

Preface

This is a book about the rock art of Ukraine. Most probably, you don't know much about it. Regularly, when describing my field to my colleagues, they are surprised that there is anything to study on the topic at all. Such a state of the art is quite reasonable—we have not put much effort into presenting and disseminating information about our sites, their art and our research efforts, especially abroad, and the study of Ukrainian rock art has barely been presented in English at all. However, there are several sites, and at least one of them is large enough to be presented in a book, or rather, series of books. Still, a lot of work is to be done before one can say that they know the rock art of Ukraine well.

Kamyana Mohyla is (and used to be) a real terra incognita for most archaeologists and rock art scholars around the world. Funnily enough, it remains almost unknown in Ukraine. Though all of us know this name and a few images associated with the site, people rarely understand its importance and uniqueness. Fair enough—most engraved caves are covered with sand; the place lacks public representation, and it is located far from main travelling routes in Ukraine. Even archaeologists, those who know the most about Kamyana Mohyla and Ukrainian prehistory, are not usually aware of what the rock art of Ukraine is like and how to communicate it to others.

My colleagues and I were lucky to study this unique site during a new stage of its existence. We spent a decade of field work there, participating in archaeological projects and thinking about its rock art from time to time. The research that started later resulted in a PhD thesis on the portable art of Kamyana Mohyla. This was not focused on the rock art *per se*, but rather explored the technological means to study portable rock art with submillimeter accuracy with digital cameras and several software solutions. Though this book is written in the footsteps of that PhD, it is focused on the site itself and aims to present it to people—those interested enough to read about it.

Another stimulus to show this awesome and, in my view, very impressive rock art location to the world, is its current state. Being located on the steppes of southeastern Ukraine, it has been occupied by Russian forces since late February 2022. We have observed many crimes against culture over the last decades and we know well that terroristic regimes treat cultural heritage in their own way—destroying the sites or making them serve unjust and untruthful ends. With this in mind, I find presenting Kamyana Mohyla in the best possible way extremely important, as the largest and the most iconic rock art site in Ukraine. First of all, it is necessary to remember what is endangered and might be lost or erased from Ukrainian history. This publication aims to prevent that erasure from happening. Furthermore, it shows the site's current state and indicates several organizational problems and research issues to be solved after the war. The unwanted pause in my research activity is a good point to look back and plan future work, and summarize our results obtained over the last decade. In some ways, winter has come to Ukrainian archaeology; and winter is a good time to write.

Finally, Kamyana Mohyla provides a good picture of Ukraine on the map of Europe. Being located on the western border of the incredibly large Eurasian Steppe belt, it fuses and mixes different ideas, artistic impressions, and archaeological data both from Europe and Asia. The location represents both the western part of “the East” and the eastern part of “the West” and is strange and special for both of them. Finally, it remains special and unique, addressing local Ukrainian processes that developed independently both from the European world and the vastness of the steppe. Just like Ukraine today, this site is a true crossroad of different routes.

As I have very personal feelings about Kamyana Mohyla, the research process and the results I am presenting below, this book is personal. However, by telling my story I try to make the science of rock art sound alive and dynamic, but do not replace research with entertainment. I feel that this Ukrainian site should be presented like it is telling thousands of different stories rather than one linear and methodologically strict narrative. From prehistory, through to its research history during the 20th century, to the recent advantages of our study, these stories are different, alive and exciting.

And the first personal thing I should do here is to express my respect and gratitude to all those somehow connected to this research—those who donated their time, efforts, inspiration and wisdom—sometimes much more than that—to bring it into being. To begin with, my teachers, colleagues and senior advisors who guided me through the first years of my archaeological existence are to be thanked. Therefore, special thanks go to

Oleh Tuboltsev, Nadiia Kotova, Dmytro Kiosak and Dmytro Nykonenko. Not only did they teach me almost everything I know about my work, but also accompanied and co-authored substantial pieces of research on Kamyana Mohyla prehistory. Special thanks go to Trond Lødøen, who inspired and encouraged me to proceed with rock art research through a small talk in Italy and was helpful many times since then. My supervisors, Professors Vito Messina, Fulvio Rinaudo, and Paolo Biagi, managed and pushed me when required and left me to work independently when possible. The whole team from the “Technologies 4 Cultural Heritage” PhD school took care of many technical issues. The fantastic members of the “Maibutni” democratic school (namely Liza Holitsyna) and the “New Archaeological School” (too many to name all of them here) have supported me in my field trips and safeguarded my mental health during the research. The latter is my true archaeological motherland, where I grew as a human being and a scholar. A special hug to Anna Radchenko, Yevhenii Pohribniy, and Oleh Yatsuk, who spent night after night listening to long narratives about the portable rock art of Kamyana Mohyla—which is rarely the desired way to spend your time. Rory Connolly donated more of his time than anybody else, tremendously improving my English writing. All best efforts have been made to contact the copyright holders for images reproduced in this manuscript, but in some cases rightsholders could not be traced. If any issues arise with the use of these images, please contact me or the publisher, who will be happy to resolve them. Finally, many thanks to Jacqueline Senior and the team at BAR Publishing as they are those made it physically possible, and two anonymous reviewers who helped to significantly improve the text.

It is imperative to mention Victor Dzhos, Yuriy Ratskevich, and other Kamyana Mohyla National Reserve workers who are trying to protect this unique site from the constant risks of Russian occupation. Though their lives are endangered by the unjustified aggression of a terrorist state, they are standing to protect their workplace. I am honored to know them. Similarly, I am in tremendous debt to my colleagues who are fighting on a frontline of freedom, allowing me to conduct my research: Dmytro Kobaliia, Denys Grechko, Dmytro Romanchuk, Oleksandr Malyshev, Denys Bondarenko, Oleksiy Kryutchenko, Andrew Kobaliia, Mykola Belenko, Pavlo Vasyliiev, Oleksandr Nezdoliiy, Andriy Petrauskas, Ihor Starenkiy, Stepan Cheltsov and many others. These are the real heroes protecting our country and the unique place I have described and continue to study.