

# TRACES OF THE ORIGIN OF TRADITIONAL SPORTS IN ÇILDİR BAŞKÖY ROCK ART

Yavuz GÜNAŞDI<sup>1</sup>, Uğur KARCIÖĞLU<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ataturk University, Faculty of Letters, Department of History, Erzurum/TURKEY, gunasdi@atauni.edu.tr

<sup>2</sup>Atatürk University, Institute of Turkic Studies, Erzurum/TURKEY, ugur.karcioglu@hotmail.com

## Abstract

Archaeological documents are the most important source for the periods when there were no written documents. Rock art drawn by human beings are one of these sources. Through these pictures, information about the social, economic, cultural and even sports activities of the period can be obtained. Çıldır district, Damlıca village and Başköy stream, which were determined by our team in the light of the surveys, are valuable in this respect in the depictions in the rock art. In our study, information about the origin of traditional sports is given in the light of Başköy rock art. Suggestions regarding the origin of the javelin and taigan race were made in the light of the depictions on the panel on which the rock art were processed. Our research, in the light of archaeological data, reveals that the origins of traditional sports, which are still played today, are quite old.

**Keywords:** Rock Art, Petroglyphs, Traditional Sports, Javelin Mounted, Taigan Race.

**DOI:** 10.47750/pnr.2022.13.S08.255

## INTRODUCTION

In order to understand in which geography and in which situation people lived, it is necessary to examine the archaeological sources as well as the written documents of their periods. In this respect, archaeological artifacts such as ceramic pots, metal objects, materials made of stone, bone or wood, wall paintings are valuable. Rock art and other archaeological finds that we encounter in many parts of the world partially reveal the cultures, mentalities, social lives, beliefs and social activities of the period in which they were made. In addition, these archaeological artifacts contribute to a more understandable interpretation of today's world.

While a lot of research has been done on communities with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds in the Central Asian geography, where rock art are intense, unfortunately the depictions on the rocks have not been adequately researched. However, further research on rock art will seriously reveal the art, lifestyle, socio-economic and sportive activities of the people living in these geographies.

With these thoughts, we tried to examine the depictions belonging to the prototype of traditional sports on Başköy Rock Art in Eastern Anatolian Geography. However, we know that human groups have changed constantly throughout history. Parallel to these changes, the sports performed changed. Because there is a strong connection between the history of sports and the history of humanity. Therefore, as humanity develops, sports also develop and change.

Throughout history, people have created some activities to improve themselves. The activities created are actions that reflect people's own social lives. One of these actions was the games or sports belonging to their own culture. When we look at the history of games and sports, we understand that people did some activities to protect themselves, develop or fight. The aim of the actions, which

we call the prototype of traditional sports, can be war training as well as hunting training. These sports are generally sports such as shooting and horse riding. Because shooting and equestrian activities are the most important tools used in wars and hunting. We are of the opinion that the depictions of shooting and equestrian on the Başköy Rock Art are the prototypes of some traditional sports that are tried to be kept alive today.

## MATERIALS, METHODS AND FINDINGS

In the field studies we have been carrying out in the Eastern Anatolia Region since 1998, many castles, mounds, rock tombs and settlements belonging to the Ancient Age have been identified. During our research, more than 20 rock art areas were found and they were examined in detail. The rock art we found in Çıldır district of Ardahan province is one of them. The figures on the panel with the Başköy rock art were examined in detail and their drawings were made. In addition, these depictions in Başköy rock art were compared with the rock art we found in Central Asia, the Caucasus, Iran and Eastern Anatolia Regions and evaluations were made.

Çıldır district, which is approximately 42 km east of Ardahan, is located in the Kars-Erzurum section of the Eastern Anatolia Region (Map: 1). Located at a strategic point, Çıldır is at a point that connects Anatolia with the Caucasus. Ardahan is located on the west side, Arpaçay and Susuz districts of Kars on the south, Georgia on the north and northeast side, and Armenia on the east side. The altitude of Çıldır district is approximately 1900 m above sea level (Ketin, 1983; 464; Saraçoğlu, 1989; 312 et al.; Atalay, 1992; 55 et al.; Ceylan, 2015; 9-24).

