象雄与苯教研究论丛

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青藏高原的古代文明

北京首届国际象雄文化学术研讨会论文集

Ancient Civilization of Tibetan Plateau

Proceedings of the First Beijing International Conference on Shang shung Cultural Studies

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གཙོ་སྒྲིག་པ། ཚྭང་སྐོར་ཆོ་རིང་ཐར། ཤར་གཞོན་ཆོ་རིང་ཟླ།

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མཆོ་ངྷོན་མི་རིགས་དཔེ་ཚན་ཁང་།

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Ancient Civilization of Tibetan Plateau

(སྟོད་ཆ)

མཆོ་སྟོན་མི་རིགས་དཔེ་སྐྲུན་ཁང་།

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协办单位：四川大学中国藏学研究所

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《མངའ་ད་བྱང་མཐོ་སྒང་གི་གནའ་བའི་རིག་གནས་རིག》གི་རྩོམ་སྒྲིག་ཡུ་ཡིན་ལྷན་ཚོགས།

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Discerning *Bon* and Zhang Zhung on the Western Tibetan Plateau

Designing an archaeological nomenclature for Upper Tibet, Ladakh and Spiti based on a study of cognate rock art ①

John Vincent Bellezza
(University of Virginia, USA)

Introduction

This paper examines rock paintings and carvings common to Upper Tibet in the Peoples Republic of China and Ladakh and Spiti in the Republic of India. The cognate rock art of these adjacent regions on the western portion of the Tibetan plateau is distinguished by allied thematic, stylistic and technical features. These shared traits delineate an interrelated cultural realm in antiquity of significant depth and breadth.

After presenting signature examples of interregional rock

① The writing of this article was made possible by a recurring grant awarded me by the Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation, New York.

art, common historical and cultural labels are analyzed to determine how these might be used in a system of nomenclature applicable to rock art studies and cultural history and archaeology more broadly. In particular, the archaeological records of Upper Tibet, Ladakh and Spiti are scrutinized in relation to the commonly employed terms "*Bon*" and "*Zhang Zhung*".①

Upper Tibet is composed of the geographically interrelated Stod and Byang thang, a territory of some 600, 000 km² that stretches from the Transhimalayan ranges north and west of Lhasa to the Great Himalayan Range in the far southwest of Tibet. Ladakh (including Zangs dkar, Bod rig, Ldum ra, etc.) is located immediately west of Upper Tibet and covers approximately 60,000 km².② Ladakh (La dwags) is bounded by the Karakorum in the north, the Great Himalaya in the west and Transhimalayan

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① This study is largely based on extensive fieldwork carried out by the author in Upper Tibet and northwestern India over a period of two decades. Surveys of rock art in Upper Tibet were made between 1995 and 2013 and were supported by a number of prestigious institutions including the Asian Cultural Council (New York) Spalding Trust (Stowmarket), Shang Shung Institute (Merigar) Expeditions Council, National Geographic Society (Washington, D.C.), Tibet Medical Foundation (Weslaco) and Unicorn Foundation (Atlanta), as well as private donors. A comprehensive survey of rock art in Spiti was conducted by the author in May and June of 2015 with the financial support of Joseph Optiker (Burglen). I would also like to acknowledge Martin Vernier, Viraf Mehta and Rob Linrothe for kindly sharing photographs of Ladakh rock art with me.

② The highly diverse rock art and monumental assets of Ladakh exhibit distinctive regional characteristics. It is the rock art of the upper areas of Ladakh that have the strongest affinity with the archaeological complexion of Upper Tibet and Spiti.

ranges in the south and east. Spiti (Spi ti/Spyi ti), a fringe region of the plateau of approximately 8000 km², lies to the south of Ladakh, west of the Gu ge region of Upper Tibet and north of the Indian district of Kinnaur (Khu nu). ①

Chinese and Tibetan researchers first began studying rock art in Upper Tibet in the 1980s. Rock art has been documented in most counties of the Byang thang west of Lake Gnam mtsho.② In his landmark work, Suolang Wangdui (1994) identifies 22 rock art sites in the region, 11 of which are located in Ru thog, a county that borders on Ladakh. I have documented an additional 50 sites throughout the course of my extensive fieldwork, collecting images and locational information for around 10, 000 individual rock carvings and paintings. This art is diverse in terms of content, production and age, boasting a wide spectrum of figurative

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① In modern administrative terms, Upper Tibet includes parts of the Lhasa (Lha sa), Shigatse (Gzhis ka rtse) and Nagchu (Nag chu) prefectures and all of the Ngari (Mnga' ris) prefecture of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). Ladakh is part of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, while Spiti forms half of the district of Lahaul & Spiti in the state of Himachal Pradesh. In some sectors, the international boundary between the TAR in the PRC and Ladakh and Spiti in India has not been conclusively demarcated. Negotiations to resolve all outstanding border issues are ongoing. This article discusses Upper Tibet, Ladakh and Spiti in the perspective of the remote past and makes no allusion to contemporary matters of jurisdiction.

