

A Comprehensive Survey of Rock Art in Upper Tibet  
Volume IV.1. Stod (Western Half)





# A Comprehensive Survey of Rock Art in Upper Tibet

Volume IV.1  
Stod (Western Half)

John Vincent Bellezza

ARCHAEOPRESS ARCHAEOLOGY



ARCHAEOPRESS PUBLISHING LTD

13-14 Market Square

Bicester

Oxfordshire OX26 6AD

United Kingdom

[www.archaeopress.com](http://www.archaeopress.com)

ISBN 978-1-80327-873-5

ISBN 978-1-80327-874-2 (e-Pdf)

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Cover: The valley housing rock art in S79. In the distance is the Transhimalyan A yi la Range of far western Tibet.  
Spine: Outline of an anthropomorph, inv. no. S71\_L16\_C1c. Iron Age. Cat222.

Text and photographs by John Vincent Bellezza

Maps by Brian Sebastian and John Vincent Bellezza

Rock art locator diagrams by Brian Sebastian and John Vincent Bellezza



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# Contents

## Volume IV.1

<b>List of Figures .....</b>	<b>xi</b>
<b>List of Maps.....</b>	<b>xv</b>
<b>List of Catalogue Images .....</b>	<b>xvi</b>
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>xxv</b>
<b>Precis .....</b>	<b>xxvi</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Ia. A Brief Introduction to the Volume.....	1
Ib. Rock Art Sites of Upper Tibet .....	5
Ic. Chronology Outline .....	9
Id. Abbreviations Used in the Rock Art Inventory .....	10
<b>Inventoried Rock Art Sites.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<i>Mtha' kham pa ri (S69).....</i>	<i>11</i>
S69_L1 .....	16
Panel 1 (lower panel of main face) .....	16
Panel 2 (lower middle panel of main face).....	43
Panel 3 (upper middle panel of main face) .....	43
Panel 4 (upper panel of main face).....	71
Panel 5 .....	71
Panel 6 .....	72
Panel 7 .....	73
Panel 8 .....	75
Panel 9.....	77
Panel 10.....	78
S69_L2 .....	79
Panel 1.....	79
Panel 2.....	83
Panel 3.....	83
Panel 4.....	83
Panel 5.....	85
Panel 6.....	85
<i>Nag skyom (S70).....</i>	<i>86</i>
Panel 1.....	87
Panel 2.....	87
Panel 3.....	87
<i>Rgyab lung (S71) .....</i>	<i>88</i>
West Formation .....	90
S71_L1.....	90
S71_L2.....	95
S71_L3.....	96
S71_L4.....	97
S71_L5.....	97
S71_L6.....	100
S71_L7.....	100
S71_L8.....	100
S71_L9.....	101
S71_L10.....	102

East outcrop .....	105
S71_L12 .....	108
S71_L13 .....	121
S71_L14 .....	123
S71_L15 .....	126
S71_L16 .....	128
S71_L17 .....	130
S71_L18 .....	130
S71_L19 .....	131
<b>Brag gtsug (S72) .....</b>	<b>132</b>
S72_L1 .....	135
S72_L2 .....	135
S72_L3 .....	136
S72_L4 .....	162
S72_L5 .....	162
S72_L6 .....	162
S72_L7 .....	163
S72_L8 .....	163
S72_L9 .....	163
S72_L10 .....	165
S72_L11 .....	173
S72_L12 .....	181
S72_L13 .....	183
S72_L14 .....	183
S72_L15 .....	184
S72_L16 .....	186
Panel 1 .....	186
Panel 2 .....	187
Panel 3 .....	188
Panel 4 .....	190
Panel 5 .....	190
Panel 6 .....	191
Panel 7 .....	193
Panel 8 .....	196
Panel 9 .....	196
Panel 10 .....	196
Panel 11 .....	199
Panel 12 .....	201
Panel 13 .....	203
Panel 14 .....	208
Panel 15 .....	209
Panel 16 .....	209
Panel 17 .....	210
Panel 18 .....	211
Panel 19 .....	213
Panel 20 .....	214
Panel 21 .....	215
Panel 22 .....	216
Panel 23 .....	216
Panel 24 .....	216
Panel 25 .....	217
Panel 26 .....	220
Panel 27 .....	220
Panel 28 .....	221
Panel 29 .....	221
Panel 30 .....	222
Panel 31 .....	223
S72_L17 .....	226

S72_L18 .....	226
S72_L19 .....	226
<i>Gna' bo lung (S73)</i> .....	<b>228</b>
S73_L1 .....	230
S73_L2 .....	234
S73_L3 .....	234
S73_L4 .....	240
S73_L5 .....	242
S73_L6 .....	242
S73_L7 .....	246
<i>Chu lung (S74)</i> .....	<b>248</b>
S74_L1 (upper sector) .....	250
Panel 1 .....	250
Panel 2 .....	250
Panel 3 .....	253
S74_L2 .....	253
Panel 1 .....	253
Panel 2 .....	255
Panel 3 .....	264
Panel 4 .....	267
Panel 5 .....	269
Panel 6 .....	272
Panel 7 .....	289
<i>Gyam kham pa (S75)</i> .....	<b>290</b>
Panel 1 .....	290
Panel 2 .....	292
<i>Rdu ru can (S76)</i> .....	<b>296</b>
Lower Sector of Rdu ru can .....	311
S76_L1 .....	311
S76_L2 .....	312
S76_L3 .....	313
S76_L4 .....	313
S76_L5 .....	314
S76_L6 .....	318
S76_L7 .....	319
S76_L8 .....	320
S76_L9 .....	321
S76_L10 .....	322
S76_L11 .....	323
S76_L12 .....	323
S76_L13 .....	327
S76_L14 .....	327
S76_L15 .....	329
S76_L16 .....	329
S76_L17 .....	334
S76_L18 .....	335
S76_L19 .....	342
S76_L20 .....	344
S76_L21 .....	346
S76_L22 .....	348
S76_L23 .....	348
S76_L24 .....	349
S76_L25 .....	349
S76_L26 .....	349
S76_L27 .....	350
S76_L28 .....	350
S76_L29 .....	350
S76_L30 .....	352

S76_L31 .....	352
S76_L32 .....	353
S76_L33 .....	354
S76_L34 .....	361
S76_L35 .....	361
S76_L36 .....	365
S76_L37 .....	365
S76_L38 .....	378
S76_L39 .....	385
S76_L40 .....	390
S76_L41 .....	391
S76_L42 .....	391
S76_L43 .....	391
S76_L44 .....	396
S76_L45 .....	396
S76_L46 .....	396
S76_L47 .....	397
S76_L48 .....	398
S76_L49 .....	399
S76_L50 .....	400
S76_L51 .....	401
S76_L52 .....	402
S76_L53 .....	402
S76_L54 .....	403
S76_L55 .....	403
S76_L56 .....	404
S76_L57 .....	407
S76_L58 .....	407
S76_L59 .....	408
S76_L60 .....	408
S76_L61 .....	409
S76_L62 .....	411
S76_L63 .....	411
S76_L64 .....	412
S76_L65 .....	412
S76_L66 .....	412
S76_L67 .....	413
S76_L68 .....	416
S76_L69 .....	416
S76_L70 .....	419
S76_L71 .....	420
S76_L72 .....	421
S76_L73 .....	423
S76_L74 .....	424
S76_L75 .....	424
S76_L76 .....	425
S76_L77 .....	425
S76_L78 .....	426
S76_L79 .....	428
S76_L80 .....	428
S76_L81 .....	432
S76_L82 .....	433
S76_L83 .....	439
S76_L84 .....	444
S76_L85 .....	449
S76_L86 .....	450
S76_L92 .....	450
S76_L93 .....	451

S76_L94 .....	454
S76_L95 .....	455
S76_L96 .....	456
S76_L97 .....	457
S76_L98 .....	460
S76_L99 .....	463
S76_L100 .....	463
S76_L101 .....	464
S76_L102 .....	464
S76_L103 .....	465
S76_L104 .....	466
S76_L105 .....	467
S76_L106 .....	468
S76_L107 .....	469
S76_L108 .....	470
S76_L109 .....	471
S76_L110 .....	473
S76_L111 .....	476
S76_L112 .....	476
S76_L167 .....	477
S76_L168 .....	477
S76_L169 .....	477
S76_L170 .....	478
S76_L171 .....	478
S76_L180 .....	479
S76_L181 .....	482
Intermediate Sector of Rdu ru can (S76) .....	482
S76_L87 .....	482
S76_L88 .....	483
S76_L89 .....	484
S76_L90 .....	484
S76_L91 .....	485
S76_L113 .....	485
S76_L114 .....	485
S76_L115 .....	486
S76_L116 .....	486
S76_L117 .....	487
S76_L118 .....	489
S76_L119 .....	489
S76_L120 .....	489
S76_L121 .....	489
S76_L122 .....	490
S76_L123 .....	490
Upper Sector of Rdu ru can (S76) .....	490
S76_L124 .....	490
S76_L125 .....	493
S76_L182 .....	499
S76_L126 .....	504
S76_L127 .....	511
S76_L128 .....	512
S76_L129 .....	513
S76_L130 .....	513
S76_L131 .....	520
S76_L132 .....	521
S76_L133 .....	521
S76_L134 .....	524
S76_L135 .....	527
S76_L136 .....	529

S76_L137 .....	532
S76_L138 .....	532
S76_L139 .....	533
S76_L140 .....	533
S76_L141 .....	534
S76_L142 .....	534
S76_L143 .....	536
S76_L144 .....	536
S76_L145 .....	538
S76_L146 .....	539
S76_L147 .....	540
S76_L148 .....	540
S76_L149 .....	541
S76_L150 .....	542
S76_L151 .....	542
S76_L152 .....	545
S76_L153 .....	545
S76_L154 .....	545
S76_L155 .....	545
S76_L156 .....	546
S76_L157 .....	547
S76_L158 .....	548
S76_L159 .....	548
S76_L160 .....	549
S76_L161 .....	549
S76_L162 .....	550
S76_L163 .....	552
S76_L164 .....	553
S76_L165 .....	558
S76_L166 .....	559
S76_L172 .....	560
S76_L173 .....	562
S76_L174 .....	562
S76_L175 .....	565
S76_L176 .....	565
S76_L177 .....	566
S76_L178 .....	573
S76_L179 .....	575

## Volume IV.2

<i>Ri mo gdong (S77) .....</i>	577
S77_L1 .....	582
S77_L2 .....	582
S77_L3 .....	582
S77_L4 .....	583
S77_L5 .....	584
S77_L6 .....	584
S77_L7 .....	585
S77_L8 .....	601
Panel 1 .....	602
Panel 2 .....	606
Panel 3 .....	613
Panel 4 .....	613
Panel 5 .....	614
Panel 6 .....	614
Panel 7 .....	617
Panel 8 .....	617
Panel 9 .....	617
Panel 10 .....	618
Panel 11 .....	619
Panel 12 .....	619
Panel 13 .....	620
Panel 14 .....	621
Panel 15 .....	624
Panel 16 .....	627
Panel 17 .....	627
Panel 18 .....	628
Panel 19 .....	628
Panel 20 .....	633
Panel 21 .....	634
Panel 22 .....	635
<i>Sa snying (S78) .....</i>	636
<i>Rno ba g.yang rdo (S79) .....</i>	643
S79_L1 .....	645
Upper sector of S79_L1 .....	645
Panel 1 .....	645
Panel 2 .....	647
Panel 3 .....	648
Panel 4 .....	649
Panel 5 .....	649
Panel 6 .....	651
Panel 7 .....	651
Panel 8 .....	651
Lower Sector of S79_L1 .....	653
Panel 9 .....	653
Panel 10 .....	655
S79_L2 .....	667
<i>Nag khung rdo ring (S80) .....</i>	668
<i>Gri'u chu thang (S81) .....</i>	669
<i>She rang sna kha shar ma (S82) .....</i>	677
<i>'Bri mo spo ba (S83) .....</i>	679
Panel 1 .....	681
Panel 2 .....	684

