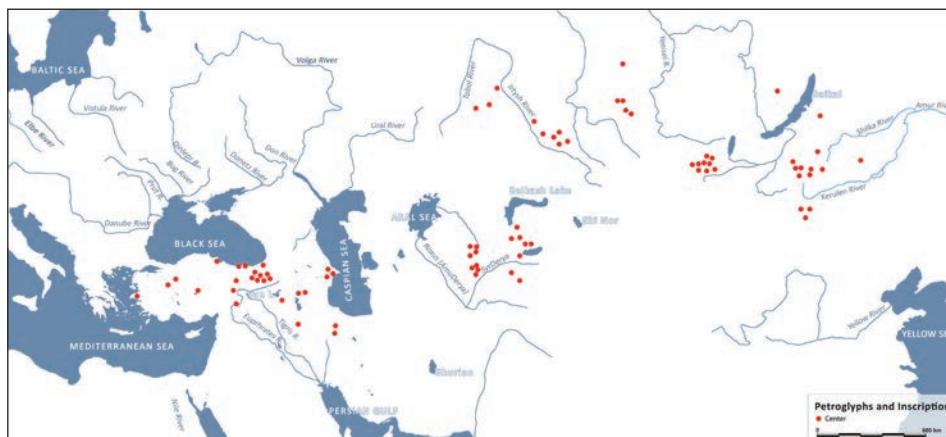


Fig. 1: Petroglyph and inscription areas (Asia-Anatolia).

Towards the end of the Early Bronze Age, migrations occurred from eastern Anatolia to both the north and south due to resource scarcity (Albright, 1926, 27–31; Buccellati, 1974, 5; 1979, 413 ff.; Burney, 1958, 165, 173; Burney & Lang, 1971, 43–44; Dyson, 1973, 686 ff.; Kosay & Turfan, 1959, 359; Kosay & Vary, 1964, 25 ff.; Kuftin, 1943, 92–123; Sagona, 1999, 153; 2000, 329 ff.; Sukenik, 1947, 9 ff.; Yaylalı, 2007, 165 ff.). As for Rize, it can be considered to have undergone its first political formation with the Hurrians (Alpman, 1981, 284–312; Şahin, 2015, 289 ff.; Ünal, 1997, 11–29). In the eighth to seventh century BC, the Rize region, like the entire Black Sea region, witnessed invasion and plundering expeditions by tribes of steppe origin (Scythians-Cimmerians) moving from the north into Anatolia. The struggle between the Scythians and Cimmerians was also evident along rivers such as the Araxes, Chorokh, Euphrates and Kura (Bilgin, 2010, 20–21; Durmuş, 2002, 15–25; 2019, 11–35; Emir, 2011, 84–96; Kirzioğlu, 1976, 368; 1992, 213; Pullu, 2009, 55–66; Tarhan, 1983, 113; 2002, 597 ff.; Tellioğlu, 2007a, 19; 2007b, 655). Subsequently, the colonization movements in the Black Sea region also had an impact on Rize. From the Middle Iron Age onward, the presence of Colchis extended from Iberia to the central Black Sea, encompassing the Caucasus Mountains and the eastern regions of Anatolia (Herodotus, 1973, 1.104, 78; Procopius, 1928, VIII, VI, 12–15; Strabo, 2009, XI, 3–17; Xenophon, 1974, IV, 8–22; Arslan, 2000, 26–40; Barnett, 1982, 349; Çilingiroğlu, 1994, 83; Edwards, 1988, 119 ff.). The state is referred to as “Qulha” in Urartian sources, although there are different opinions, there are opinions that it is the same as “Colchis” or a part of it (Diakonoff. & Kashkai, 1981, 68–69; Melikişvili, 1960, 155; Payne, 2006, 210–223). During this period, Urartian presence was noted in eastern Anatolia, followed by the Medes and then the Persians. It is recognized that the Persians exerted domi-

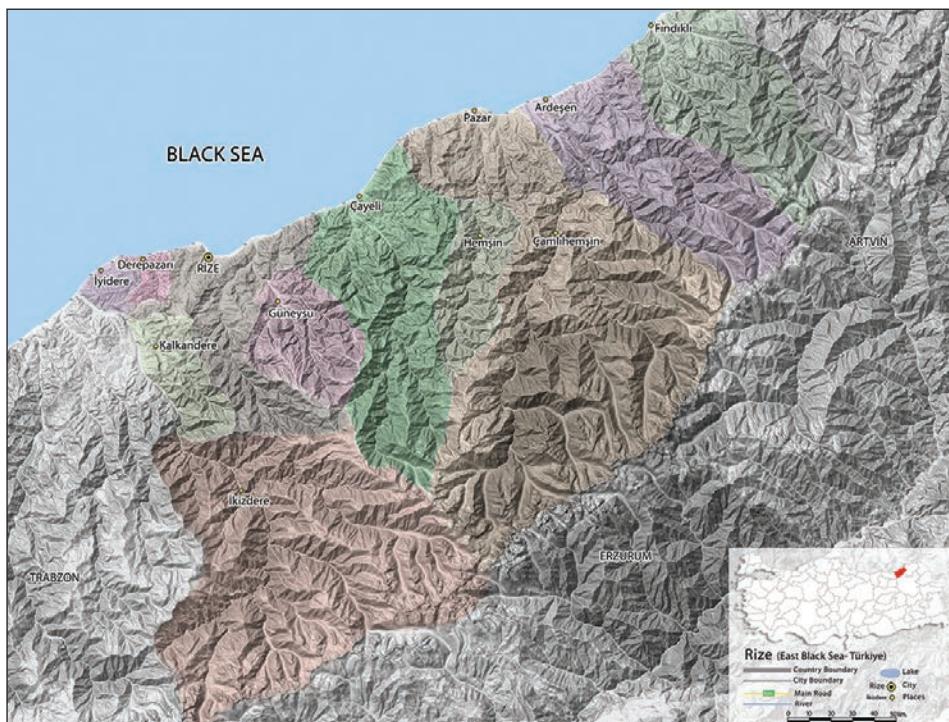


Fig. 2: Northeast Anatolia and Rize.

nance over the Eastern Black Sea region and Anatolia from the sixth century BC (Ak, 2000, 5–6; Bausani, 1971, 34–48; Bostan, 2008, 147 ff.). From 332 BC onwards, Alexander the Great, after conquering Persian territories, also became the ruler Anatolia. Subsequently, the Eastern Black Sea region remained under the control of the Hellenistic Pontic Kingdom. During the reign of Pontus King Mithridates Eupator VI, the kingdom expanded its borders to include territories of other Hellenistic kingdoms. However, following Mithridates' defeat by Rome in 63 BC, the western part of the Kingdom of Pontus was initially annexed to Rome, and by 47 BC, it became a fully incorporated kingdom under Roman rule (Arslan, 2007; Duggan, 1959; Hind, 1994; Kantor, 2012; Karpuz, 1993; 1997; Özmenli & Kuruca, 2020).

## ASIAN-ANATOLIAN ROCK ARTS

Petroglyphs (rock arts), have been created on rock or cave surfaces since the Paleolithic Age. The term “petroglyph” is derived from the combination of the Greek words “petra (πέτρα-stone)” and “glyph (γλύφω-carving)”, and

is based on the French word “pétroglyphe”, meaning “wall-rock painting”. Nowadays, “petroglyph” refers to any art made through engraving, carving, etching, drawing, or painting methods on rock surfaces. This term encompasses various meanings such as “depiction on rock”, “rock painting”, or “stone carving” (Alyılmaz, 2004, 157). Rock arts, which reflect the culture, beliefs, and traditions of mankind, have been created in numerous cultures and periods across the globe. These paintings, often found on sheltered cave walls, depict hunting scenes, natural events, animals, humans, and symbols. The earliest examples of wall paintings, dating back to the Paleolithic Age, are highly significant. However, Paleolithic wall paintings differ considerably from Asian-Anatolian rock paintings. The Hekimdere discussed in this article bear more resemblance to Asiatic rock arts (petroglyphs) found from South Siberia to Anatolia, and from Russia to Europe, despite differences in painting methods (coloring). It is widely accepted that Asiatic petroglyphs became prevalent during the Chalcolithic Age and spread to additional regions through migrations. It is also recognized that this tradition persisted into the Middle Ages and even more recently due to migrations. The most significant rock art (petroglyph) and inscription sites in this geographical area are in the Russian Federation (Garadok, Lena, Novosibirsk, Ulan-Ude, Mountainous Altai, Bichiktu-Boom, Jalaman-Tash, Gorno, Kalbak-Tash, Kosh-Agach Karachaky, Mendur-Sokkon, Yalbak Tash, Khakassia, Abakan, Minusinsk, Sülyek, Uluboyar, Tuva, Aktala, Aktoprak, Khemchik, Kemerovo, Kyzyl, Kyzylkaya, Krasnoyarsk, Sonkholaghzy, Yazylykaya), in Mongolia (Arhangay, Bugut, Bungur-Tash, Gobi, Harbalgas, Hoytu, Mandal, Orkhon, Shatar Chuluu), in Uzbekistan (Zaraut-Kamar Cave), in Kazakhstan (Jygdely-Say, Kaskyr-Say, Tamgaly-Say), in Kyrgyzstan (Chyghym-Tash, Cholpon-Ata, the Karakol Plateau, Kochkor, Kurubakayir, Saimaluu-Tash, Talas, Tuyuktör), and in Azerbaijan (Gobustan). These sites represent invaluable repositories of ancient cultural heritage, offering insights into the beliefs, traditions, and artistic expressions of diverse societies throughout history.<sup>1</sup>