The first scientific studies on Çıldır and its surroundings were made by Kökten. Kökten stated that settlement has existed in the area since the Neolithic Age. The history of Çıldır, which has

existed since the Neolithic Age, continued in the Early Bronze Age, Middle Bronze Age, Early Iron Age and Middle Iron Age and in the following period (Ceylan, 2007; 375 et al.; Gündoğdu, 2001; I et al.; Ceylan 2015; 9-24).

Rock art are symbols that people have drawn or painted on cave walls or rock blocks since Prehistoric Ages to express themselves. Rock art is sometimes called cave art or wall art. However, whatever the naming is, the most distinctive feature of rock art is that it is made on natural rocks. This feature of rock art distinguishes it from wall paintings on built walls, paintings on wood, canvas, ceramics or other floors, carvings and sculptures made independently (Whitley, 2011; 23-31; Özgül, 2016; 374). Research on rock art gained a different dimension in the 19th century and became a field of research that gradually increased with people's sense of understanding themselves and wondering about their past (Whitley, 2011; 15).

Rock art are artistic works that people have made on rock surfaces from the Paleolithic Age to recent times. Although the rock art found in Central Asia, the Caucasus, Anatolia and even in many parts of Europe are similar to each other in terms of construction techniques, style and geographical space, they can sometimes show differences in terms of figures. Numerous rock art areas drawn by nomads have been discovered in Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Anatolia, Iran, Eastern Europe and the Balkans (Figure 1-4). These discovered rock art are generally similar to each other in terms of construction technique, style and variety of figures (Caferoğlu, 1953; 201-212; Esin, 1965; 167-227; Seyidoğlu, 1995; 12 et al.; Çınar, 1996, 15 et al.; Ceylan, 2018; 170-172; Beksaç, 2000; 191; Günaşdı, 2016; 391-407; Çoruhlu, 2019; I: 83; Bingöl, 2020; 70-175; Özgül and Bingöl, 2021; 491-527).