Panel 3 .....	684
Panel 4 .....	684
Panel 5 .....	685
Panel 6 .....	686
Panel 7 .....	686
Panel 8 .....	686
Panel 9 .....	686
<b>Rdzong chen (S84) .....</b>	<b>687</b>
S84_L1 .....	690
S84_L2 .....	690
S84_L3 .....	690
S84_L4 .....	692
S84_L5 .....	692
S84_L6 .....	692
S84_L7 .....	696
S84_L8 .....	696
S84_L9 .....	696
S84_L10 .....	697
S84_L11 .....	699
S84_L12 .....	699
S84_L13 .....	699
S84_L14 .....	699
S84_L15 .....	700
S84_L16 .....	700
S84_L17 .....	701
S84_L18 .....	702
S84_L19 .....	703
S84_L20 .....	703
S84_L21 .....	704
S84_L22 .....	705
S84_L23 .....	706
S84_L24 .....	707
S84_L25 .....	707
S84_L26 .....	707
S84_L27 .....	707
S84_L28 .....	708
S84_L29 .....	708
S84_L30 .....	708
S84_L31 .....	708
S84_L32 .....	709
S84_L33 .....	709
S84_L34 .....	709
S84_L35 .....	709
S84_L36 .....	710
S84_L37 .....	710
<b>She rang mkhar lung (S85) .....</b>	<b>711</b>
S85_L1 .....	713
S85_L2 .....	715
S85_L3 .....	716
S85_L4 .....	717
<b>Rdzong chung (S86) .....</b>	<b>718</b>
S86_L1 .....	722
S86_L2 .....	722
S86_L3 .....	723
S86_L4 .....	723
S86_L5 .....	724
S86_L6 .....	725

S86_L7 .....	725
S86_L8 .....	729
S86_L9 .....	729
S86_L10 .....	730
S86_L11 .....	731
S86_L12 .....	731
S86_L13 .....	735
S86_L14 .....	736
S86_L15 .....	737
S86_L16 .....	738
S86_L17 .....	738
S86_L18 .....	739
S86_L19 .....	739
S86_L20 .....	740
S86_L21 .....	741
S86_L22 .....	741
S86_L23 .....	741
S86_L24 .....	742
S86_L25 .....	742
S86_L26 .....	743
S86_L27 .....	743
S86_L28 .....	743
S86_L29 .....	743
S86_L30 .....	744
S86_L31 .....	744
S86_L32 .....	744
S86_L33 .....	745
S86_L34 .....	745
S86_L35 .....	746
S86_L36 .....	746
S86_L37 .....	746
S86_L38 .....	749
S86_L39 .....	750
S86_L40 .....	752
S86_L41 .....	752
S86_L42 .....	753
S86_L43 .....	753
S86_L44 .....	754
S86_L45 .....	754
S86_L46 .....	757
S86_L47 .....	759
S86_L48 .....	759
S86_L49 .....	764
S86_L50 .....	764
S86_L51 .....	767
S86_L52 .....	767
S86_L53 .....	768
S86_L54 .....	769
S86_L55 .....	772
S86_L56 .....	772
S86_L57 .....	773
S86_L58 .....	773
S86_L59 .....	774
S86_L60 .....	776
S86_L61 .....	776
S86_L62 .....	777
S86_L63 .....	778

S86_L64 .....	779
S86_L65 .....	781
S86_L66 .....	782
S86_L67 .....	783
S86_L68 .....	784
S86_L69 .....	788
S86_L70 .....	791
<i>Mkhar po che</i> .....	792
<i>Ru thog rdzong</i> (S87) .....	793
<i>Gser sgam</i> (S88) .....	798
<i>Lu ring sna kha</i> (S89) .....	806
S89_L1 (main face) .....	808
S89_L2 .....	817
<i>Mar lung</i> (S90) .....	822
<i>Brag gyam</i> (S91) .....	823
<i>Rgyal la ding</i> (S92) .....	824
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	828
<b>Catalogue of Images</b> .....	830
<b>Concordance</b> .....	1131
Catalogue No – Inventory No .....	1131
Inventory No. – Image No .....	1150

# List of Figures

## Volume IV.1

Figure 1.	Mtha' kham pa ri (S69). The main outcrop (L1) is the stepped formation on the middle-right side of the photograph. The west outcrop (L2) is on the far-left side of the image .....	14
Figure 2.	Mtha' kham pa ri (S69), Locus 1.....	14
Figure 3.	The view looking southwest from Mtha' kham pa ri. Note the herder's permanent residence ( <i>gzhima</i> ) on the lower-left side of the photograph .....	15
Figure 4.	The four rock panels of the main face of Mtha' kham pa ri (S69_L1) .....	17
Figure 5.	Panel 1 of Mtha' kham pa ri (S69_L1).....	17
Figure 6.	The locations of petroglyphs on the lower-left side of Panel 1 .....	18
Figure 7.	The locations of petroglyphs in the middle section of the lower panel, with the exception of S69_L1_C12, S69_L1_C13, and S69_L1_C18 .....	22
Figure 8.	The locations of petroglyphs in the right section of the lower panel.....	36
Figure 9.	A view of most of Panel 3 (6.3 m × 2.1 m), Mtha' kham pa ri (S69_L1).....	44
Figure 10.	The locations of petroglyphs on the left side of Panel 3 .....	44
Figure 11.	The locations of petroglyphs in the middle-left section of Panel 3 and extending as far right as S69_L1_C65h ..	49
Figure 12.	The locations of petroglyphs in the middle-right section of Panel 3, up to S69_L1_C65aa and S69_L1_C72e, except for S69_L1_C67, S69_L1_C68 and S69_L1_C73 .....	53
Figure 13.	The locations of petroglyphs in the lower-right section of Panel 3, but not including S69_L1_C79, S69_L1_C80, S69_L1_C84, and S69_L1_C85 .....	68
Figure 14.	The locations of petroglyphs on Panel 8 of Mtha' kham pa ri (S69_L1).....	75
Figure 15.	The locations of panels of Mtha' kham pa ri, Locus 2 (S69_L2) .....	79
Figure 16.	The locations of petroglyphs on Panel 1 of Mtha' kham pa ri (S69_L2).....	79
Figure 17.	The rock art site of Nag skyom (S70) .....	86
Figure 18.	The west outcrop in Rgyab lung (S71).....	90
Figure 19.	The locations of petroglyphs on S71_L1.....	91
Figure 20.	The rock outcrop housing S71_L5 (left side of photograph) and S71_L6 and S71_L7 (right side of photograph) ...	98
Figure 21.	The east outcrop at Rgyab lung (S71) .....	105
Figure 22.	Rgyab lung, S71_L12.....	108
Figure 23.	The locations of petroglyphs on the large lower panel of S71_L12 .....	109
Figure 24.	The locations of petroglyphs on the large upper panel of S71_L12.....	114
Figure 25.	Tibetan <i>dbu can</i> mantric inscription of uncertain age that appears to read: <i>hung</i> .....	127
Figure 26.	The pyramidal rock formation marking the entrance to Brag gtsug (S72) .....	133
Figure 27.	A view up the narrow Brag gtsug valley from near its mouth .....	134
Figure 28.	The location of S72_L3 (inclined, rectangular boulder in the middle of the photograph) among a jumble of boulders disgorged from the southeast flank of the pyramidal formation.....	136
Figure 29.	The southeast face of the boulder comprising S72_L3.....	137
Figure 30.	The locations of petroglyphs in the left section of the main boulder face of S72_L3 .....	137
Figure 31.	Locations of petroglyphs in the middle section of the main boulder face of S72_L3 .....	147
Figure 32.	Locations of petroglyphs in the right section of the main boulder face of S72_L3 .....	150
Figure 33.	An ancient structure built at the foot of the outcrop in the vicinity of S72_L3 .....	161
Figure 34.	A side view of the structure illustrated in Figure 33 .....	161
Figure 35.	A view of the structure from above .....	161
Figure 36.	The locations of petroglyphs in S72_L9 .....	164
Figure 37.	The locations of petroglyphs in S72_L10_C1.....	166
Figure 38.	The locations of petroglyphs in S72_L11_C1c to S72_L11_C1e and S72_L11_C12 .....	178
Figure 39.	Looking west towards the outcrop that hosts S72_L11 and S72_L12 (left side) and the outcrop with S72_L13 (middle) .....	182
Figure 40.	The rock face of S72_L15 .....	184
Figure 41.	The locations of panels in S72_L16 except for Panel 8 and Panels 27–30 .....	186
Figure 42.	The locations of petroglyphs on Panel 6 of S72_L16 .....	191
Figure 43.	The locations of petroglyphs on Panel 7 of S72_L16 .....	193
Figure 44.	The locations of petroglyphs on Panel 10 of S72_L16 .....	197
Figure 45.	The locations of petroglyphs on Panel 13 of S72_L16 .....	204
Figure 46.	The locations of petroglyphs in S72_L16_C42.....	218
Figure 47.	The series of panels with S72_L16_C43 and other petroglyphs .....	221
Figure 48.	Looking down the Brag gtsug valley from the upper or east end of S72 .....	225
Figure 49.	The pastoralist encampment and rock art site of Gna' bo lung (S73) .....	229
Figure 50.	The outcrop housing the petroglyphs of Gna' bo lung (S73) .....	229
Figure 51.	S73_L1 is the rocky mass in the foreground. S73_L1_C1 is on a small vertically aligned panel on the upper-right side of the rock facies, while S73_L1_C2 is situated on the much larger vertically aligned panel on the lower-left side on the image .....	230
Figure 52.	The locations of petroglyphs in S73_L1_C2.....	231
Figure 53.	The locations of petroglyphs on the main formation of Gna' bo lung (S73) except for L7 .....	235

Figure 54.	The locations of petroglyphs in S73_L3 except for S73_L3_C3.....	235
Figure 55.	The remains of an irrigation channel in the lower Chu lung valley.....	248
Figure 56.	The ruins of three stepped ritual structures ( <i>mchod rten</i> ) near the confluence of the Chu lung and Lcags sgang streams.....	249
Figure 57.	The cliff face comprising the upper sector of Chu lung (S74_L1) .....	250
Figure 58.	The lower sector of Chu lung (S74_L2) .....	254
Figure 59.	The locations of petroglyphs on Panel 2 of S74_L2 .....	255
Figure 60.	The locations of petroglyphs on Panel 5 of S74_L2 .....	269
Figure 61.	The locations of petroglyphs on Panel 6 of S74_L2 .....	273
Figure 62.	The downstream end of the series of rock panels composing S74_L2.....	289
Figure 63.	Panel 1 of Gyam kham pa (S75).....	291
Figure 64.	The locations of petroglyphs on Panel 2 of Gyam kham pa (S75) .....	293
Figure 65.	View from the site of archaic residential structures in the upper sector of Rdu ru can. This location is situated c. 50 m below the rim of the esplanade.....	300
Figure 66.	The valley floor in Rdu ru can facing in a downstream direction.....	301
Figure 67.	Site of an archaic settlement, north sector, Rdu ru can. Most of the walls visible in the image were reconstructed for use as a livestock corrals .....	302
Figure 68.	An ancient naturally-occurring foundation stone pullulating with carvings (see S76_L164).....	304
Figure 69.	The structural dispersion in the upper sector of Rdu ru can with the badlands of Gu ge in the background .....	304
Figure 70.	A view of the middle tier of all-stone corbelled structures in the upper sector of S76 .....	304
Figure 71.	Fragmentary walls of the middle tier of all-stone corbelled structures.....	305
Figure 72.	The east section of the middle-tier rear wall with the remains of two niches (right and left), a telltale architectonic feature of all-stone corbelled buildings in Upper Tibet .....	305
Figure 73.	A partially intact chamber in the middle tier of the dispersion .....	305
Figure 74.	A view of the only partially intact upper-tier room in the upper sector .....	306
Figure 75.	The bridging stone still in place on the roof of the upper-tier chamber .....	307
Figure 76.	The four niches in the rear wall of the upper-tier room.....	307
Figure 77.	The lower tier of the all-stone corbelled building complex in the upper sector of Rdu ru can.....	308
Figure 78.	An intact wall fragment of the lower tier .....	308
Figure 79.	The largest and most recognizable all-stone corbelled structure in the lower sector of Rdu ru can, looking in downstream direction .....	308
Figure 80.	The same structure as Figure 79, looking upstream. Note the rock art in the left foreground .....	309
Figure 81.	The southwest wall (right side), northwest wall (middle) and southeast wall (lower-left side) of the main all-stone corbelled edifice structure in the lower sector of Rdu ru can .....	309
Figure 82.	The upper-tier room in the all-stone corbelled structure of the lower sector of Rdu ru can.....	309
Figure 83.	A long in situ bridging stone that belonging to the roof with other structural members of the northwest wall placed on top of it.....	310
Figure 84.	A corral in the bottom of the Gdong po valley, which appears to have appropriated lengthy stone members from nearby all-stone corbelled structures.....	310
Figure 85.	The jumble of boulders in the bottom part of the lower sector of Rdu ru can (S76). Note the corral at the base of the slope.....	311
Figure 86.	Looking down the Gdong po Valley from the bottom end of the lower sector of Rdu ru can.....	311
Figure 87.	The locations of petroglyphs on S76_L5.....	314
Figure 88.	Petroglyphs of S76_L12, except for S76_L12_C6 .....	323
Figure 89.	The locations of petroglyphs in S76_L16_C4 to S76_L16_C6.....	332
Figure 90.	The locations of petroglyphs in S76_L18.....	335
Figure 91.	The boulder S76_L32 with rock art visible .....	353
Figure 92.	The locations of petroglyphs S76_L33_C1 to S76_L33_C5 .....	355
Figure 93.	The locations of petroglyphs in S76_L35_C1.....	362
Figure 94.	The locations of petroglyphs in S76_L37.....	365
Figure 95.	The locations of petroglyphs S76_L38_C1 to S76_L38_C9 .....	378
Figure 96.	The locations of petroglyphs in S76_L39.....	385
Figure 97.	The locations of petroglyphs in S76_L67, except for S76_L67_C1n .....	413
Figure 98.	The locations of petroglyphs in S76_L80.....	429
Figure 99.	The locations of petroglyphs in S76_L83.....	439
Figure 100.	The locations of petroglyphs S76_L84_C1a to S76_L84_C1p .....	444
Figure 101.	The locations of petroglyphs in S76_L97_C1.....	457
Figure 102.	The locations of petroglyphs in S76_L98.....	460
Figure 103.	The locations of petroglyphs in S76_L110_C1.....	474
Figure 104.	The locations of petroglyphs in S76_L180.....	479
Figure 105.	The locations of petroglyphs in S76_L125, except for S76_L125_C9 .....	493
Figure 106.	Situated in the upper section of the S76_L125 boulder face is a Tibetan <i>dbu can</i> inscription that reads: <i>Nyang pa'i In</i> (I am of the Nyang pa).....	494
Figure 107.	The locations of petroglyphs in S76_L182.....	499
Figure 108.	The locations of petroglyphs in S76_L126.....	505
Figure 109.	The locations of petroglyphs S76_L130_C1a to S76_L130_C1p and S76_L130_C2a .....	513
Figure 110.	The locations of petroglyphs on the lower section of S76_L130_C1l to S76_L130_C1ah, except for S76_L130_C1o .....	516
Figure 111.	The locations of petroglyphs in S76_L134, except for S76_L134_C1p .....	524