In many regions of Anatolia, numerous rock arts (petroglyphs) created through various methods on different surfaces have been discovered. Anatolian rock arts are particularly abundant in the eastern and southeastern regions. These depictions, whose exact dates cannot always be determined, are generally associated with the archaeological and historical contexts of their surroundings. Among the most significant Anatolian rock/wall depiction and inscription sites are Kars: Camuşlu, Kurbanaga, Yazılıkaya, Geyiklitepe

1 For more information on Central Asian rock arts (petroglyphs) and “runic” inscriptions, cf. Bayçarov (1996), Çoruhlu (1998; 2005), Doğan (2000; 2002), Hermann (2011a–c; 2012), Ibekeyeva (2015), Konstantinov et al. (2016), Kutlu (2020), Myradova (2011), Ranov (2001), Rüstəmov and Muradova (1999), Somuncuoğlu (2008; 2011; 2012), Tashbayeva et al. (2001), Tokhatyan (2015), Tyarski (1985).

(Çallı), Borluk, Karabonjuk, Dereici, Yaglica, Cicekli, Tunckaya, Dolayli, Doyumlu; Ardahan: Başköy; Erzurum: Cunni, Kaynakköy; Erzincan: the Dilli Valley, the Fire Temple; Ordu: Esatlı; Ankara: Güdül, Yandaklıdere; Şanlıurfa: Harran Şuayp; Van: Yedisalkim (Girls' Cave), Pagan, Narli Huş; Hakkâri: Gevaruk Plateau, Trişin; Artvin: Bakirtepe, Arili; Kütahya: Aizonai; Antalya: Beldibi; Konya: Çatalhöyük; Bingöl: Serevdin Plateau; Kahramanmaraş: Keçe Cave; Batman: Nis, Berha, Gülnar-Akyapi Deraser and Sinekcayi, Tavabaşı Caves. These sites are invaluable for understanding Anatolia's cultural and historical heritage, providing insights into the beliefs, practices, and artistic expressions of ancient societies in the region.<sup>2</sup>

## HEKIMDERE DEPICTIONS

Rock arts, which have examples dating back to the Paleolithic Age around the world, are in Asia generally dated between the first millennium BC and the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries AD. Early examples often depict themes related to "hunting and the sky", while later examples include a wider range of subjects such as animals (horses, wolves, ibexes, deer), cavalry, scenes of war and traps, chariots, tents, celestial bodies, geometric shapes, mythological figures, and symbols (Çoruhlu, 1998, 66 ff.). While a distinct artistic style cannot always be discerned in the early examples, a gradually evolving style becomes more apparent in later depictions. Nonetheless, it is known that archaic examples continued to coexist alongside more sophisticated ones during the same periods. In Anatolia, the earliest rock arts examples are found in caves, and their origins can be traced back to the Paleolithic or Neolithic Ages, similar to examples found in other parts of the world (such as Sierra de San Francisco in Mexico and the Ekain Cave in Spain). Typically, these early rock arts were created using the "paint method". In Anatolia, examples at sites like Çatalhöyük (Haydaroglu, 2006; Mellaart, 2003), Trişin (Özdoğan, 2019), Yedisalkim (Belli, 1975, 1–40), Camuşlu, Yazılıkaya, and Kurbanaga (Harmankaya & Tanındı, 1996; Kökten, 1970, 2–16) have been dated to the Paleolithic and Neolithic Ages based on the methods used or the subject matter depicted, although their dating remains subject to controversy today. Kökten states that the petroglyphs of Yazılıkaya and Kurbanaga were made in the Paleolithic Age. However, today the view that the petroglyphs do not

2 For more information on Anatolian petroglyphs and "runie" inscriptions, cf. Alok (1988), Belli (1975, 1–40; 1979, 19–27; 2000, 291–297; 2005, 1–17; 2007, 30–75), Beyazit and Göktürk (2022, 1–44), Bingöl et al. (2010, 375–398), Ceylan (2007a, 163–182; 2007b, 103–117; 2008; 2015, 7–28; 2018, 1–30), Ceylan et al. (2009a, 120–148; 2009b, 133–150), Freh and Uyanık (1957, 619–625), Girginer and Durukan (2017, 1–15), Günaşdı (2016, 391 ff.), Güneri (2014, 175–182), Karpuz (1970, 1–5), Korkut et al. (2016, 37–49), Mellaart (2003a), Mert (2007, 233–54), Özbek and Yükmen (1998, 30–37), Özgül (2021, 781–818), Somuncuoğlu (2008), Soydan and Korkmaz (2013, 665–86), Tiryaki (2020, 251–268), Topaloğlu et al. (2011, 1–19), Üngör et al. (2014, 61–77), Uyanık (1968, 97–104), Uyanık (1974), Yaman (2019, 11–24).



Fig. 3: Hekimdere rock arts area.

belong to the Paleolithic Age is gaining weight.<sup>3</sup> However, like elsewhere in the world, dating Anatolian rock arts remains one of the most significant challenges even with today's modern resources. Consequently, rock paintings are typically

<sup>3</sup> For comments on Prehistoric wall paintings cf. Bahn and Vertut (1997), Bahn (1995), Chazine (2005), Halverson (1992), Heyd and Clegg (2005), Hodder (2004), Leroi-Gourhan (1968), Moro Abadía (2006), Peschlow-Bindokat (2006).



Fig. 4: Valley where Hekimdere rock art is located.

dated by comparison with archaeological sites (such as castles, necropolises, rock tombs, etc.) or other dated examples. Alternatively, isolated individual rock art areas, can only be dated through comparison with similar examples based on their depictions and construction methods.

The Hekimdere, the focus of this article, are situated 31 kilometers southeast of the İkizdere district in Rize province, Türkiye. They are located in the area known as “Hekimdere”, at an altitude of 2,067 meters, near the borders of Anzer Plateau and Cicekli Village (Fig. 3–4). Positioned on a large rock mass within a steep valley carved by a stream amidst a densely forested area, the site is accessed today via a road passing just west of the rock depictions area (GPS coordinates: 40.62065, 40.53993).

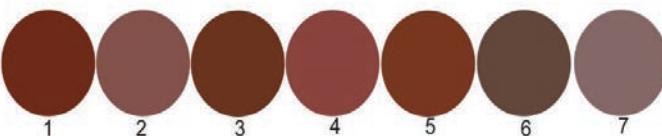
Although there is no direct ancient settlement associated with the Hekimdere the nearby Anzer Plateau has been situated along historical routes utilized for millennia. Today, a footpath along this route connects the Black Sea coastline to the interior regions of Anatolia, providing access to modern-day Bayburt Province and Erzurum-Ispir District. Along this path lies the Buzluhan (Haros) Castle (located at coordinates 40.56961, 40.51802, at an altitude of 2,410 meters), reminiscent of historical castles in eastern Anatolia, featuring

Late Bronze and Iron Age architectural traits. This castle likely served to safeguard the numerous civilian settlements on the Anzer Plateau and regulate traffic along the historical route. Archaeological evidence suggests that both the castle and the nearby civilian settlements were inhabited until the Middle Ages. Given the approximately 6 kilometers distance between the Hekimdere and Buzluhan (Haros) Castle, as well as the 3 kilometers distance between the settlements on the Anzer Plateau, it is reasonable to assess these locations collectively. Consequently, it would not be erroneous to assert that the Hekimdere are a testament to the cultural heritage of the people, particularly the Anzer community, inhabiting this area since the Late Bronze Age. Considering the region's climate, livelihood conditions, and historical context outlined in the introduction, it is plausible to surmise that the individuals who settled here and crafted the rock paintings were part of a nomadic highland culture reliant on animal husbandry, engaging in trade with nearby communities through animal products. Hekimdere therefore undoubtedly emerged as an expression of the beliefs, values and culture of the people who adopted such a way of life, reflecting elements specific to their identity.