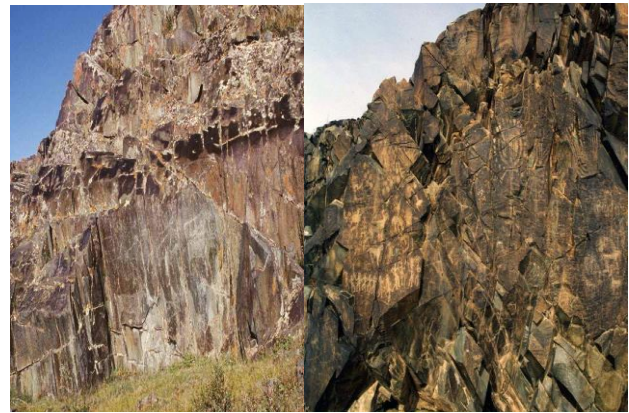


Figure 3: Mongolia Baga Oigor

Figure 4: Kazakhstan Tamgalisay



Figure 5: Baskoy Rock Art Area

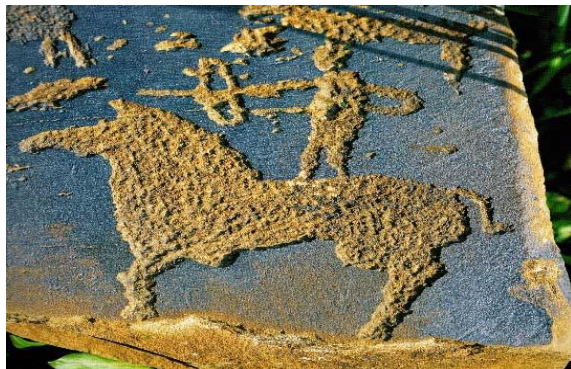


Figure 1: Kyrgyzstan Saymalitas Rock Art



Figure 6: Board with Baskoy Rock Art



Figure 2: Armenia Rock Art



Figure 7: Drawings of Başköy Rock Art Numbered Version of Mounted Horsemen

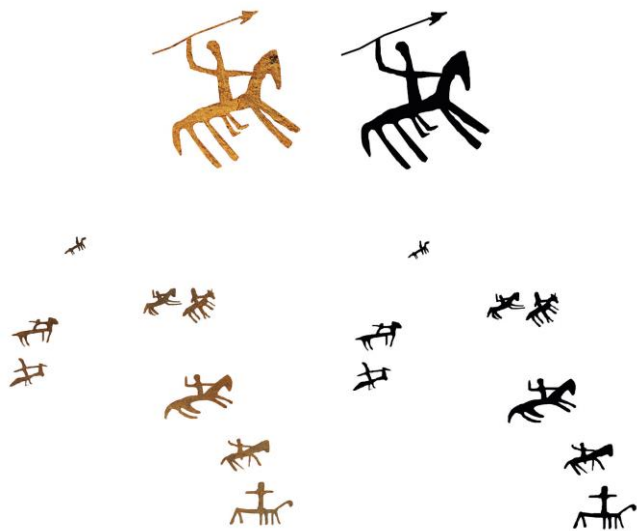


Figure 8: Drawings of Horsemen



Figure 9a: Drawing of the Original State of the Depiction Found on the Rock



Figure 9b: The Equestrian Javelin Play Position Trying to Keep Alive Today



Figure 10a: Drawing of the Original State of the Depiction Found on the Rock



Figure 10b: The Equestrian Javelin Play Position Trying to Keep Alive Today



Figure 11a: Drawing of the Original State of the Depiction Found on the Rock



Figure 11b: The Equestrian Javelin Play Position Trying to Keep Alive Today



Figure 12: Drawing of the Original State of the Depictions Found on the Rock



Figure 13a: Drawing of the Original State of the Depictions Found on the Rock



Figure 13b: The Equestrian Sports Scene That Is Trying To Keep Alive Today



Figure 14: Drawing of the Original State of the Depiction Found on the Rock



Figure 15: Drawing of the Original State of the Depiction Found on the Rock



Figure 16a: Drawing of the Original State of the Depictions Found on the Rock



Figure 16b: The Scene of the Taigan (Dog) Race to Survive Today  
If we look at the definition of traditional sports, warrior and hunter features are generally seen in the emergence of these sports. In other words, these kinds of activities, which were life itself at first,

are now seen as sports activities due to the longing for ancestors. These sports, which we know traditionally, are seen in two ways as sports done on a horse or without a horse. At first, these sports were organized on toy (festival) and yuğ (mourning) days. If we count the sports that are among the traditional equestrian sports in Turkey; Equestrian Javelin Sport, Rahvan Equestrian Races, Equestrian Archery Sport, Gökbörü Contest and Horse Sleigh Contests. This number may increase when the whole Turkish world is considered. If we count non-equestrian traditional sports; There are 7 pieces as Aba Wrestling, Belt Wrestling, Shalwar Wrestling, Traditional Sledge, Mangala, Minstrel Game and Mas (Wood) Wrestling. Again, looking at the Turkish World in general, this number of changes can be seen (Türkmen and Karcioğlu, 2021; 21-44).

Today, traditional sports organizations have gained a feature that creates cultural unity in the nations they are in, alleviates the crises between nations, and even brings nations closer to each other, rather than preparing for wars or hunting (Karcioğlu and Arstanbekov, 2021; 81-101).

Çıldır Başköy Rock Art, which constitute the main theme of our subject, are located in Başköy Stream on the east side of Damlıca Village, which is connected to Çıldır district of Ardahan province (Figure 5). On the panel, figures such as people on foot, dogs, mountain goats, horses and cavalry can be seen (Figure 6-7). These figures are generally made with line technique. The lower part of the panel has been highly damaged since it is at a point accessible to people (Ceylan, 2015; 9-24).

There are 9 mounted cavalry depictions and 3 dismounted cavalry on the panel where the rock art are called Çıldır Başköy. It is thought that some of these drawings bear traces of the prototype of our traditional sports.