Figure 112.	The locations of petroglyphs in S76_L136.....	529
Figure 113.	Looking up the Gdong po valley from near S76_L137, with the all-stone residential complex of the upper sector converted to corrals in the centre of the photograph.....	532
Figure 114.	The three boulders of S76_L162 (upper-left side).....	550
Figure 115.	The locations of petroglyphs in S76_L163.....	552
Figure 116.	The locations of petroglyphs in S76_L164.....	554
Figure 117.	The Tibetan <i>dbu can</i> letter A; it is best dated to the Early Historic period.....	563
Figure 118.	Locations of petroglyphs S76_L177_C1, except for S76_L177_C1j.....	566
Figure 119.	The locations of petroglyphs S76_L177_C3 and S76_L177_C4, except for S76_L177_C4b.....	570

## Volume IV.2

Figure 120.	An area nearby S77_L1 in which the rock outcrops along the side of the old road linking Ru thog to the prefectural capitol of Mnga' ris (Chinese: Shiquanhe) were destroyed to make room for the improved highway .....	579
Figure 121.	Another portion of Ri mo gdong (S77) that was heavily disturbed during reconstruction of the road linking Ru thog to the prefectural capitol, Mnga' ris .....	579
Figure 122.	The highway traversing the confluence of the Ri gsum and Khul pa valleys, which is situated just north of Ri mo gdong .....	580
Figure 123.	A view of S77_L4 .....	583
Figure 124.	A view of S77_L7 .....	585
Figure 125.	A view from above of the interconnected panels of S77_L7, the core of the locus .....	585
Figure 126.	The locations of petroglyphs S77_L7_C1 to S77_L7_C39 .....	586
Figure 127.	The rock formation of S77_L8 .....	601
Figure 128.	The sign erected at S77_L8 by the 'Tibet Autonomous Region Peoples Government' (Bod rang skyong ljongs mi dmangs srid gzhung) announcing the rock art site can be seen on the upper-right side of the photograph .....	601
Figure 129.	The locations of petroglyphs on Panel 1 of S77_L8 .....	602
Figure 130.	Parts of Panels 1 and 2 of S77_L8 .....	606
Figure 131.	The locations of panels 3-22 in S77_L8 .....	613
Figure 132.	The locations of petroglyphs on Panel 6 of S77_L8 .....	615
Figure 133.	The locations of petroglyphs S77_L8_C60 to S77_L8_C65b on Panel 14 .....	621
Figure 134.	The locations of petroglyphs on Panel 19 of S77_L8 .....	629
Figure 135.	Looking downstream towards Sa snying (S78).....	636
Figure 136.	Looking upstream from Sa snying (S78) towards the Transhimalayan A yi la Range .....	637
Figure 137.	The rock face hosting the petroglyphs of Sa snying .....	637
Figure 138.	The locations of petroglyphs S78_C1 to S78_C3 .....	638
Figure 139.	The dam and impoundment at Rno ba g.yang rdo .....	644
Figure 140.	A trilingual (Tibetan, English, Chinese) sign dedicated to the rock art of Ru thog erected beside the road nearby S79_L2, sometime before 2013.....	644
Figure 141.	The locations of petroglyphs on Panel 8 of S79_L1 .....	651
Figure 142.	The locations of petroglyphs on Panel 10 of S79_L1, except for S79_L1_C39b .....	656
Figure 143.	The east side of the standing stone ( <i>rdo ring</i> ) hosting S80_C1 .....	666
Figure 144.	Locations of petroglyphs S81_C3 to S81_C6h, except S81_C6d .....	670
Figure 145.	Locations of petroglyphs S81_C6, except for S81_C6e to S81_C6h .....	673
Figure 146.	The line of outcrops of which 'Bri mo spo ba (S83) is a part.....	679
Figure 147.	'Bri mo spo ba (S83). Panel 1 is the large rock face on the far-left side of the photograph.....	680
Figure 148.	'Bri mo spo ba (S83). The two individuals in the photograph are sitting beside Panel 1. Panels 2-4 are to the right of their backs .....	680
Figure 149.	The locations of petroglyphs on panel 1 of 'Bri mo spo ba .....	681
Figure 150.	The right (north) side of the lower Rdzong chen Valley .....	688
Figure 151.	The view northwest from the lower Rdzong chen Valley .....	689
Figure 152.	The locations of petroglyphs in S84_L6 .....	693
Figure 153.	A view of the She rang valley from above its confluence with the Mkhar lung Valley .....	711
Figure 154.	The hilltop residential installation of She rang mkhar gog .....	712
Figure 155.	A section of the derelict agricultural fields in the She rang Valley .....	712
Figure 156.	The Rdzong chung valley as viewed from the larger Ma ga gtsang po Valley to the west .....	719
Figure 157.	Looking north across the mouth of the Rdzong chung Valley .....	719
Figure 158.	Looking south across the mouth of the Rdzong chung Valley .....	720
Figure 159.	Looking up the Rdzong chung Valley from the north side of its mouth.....	720
Figure 160.	A permanent foundation for a black yak hair tent ( <i>sbra</i> ) located a little north of the mouth of the Rdzong chung Valley .....	721
Figure 161.	The intentional stacking of stones as part of a rudimentary ovoid enclosure situated in a gully between S86_L4 and S86_L5 .....	724
Figure 162.	The locations of petroglyphs in S86_L7 .....	725
Figure 163.	The locations of petroglyphs in S86_L12 .....	732
Figure 164.	The locations of petroglyphs in S86_L37 .....	747
Figure 165.	Looking up the Rdzong chen valley from S86_L48 .....	760
Figure 166.	The locations of petroglyphs S86_L48_C1 .....	760

Figure 167.	The locations of petroglyphs in S86_L50.....	765
Figure 168.	The locations of petroglyphs in S86_L54.....	770
Figure 169.	An oval enclosure (foreground) and stacked rocks forming other rudimentary walls situated in the vicinity of S86_L57.....	773
Figure 170.	The locations of petroglyphs in S86_L68.....	784
Figure 171.	The locations of petroglyphs in S86_L69.....	789
Figure 172.	A sub-rectangular enclosure that is open on one side.....	791
Figure 173.	The petroglyph of a wild yak carved on a stone in the lower residential dispersion of Mkhar po che .....	792
Figure 174.	The ancient acropolis of Ru thog rdzong ri as viewed from the south .....	794
Figure 175.	The ancient acropolis of Ru thog rdzong ri as viewed from the north .....	794
Figure 176.	A portion of the castle of Bshan pa'i mkhar as seen from the east.....	795
Figure 177.	The ancient settlement of Ser sgam (S88) on the north bank of the Sutlej River (Glang chen gtsang po) .....	798
Figure 178.	The so-called castle (mkhar) of Ser sgam on slopes immediately north of the valley bottom .....	799
Figure 179.	Lu ring sna kha (S89) .....	807
Figure 180.	S89_L1 (main face) .....	809
Figure 181.	Petroglyphs on the lower-left side of S89_L1 .....	809
Figure 182.	Petroglyphs on the lower-right side of S89_L1 .....	812
Figure 183.	Brag gyam (S91).....	823
Figure 184.	The village of Ri ba and surrounding area.....	825
Figure 185.	The south-oriented boulder face with S92_C1b to S92_C1d pictured (only S92_C1c is fully visible in the photograph).....	826

## List of Maps

### Volume IV.1

Map 1.	Map of the Tibetan Plateau and adjoining countries. The TAR (Tibet Autonomous Region) is highlighted in the middle of the map. This region corresponds with what is sometimes called Outer Tibet .....	2
Map 2.	The location of Upper Tibet .....	3
Map 3.	The locations (digital degrees) of rock art sites in Upper Tibet surveyed in this work .....	6
Map 4.	The locations of rock art sites Mtha' kham pa ri (S69), Rgyab lung (S71), Brag gtsug (S72), Gna' bo lung (S73)....	11
Map 5.	The two rock art loci of Mtha' kham pa ri .....	12
Map 6.	The two main rock outcrops of Rgyab lung (S71) .....	88
Map 7.	The various rock art loci of Rgyab lung (S71).....	89
Map 8.	The locations of rock art in Brag gtsug (S72) .....	132
Map 9.	The locations of rock art in Gna' bo lung (S73).....	228
Map 10.	The two rock art loci of Chu lung (S73) .....	248
Map 11.	The locations of Rdu ru can (S76) and the other five rock art sites (S56, S78, S83, S88, S92) surveyed in Gu ge (Rtsa mda' County) .....	296
Map 12.	Rdu ru can (S76) and environs.....	298
Map 13.	The distribution of rock art loci in Rdu ru can (S76).....	299

### Volume IV.2

Map 14.	Ri mo gdong (S77) and the five other rock art sites (S80, S82, S84, S85, S86) in the Ma ga gtsang po drainage system.....	577
Map 15.	The distribution of rock art loci in Ri mo gdong (S77) .....	578
Map 16.	The locations of the two rock art loci in Rno ba g.yang rdo (S79) .....	643
Map 17.	The locations of the rock art dispersions in Rdzong chen (S84) and Rdzong chung (S86) .....	687
Map 18.	The rock art loci L1-L21 of Rdzong chen (S84).....	688
Map 19.	The rock art loci S86_L1 to S86_L66 of Rdzong chung (S85).....	718
Map 20.	The locations of Ru thog Rdzong (S87) and Lu ring sna kha (S89) and Mar lung (S90) .....	793
Map 21.	The formation of Lu ring sna kha and the surrounding area .....	806
Map 22.	Brag gyam and surrounding areas .....	823
Map 23.	The location of Rgyal la ding (S92).....	824