The Hekimdere comprise 10 depictions arranged in two overlapping parts; unfortunately, most of these depictions have suffered damage over time. The lower panel measures 2.70 meters, while the upper panel stands approximately 5 meters tall. Both sections are accessible via a short climb. Despite being situated in an open area, the dense forest vegetation has offered some degree of protection. However, those depictions directly exposed to natural elements such as sunlight, rain, and snow show more pronounced signs of deterioration. Consequently, it is speculated that there may be more depictions in the region than the 10 depictions currently identifiable. Painted with a dark red pigment (ochre), the rock paintings represent the earliest known examples in the Black Sea region and are among the rare instances found in Anatolia. The color codes (Hex, RGB, CMYK, Munsell) corresponding to the red-brown hues of the Hekimdere are provided below (Fig. 5).

These color codes bear striking resemblance to the paints utilized in the adornments of recent religious edifices within Rize province (Munsell 10 R 3/4, 10 R 3/10, 5 YR 3/3). Given that these embellishments, commonly found in contemporary religious structures, are predominantly indoors and applied to wooden surfaces, it implies that the paint pigments used were likely locally sourced and historically employed by the region's inhabitants. It is presumed that hematite (iron oxide), commonly referred to as "ochre", has been used across many regions of the world, from the Asia to the interior of Europe (Baragona et al., 2022, 500). It is believed that "iron oxide", which is easily found in the Hekimdere region, served as the primary coloring agent for these depictions. The substance in question is an organic-inorganic, odorless powder characterized by red/brown particles, with hematite (commonly referred to as "bloodstone") comprising 60–90% of its iron oxide content. Notably, it demonstrates high resistance to light and temperature.

Color	Fig	Hex Code	RGB Code	CMYK Code	Munsell Code
-Red /Brown (R)	Depiction 1	6f2b18	111, 43, 24	34, 85, 93, 45	10 R 3/8
-Red-Pink (RP)	Depiction 2	84524b	132, 82, 75	38, 68, 64, 26	7.5 R 4/4
-Yellow-Red (YR)	Depiction 3	6b341f	107, 52, 31	36, 78, 89, 45	2.5 YR 3/6
	Depiction 4	8b443e	139, 68, 62	32, 78, 71, 27	7.5 R 4/8
	Depiction 5	783721	120, 55, 33	33, 80, 92, 39	2.5 YR 3/6
	Depiction 6	63473b	99, 71, 59	47, 64, 69, 40	5 YR 3/2
	Depiction 7	846867	132, 104, 103	45, 57, 51, 16	10 RP 5/4



*(Although the depictions are similar in color within themselves, color changes can be seen)*

Fig. 5: Color codes of paints used in Hekimdere depictions.

This substance has been widely recognized for its prevalent usage in rock paintings executed through the painting method. Presently, the painting culture of the region is undergoing comprehensive examination through a multidisciplinary study conducted in collaboration with experts in History and Materials Engineering as part of the TÜBİTAK-Scientific and Technological Research Project. Within the scope of this project, efforts are underway to precisely identify the type, content, and regional source of the material utilized in these depictions.

We believe that depictions created through the painting method should be categorized into two distinct groups: “rock paintings” and “wall paintings”. This distinction arises from the fact that wall paintings were typically executed within enclosed environments such as caves or architectural structures and have been dated to prehistoric periods through scientific excavations. On the other hand, paint-decorated rock depictions are generally exposed and situated on natural bedrock, often depicting shorter and more recent scenes. In this regard, it is noteworthy that even paintings found in renowned sites such as Çatalhöyük, Yedisalkım, Nis, Berha, Beldibi, Arslantepe, and Ani—representing some of Anatolia’s leading wall painting areas—have suffered significant destruction over time. Therefore, the preservation of the Hekimdere depictions located in an open area, is indeed a stroke of luck. However, these depictions are increasingly susceptible to degradation with each passing day. It is imperative to promptly introduce the Hekimdere to the scientific community and seek support for the development of conservation methods. Despite the limited information available within the scope of this article, we have endeavored to provide an evaluation and introduction in light of regional examples.

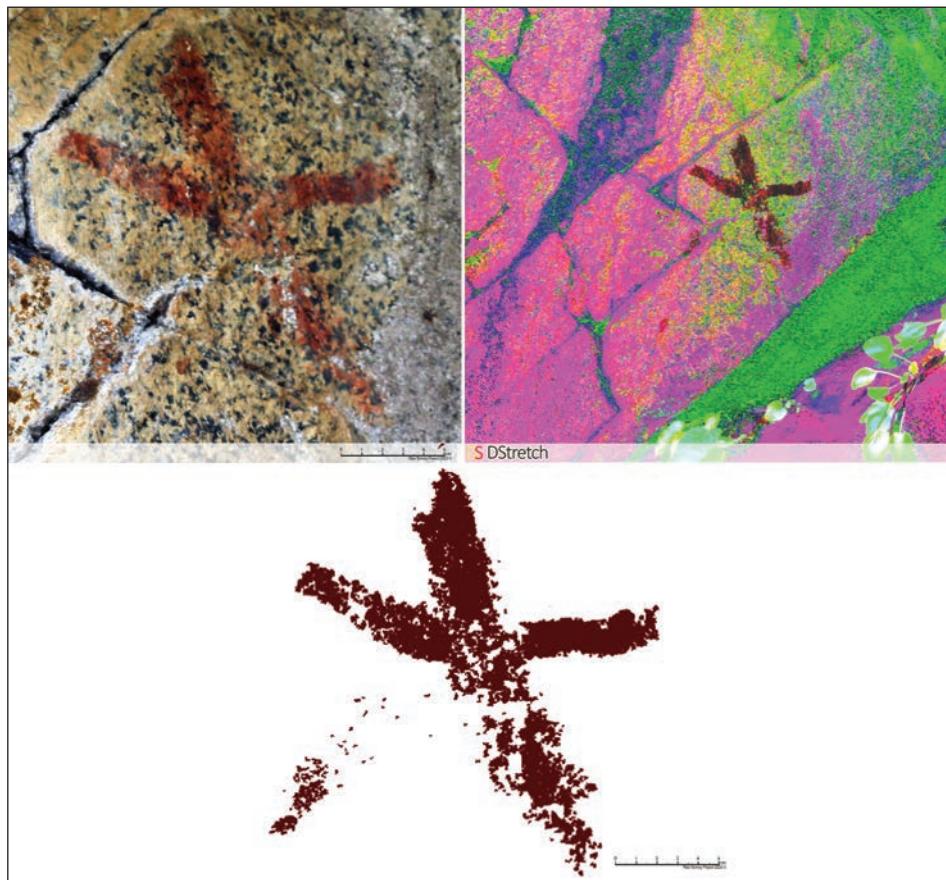


Fig. 6: Hekimdere depiction 1 (Original Photo, DStretch Filter, Drawing).

#### UPPER PANEL

The spacing and arrangement of the four depictions on the upper panel suggest that they do not constitute a unified composition and are instead independent of each other.

*Depiction 1:* The uppermost depiction bears a resemblance to a sun or star. Measuring 21x16 centimeters, the depiction takes the form of five arms, with the lower left arm significantly damaged. Similar depictions found on flags associated with Saka (Scythian), Uyghur, Seljuk, and Ottoman artifacts likely denote a connection to the concept of “God” within a society residing close to the sky, akin to Asian cultural influences (Mert, 2007, 247–248). The Munsell color of the depiction, characterized by a dark red hue, is 10 R 3/8 (Fig. 6).



Fig. 7: Hekimdere depiction 2 (Original Photo, DStretch Filter, Drawing).

*Depiction 2:* Another depiction on the upper panel portrays a horse painting accompanied by its rider. The horseman, measuring 12x11 centimeters, is depicted in a walking stance, with the front left foot slightly raised compared to the others. Notably, the rider's hands and feet are not depicted, and there is no visible harness or weaponry. Consequently, given the location of this depiction along a historical road route, the possibility that it represents a civilian journey should be considered. Although the 3 centimeters tail appears exaggerated, both the horse and the rider are depicted with well-proportioned depictions. The Munsell color of this depiction is 7.5 R 4/4 (Fig. 7).

*Depiction 3:* Another depiction on the panel closely resembles the previous one, measuring 15x11 centimeters, albeit with significant damage. The horse is depicted in a walking pose, with both the front left foot and the rear right foot partially raised.