#### Depictions Reflecting the Proto Type of Equestrian Javelin Sport

The “javelin” stick, which is another type of bayonet or spear known as a war tool by the Turks, is 100 cm. length of the head is 2.5 cm. It is a wooden and round shaped stick. The horse javelin game is a game developed in order to better throw the bayonet or spear-like stick against the animal or enemy while on the horse. In short, it can be said that equestrian javelin, like the prototype of other traditional sports, is a preparatory sport created for social life. It is known that the javelin stick, which is the main theme of this game, was created in order to improve the warrior and hunting characteristics of people. This activity, which used to be life itself, has become our traditional equestrian sport until today. The prototype of the mounted javelin game is the game “Count”, which is still known to be played, albeit rarely, in Central Asia. (Turkmen, 199; 129; Karcioğlu, 2017; 167-198). We tried to examine the existence of the traces of the prototype of the traditional sports that are tried to be kept alive today, starting from the drawings on the panel created by the rock art of Başköy, Ardahan province, Çıldır district. We explained this by numbering the drawings on the board.

Horseman number 1 holds a spear or bayonet similar to a javelin stick (Figure 8). The cavalryman prepared this device to throw it towards the mountain goat just in front of him. This move is very similar to the javelin throwing position in the horse javelin game (Figure 9). In both of them, there is a situation of throwing a shot at an entity running ahead. In the horse javelin game, the athlete who wants to throw the javelin stick to the athlete running in front of him, waits for the moment when his horse gets support from his hind legs and throws his front legs forward in order to throw the javelin stick more accurately and harder. In this way, both the speed of the running horse is used and a harder shot is made because the horse's front legs are firmly on the ground when the javelin is thrown. Probably the person who drew the cavalryman

on the board also knew this tactic. Because while drawing, he drew the position of the horse in the same way as the cavalry shot. In the drawing number 1 that we have mentioned, it has been observed that the horseman is depicted in such a way that the horse's hind legs are powered by the horse's hind legs at the moment of the shooting move, and the front legs are extended and firmly on the ground. Based on this interpretation, such activities, which were the life struggle of the people of that period, are tried to be kept alive as traditional sports by today's people.

No object could be observed in the hand of the cavalryman, whom we tried to indicate with the number 2, among the cavalrymen depicted on the same panel (Figure 10). However, when we look at the horse's movement, it is seen that it is the same as the drawing number 1. It is noteworthy that the hand of the cavalryman is above. Another striking detail is the depiction of a human being with a spear, bayonet or stick just behind it. It is thought that this person, who was on foot, extended the tool in his hand towards the horseman. From this point of view, we can think that the mounted cavalry made the shooting move and the person, who was on foot, tried to give the thrown tool to the mounted cavalry again. Because it can be seen that all the drawings on the panel are in motion from left to right.

When the horseman number 3 on the panel is examined, it is seen that he is running his horse from the left side to the right (Figure 11). The point to be noted here is that the cavalryman does not have any materials in his hand. Although he did not have any material, it is thought that he had a connection with the mountain goat and the number 2 mounted cavalry. Because he is depicted chasing any of them. Again, it is thought that this scene has a connection with catching and forgiving the opponent in the horse javelin game, which is still alive today. Because it is known that the main purpose of this game is to catch and forgive the opponent or to hit the opponent with the javelin stick (Figure 12).

Among the mounted cavalry on the board, those numbered 4, 5 and 6 are drawn as dismounted. In the cavalry number 3, the foot shapes of the horse and the hand shapes of the cavalry were drawn in the same style. Unfortunately, none of these depictions have been linked to any of the traditional sports. The horseman numbered 7, on the other hand, is drawn in a standing position. In fact, the presence of a pedestrian human being drawn in a smaller shape in front of this mounted cavalry can also be seen. It is thought that the horseman and this man on foot are related to each other. Because it is observed that the hand movements are directed towards each other.

There is another horseman depiction just above the horseman numbered 7. It is observed that one hand of this cavalryman numbered 8 is in the air. It is seen that his horse is depicted in a running position. No objects called spears, bayonets or sticks were found in the cavalry's hand. However, it is seen that there is another mounted cavalry right behind it and the cavalryman numbered 9 is running his horse with full bridle. In addition, it is thought that this horseman and the horseman number 8 in front of him are related to each other. In other words, it is understood that the horseman number 9 is in an effort to catch up with the horseman number 8 (Figure 13).

