

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

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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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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		

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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 volume 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.

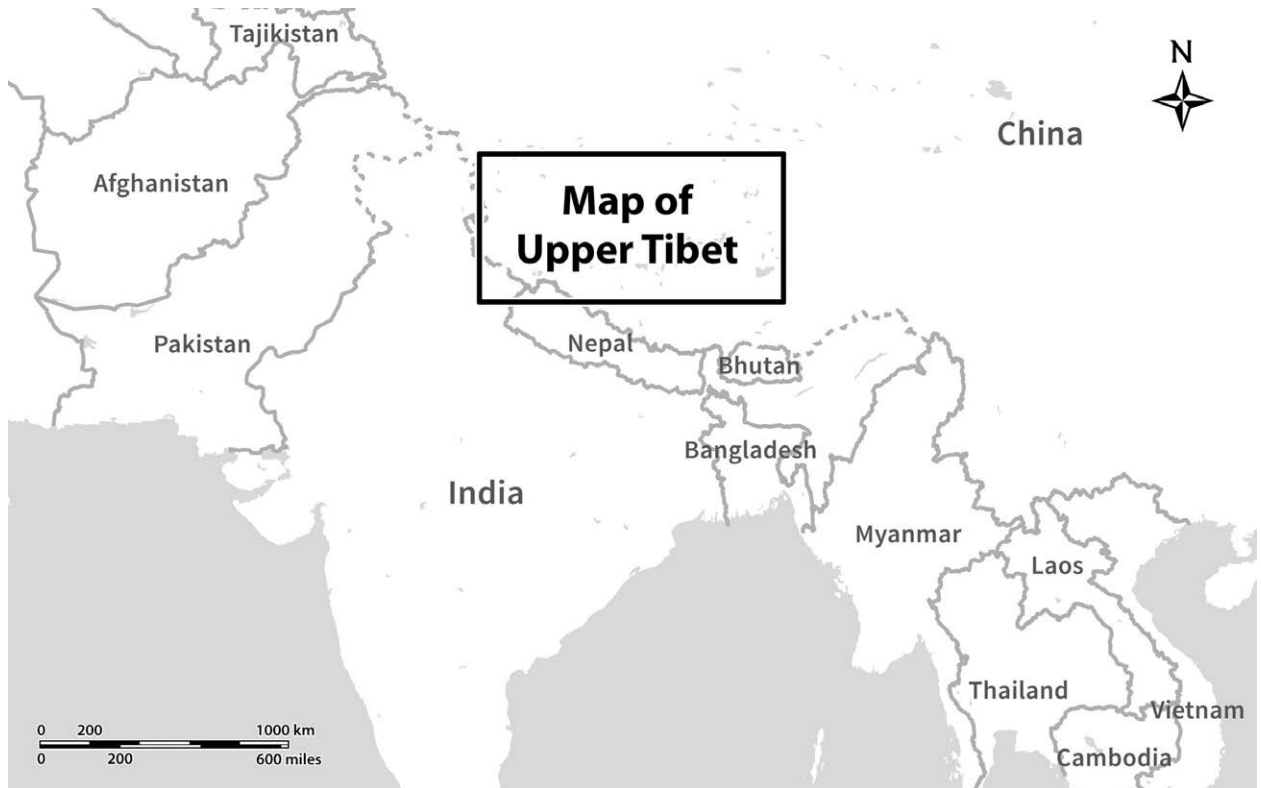


Map 1. Map of the Tibetan Plateau and adjoining countries. The TAR (Tibet Autonomous Region) is highlighted in the middle of the map. This region corresponds with what is sometimes called Outer Tibet.