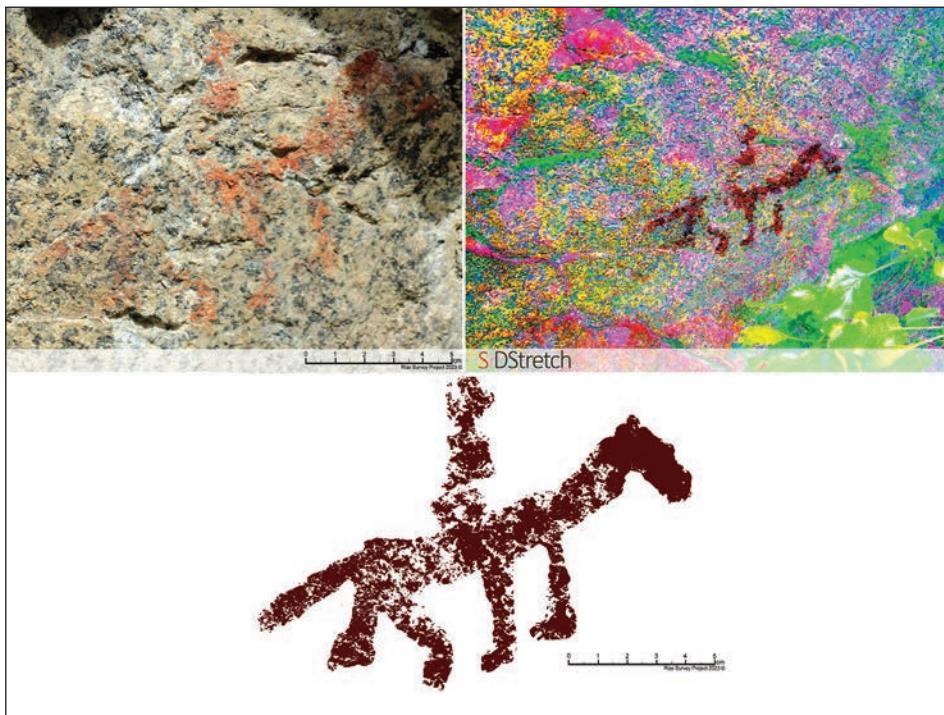


Fig. 8: Hekimdere depiction 3 (Original Photo, DStretch Filter, Drawing).

Although the 4 centimeter tail and 5 centimeter neck of the horse seem exaggerated, both the horse and the rider are proportionate to each other. Similar to the previous depiction, the hands and feet of the rider, as well as any harness, are not visible, and there are no visible war tools held by the horseman. Consequently, it is plausible to interpret this depiction, located along a historical road route, as representing a civilian journey. The depiction's dominant color is a pale orange (yellow-red), with the Munsell color recorded as 2.5 YR 3/6 (Fig. 8).

*Depiction 4:* Since the last depiction on the upper panel has been eroded due to natural conditions, its identity is unclear. However, when compared to the other depictions, it would not be wrong to suggest that this could also be a cavalry depiction. The depiction can be seen more clearly as a result of filtering with the DStretch application. The Munsell color of the depiction is recorded as 7.5 R 4/8 (Fig. 9).

The depictions on the upper panel do not exhibit a cohesive design. The rock's structure, with its indentations and protrusions, along with the slope, suggests that the depictions are intended to be independent figures. Due to the angle of the photography and the rock's irregular structure, it is not possible to capture the entire panel within a single photo frame.

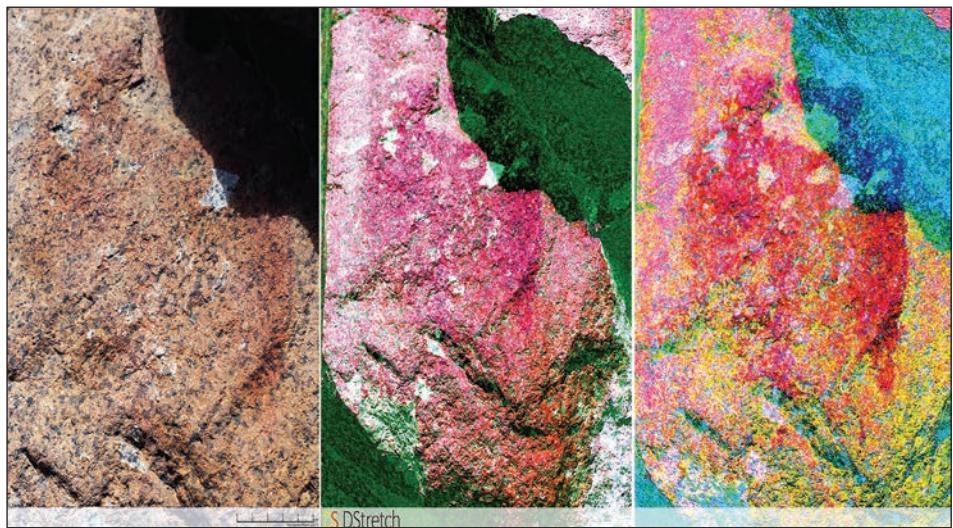


Fig. 9: Hekimdere depiction 4 (Original Photo, DStretch Filters).

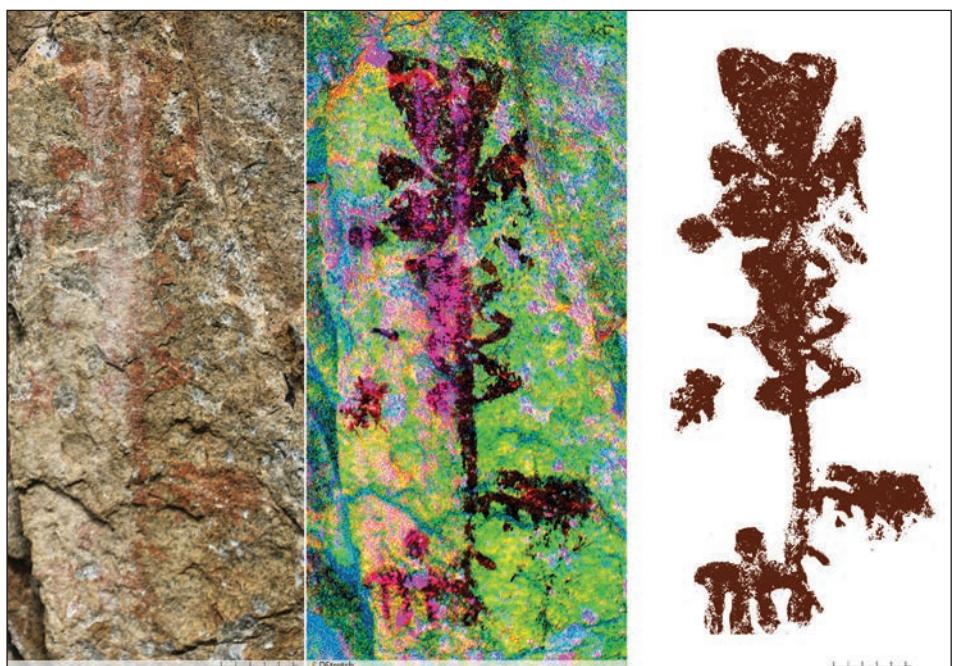


Fig. 10: Hekimdere depiction 5 (Original Photo, DStretch Filter, Drawing).