Just below the horseman number 9, there is another horseman, who is depicted in a standing position. This horseman numbered 10 is also thought to have a connection with the horsemen numbered 8 and 9. In fact, it is thought that an attempt was made to describe the moment when the horseman number 9 and the horseman number 10 were standing side by side, while the horseman number 9 suddenly started to run. At the top of the panel, there is another mounted cavalry numbered 11. This horseman is depicted in a standing position. When this cavalry is examined, it cannot be

associated with any equestrian sport. Another cavalryman numbered 12 stands out in the middle of the panel. This cavalryman is also depicted with one hand in the air. He probably held an object in his hand, which we called a spear, bayonet or stick. However, this object cannot be observed due to destruction (Figure 14).

#### Depictions Reflecting the Prototype of Taigan Racing

This type of race, called the taigan race, is a sport in which the hunting dogs of Central Asia compete with each other. The purpose of this sport is to take the food behind the horse rider running in front by the dogs. In the game, a equestrian starts to run his horse by opening a certain distance, while the hunting dogs run after the equestrian at the same time and try to catch the food hanging behind him by catching up with the equestrian. The dog that gets the food first is the winner of the race. This sport, whose existence is not very well known in Anatolia, is practiced with great interest in Central Asia (Figure 15).

Ardahan and its surroundings, which is one of the most important points of the transition from Central Asia to Anatolia, is undoubtedly one of the settlements where Central Asian culture can be seen. With these thoughts, it is argued that the depictions and scenes on the rock art of Ardahan Çıldır Başköy will reflect the lifestyles and social lives of the people of the migrating culture. Therefore, it is thought that the depictions of the horseman numbered 13 and the dog behind it on the panel may be the prototype of the Taigan race, which is seen extensively in Central Asia. Because the horseman in the front was drawn with his hand extended backwards, and two very similar dogs were drawn behind him. These drawn dogs are depicted in a running position to quickly catch up with the mounted cavalry. This depiction is thought to be the training scene of hunting dogs, which are very valuable for the people of the period (Figure 16).

When the panel is examined in general, there are 8 pedestrian people who are thought to have shields, spears or swords in their hands. It is striking that these people are in a struggle with each other. Therefore, it is thought that these scenes either indicate a war situation or indicate a training situation. The second situation is more severe. If these scenes reflect the training situation, the view that the horse and cavalry depictions, which constitute the main theme of our subject, were made for the purpose of training for war or hunting comes to the fore. It can be argued that these training scenes, in time, formed the prototype of today's traditional sports.

## DISCUSSION

Rock art have been made by painting, scraping or drawing on the surfaces of rocks, inside caves and places considered sacred since the Prehistoric Age, within the scope of certain thoughts. This action continued in the later periods, namely in the Neolithic Age, Chalcolithic Age, Bronze Age and Iron Age cultures. In addition, this tradition is also seen in the Scythians, the Huns and the Gokturks. In short, although the areas where the rock art were found were used in different periods, the fact that they are similar shows that there is a common understanding that continues in the Central Asia, Caucasus and Anatolian geography.

It is known that the people living in these geographies create sports activities in order to improve the activities in their lifestyles and they have a rich culture. Some of these sports activities we have mentioned are continued as traditional sports today. The fact that these activities, which are lifestyles themselves, take place on rock art, perhaps offers us the finest details of our traditional sports. Rock art convey the perception of nature, environment and life felt by people living in the steppe geography. This reveals the fact

that geography is the most important factor in shaping the whole of life, from the understanding of art to the lifestyle, from sports activities to the perception of the universe. The formation of sportive activities and their examination in rock art come from the desire to transfer them to future generations by ensuring their permanence in the activities that are effective in their lives.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the horse and cavalry depictions on the Ardahan Çıldır Başköy Rock Art, which constitute the main theme of our subject, we can argue that the people living in this geography are on war and hunting like the people living in the Central Asian geography. It is understood that the people of the period in which the drawings were made carried out some activities in order to improve their fighting and hunting characteristics. They drew on the rocks to pass on their activities to future generations. Today's people, on the other hand, are trying to keep the activities necessary for the life of their ancestors alive with some activities due to the feeling of longing and emulation for their ancestors. These activities, which are kept alive, continue as traditional sports within the framework of common culture in Central Asia, Caucasus, Iran and Anatolia.