# List of Catalogue Images

## Volume IV.2

Cat1.....	830	Cat63.....	840	Cat125.....	850
Cat2.....	830	Cat64.....	840	Cat126.....	850
Cat3.....	830	Cat65.....	840	Cat127.....	851
Cat4.....	830	Cat66.....	840	Cat128.....	851
Cat5.....	830	Cat67.....	841	Cat129.....	851
Cat6.....	830	Cat68.....	841	Cat130.....	851
Cat7.....	831	Cat69.....	841	Cat131.....	851
Cat8.....	831	Cat70.....	841	Cat132.....	851
Cat9.....	831	Cat71.....	841	Cat133.....	852
Cat10.....	831	Cat72.....	841	Cat134.....	852
Cat11.....	831	Cat73.....	842	Cat135.....	852
Cat12.....	831	Cat74.....	842	Cat136.....	852
Cat13.....	832	Cat75.....	842	Cat137.....	852
Cat14.....	832	Cat76.....	842	Cat138.....	852
Cat15.....	832	Cat77.....	842	Cat139.....	853
Cat16.....	832	Cat78.....	842	Cat140.....	853
Cat17.....	832	Cat79.....	843	Cat141.....	853
Cat18.....	832	Cat80.....	843	Cat142.....	853
Cat19.....	833	Cat81.....	843	Cat143.....	853
Cat20.....	833	Cat82.....	843	Cat144.....	853
Cat21.....	833	Cat83.....	843	Cat145.....	854
Cat22.....	833	Cat84.....	843	Cat146.....	854
Cat23.....	833	Cat85.....	844	Cat147.....	854
Cat24.....	833	Cat86.....	844	Cat148.....	854
Cat25.....	834	Cat87.....	844	Cat149.....	854
Cat26.....	834	Cat88.....	844	Cat150.....	854
Cat27.....	834	Cat89.....	844	Cat151.....	855
Cat28.....	834	Cat90.....	844	Cat152.....	855
Cat29.....	834	Cat91.....	845	Cat153.....	855
Cat30.....	834	Cat92.....	845	Cat154.....	855
Cat31.....	835	Cat93.....	845	Cat155.....	855
Cat32.....	835	Cat94.....	845	Cat156.....	855
Cat33.....	835	Cat95.....	845	Cat157.....	856
Cat34.....	835	Cat96.....	845	Cat158.....	856
Cat35.....	835	Cat97.....	846	Cat159.....	856
Cat36.....	835	Cat98.....	846	Cat160.....	856
Cat37.....	836	Cat99.....	846	Cat161.....	856
Cat38.....	836	Cat100 DEI.....	846	Cat162.....	856
Cat39.....	836	Cat101.....	846	Cat163.....	857
Cat40.....	836	Cat102.....	846	Cat164.....	857
Cat41.....	836	Cat103.....	847	Cat165.....	857
Cat42.....	836	Cat104.....	847	Cat166.....	857
Cat43.....	837	Cat105.....	847	Cat167.....	857
Cat44.....	837	Cat106 DEI.....	847	Cat168.....	857
Cat45.....	837	Cat107.....	847	Cat169.....	858
Cat46.....	837	Cat108.....	847	Cat170.....	858
Cat47.....	837	Cat109.....	848	Cat171.....	858
Cat48.....	837	Cat110.....	848	Cat172.....	858
Cat49.....	838	Cat111.....	848	Cat173.....	858
Cat50.....	838	Cat112.....	848	Cat174.....	858
Cat51.....	838	Cat113.....	848	Cat175.....	859
Cat52.....	838	Cat114.....	848	Cat176.....	859
Cat53.....	838	Cat115.....	849	Cat177.....	859
Cat54.....	838	Cat116.....	849	Cat178.....	859
Cat55.....	839	Cat117.....	849	Cat179.....	859
Cat56.....	839	Cat118.....	849	Cat180.....	859
Cat57.....	839	Cat119.....	849	Cat181.....	860
Cat58.....	839	Cat120.....	849	Cat182.....	860
Cat59.....	839	Cat121.....	850	Cat183.....	860
Cat60.....	839	Cat122.....	850	Cat184.....	860
Cat61.....	840	Cat123.....	850	Cat185.....	860
Cat62.....	840	Cat124.....	850	Cat186.....	860

Cat187.....	861	Cat256.....	872	Cat325.....	884
Cat188.....	861	Cat257.....	872	Cat326.....	884
Cat189.....	861	Cat258.....	872	Cat327.....	884
Cat190.....	861	Cat259.....	873	Cat328.....	884
Cat191.....	861	Cat260.....	873	Cat329 DEI.....	884
Cat192.....	861	Cat261.....	873	Cat330.....	884
Cat193.....	862	Cat262.....	873	Cat331.....	885
Cat194.....	862	Cat263.....	873	Cat332.....	885
Cat195.....	862	Cat264.....	873	Cat333.....	885
Cat196.....	862	Cat265.....	874	Cat334.....	885
Cat197.....	862	Cat266.....	874	Cat335.....	885
Cat198.....	862	Cat267.....	874	Cat336.....	885
Cat199.....	863	Cat268.....	874	Cat337.....	886
Cat200.....	863	Cat269.....	874	Cat338.....	886
Cat201.....	863	Cat270.....	874	Cat339.....	886
Cat202.....	863	Cat271.....	875	Cat340.....	886
Cat203.....	863	Cat272.....	875	Cat341.....	886
Cat204.....	863	Cat273.....	875	Cat342.....	886
Cat205.....	864	Cat274.....	875	Cat343.....	887
Cat206.....	864	Cat275.....	875	Cat344.....	887
Cat207.....	864	Cat276.....	875	Cat345.....	887
Cat208.....	864	Cat277.....	876	Cat346.....	887
Cat209.....	864	Cat278.....	876	Cat347.....	887
Cat210 DEI.....	864	Cat279.....	876	Cat348.....	887
Cat211 DEI.....	865	Cat280.....	876	Cat349.....	888
Cat212.....	865	Cat281.....	876	Cat350.....	888
Cat213.....	865	Cat282.....	876	Cat351.....	888
Cat214.....	865	Cat283.....	877	Cat352.....	888
Cat215.....	865	Cat284.....	877	Cat353.....	888
Cat216.....	865	Cat285.....	877	Cat354.....	888
Cat217.....	866	Cat286.....	877	Cat355.....	889
Cat218.....	866	Cat287.....	877	Cat356.....	889
Cat219.....	866	Cat288.....	877	Cat357.....	889
Cat220.....	866	Cat289.....	878	Cat358.....	889
Cat221.....	866	Cat290.....	878	Cat359.....	889
Cat222.....	866	Cat291.....	878	Cat360.....	889
Cat223.....	867	Cat292.....	878	Cat361.....	890
Cat224.....	867	Cat293.....	878	Cat362.....	890
Cat225.....	867	Cat294.....	878	Cat363.....	890
Cat226.....	867	Cat295.....	879	Cat364.....	890
Cat227.....	867	Cat296.....	879	Cat365.....	890
Cat228 DEI.....	867	Cat297.....	879	Cat366 DEI.....	890
Cat229.....	868	Cat298.....	879	Cat367 DEI.....	891
Cat230.....	868	Cat299.....	879	Cat368 DEI.....	891
Cat231.....	868	Cat300.....	879	Cat369.....	891
Cat232.....	868	Cat301.....	880	Cat370.....	891
Cat233.....	868	Cat302.....	880	Cat371.....	891
Cat234.....	868	Cat303.....	880	Cat372.....	891
Cat235.....	869	Cat304.....	880	Cat373.....	892
Cat236.....	869	Cat305.....	880	Cat374.....	892
Cat237.....	869	Cat306.....	880	Cat375.....	892
Cat238.....	869	Cat307.....	881	Cat376.....	892
Cat239.....	869	Cat308 DEI.....	881	Cat377.....	892
Cat240.....	869	Cat309.....	881	Cat378.....	892
Cat241.....	870	Cat310.....	881	Cat379.....	893
Cat242.....	870	Cat311.....	881	Cat380.....	893
Cat243.....	870	Cat312.....	881	Cat381.....	893
Cat244.....	870	Cat313.....	882	Cat382.....	893
Cat245.....	870	Cat314.....	882	Cat383.....	893
Cat246.....	870	Cat315.....	882	Cat384.....	893
Cat247.....	871	Cat316.....	882	Cat385.....	894
Cat248.....	871	Cat317.....	882	Cat386.....	894
Cat249.....	871	Cat318.....	882	Cat387.....	894
Cat250.....	871	Cat319.....	883	Cat388.....	894
Cat251.....	871	Cat320.....	883	Cat389.....	894
Cat252.....	871	Cat321.....	883	Cat390.....	894
Cat253.....	872	Cat322.....	883	Cat391.....	895
Cat254.....	872	Cat323.....	883	Cat392.....	895
Cat255.....	872	Cat324.....	883	Cat393.....	895

Cat394.....	895	Cat463.....	907	Cat532.....	918
Cat395.....	895	Cat464.....	907	Cat533.....	918
Cat396.....	895	Cat465.....	907	Cat534.....	918
Cat397.....	896	Cat466.....	907	Cat535.....	919
Cat398 DEI.....	896	Cat467.....	907	Cat536.....	919
Cat399 DEI.....	896	Cat468.....	907	Cat537.....	919
Cat400 DEI.....	896	Cat469.....	908	Cat538.....	919
Cat401.....	896	Cat470.....	908	Cat539.....	919
Cat402.....	896	Cat471.....	908	Cat540.....	919
Cat403.....	897	Cat472.....	908	Cat541.....	920
Cat404.....	897	Cat473.....	908	Cat542.....	920
Cat405.....	897	Cat474.....	908	Cat543.....	920
Cat406.....	897	Cat475.....	909	Cat544.....	920
Cat407.....	897	Cat476.....	909	Cat545.....	920
Cat408.....	897	Cat477.....	909	Cat546.....	920
Cat409.....	898	Cat478.....	909	Cat547.....	921
Cat410.....	898	Cat479.....	909	Cat548.....	921
Cat411.....	898	Cat480.....	909	Cat549.....	921
Cat412.....	898	Cat481.....	910	Cat550.....	921
Cat413.....	898	Cat482.....	910	Cat551.....	921
Cat414.....	898	Cat483.....	910	Cat552.....	921
Cat415.....	899	Cat484.....	910	Cat553.....	922
Cat416.....	899	Cat485.....	910	Cat554.....	922
Cat417.....	899	Cat486.....	910	Cat555.....	922
Cat418.....	899	Cat487.....	911	Cat556.....	922
Cat419.....	899	Cat488.....	911	Cat557.....	922
Cat420.....	899	Cat489.....	911	Cat558.....	922
Cat421.....	900	Cat490.....	911	Cat559.....	923
Cat422.....	900	Cat491.....	911	Cat560.....	923
Cat423.....	900	Cat492.....	911	Cat561.....	923
Cat424.....	900	Cat493.....	912	Cat562.....	923
Cat425.....	900	Cat494.....	912	Cat563.....	923
Cat426.....	900	Cat495.....	912	Cat564.....	923
Cat427.....	901	Cat496.....	912	Cat565.....	924
Cat428.....	901	Cat497.....	912	Cat566.....	924
Cat429.....	901	Cat498.....	912	Cat568.....	924
Cat430.....	901	Cat499.....	913	Cat569.....	924
Cat431.....	901	Cat500.....	913	Cat570.....	924
Cat432.....	901	Cat501.....	913	Cat571.....	925
Cat433.....	902	Cat502.....	913	Cat572.....	925
Cat434.....	902	Cat503.....	913	Cat573.....	925
Cat435.....	902	Cat504.....	913	Cat574.....	925
Cat436.....	902	Cat505.....	914	Cat575.....	925
Cat437.....	902	Cat506.....	914	Cat576.....	925
Cat438.....	902	Cat507.....	914	Cat577.....	926
Cat439.....	903	Cat508.....	914	Cat578.....	926
Cat440.....	903	Cat509.....	914	Cat579.....	926
Cat441.....	903	Cat510.....	914	Cat580.....	926
Cat442.....	903	Cat511.....	915	Cat581.....	926
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Cat1481.....	1076	Cat1550.....	1088	Cat1619.....	1099
Cat1482.....	1076	Cat1551.....	1088	Cat1620.....	1099
Cat1483.....	1077	Cat1552.....	1088	Cat1621.....	1100
Cat1484.....	1077	Cat1553.....	1088	Cat1622.....	1100
Cat1485.....	1077	Cat1554.....	1088	Cat1623.....	1100
Cat1486.....	1077	Cat1555.....	1089	Cat1624.....	1100
Cat1487 DEI .....	1077	Cat1556.....	1089	Cat1625.....	1100
Cat1488.....	1077	Cat1557.....	1089	Cat1626.....	1100
Cat1489.....	1078	Cat1558 DEI .....	1089	Cat1627.....	1101
Cat1490.....	1078	Cat1559.....	1089	Cat1628.....	1101
Cat1491.....	1078	Cat1560 DEI .....	1089	Cat1629.....	1101
Cat1492.....	1078	Cat1561.....	1090	Cat1630.....	1101
Cat1493.....	1078	Cat1562.....	1090	Cat1631.....	1101
Cat1494.....	1078	Cat1563.....	1090	Cat1632.....	1101
Cat1495.....	1079	Cat1564 DEI .....	1090	Cat1633.....	1102
Cat1496.....	1079	Cat1565.....	1090	Cat1634.....	1102
Cat1497.....	1079	Cat1566.....	1090	Cat1635.....	1102