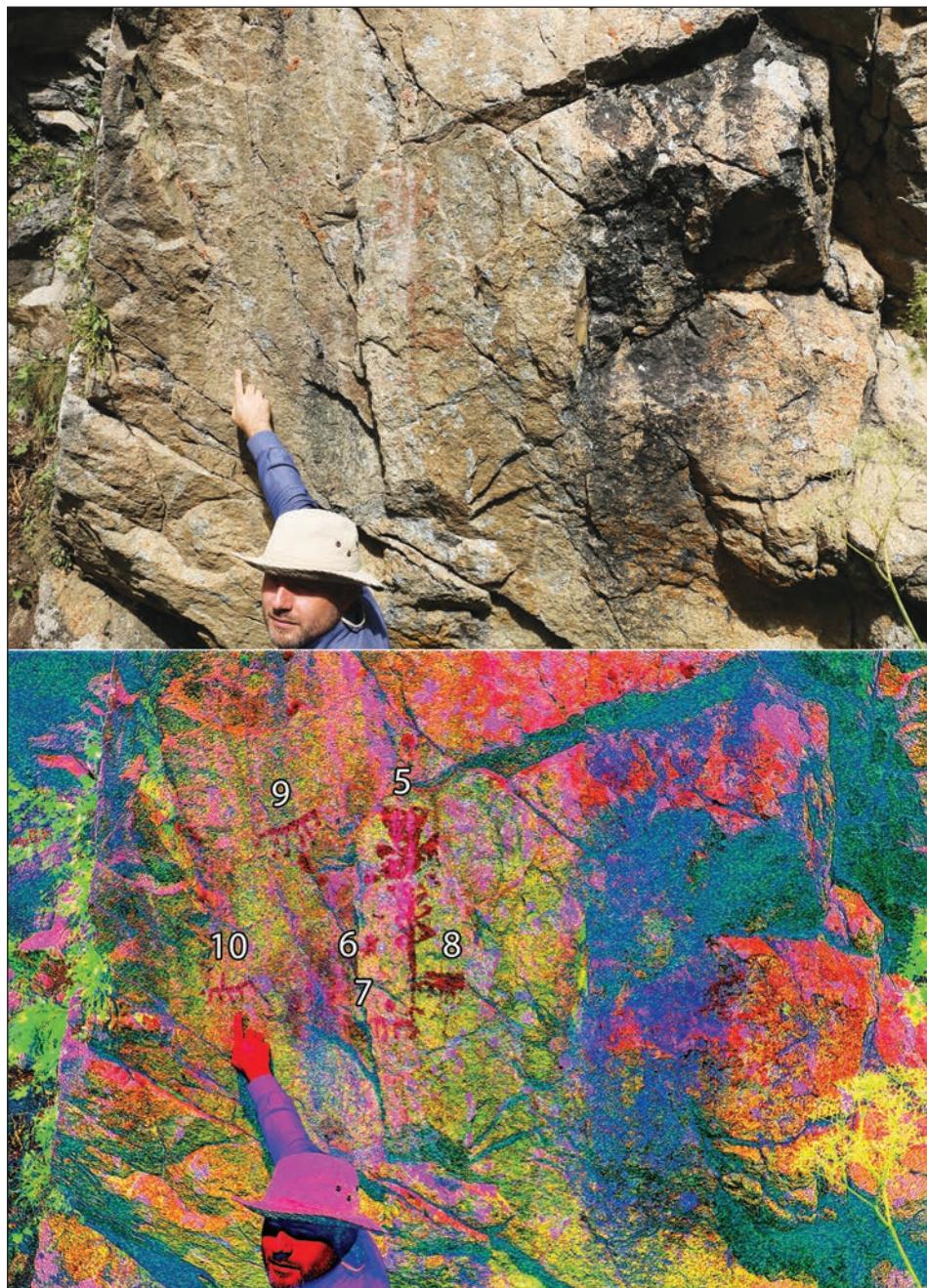


Fig. 11: Hekimdere lower panel: general view (Original Photo, DStretch Filter).

## LOWER PANEL

*Depictions 5–8:* In the center of the lower panel, there is a floral depiction measuring 37x16 centimeters. Although it is largely destroyed, its form can be easily recognized. There are twelve branches, six on the left and six on the right, with branches ranging between 3–7 centimeters as far as can be determined. It is thought that this vegetal depiction, which is quite large compared to the other depictions, is probably a “Tree of Life” attributed to sacredness. With some of its features, this depiction can also be associated with the trap scenes seen in Asia and Anatolia. The pale orange (yellow-red) color of the depiction is dominant, and the basic Munsell color is recorded as 2.5 YR 3/6 (Fig. 10).

The DStretch application also reveals several animal figures around the main depiction, making them more clearly visible. Including depictions 9 and 10, it becomes clear that a total of five animal figures are gathered around the tree depiction. On the left side of the scene, there is a horse, two horsemen, and possibly a goat. To the right, there is another potential equestrian figure, though it cannot be identified with certainty (Fig. 11).

*Depiction 9:* To the left of the large depiction in the center of the lower panel is a horse, which has been largely destroyed and measures approximately 9x5 centimeters. It is thought that the horse is depicted as walking since the forelegs of the horse are drawn shorter in the air compared to the others. The 3.5 centimeter tail is exaggerated. The depiction is predominantly Dark Brown (Yellow-Red) in color, and the basic Munsell color is recorded as 5 YR 3/2 (Fig. 12).

*Depiction 10:* Just below depiction 9, to the left of the depiction 5, there is another equestrian depiction measuring 13x7.5 centimeters. Since the forelegs of the horse are drawn shorter in the air compared to the others, it can be assumed that the horse was in a walking position. It can be understood that the hands and feet of the rider are not depicted in the largely destroyed depiction, and there is no visible harness. As seen in the other depictions, there is no weapon depicted in the rider's hand. Therefore, this depiction may represent a civilian journey, considering its location on a historical road route. The proportions of the horse's 2 centimeter tail and 3 centimeter neck appear disproportionate in the depiction. The Munsell color of the depiction is recorded as 10 RP 5/4 (Fig. 13).

Horse depictions are common throughout Anatolia and Asia in rock art (petroglyphs). In Asian and Early Anatolian societies that adopted a nomadic lifestyle, the horse served as the rider's companion and aid in hunting, warfare, and daily life. The creators of the Hekimdere embraced a similar lifestyle. The horse is depicted as central to the life of this society, serving as a companion and helper to its rider in various activities.

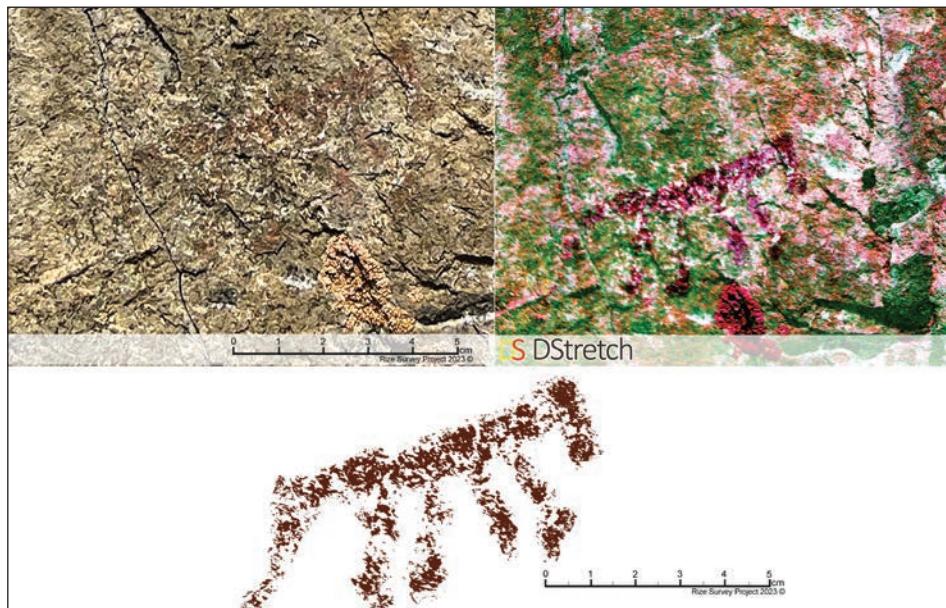


Fig. 12: Hekimdere depiction 6 (Original Photo, DStretch Filter, Drawing).

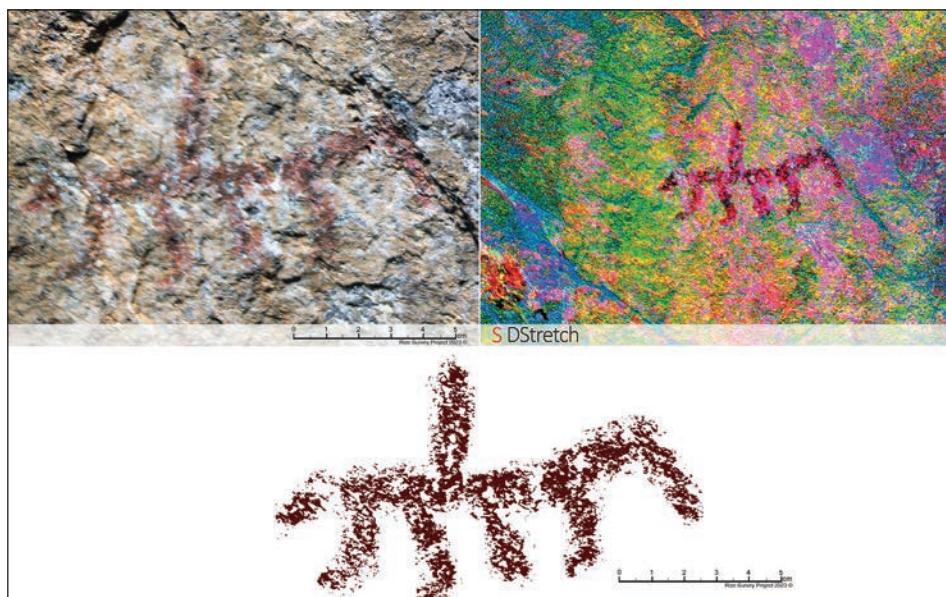


Fig. 13: Hekimdere depiction 7 (Original Photo, DStretch Filter, Drawing).

## CONCLUSION AND EVALUATION

Although rock/wall paintings found in nearly all regions of the world serve various purposes, they fundamentally represent human efforts to convey aspects of life, culture, beliefs, and relationships with the world or deities across generations. Deciphering these depictions, present since the Paleolithic Age, has long posed a challenge for scientists. While excavated depictions allow for more accurate dating and interpretations, those found elsewhere have consistently faced scrutiny, both in their dating and in the interpretations drawn from them. Establishing a reliable categorization may be one of the few viable approaches. We believe this can be achieved through the expertise of experienced researchers, even at a regional level. Drawing upon our extensive experience conducting surveys in Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Anatolia, we are confident in our ability to differentiate Anatolian and Asian rock arts (petroglyphs) from other examples.