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\_C5o, 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 mascoïd, 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\_C12), 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,

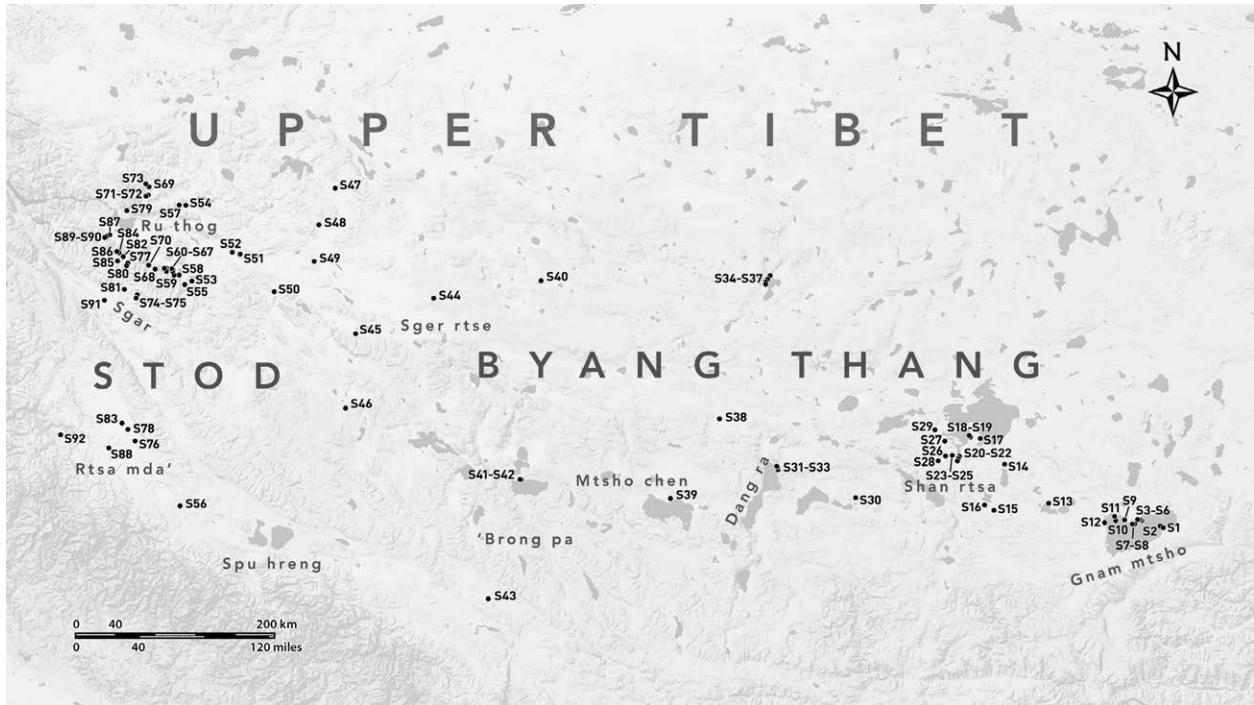
S76\_L86\_C1, S76\_L149\_C1). The majority of horseback riders in Upper Tibet occur as part of hunting scenes and unidentified compositions with multiple subjects.

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.



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 re-patination 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**

Alpha-numerical spatial identifier

S = Site, L = Locus, C = Composition

Type of rock art

Picto = pictograph

RO = red ochre

YO = yellow ochre

BP = black pigment

BGP = blue-grey pigment

WP = white pigment

Petro = petroglyph

LC = light cut

MC = moderate cut

DC = deep cut

VDC = very deep cut

Subject identification

? The use of a question mark designates that the identity of a subject is uncertain

Arrangement

? The use of a question mark designates that it is uncertain whether a composition consists of one, two, or more subjects

Theme identification

? The use of a question mark designates that the identity of a theme is uncertain

Dimensions

(h) = horizontal dimension

(v) = vertical dimension

(d) = diameter

NA = not available

Physical condition

LW = light wear

MW = moderate wear

HW = heavy wear

VHW = very heavy wear

Estimated age

BA = Bronze Age

LBA = Late Bronze Age

PP = Protohistoric period

EHP = Early Historic period

IP = Imperial period

PIP = post-Imperial period

VP = Vestigial period

LHP = Late Historical period

MP = Modern period

Images

NI = not illustrated

General comments

NIS = not inventoried separately

Other

P = natural rock panel

B = boulder

Rock Art Catalogue

DEI = digitally enhanced image