Cat1636.....	1102	Cat1693.....	1112	Cat1750.....	1121
Cat1637.....	1102	Cat1694.....	1112	Cat1751.....	1121
Cat1638.....	1102	Cat1695.....	1112	Cat1752.....	1121
Cat1639.....	1103	Cat1696.....	1112	Cat1753.....	1122
Cat1640.....	1103	Cat1697.....	1112	Cat1754.....	1122
Cat1641.....	1103	Cat1698.....	1112	Cat1755.....	1122
Cat1642.....	1103	Cat1699.....	1113	Cat1756.....	1122
Cat1643.....	1103	Cat1700.....	1113	Cat1757.....	1122
Cat1644.....	1103	Cat1701.....	1113	Cat1758.....	1122
Cat1645.....	1104	Cat1702.....	1113	Cat1759.....	1123
Cat1646.....	1104	Cat1703.....	1113	Cat1760.....	1123
Cat1647.....	1104	Cat1704.....	1113	Cat1761.....	1123
Cat1648.....	1104	Cat1705.....	1114	Cat1762.....	1123
Cat1649.....	1104	Cat1706.....	1114	Cat1763.....	1123
Cat1650.....	1104	Cat1707.....	1114	Cat1764.....	1123
Cat1651.....	1105	Cat1708.....	1114	Cat1765.....	1124
Cat1652.....	1105	Cat1709.....	1114	Cat1766.....	1124
Cat1653.....	1105	Cat1710.....	1114	Cat1767.....	1124
Cat1654.....	1105	Cat1711.....	1115	Cat1768.....	1124
Cat1655.....	1105	Cat1712.....	1115	Cat1769.....	1124
Cat1656.....	1105	Cat1713.....	1115	Cat1770.....	1124
Cat1657.....	1106	Cat1714.....	1115	Cat1771.....	1125
Cat1658.....	1106	Cat1715.....	1115	Cat1772.....	1125
Cat1659.....	1106	Cat1716.....	1115	Cat1773.....	1125
Cat1660.....	1106	Cat1717.....	1116	Cat1774.....	1125
Cat1661.....	1106	Cat1718.....	1116	Cat1775.....	1125
Cat1662.....	1106	Cat1719.....	1116	Cat1776.....	1125
Cat1663.....	1107	Cat1720.....	1116	Cat1777.....	1126
Cat1664.....	1107	Cat1721.....	1116	Cat1778.....	1126
Cat1665.....	1107	Cat1722.....	1116	Cat1779.....	1126
Cat1666.....	1107	Cat1723.....	1117	Cat1780.....	1126
Cat1667.....	1107	Cat1724.....	1117	Cat1781.....	1126
Cat1668.....	1107	Cat1725.....	1117	Cat1782.....	1126
Cat1669.....	1108	Cat1726.....	1117	Cat1783.....	1127
Cat1670.....	1108	Cat1727.....	1117	Cat1784.....	1127
Cat1671.....	1108	Cat1728.....	1117	Cat1785.....	1127
Cat1672.....	1108	Cat1729.....	1118	Cat1786.....	1127
Cat1673.....	1108	Cat1730.....	1118	Cat1787.....	1127
Cat1674.....	1108	Cat1731.....	1118	Cat1788.....	1127
Cat1675.....	1109	Cat1732.....	1118	Cat1789.....	1128
Cat1676.....	1109	Cat1733.....	1118	Cat1790.....	1128
Cat1677.....	1109	Cat1734.....	1118	Cat1791.....	1128
Cat1678.....	1109	Cat1735.....	1119	Cat1792.....	1128
Cat1679.....	1109	Cat1736.....	1119	Cat1793.....	1128
Cat1680.....	1109	Cat1737.....	1119	Cat1794.....	1128
Cat1681.....	1110	Cat1738.....	1119	Cat1795.....	1129
Cat1682.....	1110	Cat1739.....	1119	Cat1796.....	1129
Cat1683.....	1110	Cat1740.....	1119	Cat1797.....	1129
Cat1684.....	1110	Cat1741.....	1120	Cat1798.....	1129
Cat1685.....	1110	Cat1742.....	1120	Cat1799.....	1129
Cat1686.....	1110	Cat1743.....	1120	Cat1800.....	1129
Cat1687.....	1111	Cat1744.....	1120	Cat1801.....	1130
Cat1688.....	1111	Cat1745.....	1120	Cat1802.....	1130
Cat1689.....	1111	Cat1746.....	1120	Cat1803.....	1130
Cat1690.....	1111	Cat1747.....	1121	Cat1804.....	1130
Cat1691.....	1111	Cat1748.....	1121	Cat1805.....	1130
Cat1692.....	1111	Cat1749.....	1121		

## Acknowledgements

It is with much gratitude that I acknowledge the support of the **Lumbini International Research Institute** (LIRI) and **Dr David Pritzker**, both of whom contributed financially towards the writing of this volume. LIRI also underwrote copyediting services and defrayed expenses involved in the production of the book and making it open access or freely available for digital download. I want to specially thank Dr Christoph Cüppers, the acting Director of LIRI, who has assisted my efforts in recent years to publish findings made in Tibet. Vanessa Smith and John Hammer kindly covered an additional outlay for the creation of diagrams featured in the work. Angela Clyburn yet again took it upon herself to digitally enhance hundreds of rock art images using special software. Her efforts proved essential to this work by making some rock art compositions visible to me for the first time and by bringing many others into clearer focus.

As an independent researcher and explorer with little recourse to university and corporate sponsorship, every act of kindness shown to me by friends, colleagues and strangers alike, whether it was material or informational in nature, assumes special significance. Nonetheless, I have enjoyed much intellectual liberty in my quest to elucidate the ancient cultural make-up of Tibet, managing to be free of burdensome teaching assignments and faculty obligations. Operating independently has also allowed me to remain vigilant regarding the pet theories of others and the latest socio-political trends in academia. Yet I am always cognizant that the liberty I have attained is largely empowered by the generosity and goodwill of others.

I am most fortunate to have been guided and befriended by many Tibetans over the course of launching expeditions to uppermost Tibet. This volume is the fruit of fieldwork and exploration in Tibet initiated in 1986, none of which would have been possible without the assistance of literally thousands of shepherds, farmers, monks, scholars, and government officials in Tibet. The drivers, cooks and guides who helped run many of my expeditions often had to endure difficult conditions and they command my respect. Although even those Tibetans whom I remember most must remain unnamed for the time being, their contributions are needless to say much appreciated. I also want to heartily thank the dear friends who accompanied me on expeditions to Tibet. Of special note is the late C. Ashely McAllen M.D., who participated in and helped fund fieldwork in 1999 and 2004-2007. His memory is cherished. Special thanks go out to R. Claire Bellezza who helped make the 1994 expedition to Upper Tibet especially productive and pleasurable. Many friends have offered moral and material encouragement over the decades of exploration and research on which this work rests. It is with much satisfaction that I salute them all. Family members have been steadfast in their support of my labours and have helped me as best they could. Expressing the debt of gratitude owed and affection I have for them is beyond my powers as a writer to express.

Despite any shortcomings in this book, as surely there are, I sincerely hope that all those who have assisted me (directly or indirectly) in writing it will not see their efforts as having been made in vain.

## Precis

This volume comprehensively documents rock art in Upper Tibet,<sup>1</sup> the fourth of five books planned on the subject. Rock art, the alteration of natural rock surfaces as cultural productions, is typically one of the most durable of archaeological assets worldwide. The territory referred to as Upper Tibet in this work occupies much of the western half of the Tibetan Plateau, the highest part of the highest plateau on earth.<sup>2</sup> The Tibetan Plateau is strategically situated in the heart of Asia and covers an area of c. 2,400,000 km<sup>2</sup>. To the west and south lies the Indian Subcontinent and Burma, while cultural China occupies the east, and Inner Asian territories are in the north. The pictographs (rock paintings) and petroglyphs (rock carvings),<sup>3</sup> rock art sites, and descriptions and analyses presented in this work are the direct result of intensive fieldwork conducted by the author in Upper Tibet between 1995 and 2016. By organizing rock art, as well as related findings collected on eighteen major expeditions into a single research framework,<sup>4</sup> a coherent exposition of this area of inquiry is achieved. The present volume and others in the series, examine the physical, aesthetic and semantic characteristics of rock art in Upper Tibet. These paintings and carvings are subject to archaeological, historical and ethnographic investigation, which lays the foundation for systematically exploring various questions regarding the role of rock art in forging Tibet's past. As is conveyed here and in the companion volumes, Upper Tibetan rock art serves as a kind of cultural bridge spanning some 3000 years. Hence this corpus of primary materials is uniquely placed chronologically, enabling the distant past to set the stage for gaining new perspectives on the more familiar Tibetan legacies of later times.

The study of rock art is of much value, for it provides a great wealth of information on ancient settlement and culture in Tibet (as it does worldwide). These paintings and carvings on stone represent a continuous record of habitation and cultural development over a wide swath of the Tibetan Plateau, beginning no later than the Late Bronze Age and continuing until c. AD 1400 and even to the present day. The origins of the large fund of rock art in Upper Tibet can be traced back to the Late Bronze Age (c. 1200–700 BC) and persisted as an interrelated cultural, regional, and technological expression in the Iron Age (c. 700–100 BC) and Protohistoric period (c. 100 BC – AD 600). The rock art of this Late Prehistoric era (c. 1200 BC – AD 600) is primarily characterized by zoomorphic depiction and close interactions between animals and humans in both hunting and non-hunting contexts. In the Early Historic period (c. AD 600–1000), the rock art of Upper Tibet began to chronicle numerous encounters between Buddhist and non-Buddhist religions and sometimes appears alongside Tibetan rock inscriptions. As this volume and others in the same series demonstrate, it is in the rock art of Upper Tibet that some of the most widespread icons and symbols adopted by the two Lamaist religions (Buddhism and Yungdrung Bon) first manifested. Yet there was no complete break with the past, and hunting displays and anthropomorphic and zoomorphic portraiture continued to fascinate rock art makers in the Early Historic and Vestigial periods (c. AD 1000–1400). The old tradition of carving and painting natural rock surfaces in Upper Tibet, often relying upon pre-established themes and scene architecture, continued until as late as c. 14th century AD, before largely disappearing from the archaeological record (Bellezza 2020b). Nonetheless, there is also a smaller body of rock paintings and carvings that belongs to the Later Historic period (c. AD 1400–1950), which extends traditional legacies of figuration to within living memory.

<sup>1</sup> This territory falls under the jurisdiction of the Tibet Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China. In premodern times, it was part of lands ruled by the Lhasa government (Sde pa gzhung).

<sup>2</sup> West of Upper Tibet, the 'Western Tibetan Plateau' includes the regions of Ladakh and Spiti under Indian jurisdiction, Baltistan in Pakistan, and Transhimalayan areas of Nepal (Humla, Dolpo, Mustang, etc.). There are manifold commonalities in the content of rock art on the Western Tibetan Plateau. Adjacent tracts to the east of Upper Tibet, in what are now the Mtsho nub and Yul shul prefectures of Qinghai province on the Eastern Tibetan Plateau, also share an interrelated physical and cultural environment with the Western Tibetan Plateau.

<sup>3</sup> Pictographs (rock paintings) are also known as cave paintings, cave drawings, rock paintings, and rupestrian paintings. Synonyms for petroglyphs include rock engravings/etchings, and rupestrian carvings/engravings/etchings.

<sup>4</sup> These expeditions were planned and executed by the author, with local residents acting as guides and providing logistical support on a voluntary basis. Friends of the author also accompanied him on several of the campaigns to survey rock art, sometimes participating in its documentation. In expeditions launched after 1998, paid staff was a critical element of most missions. Staff members were engaged in the operation and maintenance of transport vehicles, cooking and other camp chores, and as liaisons with government officials. The expeditions in which rock art was surveyed are as follows: Divine Dyads Expedition, year two (1995), Changthang Phase II Expedition, year one (1997), Changthang Phase II Expedition, year two (1998), Changthang Circuit Expedition (1999), Upper Tibet Circumnavigation Expedition (2000), Upper Tibet Antiquities Expedition (2001), High Tibet Circle Expedition (2002), High Tibet Antiquities Expedition (2003), High Tibet Welfare Expedition (2004), Tibet Upland Expedition (2005), Tibet Ice Lakes Expedition (2006), Tibet Highland Expedition (2006), Wild Yak Lands Expedition (2007), Sky Lake Expedition I (2008), Upper Tibetan Rock Art Expedition I (2010), Upper Tibetan Rock Art Expedition II, year one (2011), Sky Lake Expedition II (2012), and Upper Tibetan Rock Art Expedition II, year two (2013). Each of the expeditions in which rock art was catalogued was between one and six months in length. As well as these expeditions, rock art was documented on two shorter excursions to Upper Tibet in 2014 and 2016.