As previously mentioned, the depictions created on rock surfaces through methods such as engraving, carving, etching, drawing, or painting are commonly referred to worldwide as “rock paintings”, “wall paintings”, or “petroglyphs”, although sometimes these terms are used incorrectly. Unfortunately, this misclassification is prevalent in Anatolian-Asian studies. It is essential to distinguish between cave paintings and depictions on the walls of architectural structures discovered in archaeological excavations, categorizing them collectively as “wall paintings” regardless of the construction method. Among these depictions, those found on cave walls are often created using painting techniques, although scraping and striking methods are also observed. Cave depictions are typically dated to the Paleolithic and Neolithic Ages, indicating their integration into living spaces and their emergence as products of long-term endeavors.

Rock paintings, drawings, or petroglyphs, in our view, are exclusively created on rock surfaces in open areas. These depictions are not crafted within living spaces but rather in areas outside settled areas where they are visible to all. They are typically produced by nomadic or semi-nomadic cultures. Consequently, even if it is determined that the same area was utilized in different periods, these depictions were likely created within a shorter timeframe. Various methods such as engraving, carving, etching, drawing, or painting are employed, with painted depictions being the rarest examples. The scarcity of painted depictions in open areas, which are accessible to everyone, can be attributed to the lower resilience of paint pigments to natural conditions. Therefore, the survival of these depictions to the present day is of utmost significance.

Among the numerous rock art areas in Anatolia, painted depictions can be found at sites such as Çatalhöyük, Yedisalkım, Keçe Cave, Nis, Berha, Beldibi, Arslantepe, and Ani (Fig. 14).

Furthermore, there are instances of similar depictions created through striking or drawing methods throughout Anatolia. Here are the locations, methods of execution, and dating suggestions for some of them:



Fig. 14. Anatolian rock art samples: a–b - Çatalhöyük, c - Alihger Cave-Adilcevaz (AA), d - Keçe Cave, e - Gülnar Cave-Mersin, f - Kızlar Cave, g - Tortum (AA), h - Baltalıin/İnkara Cave (AA).

Table 1: Positional distribution and dating suggestions for Anatolian rock arts (examples).

Wall Paintings / Wall Art (Painting Methods)		
Name	Location	Dating
Ani Cave (Belli, 2019)	Kars	Prehistoric (?)/Middle Ages
Arapgir-Onar Rock Tomb (Şahin, 2019)	Malatya	Roman Period
Arslantepe Mound (Özdogan, 2019)	Malatya	Prehistoric (fourth millennium BC)
Beldibi Cave (Bostancı, 1964)	Antalya	Prehistoric
Berha Cave (Soydan & Korkmaz, 2013)	Batman	Prehistoric
Çatalhöyük (Mellaart, 2003b)	Konya	Neolithic/Chalcolithic
Cunni Cave (Ceylan, 2002)	Erzurum	Asiatic-Middle Ages
Gülnar Cave (Girginer & Durukan, 2017)	Mersin	Prehistoric
Keçe Cave (Yaman, 2019)	K. Maraş	Prehistoric
Nis Cave (Batman Culture Inventory)	Batman	Prehistoric
Pirun Cave (Tiimer, 2018)	Adiyaman	Prehistoric
Yedisalkım-Put Cave (Belli, 1975)	Van	Iron Age (?)

Rock Paintings / Rock Art (Striking-Drawing Methods)		
Name	Location	Dating
<b>Arılı</b> ( <i>Özgül 2021</i> )	Artvin	Early–Middle Bronze Age
<b>Borluk</b> ( <i>Özbek &amp; Yükmen 1998; Topaloğlu et al., 2011</i> )	Kars	Prehistoric (Chalcolithic)/Asiatic
<b>Camuşlu</b> ( <i>Karpuz 1970; Ceylan 2008</i> )	Kars	Paleolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Middle Ages
<b>Cicekli</b> ( <i>Ceylan et al., 2009a</i> )	Kars	Asiatic (Bronze–Iron Age)
<b>Çıldır-Başköy</b> ( <i>Ceylan 2015</i> )	Ardahan	Asiatic (Bronze–Iron Age)
<b>Dereçi</b> ( <i>Ceylan 2007a</i> )	Kars	Asiatic (Bronze–Iron Age)
<b>Dilli</b> ( <i>Mert, 2007</i> )	Erzincan	Asiatic
<b>Dolaylı</b> ( <i>Ceylan, 2018</i> )	Kars	Asiatic (Middle Bronze Age)
<b>Gevaruk</b> ( <i>Freh et al., 1957</i> )	Hakkâri	Prehistoric (?)
<b>Karabonjuk</b> ( <i>Ceylan et al., 2009</i> )	Kars	Asiatic
<b>Kurbanağa</b> ( <i>Kökten, 1970</i> )	Kars	Prehistoric (?)
<b>Şenkaya-Kaynak</b> ( <i>Üngör et al., 2014</i> )	Erzurum	Asiatic
<b>Serevdin</b> ( <i>Tiryaki, 2020</i> )	Bingöl	Prehistoric (?)
<b>Tırşın</b> ( <i>Tümer, 2018</i> )	Hakkâri	Prehistoric (?)
<b>Tunckaya</b> ( <i>Ceylan et al., 2009</i> )	Kars	Asiatic (Bronze–Iron Age)

As shown in the table above, Anatolian rock art was created using various methods and are predominantly concentrated in eastern and southeastern Anatolia. Dating suggestions span from the Prehistoric period to the Middle Ages, reflecting a wide chronological range. However, many of these dating proposals rely on the outcomes of short-term surveys, leading to doubts regarding their accuracy.

The relationship with the settlements or location alone is undoubtedly not sufficient for the dating of rock art samples. However, the special situation of the geography under study and the inadequacy of scientific petroglyph studies in Anatolia is also a fact. It should also be kept in mind that it is impossible to find any archaeological material in surface surveys due to the thickness and density of the Black Sea sub-forest vegetation. This can only be done through systematic excavation. Therefore, we believe that it would be more prudent to interpret Hekimdere in conjunction with other examples of rock art (petroglyphs) rather than a stylistic comparison. Due to the scarcity of Anatolian painted depictions, a precise dating has been avoided for the time being. In addition, age determinations based on the colouring technique in petroglyphs may not give accurate results (Jamnik et al., 2015, 710).

The regional distribution of Anatolian rock arts aligns with the migration or movement route of a nomadic culture centered around animal husbandry, extending from Mongolia to Tuva, Altai, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Northwest Iran, Caucasus, and Anatolia. Along the Asia-Anatolia route, regions such as the eastern Black Sea, northeastern and southeastern Anatolia, and central Anatolia exhibit concentrations of rock arts areas. Despite some differences, Anatolian and Asian rock arts share similar styles and depict various phases and dates. This suggests that these depictions evolved and changed in tandem with migrations, originating from a common cultural sphere. The rock paintings not only shed light on the prehistoric period in Anatolia but also offer evidence of Anatolian-Asian cultural ties. In this way, communication between Anatolia and Asia can be traced back to antiquity and potentially even further.

The rock art of Hekimdere, representing the first and unique example in the Black Sea region and one of the rare instances in Anatolia, exhibit the distinct characteristics of a highland culture owing to their location north of the Eastern Black Sea Mountains. Situated in areas more conducive to small-scale cattle breeding, these regions have remained consistent living areas throughout history for societies adhering to the summer-wintering concept. Given the expectation of a lifestyle centered around animal husbandry within this culture, it is reasonable to anticipate that the petroglyphs are related to such practices. This expectation is supported by the presence of maritime culture motifs, such as boats, ships, and fish, in nearby examples like Namazgah (Artvin-Arhavi) and Gobustan (Azerbaijan). Conversely, in areas such as Camuşlu, Kurbanağa, Doyumlu, Borluk and Cicekli (Kars-Erzurum), characteristic traits of highland culture are evident, including depictions of horses, mountain goats, deer, cavalry, and hunting scenes (Fig. 15).

Probably, the Hekimdere rock depictions do not constitute a singular composition from a single period. The lack of intricate details suggests that they were created over a short period, likely influenced by religious beliefs. This might indicate that the painters were part of a migratory journey. The depictions of horsemen, the Tree of Life (?), and the sun/star in the rock paintings of Hekimdere evoke imagery associated with a non-combatant, nomadic, or semi-nomadic transhumant culture, which traversed from the Black Sea into the interior of Anatolia via Ispir. This cultural exchange likely resulted from reciprocal migration or the movement of nomadic cultures from the Caucasus or the Black Sea region into the Anatolian interior since ancient times. The depictions of the Tree of Life and the sun/star appear to have been created to ensure the success of this journey, possibly under the influence of religious beliefs. Their preservation throughout history, perhaps due to religious reverence, suggests that they have been respected and left unaltered over time.