② Select studies of rock art for Upper Tibet include Chayet 1994; Chen Zhao Fu 1988; 2006a; 2006b; Francfort *et al*. 1992; Li Yongxian 2004; Suolang Wangdui (Bsod nams dbang 'dus) 1994; Tang Huisheng and Zhang Wenhua 2001; Wu Junkui and Zhang Jianlin 1987; Bellezza 1997; 2000; 2001; 2002a; 2002b; 2008; Bruneau and Bellezza 2013.

and non-figurative compositions. These consist of zoomorphic (roughly 70% of total), anthropomorphic (10%) and material objects and symbolic subjects (20%). The most emblematic animal in Upper Tibetan rock art is the wild yak, which makes up approximately 40% of all zoomorphic art. Antelope, wild sheep and birds are also well represented. The most widely distributed regional symbol is the swastika. In addition to Ladakh and Spiti, the rock art of Upper Tibet has demonstrable affinities with that of Central Asia, Mongolia and Siberia.

Study of Ladakh's rock art began in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and has gathered much momentum in recent years.① Around 300 rock art sites have been documented in Ladakh and a total of over 20, 000 petroglyphs and some pictographs recorded. The highest density of rock art is found along the Indus, where sites stretch from Mda' in the west to Skyid mang in the east. Much other rock art is located near the banks of the Ldum ra, Shyok and Zangs dkar rivers. About half of all rock art in Ladakh is zoomorphic, 15% is anthropomorphic, and the remainder is comprised of representations of material objects and symbolic compositions. Zoomorphic species and genera represented (in decreasing order of importance) are ibex, wild sheep, wild yaks, canines, caprids, felines, equids,

① Works on rock art in Ladakh include Francke 1902; 1903; 1914; De Terra 1940; Mani 1998; Vernier 2007; Aas 2009; Bruneau 2010; 2013; Bruneau *et al*. 2011; Bruneau and Vernier 2010; Bruneau and Bellezza 2013; Thsangspa 2014.

birds, deer, markhor, argali, camels and antelope. The rock art of Ladakh is highly diverse, revealing cultural influences from all surrounding areas and further afield in Central Asia, Mongolia and Siberia.

The first report of petroglyphs in Spiti was made more than a century ago. Recently, more than 6000 individual carvings and paintings at 28 different sites have been documented.① The rock art of Spiti consists of a fairly limited assortment of zoomorphic, anthropomorphic, geometric and symbolic subjects. These exhibit less stylistic and thematic diversity than the rock art of either Upper Tibet or Ladakh, suggesting, among other things, that this smaller region was somewhat insulated from the extraneous cultural forces buffeting its neighbors on the Tibetan plateau. Animals make up around 70% of the total number of petroglyphs in Spiti, anthropomorphs constitute approximately 15% and material objects and symbols 15%. By far the most common species of animals represented are the blue sheep and ibex.

An absolute chronology for the rock art of the Tibetan plateau is not yet feasible due to well-known technical limitations in scientific methods for dating it directly. As an alternative, I have devised a relative chronology based on collateral forms of evidence, one that assigns chronological values in broad terms

① Published studies include Francke 1914; Tucci 1936; Thakur 2001; 2008; Handa 2001, Chauhan et al. 2014; Bellezza 2015a; 2015b; 2015c.

to rock art. This kind of chronology is based on informed means including cultural historical analysis, stylistic and thematic categorization, associative archaeological data, cross-cultural comparison, gauging environmental changes, examination of techniques of production, placement of superimpositions, and assessment of erosion and re-patination of petroglyphs and browning and ablation of pictographs. A comparable relative chronology is applicable to other archaeological resources on the Tibetan plateau.

The chronology employed in this study is as follows:

I. Prehistoric Epoch

Late Bronze Age (1200—700 BCE)

Iron Age (circa 700—100 BCE) ①

Protohistoric period (100 BCE to 630 CE)

II. Historic Epoch

Early Historic period (630—1000 CE)

The "Western Tibetan Plateau" and "Western Tibetan Plateau Style"

For the purposes of this study, Upper Tibet, Ladakh and Spiti are grouped together under the rubric of "Western Tibetan Plateau"

① Due to a lack of archaeological data, no attempt has been made to differentiate the Late Bronze Age from an Early Iron Age.

(WTP), a geographically interrelated expanse with allied languages, cultures and peoples.① Evidence from the mortuary, monumental and artistic records indicates that communications between these constituent regions began in prehistory.