In addition to Volumes I-III and the present work, a fifth volumes is planned for this series which, when brought to fruition, will constitute the most extensive survey of rock art conducted in Upper Tibet to date. All five volumes are contracted for publication by Archaeopress (Oxford) and are expected to appear in print over the next two years. The first two volumes are devoted to the rock art of the Byang thang, while the third and fourth volumes examine the rock art of Stod, a region covering the far west of Tibet. This fourth volume inventories rock art in the western half of Stod (pronounced Tö), an 85 km-wide strip of land adjacent to the boundary with India that extends across the territory from north to south.<sup>5</sup> Like Volumes I-III, it consists of detailed surveys of rock art and is geographically organized from east to west. In total, more than 12,000 rock art subjects have been inventoried individually through the compilation of standardized sets of data. Basic information on rock art technique, subject identification, thematic class, mode of presentation, physical condition, estimated age, and relative location, etc. are supplied for each piece of rock art. In addition to the datasets, the first four volumes of the series offer rock art site descriptions and assess the cultural, religious and artistic traits of these locations. In each of these volumes, collateral archaeological sites (residential, ceremonial and funerary) are also scrutinized. When viewed in combination with these monumental assets, the social and economic context of rock art production in Upper Tibet comes into sharper focus. The fifth and final volume of the series contains the bulk of the text, a rigorous look at the ideological, technical, chronological, statistical, and cross-cultural comparative aspects of rock art in Upper Tibet. This multi-dimensional framework contributes to an enhanced understanding of the cultural and historical development of the Tibetan Plateau more widely during the Late Prehistoric era and Early Historic period. The synthesis effectuated facilitates a more thorough appraisal of the place of Tibet in the archaeological mosaic of Eurasia. Finally, there are methodological and theoretical discussions planned for the fifth volume, which situate the rock art of Upper Tibet in a broader academic and artistic ambit.

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<sup>5</sup> In this work the most widely used system of Roman transliteration of Tibetan terms, which is referred to as modified Wylie, is uniformly employed for consistency and accuracy. Without the degree of linguistic precision offered by the correct rendering of Tibetan terms, the cultural and historical analyses undertaken in this volume and others in the series would be seriously compromised. To avoid unwieldy repetitions, it was decided that phonetic equivalents of Tibetan terms would not be included in the work. However, Tibetan words that have been adopted into the English language (e.g., lama, Lhasa) appear as they do in English. It should be emphasized that the system of transliteration employed in this work differs greatly from Sinicized designations of Tibetan terms that are now frequently used in science publications worldwide. For example, the Tibetan word for lake *mtsho* (pronounced *tsho*) is often written as *co* in technical articles. It is the opinion of the author that the confusion engendered by disparate systems of transliteration is best overcome by embracing Tibetan linguistic traditions.



# Introduction

## Ia. A Brief Introduction to the Volume

Only an overview of the subjects and the themes characterising rock art sites covered in this volume is presented here. The 24 main sites surveyed are composed entirely of petroglyphs (rock carvings). These places are in the Upper Tibetan region known as Stod; specifically, its western half, which extends to the boundary with India in the west. A synopsis of the physical and political geography, climate, flora and fauna, and geology of Stod is given in Vol. III, Section Ia, of the series. Section Ib of Vol. III furnishes details about the genomic composition, cultural history and archaeology of Stod and need not be repeated here either. In that volume a description of the categories of subjects and themes represented in the petroglyphs and pictographs of Stod is given in more depth. Furthermore readers are urged to consult Vol. III for an analysis of the chronological, cultural and technological relationships that the rock art has with other bodies of archaeological evidence in the region. Additional information on the archaeology and cultural history of Upper Tibet shall be tendered in Vol. V.

In the 24 main sites included in this volume and marked on Map 3, as well as a supplemental site with just one petroglyph, a total of 4117 rock art subjects have been inventoried separately.<sup>1</sup> Combined with the 1960 subjects in Vol. I, 2380 subjects in Vol. II, and 3735 subjects in Vol. III, this work examines a total of c. 12,192 petroglyphs and pictographs inventoried separately. Another c. 1800 subjects of no obvious pictorial value are noted in the four volumes but do not have discrete entries. A fuller statistical analysis of rock art is slated for Vol. V of the series. While only petroglyphs are found in Vol. IV, both pictographs and petroglyphs were recorded in the first three volumes.

<sup>1</sup> In this work, each individual piece of rock art is called a 'subject'. The rock art of Upper Tibet is divided into two major categories of depiction: animate and inanimate. Animate subjects are subdivided into two major groups: anthropomorphic and zoomorphic (with therianthropic subjects also represented), while inanimate subjects include geometrics, architectural structures, symbols, and various minor compositions. Rock art is broadly classified chronologically as either belonging to the Late Prehistoric era (c. 1200 BC – AD 600) or Historic era (AD 600–1950). The basic terms, categories and chronology of rock art are defined in Vol. III, Section IIc of the work.

As in the other volumes, there are large rock art sites documented within these pages. Those with more than 300 petroglyphs inventoried separately include Mtha' kham pa ri (371 subjects), Brag gtsug (488 subjects), Rdzong chung (388 subjects), and Rdu ru can (1492 subjects), the largest rock art site surveyed in Upper Tibet to date. The rock art of these four sites makes up 67% of the subjects inventoried individually in this volume. Between 3701 to 3893 subjects in western Stod, 90% to 95% of the total, are assigned to the Late Bronze Age (c. 1200–700 BC), Iron Age (c. 700–100 BC) and Protohistoric period (c. 100 BC – AD 600).<sup>2</sup> Rock art belonging to the Late Prehistoric era is also numerous and well distributed in eastern Stod (Vol. III) and the Western and Central Byang thang (Vol. II). The proportion of rock art dated to the Late Prehistoric period in the western portion of Stod is somewhat greater than in eastern part of the region (84% to 88% of the total).

The most common animal in the rock art of Upper Tibet is the wild yak and most of the 24 sites featured in this volume lavishly showcase this culturally and economically vital creature. Between 710 and 885 of these bovids have been surveyed individually, making up 17% to 21% of total rock art, not to mention unrecognizable specimens that by default have ended up in the 'wild ungulate', 'quadruped' or 'indeterminate' categories. Wild yaks come in a great variety of styles and span the entire chronological range of rock art production in Upper Tibet. They are also among the largest zoomorphic pieces of rock art in Upper Tibet, reaching 145 cm and 160 cm in length (see S83\_C1a, S83\_C1c). Other common wild ungulates in the rock art of this volume are wild sheep (165–210 specimens), deer (101–117 specimens), antelopes (25–46 specimens), and Tibetan wild asses (c. 12 specimens), their relative proportions more or less matching those on the Byang thang and in eastern Stod. Identification of certain wild sheep, antelopes, equids, and carnivores could not be made, relegating a significant number of

<sup>2</sup> Discrepancies in the number of subjects belonging to any one period reflect uncertainties inherent in the chronological system of rock art classification used in this work. Therefore some subjects are attributed to two periods instead of one. For a discussion of this matter, see Vol. III, Section IIc.

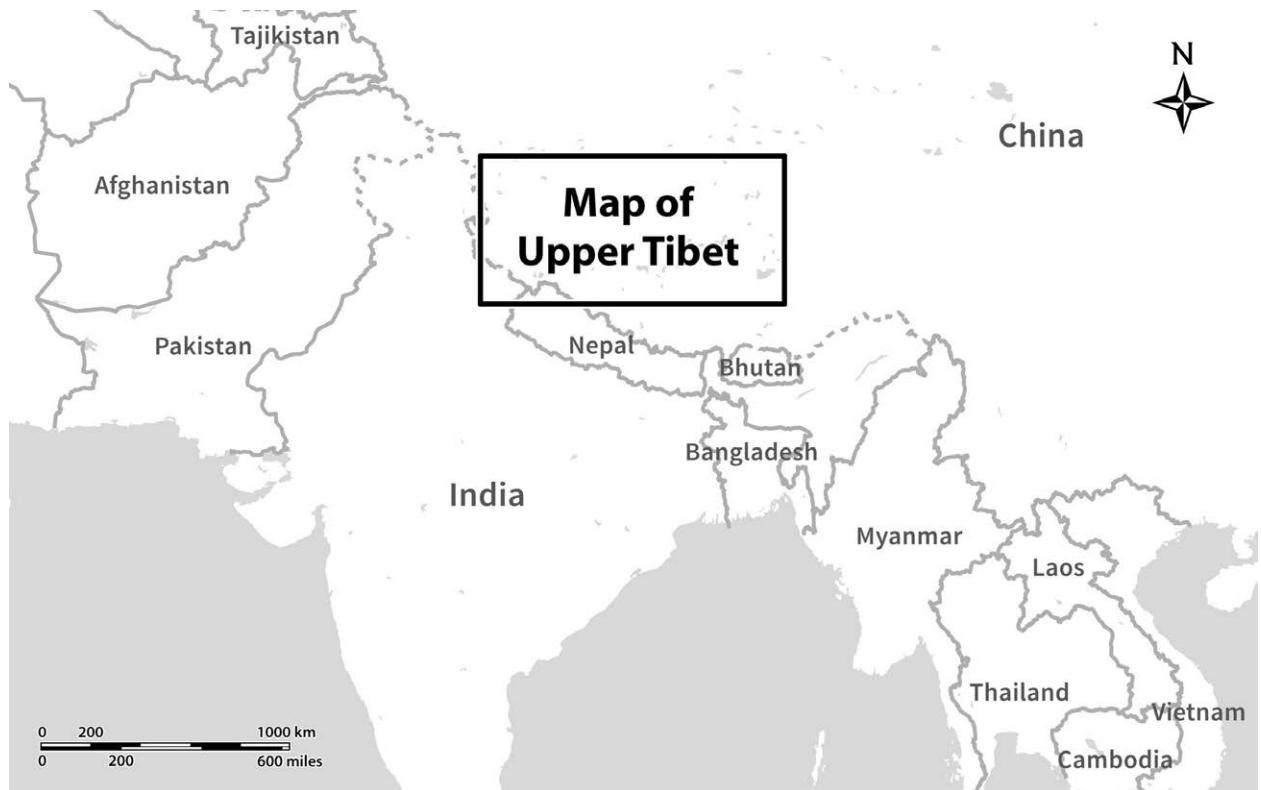


Map 1. Map of the Tibetan Plateau and adjoining countries. The TAR (Tibet Autonomous Region) is highlighted in the middle of the map. This region corresponds with what is sometimes called Outer Tibet.

these animals to the 'wild ungulate' and 'quadruped' categories. 136–231 carnivores (wild and domestic) have been identified, similar in proportion to Upper Tibet as a whole. Perhaps the most curious creatures in the bestiary of western Stod are ostensible tiger carvings (e.g. S76\_L130\_C1g, S77\_L7\_C47a). As observed in Vol. III, birds are fairly common in the rock art of Stod with 82–95 specimens occurring in the present volume. Like other parts of Upper Tibet, the majority of birds represent raptors with spread wings, captured by artists as if soaring in the skies (e.g. S71\_L1\_C12, S72\_L16\_C30, S76\_L5\_C1b, S89\_L2\_C12). A single carving of a Bactrian camel (S77\_L8\_C44c) and two of fish (S77\_L8\_C43a, S88\_C3) were also pinpointed in the sites surveyed in this volume. These two kinds of zoomorphs are rare in the rock art of other parts of Upper Tibet too. A zoomorphic subject rendered in a highly unusual overhead perspective limns either a lizard or carnivore (S76\_L126\_C5). As in rock art sites in Ru thog documented in Vol. III, animals (mostly wild ungulates) rendered in the 'Eurasian Animal Style' (EAS) are a conspicuous addition to the petroglyphic record. The EAS in Upper Tibet is most characterised by bodies embellished with single and double volutes. 90 EAS

specimens have been inventoried in this volume and include examples exhibiting sophisticated technical and artistic traits (e.g. S69\_L1\_C99b, S71\_L12\_C50, S77\_L7\_C17, S77\_L7\_C30).

Anthropomorphic figures, both mounted and unmounted, constitute one of the most common and evocative components of Upper Tibetan rock art. Between 488 and 574 anthropomorphs, some carrying implements and weapons have been inventoried separately, while 240 to 283 anthropomorphs mounted on horses have been tallied. One or two yak riders were also detected in the rock art of western Stod (S69\_L1\_C48i, S76\_L133\_C5h). Among the most intriguing anthropomorphs are specimens that seem to portray priests in ceremonial regalia and possibly divinities and ancestral heroes as well (e.g. S69\_L1\_C61a, S69\_L1\_C61b, S69\_L1\_C83d, S69\_L1\_C83e, S76\_L38\_C19, S76\_L38\_C20). Other anthropomorphs are situated in highly unusual contexts such as a figure standing beside a raptor (S76\_L50\_C1a, S76\_L50\_C1b) and what may be a horned birth-giving figure (S76\_L72\_C1b). Two other anthropomorphs may also possibly illustrate noumenal dimensions of parturition (S77\_L7\_C38b, S79\_L1\_C13).



Map 2. The location of Upper Tibet.