The Hekimdere rock paintings represent perhaps the first instance of “painted rock arts” displaying Asian characteristics in terms of depiction. While sites like Çatalhöyük, Yedisalkim, Nis, Berha, and Beldibi also utilize the painting method, they differ from the Hekimdere rock paintings in terms of depiction. Therefore, it would be more accurate to compare the Hekimdere petroglyphs with examples

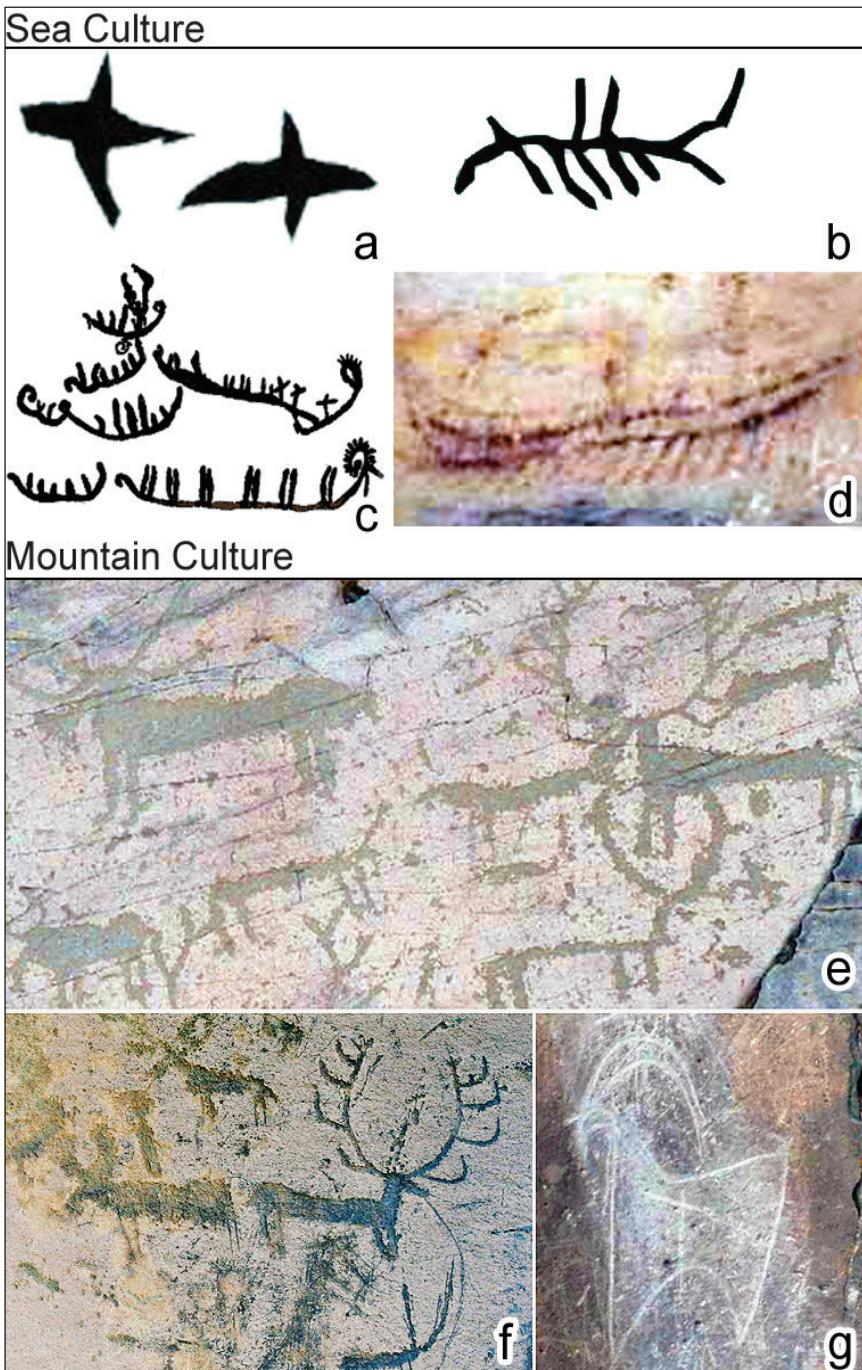


Fig. 15: Examples of the effect of Sea and Mountain Culture on rock arts: a–b - Arıvin-Arılı (Özgül, 2021), c - Göbustan, d - Yarimburgaz, e - Kurbanaga, f - Camuslu, g - Karabonjuk (Ceylan, et al., 2009).

using the “percussion method,” despite the methodological difference. Depictions of the tree of life, horsemen, sun, and stars can be observed in petroglyph areas such as Cholpon-Ata, Tamgaly-Say, Lena, Camuşlu, Kurbanaga, Karabonjuk, and Arılı. Additionally, in centers such as Karmik, Başyayla, Aşağı Şimşirli, Yolkiyi and Şenköy in Rize-Çamlıhemşin, depictions of the tree of life have been utilized until recently. Comparing the Hekimdere rock paintings with these examples provides valuable insights into the cultural and artistic exchanges between different regions and civilizations, highlighting the diversity and richness of Anatolian and Asian rock art traditions.

The depictions of horsemen in the Hekimdere rock paintings bear a striking resemblance to the rock paintings of Artvin-Arılı, Van-Çatak Narlı, Ardahan-Başköy, Van-Yedisalkim and Kars-Kömürlü (Fig. 16–17). An important distinction, however, is that none of the horsemen are depicted with weapons. Similar to examples from the Eastern Black Sea and Eastern Anatolia, the Hekimdere petroglyphs are situated on a high-altitude plateau. The presence of horsemen, along with depictions of the Tree of Life (?) and the sun/star, suggests that these rock paintings are indicative of a society characterized by peaceful tendencies, high religious beliefs, and a subsistence based on animal husbandry. The representations of the Tree of Life and the sun/star may imply the existence of a sacred cult site positioned close to the sky. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, they may signify the sanctification of a journey (Fig. 18). The decision to paint these depictions in an open area accessible to the public, as seen in other Anatolian-Asian rock paintings (petroglyphs), could be attributed to their origin from a collective cult belief system. This communal aspect suggests that these rock paintings were created as part of a shared cultural or religious practice, further reinforcing the notion of a peaceful and spiritually inclined society.

In conclusion, the paint-decorated İkizdere-Hekimdere rock paintings likely represent some of the oldest examples of rock art in the region. While painted wall paintings in Anatolia have been dated to the Paleolithic and Neolithic Ages, we believe that the Hekimdere rock paintings exhibit characteristics more closely aligned with Asian traditions. Although the Hekimdere rock paintings offer valuable insights when compared to similar counterparts in terms of form and construction technique, the limited number of identified painted rock and wall paintings necessitates caution in dating. Therefore, while precise dating is challenging, it can be inferred that the earliest examples may date back to the first millennium BC, with a similar rock painting tradition continuing until the Middle Ages. Additionally, similar depictions persisted in Anatolia as a cultural reflection until recent times. Like other petroglyphs found in Anatolia, the Rize-İkizdere Hekimdere Rock Paintings provide glimpses into the daily life and beliefs of a nomadic society. Although no “runic” writing or stamps have been discovered, it is reasonable to suggest a connection to Asia based on cultural similarities.

Like the petroglyphs identified thus far in Anatolia, the Rize-İkizdere Hekimdere Rock Paintings indeed reflect the daily life and beliefs of a nomadic society. Overall, the Hekimdere rock paintings offer valuable insights into the ancient cultures and