It is thought that some of the drawings depicted in Başköy Rock Art are the prototypes of today's traditional sports such as horse-drawn javelin and taigan (dog) racing. Because, considering the geography where the rock art are located, it is seen that the people of the region have been making a living from both hunting and animal husbandry since ancient times. In addition, we know that the traditional sports, Mounted Javelin, is still heavily practiced in this region. For the people of the region, the horse has always been an indispensable element. Although the taigan (dog) race seen on the rock art is not intense in Anatolia, it is intensely lived in Central Asia. The geography where Başköy Rock Art are located is an important point in the transition from Central Asia to Anatolia. From this point of view, we can say that the taigan (dog) race is an ancestral sport that was forgotten during the transition to Anatolia, but continues in Central Asia.

## REFERENCES

- Atalay, İ., 1992. Türkiye coğrafyası. İstanbul.
- Bektaş, E., 2000. Türk Dünyasında geyik sembolizmi. Türk Dünyası araştırmaları 129, pp. 191-207.
- Bingöl, B., 2020. "Kuzeydoğu Anadolu petrogliflerindeki dağ keçisi motifi (yayımlanmamış yüksek lisans tezi), Erzurum: Atatürk Üniversitesi.
- Caferoğlu, A., 1953. Türk onomastiğinde at kültürü. Türkiyat mecmuası X, pp. 201-212.
- Ceylan, A., 2015. Çıldır Başköy kaya resimleri. Belgü, 2(2): pp. 9-24.
- Ceylan, A., 2018. Türk Dünyasından yeni kaya resimleri. XVII. Türk tarih kongresi I, pp. 155-206.
- Çınar, A. A., 1996. Kazak ve Türkiye Türklerinde at kültürü ve atın rolü (yayımlanmamış doktora tezi). Ankara: Hacettepe Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü.
- Çoruhlu, Y., 2019. Türk Sanatında Hayvan Sembolizmi I. İstanbul.
- Esin, E., 1965. The horse in Turkic. Central Asiatic journal X (3/4). pp. 167-227.
- Günaşdı, Y., 2016. Doğu Anadolu kaya resimleri ışığında Doyumlu kaya panoları, SUTAD, Bahar 39, pp. 391-407.
- Gündoğdu, H., 2001. Tarihi kalıntıları ile Çıldır. Ankara.
- Karacıoğlu, U., 2017. Türk kültüründe atın önemi ve ata sporlarımızdan atlı cirit oyunu". Anasay 2, pp. 167-198
- Karacıoğlu, U., Arstanbekov, S., 2021. Geleneksel kültür unsurları bağlamında oyun ve spor kavramları, (Ed: H. Çağlayan, O. Epe), Spor ve Bilim 7, pp. 87-101.

- Ketin, İ., (1983). Türkiye jeolojisine genel bir bakış. İstanbul.
- Kökten, İ. K., 1943. Kars'ın tarih öncesi hakkında ilk kısa rapor. Belleten, 7(27), pp. 601-613.
- Kökten, İ. K., 1944. Orta, Doğu ve Kuzey Anadolu'da yapılan tarih öncesi araştırmalar. Belleten 8(32), pp. 659-680.
- Kökten, İ. K., 1953. 1952 yılında yaptığım tarih öncesi araştırmalar. Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi dergisi 9(2), pp. 3-4.
- Özgül, O., Bingöl, B. 2021. Kuzeydoğu Anadolu petrogliflerindeki bir grup dağ Keçisi motifi. Art-Sanat Dergisi 16, pp. 491-527.
- Saraçoğlu, H., 1989. Doğu Anadolu Bölgesi. İstanbul.
- Seyidoğlu, B., 1995. Mitolojik dönemde at. Türk kültüründe at ve çağdaş atçılık I, pp. 12-18.
- Türkmen, M., 1996. Türklerde geleneksel atlı sporların yapılışı, kaynağı ve bilinmeyen yeni boyutları. Marmara Üniversitesi Sağlık Bilimleri Enstitüsü (Yayımlanmamış Doktora Tezi).
- Türkmen, M., Karacıoğlu, U., 2021. From the cultural perspective: Game and sports (G&S), (Ed: M. Türkmen, M.A. Ziyagil, A. Kaya), impacts of traditional sports and games on global peace and development during and after covid-19, pp. 29-44.
- Whitley, D., 2011. Introduction to rock art research. London - Newyork.