Likenesses of humans engaged in combat or martial sport are a highly distinctive genre of rock art in Upper Tibet. They are most numerous in Stod, where between 40 and 52 human figures in the western slice of the region face off with bows and arrows, possible knives and cudgels, and shields, as well as bare-handed (e.g. S69\_L1\_C4, S69\_L1\_C76, S74\_L2\_C27, S76\_L180\_C1a, S76\_L180\_C1b). Found only at three sites in northwestern Stod (S69, S72, S73) are compositions with bands of between ten and 44 anthropomorphs arrayed in long lines (they sometimes include zoomorphic and other kinds of subjects). Numbering 12 compositions, they record people moving from one place to another in what may be hunting expeditions or herders shifting camp (e.g. S69\_L1\_C17, S69\_L1\_C35, S72\_L3\_C24, S73\_L1\_C2). A curious feature of these kinds of scenes is that most persons in them carry something on the back and a few flaunt weapons, walking sticks and other implements. The extension on the back probably represents a pack for holding personal belongings or equipment, but perhaps baby carriers and other objects are represented too. An anthropomorphic subject found almost exclusively in Ru thog is the so-called masloid, the human visage (sometimes with the entire body) rendered in an emblematic form, as well as more abstract variants with virtually no anthropomorphic features. 14 to 17 of these enigmatic petroglyphs have been documented in western Stod (e.g. S77\_L8\_C92, S77\_L8\_C109).

Among the readily discernible inanimate subjects in the rock of Stod and other parts of Upper Tibet are those with symbolic overtones. The most wide-ranging symbol is the swastika, which appears to have had cosmogonic and/or cosmological value. A total of 49 specimens have been recorded (e.g. S76\_L37\_C1e, S77\_L7\_C37a, S86\_L22\_C1). Five examples of a triad of symbols made up of the swastika, sun and crescent moon have been located in the rock art of western Stod (e.g. S76\_L72\_C5, S76\_L135\_C1, S77\_L7\_C44). Other cosmic triads of this kind occur elsewhere in Upper Tibet (and in Ladakh and Spiti). Alternative sets of celestial symbols feature a swastika and sunburst (S77\_L7\_C37, S88\_L12), sunburst and moon (e.g. S69\_L1\_C20, S76\_L78\_C4, S76\_L156\_C1), and sunburst and spirals (S76\_L20\_C2). There are also 18 or 19 sunbursts made without recognizable companion symbols (e.g. S69\_L1\_C25, S76\_L56\_C1e, S86\_L8\_C1c). Four of the conjoined sun and moon symbols in this volume are assigned to the Historic era (e.g. S77\_L4\_C1b, S82\_C1), while one or two possibly belong to the Late Prehistoric era (S77\_L8\_C88, S84\_L6\_C1b), a cogent example of a subject that embodies complex religious concepts. Among the 41 circles inventoried are those containing a spoked or cross-shaped motif, many of which by virtue of their association with chariots appear to signify the sun and/or chariot wheel (e.g. S76\_L18\_C1ai, S76\_L43\_C5, S83\_C22). Five trees, a subject that appears to have had significant symbolic import, are documented in this

volume (e.g. S72\_L16\_C16c, S86\_L45\_C1h). Of unknown significance are three squares and rectangles filled with an X-shaped motif (e.g. S69\_L1\_C2, S69\_L1\_C104). Well crafted, complex geometric subjects in western Stod include multiple double volutes and other motifs (S76\_L5\_C1d, S76\_L5\_C1i), series of undulating lines (S76\_L5\_C1e), interconnected infolding diamonds (S76\_L37\_C3), and the Grecian border design (S76\_L111\_C1a). In Rdu ru can (S76) there are 21–26 two-wheeled, horse-drawn vehicles or chariots, ranging from simple renditions (e.g. S76\_L18\_C1aa, S76\_L93\_C1b) to much more intricate variants (e.g. S76\_L18\_C1u, S76\_L21\_C4). A special subset is those that depict the charioteer in the box/car (e.g. S76\_L35\_C1a, S76\_L37\_C1f, S76\_L37\_C1g). Finally, 37–45 facsimiles of stepped structures, both elementary (*lha rten, gsas mkhar*, etc.) and complex (*mchod rten*) variants are represented in the rock art of western Stod (e.g. S76\_L4\_C3, S76\_L33\_C10, S76\_L37\_C2).

Like rock art in Upper Tibet as a whole, that of Stod is characterized by several major themes that shaped the thrust of most compositions. These include 1) solitary and group portraits of animals and birds, 2) hunting scenes, 3) natural predation scenes, 4) alternative scenes featuring anthropomorphs and zoomorphs in close association, 5) solitary and paired anthropomorphic portraits, and 6) symbolic subjects. Unidentified and more minor compositions (e.g. simple geometrics, desultory lines, scribbles, etc.) aside, more than 90% of all rock art compositions attributed to the Late Prehistoric era in Upper Tibet is counted among these six overarching themes. Large compositions with multiple subscenes often mix together more than one major theme. The fairly restricted range of compositions in the Late Prehistoric era is indicative of systems of social organization and economic production that were not as diverse as those prevailing in the Historic era. The cultural and artistic amalgamation of Upper Tibetan rock art sites notwithstanding, each locale has its own complement of subjects and thematic and stylistic characteristics. Thus the proportion of each of the primary rock art themes, if they are represented at all, varies quite widely in western Stod on a site by site basis.

Probably the largest group among the six major categories of themes in rock art of the Late Prehistoric era is zoomorphic portraiture. It is characterised by compositions in which one or more animals is portrayed in isolation. However it is not always apparent which animals were portrayed alone and which are constituent elements of more complex scenes (many unrecognized portraits in western Stod are likely to exist among the 1983 subjects classified as belonging to an unknown theme). In this volume 481 to 506 zoomorphic subjects are categorized as portraits but, as noted, others surely exist. By far the most common

animal selected for portraiture is the wild yak, but deer, wild sheep, equids, antelopes, carnivores, and birds are also represented. Many of the animals reproduced were probably envisioned in naturalistic settings, but in other compositions they may portray archetypes or paragons of the likened species as well as numinous variants. Certain compositions featuring raptors with spread wings also seem to be redolent with meaning that transcends their mere biological status (e.g. S76\_L27\_C1, S77\_L7\_C54). This is surely the case with two horned eagles (*khyung*) (S71\_L1\_C2, S76\_L71\_C2) and what appear to be two bird-men (S76\_L39\_C4g, S76\_L97\_C161). Some compositions sporting wild ungulates are adorned with swastikas, sunbursts and crescent moons, which suggests that mythological or cosmological calculations played a role in their depiction (e.g. S76\_L37\_C1e, S76\_L39\_C4c, S76\_L56\_C1e). Hunting themed rock art is common throughout Upper Tibet. In western Stod, 430–995 subjects, as part of 61 to 129 compositions, are categorized as belonging to venatic scenes. Many compositions cannot be positively identified as having a hunting theme because of an absence of discernible weapons and ambiguities in the relationships expressed by the proximity of game animals to anthropomorphs. The standard configuration in Upper Tibet presents hunters on foot or mounted on horses, who are armed with bows and arrows, in pursuit of wild yaks, deer, wild sheep, and antelopes. There are seven very large hunting compositions in this volume that contain between 21 and 79 subjects (the three largest are S71\_L12\_C1, S72\_L10\_C1 and S74\_L2\_C1). These big killing scenes display a variety of human and animal figures in different aspects and frequently present other themes as well. Nonetheless a few of the most compelling hunting compositions portray a lone hunter in the act of slaughtering a single wild ungulate (e.g. S69\_L1\_C92, S71\_L16\_C5, S76\_L173\_C1). Natural predation scenes standing alone or integrated into hunting compositions depict wild ungulates (wild yaks, wild asses, stags, wild sheep, antelopes) being chased and attacked by wild carnivores (wolves and felids). Thematic parallels between hunting and predation in an integral composition may have served pedagogical, devotional or mythological functions. Between 265 to 383 subjects are categorized as being part of compositions in which predation is exemplified. However it has not been determined how many of the predators illustrated are wild animals or hunting hounds, because they are frequently too small and rudimentary in form to identify. This ambiguity is heightened in large compositions with various subscenes where many animals and humans intermingle. Dramatic predation scenes featuring what appear to be tigers are found in Rdu ru can (S76), Upper Tibet's largest rock art site (e.g. S76\_L130\_C1, S76\_L134\_C1). Another predation-themed composition in S76 shows a snow leopard, a rare subject in the rock of Upper Tibet (S76\_L87\_C1).

Although probably not as common in Stod as on the Byang thang, there are compositions where human-animal interactions are non-threatening in nature. Some of these however may be related to non-operational aspects of the hunting way of life. For instance in one composition an anthropomorph with two linear objects, one placed in the hand and the other at the waist, leads a horse in the midst of wild ungulates (S69\_L1\_C99). On a large boulder face with 50 subjects, which are closely interrelated stylistically and chronologically, animal predation, human combat, wild ungulates, and horseback riders, etc. produce various subscenes, none of which overtly depict the dispatch of game by hunters (S76\_L37\_C1). While hunting activity may be missing in this big composition, tacit reference to it is reflected in the alternative forms of violence perpetrated by humans and animals. Similarly a composition picturing natural predation and anthropomorphs unengaged in the armed pursuit of prey may refer indirectly to hunting (S76\_L130\_C1). Other compositions betray no indications of killing whatsoever, hunting related or otherwise. One of these appears to depict one or two horned anthropomorphs that share an enclosed space with animals (S76\_L43\_C1). In another composition that may have a ritual or mythological tone, an anthropomorph, arms by his side, is accompanied by a stag and one or more raptors (S76\_L109\_C2). A subscene that merges the body parts of two anthropomorphs and a wild ungulate may allude to an extraordinary theme as well (S76\_L126\_C1q to S76\_L126\_C1s). Another recondite composition presents an anthropomorph grasping a linear implement and shield-like object, sunburst, and two wild ungulates above (S76\_L156\_C2). There are also two compositions that depict anthropomorphs positioned next to the gaping jaws of ostensible wild felids in what seem to be ritualistic undertakings (S69\_L1\_C5, S77\_L7\_C27). An offering featuring an anthropomorph standing next to an equally sized bird also invokes an extraordinary purpose (S77\_L7\_C34). Solitary and pairs of unmounted anthropomorphs, in various styles, guises and aspects, some of whom are shown holding implements, are one of the most familiar facets of rock art in Upper Tibet in the Late Prehistoric era. Nevertheless they are uncommon in western Stod (e.g. S69\_L1\_C80, S71\_L19\_C1, S73\_L6\_C4, S76\_L160\_C2, S77\_L7\_C45, S89\_L2\_C11). The other major category of anthropomorphic portraiture is solitary and paired horseback riders, executed with and without weapons and other implements. These are relatively few in number in western Stod; just 17 examples have been positively identified (e.g. S71\_L2\_C5, S76\_L21\_C12, S76\_L62\_C1,

S76\_L86\_C1, S76\_L149\_C1). The majority of horseback riders in Upper Tibet occur as part of hunting scenes and unidentified compositions with multiple subjects.

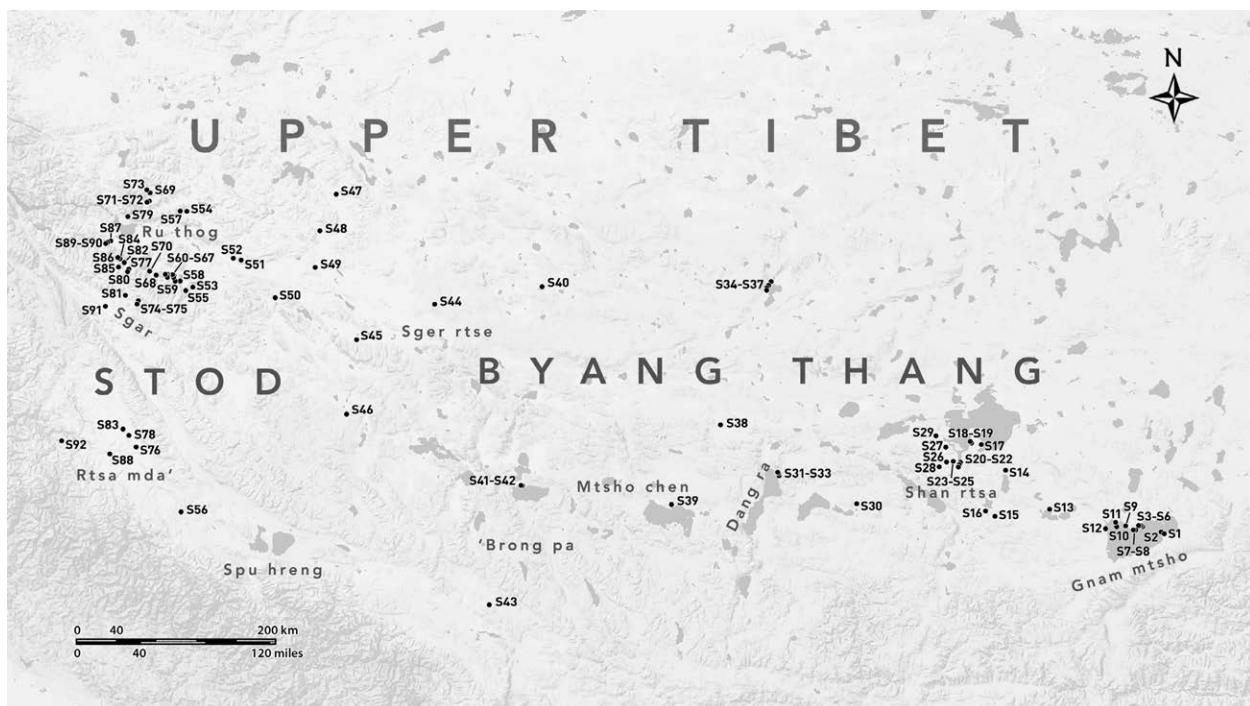
The 5% to 10% of rock art attributed to the Historic era in western Stod holds no great surprises when viewed against that presented in the first three volumes of the series. Rock art of the Historic era was often executed in a cruder or more cursory fashion and sometimes is accompanied by rock inscriptions rendered exclusively in Tibetan scripts. Historic compositions are mostly comprised of the six major themes discussed above but also by sectarian subjects, e.g. complex stepped structures (*mchod rten*), swastikas with particular alignments, and conjoined sun and moon symbols. In this volume, just 34–46 subjects are dated to the Modern period, which reflects the highly marginal cultural status more broadly of rock art in contemporary Upper Tibet.