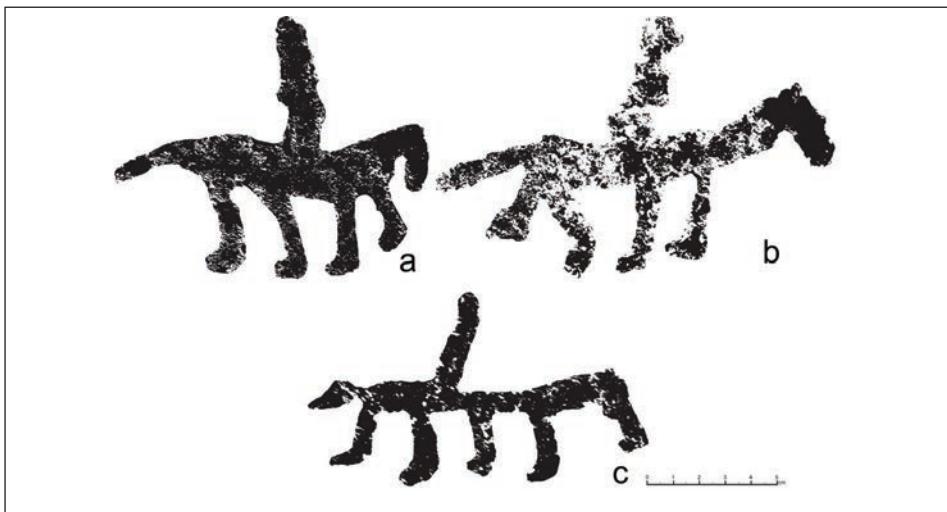


Fig. 16: *Hekimdere horsemen depictions.*

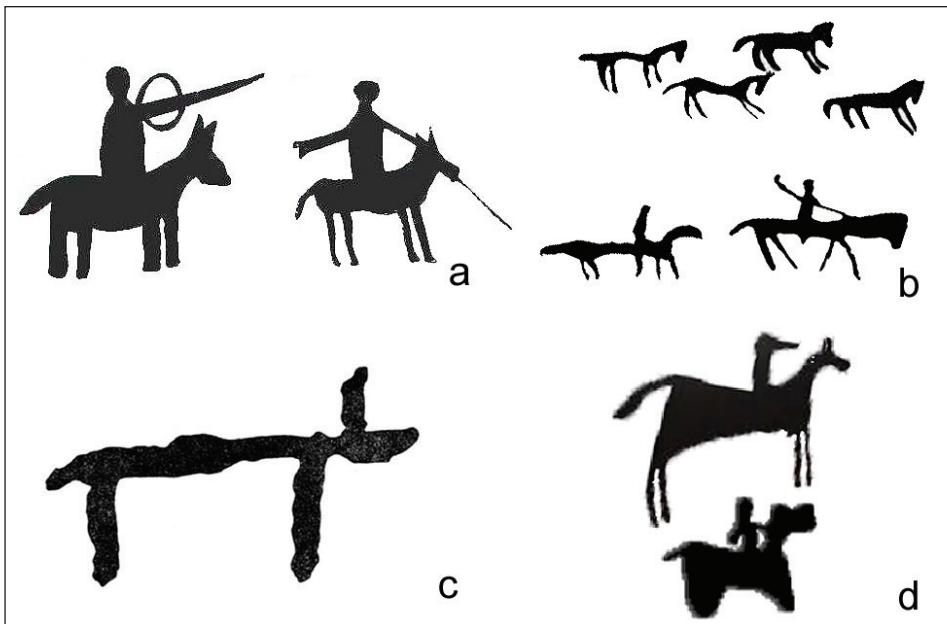


Fig. 17: *Anatolian horses/horsemen depiction examples: a - Van-Çatak Narlı (Uyanık, 1974), b - Ardahan-Başköy (Ceylan, 2015), c - Van-Yedisalkım (Belli, 1975), d - Kars-Kömürlü (Ceylan, 2018).*

traditions of the region, serving as a testament to the rich and diverse history of Anatolia and its connections to broader Asian civilizations. Indeed, despite the absence of “runic” writing or stamps, it would not be inaccurate to suggest a connection to Asia for the Hekimdere rock paintings. The cultural and stylistic similarities observed in these rock paintings, along with their geographical proximity to regions influenced by Asian civilizations, support the notion of a relationship with Asia. While direct evidence such as “runic” inscriptions or stamps would provide more concrete proof, the broader context of the cultural, artistic, and historical landscape suggests an affinity with Asian traditions. Therefore, considering these factors, it is reasonable to posit a connection between the Hekimdere rock paintings and Asian cultural influences.

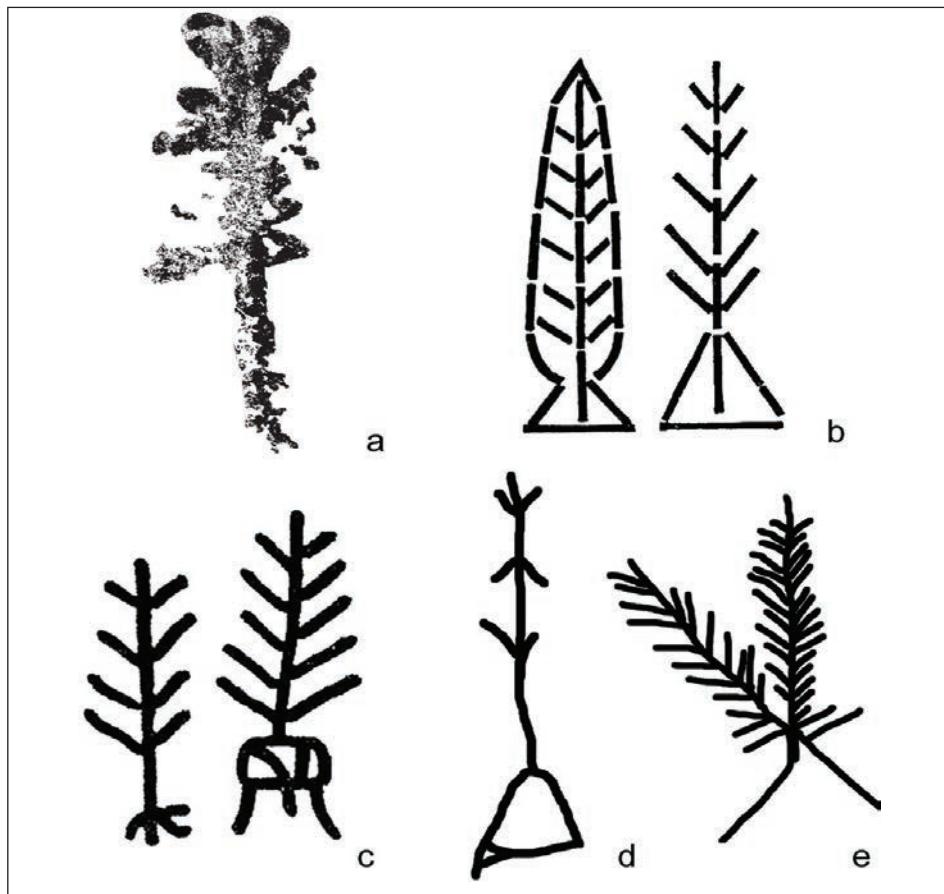


Fig. 18: *Floral depictions (Tree of Life?). Examples: a - Rize-Hekimdere, b-c - Old Van (Gülensoy, 1989), d - Kars-Dereiçi (Ceylan, 2007), e - Kars-Cicekli (Ceylan, et al., 2009).*

## NOVO OBMOČJE SKALNE UMETNOSTI V ANATOLIJI: SKALNE UPODOBITEV V HEKIMDERE

*Okay PEKŞEN*

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### POVZETEK

*Turška pokrajina Rize, strateško zelo pomembna lokacija v vzhodni črnomorski regiji, je bila skozi zgodovino dom številnim civilizacijam in kulturam, vendar v njej še ni bilo ustreznih znanstvenih zgodovinskih terenskih raziskav. Prvič smo opravili raziskavo z dovoljenjem in podporo Ministrstva za kulturo in turizem Republike Turčije. S temi raziskavami smo na lokaciji, imenovani »Hekimdere«, v bližini planote Anzer v regiji İkizdere/Rize, odkrili zelo pomembne skalne poslikave. Nedavne študije kažejo na vse večje število skalnih poslikav (petroglifov) v Anatoliji, ki so nastale s tehnikami rezbarjenja, graviranja, strganja in slikanja. Vendar vse doslej v vzhodni črnomorski regiji nismo naleteli na skalne poslikave, izdelane s slikarskimi metodami. Čeprav so bili petroglifi v Hekimdere zaradi načina slikanja v veliki meri uničeni, se je deset skalnih slik na dveh ploščah ohranilo do današnjih dni. Na petroglifih v Hekimdere so bile, podobno kot v drugih primerih, z rdečo barvo naslikane upodobitve konjev, zvezd oziroma sonca, dreves oziroma dreves življenja, ki spominjajo na druge anatolske in srednjeazijske primere. Petroglifi iz Hekimdere so zelo pomembni za anatolsko zgodovino, saj so prvi v vzhodni črnomorski regiji. Pri pripravi te študije smo uporabili naslednjo metodo: skalne poslikave, ki smo jih odkrili med terenskim delom, smo narisali in jih nato obdelali s posebno programsko opremo. Nato smo te poslikave primerjali z drugimi primeri v Anatoliji, na Kavkazu in drugih območjih Azije. Da smo pridobljene podatke podkrepili, smo se oprli na antično in sodobno literaturo. Cilj te študije je podrobno predstaviti petroglife iz Hekimdere in prikazati njihovo podobnost z anatolskimi, kavkaškimi in drugimi azijskimi primeri petroglifov.*

*Ključne besede: Anatolija, Turčija, Rize, antična zgodovina, skalno slikarstvo, petroglifi*

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