### Ib. Rock Art Sites of Upper Tibet

To fix the locations of rock art sites as accurately as possible, GPS coordinates (latitude and longitude) are furnished for most in the Table below. For rock art sites occupying large areas, the coordinates provided are for a centralized location within them. A variety of handheld consumer-grade GPS (Global Positioning System) units have been employed in the field to obtain the GPS coordinates of rock art and other types of archaeological sites in Upper Tibet since 1999. GPS units have varying levels of accuracy. In general terms, the GPS coordinates of rock art sites provided should be accurate within a radius of c. 15 m – 30 m; however, the standard deviation for any specific set of coordinates provided in this work remains unknown. In addition to inherent technical limitations pertaining to receiver design and quality, other factors that help determine the accuracy of a GPS unit include satellite geometry, signal blockage, atmospheric conditions, and topography; reduced battery power can also affect the sensitivity of GPS readings. It must also be noted that GPS base stations were not established in the field (these are used to introduce a correction factor to the GPS signals received). All coordinates in this work are given in decimal degrees:

This volume covers Site 69 to Site 92. Additionally, a minor rock art site, Mkhar po che, is treated in the work (the coordinates of this site are given in the description provided in the Inventory). The geocoordinates provided for S26 and S33 have not been GPS verified.

## A COMPREHENSIVE SURVEY OF ROCK ART IN UPPER TIBET



Map 3. The locations (digital degrees) of rock art sites in Upper Tibet surveyed in this work.

Site No.	Site Name	North Latitude	East Longitude
Site 1	Bkra shis do chen	30.775956	90.867194
Site 2	Bkra shis do chung	30.766667	90.9
Site 3	Rta mchog ngang pa do	30.8325	90.67
Site 4	Just West of Ngang pa do	30.8419	90.655433
Site 5	Further West of Ngang pa do	30.842167	90.642333
Site 6	North of Khyi rgan gag pa do	30.842133	90.6252
Site 7	Lug do	30.801667	90.595
Site 8	Ra ma do	30.8	90.57
Site 9	Stong shong phug	30.839317	90.487217
Site 10	Se mo do/Srin mo do/Nang do	30.831667	90.391667
Site 11	Rigs lnga do	30.871667	90.38
Site 12	Lce do	30.813	90.273333
Site 13	Sha ba brag Thang stong phug	30.991667	89.675
Site 14	Kong chung	31.348233	89.204533
Site 15	Gnam g.yang phug	30.927083	89.090817
Site 16	Lha ris sgrub phug	30.975183	88.990533
Site 17	Slob dpon phug	31.582667	88.945167
Site 18	Sho lo phug	31.595333	88.8405
Site 19	Lha 'dre phug	31.61	88.826667
Site 20	Gzims phug btsan khang	31.420567	88.7227
Site 21	Dpal gzims phug	31.399	88.709333

## INTRODUCTION

Site No.	Site Name	North Latitude	East Longitude
Site 22	Rdo 'khor phug pa	31.377333	88.699867
Site 23	Dgon ro dmar lding/Lcags sgo brag	31.428	88.6525
Site 24	Lha 'dre tshogs khang	31.428167	88.6495
Site 25	Dar lung phug	31.4292	88.645383
Site 26	Skyid sgrom sgo gru bzhi	31.423333	88.573333
Site 27	Sgar gsol brag phug	31.558667	88.565667
Site 28	Chu ro	31.379233	88.495267
Site 29	O rtsal phug	31.661733	88.4605
Site 30	Bshag bsangs	31.042133	87.613083
Site 31	Dar chung	31.297333	86.783
Site 32	Mgon bdag	31.321	86.7775
Site 33	Am nag	31.329333	86.769333
Site 34	Rong thil rde'u lhas	33.052983	86.699417
Site 35	Sngon gdong	33.019883	86.672567
Site 36	Gyam gdong	32.996067	86.653517
Site 37	Rgya rug	32.975917	86.6509
Site 38	Brag khung mdzes po	31.761667	86.158333
Site 39	Mu ro ri (L1)	31.03534	85.63404
Site 40	Rta ri brag phug	33.006667	84.251667
Site 41	'Phrang lam	31.2062	84.039767
Site 42	Lha khang dmar chags	31.20995	84.02606
Site 43	Rdzong pi phi	30.113333	83.686667
Site 44	Ri rgyal	32.849983	83.104217
Site 45	Dkyil sgrum	32.531067	82.269783
Site 46	Bong lhas brag (near Skya bo klu khang)	31.858333	82.161667
Site 47	Ba'o lhas	33.831667	82.051667
Site 48	Phru gu dbyar ka	33.506667	81.876667
Site 49	Sngor gyam	33.18	81.826667
Site 50	Steng rtse mtshams khang	32.908333	81.4
Site 51	Brag lung nub ma	33.245	81.035
Site 52	Kham pa rwa co	33.261667	80.951667
Site 53	Gong ra/Gong kha	33.003333	80.519667
Site 54	Chu mkhar gyam	33.68	80.455
Site 55	Skabs ren spungs ri	32.973167	80.443833
Site 56	Tham ka can	30.967167	80.393
Site 57	Rta pa gong g.yag	33.681983	80.3845
Site 58	Ser mdzod rdo ring	33.058017	80.38325
Site 59	Mchod rten sbug sna kha	33.5557	80.330533
Site 60	Brag gdong East	33.104183	80.318333

A COMPREHENSIVE SURVEY OF ROCK ART IN UPPER TIBET

Site No.	Site Name	North Latitude	East Longitude
Site 61	Glog phug mkhar	33.091	80.314167
Site 62	Brag gdong West	33.115	80.302667
Site 63	Gyam rag (East)	33.114933	80.254917
Site 64	Rtswa med god sa mon dur	33.117033	80.252033
Site 65	Rwa 'brog 'phrang	33.101667	80.251333
Site 66	Sgog ra	33.091667	80.246667
Site 67	Skal khra mon dur	33.118717	80.22465
Site 68	Sna kha sogs and Mtha' rung	33.110333	80.127167
Site 69	Mtha' kham pa ri	33.843833	80.061867
Site 70	Nag skyom	33.146133	80.05715
Site 71	Rgyab lung	33.771667	80.053333
Site 72	Brag gtsug	33.76055	80.030067
Site 73	Gna' bo lung	33.8705	80.028
Site 74	Chu lung	32.881667	79.936667
Site 75	Gyam kham pa	32.85125	79.923367
Site 76	Rdu ru can	31.56	79.913333
Site 77	Ri mo gdong	33.165	79.835
Site 78	Sa snying	31.6659	79.835667
Site 79	Rno ba g.yang rdo	33.633167	79.824333
Site 80	Nag khung rdo ring	33.141667	79.821667
Site 81	Gri'u chu thang	32.93	79.798333
Site 82	She rang sna kha shar ma	33.222317	79.786167
Site 83	'Bri mo spo ba	31.72285	79.773417
Site 84	Rdzong chen	33.2575	79.741667
Site 85	She rang mkhar lung	33.1835	79.725333
Site 86	Rdzong chung	33.268667	79.7185
Site 87	Ru thog rdzong	33.416833	79.642
Site 88	Gser sgam	31.496667	79.631667
Site 89	Lu ring sna ka	33.401983	79.607617
Site 90	Mar lung	33.393333	79.588333
Site 91	Brag gyam	32.831667	79.585
Site 92	Rgyal la lding	31.616667	79.116667

### Ic. Chronology Outline

None of the rock art inventoried in Upper Tibet has been subject to chronological analysis based on direct dating techniques. Several chronometric methods to objectively determine the age of rock art are currently under development. Despite significant progress having been made in the absolute dating of pictographs and petroglyphs over the last three decades, the application of the techniques being developed poses various technical problems that are yet to be fully resolved. Consequently a widely accepted protocol for direct dating in rock art studies has not been established. Chronological values provided in the inventory are based upon a system of non-direct methods to assess the age of rock art. This analytical approach to dating relies on a visual inspection of rock art, which is assessed according to its physical, aesthetic, cultural, and locational characteristics. Rock art sharing analogous sets of traits are organized hierarchically to build up a relative chronology (i.e. which pictographs and petroglyphs are older in relation to others).<sup>3</sup> The inductively derived dating regimen employed in this work yields provisional chronological values which are of limited resolution and unverified accuracy. As the chronological attributions proffered have not been corroborated through more objective testing methods, they must be seen as suggestive rather than prescriptive of the age of rock art. In the relative dating methods used here the periodization of rock art is inferred through an appraisal of both its intrinsic and acquired qualities. The intrinsic qualities of rock art comprise those with which it was produced, including its original style, form, compositional structure, and technique of manufacture. Acquired qualities of rock art include signs of physical degradation and anthropogenic alteration that have occurred since its production. The relative chronology devised for Upper Tibetan rock art is based on the following criteria:

Stylistic and thematic categorization of motifs, subjects, compositions, and scenes

Appraisal of the general characteristics of the contents of rock art sites

Assessment of the techniques used in carving and painting

Examination of the degree of erosion and repatination of carvings and the degree of browning and wear of pigments

Determination of the placement of palimpsests

Rock art subjects associated with particular historical contexts in textual sources

Palaeographic assessment of Tibetan inscriptions accompanying rock art

Comparison of rock art with Tibetan artefacts (metallic, ceramic, wooden, etc.) and other artforms

Association of rock art with monumental assets (cliff shelters, ritual structures, tombs)

Gauging ecological conditions depicted in rock art

Cross-cultural comparative study of rock art

Derived from the criteria outlined above, the eight chronological categories (plus two subcategories) used in this work are:

Late Neolithic/Bronze Age (c. 2000–1200 BC)

Late Bronze Age (c. 1200–700 BC)

Iron Age (c. 700–100 BC)

Protohistoric period (c. 100 BC – AD 600)

Early Historic period (c. AD 600–1000)

Imperial period (c. AD 600–850)

Post-Imperial period (c. AD 850–1000)

Vestigial period (c. AD 1000–1400)

Late Historical period (c. AD 1400–1950)

Modern period (post-1950)

<sup>3</sup> Inductively derived and absolute dating techniques will be examined further in Vol. V of the series. For other accounts of the system of dating employed here, see Bellezza 2020a: 3–8; 2020b: 12, 13; 2020c: 18–23. On the palaeographic dating of Tibetan rock inscriptions (which can be applied to rock art made in conjunction with it), see Bellezza 2020b: 119–136.

Id. Abbreviations Used in the Rock Art Inventory		Physical condition
Alpha-numerical spatial identifier		LW = light wear
S = Site, L = Locus, C = Composition		MW = moderate wear
Type of rock art		HW = heavy wear
Picto = pictograph		VHW = very heavy wear
RO = red ochre		Estimated age
YO = yellow ochre		BA = Bronze Age
BP = black pigment		LBA = Late Bronze Age
BGP = blue-grey pigment		PP = Protohistoric period
WP = white pigment		EHP = Early Historic period
Petro = petroglyph		IP = Imperial period
LC = light cut		PIP = post-Imperial period
MC = moderate cut		VP = Vestigial period
DC = deep cut		LHP = Late Historical period
VDC = very deep cut		MP = Modern period
Subject identification	Images	
? The use of a question mark designates that the identity of a subject is uncertain		NI = not illustrated
Arrangement	General comments	
? The use of a question mark designates that it is uncertain whether a composition consists of one, two, or more subjects		NIS = not inventoried separately
Theme identification	Other	
? The use of a question mark designates that the identity of a theme is uncertain		P = natural rock panel
Dimensions		B = boulder
(h) = horizontal dimension		Rock Art Catalogue
(v) = vertical dimension		DEI = digitally enhanced image
(d) = diameter		
NA = not available		