Rock art of comparable technical, stylistic and thematic characteristics furnishes evidence for adducing long established cultural strands crisscrossing the WTP. The oldest rock art distributed in all three regions consists of mascoids (anthropomorphic visages in emblematic form), which appear to be of Late Bronze Age antiquity.② However, this article focuses on rock art of the Iron Age and more recent periods, reflecting the development of a powerful idiom of artistic expression in Upper Tibet, Ladakh and Spiti.

The common body of rock art on the WTP encapsulates a sphere of cultural interactivity with both abstract and material dimensions. A number of causal factors may lie behind the diffusion of artistic information and inspiration between Upper Tibet, Ladakh and Spiti. However, more research is

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① This cultural and geographic entity can be expanded to embrace Baltistan (Sbal ti) in Pakistan and upper Kinnaur (Hang grang) and upper Lahaul (Gar zha) in India but these areas are not the object of study in this article.

② In the summer of 2016, two mascoids were discovered in Spiti by members of the Spiti Rock Art and Historical Asscoiation, pushing back in time potential interregional links on the WTP. Mascoids have wide distribution in Inner Asia and are commonly attributed by researchers working in the northern portion of this region to the Bronze Age (Jacobson-Tepfer 2015: 42-54, 152-154).

required to accurately pinpoint these. Potentially, the engines of cultural amalgamation include military forces (raids, invasion, conquest), political forces (legateship, confederation, vassalage), religious forces (cultism, missionary activity), economic forces (subsistence strategies, trade, tribute, gift giving), technological forces (introduction of agriculture, metal implements and weapons and ceramics) and/or social forces (adoption of new values, mores and fashions).

Whatever the exact mix of causal factors, Upper Tibet, Ladakh and Spiti came to share modes of artistic endeavor and methods of production that gave rise to a common rock art tradition. This rock art, which I call the "Western Tibetan Plateau Style" (WTPS),[①] consists of cognate subjects, themes, styles and techniques, reflecting the dissemination of similar customs, traditions and ideologies across the region. It is quite rare, however, for analogous rock art compositions in all three regions to exhibit matching styles; these tend to differ to some degree or another. Even making allowance for considerable stylistic variability, the WTPS represents less than 3% of the total rock art of the WTP. If rock art common to just two of the regions is considered (Upper Tibet-Ladakh, Upper Tibet-Spiti, Ladakh-Spiti) the proportion that can be categorized as WTPS is much

① This term was first used as nomenclature for rock art common to Upper Tibet and Ladakh. For an analysis of the cultural, historical and artistic characteristics of the WTPS, see Bruneau and Bellezza 2013; Bellezza 2015e.

higher (as much as 10%). Although the WTPS is in the minority, the cultural catalyst was highly persistent, manifesting in rock art from no latter than the Iron Age to later historic times.

The bulk of rock carvings and paintings on the WTP are peculiar to each region, representing inborn traditions of esthetics and figuration. A case in point is anthropomorphic art: Upper Tibet, Ladakh and Spiti have distinctive traditions of depiction (although there is some thematic and stylistic overlap). Based on the rock art record, therefore, there are graphic differences in the ancient material culture of these three regions.

Taken as a whole, the rock art of the WTP embodies significant regional variations and influences, localized manifestations of human activity distinguishing ancient Upper Tibet, Ladakh and Spiti from one another. These may or may not have been of sufficient magnitude to engender a sense of cultural exclusivity in each region, a state of affairs often derived from unique languages, customs, traditions, ethnicities and ideologies. Analogies with contemporary times can be made, as the WTP is still characterized by a mosaic of tribes, sects and dialects, conventional markers of identity and territoriality.

Whatever the precise cultural complexion of the WTP in antiquity, its rock art pinpoints differing environmental and economic conditions in each region. For example, in Upper Tibet, the most popular prey of hunters in rock art was the wild yak, in Ladakh it was the ibex and in Spiti the blue sheep.

Also, equestrian skills abound in the rock art of Upper Tibet and Ladakh but are mostly absent in Spiti. Environmental and economic variations, however, do not necessarily signify cultural differences. In the ethnographic record there are numerous examples of people who perceive themselves as belonging to the same culture pursuing various livelihoods (e.g., desert hunters versus mountain foragers; farmers versus nomads). Further study is required to better understand how cultural, economic and environmental factors manifest in the rock art of the WTP.

Rock art of the Western Tibetan Plateau Style

In this part of the article examples of rock art subjects and themes common to Upper Tibet, Ladakh and Spiti are presented. This analogous rock art is referred to as the Western Tibetan Plateau Style (WTPS). Five sets of three photographs, one each from Upper Tibet, Ladakh and Spiti, are considered. The subjects and themes illustrated are one of several similar examples located in each region.

Ascertaining what belongs to the WTPS is a subjective exercise, as it depends on esthetic choices and perceptions of what is similar in form, attitude and design. For the purposes of this article I have erred on the conservative side, choosing just five areas of stylistic and thematic correspondence. It is possible to create more inclusive categories of rock art attributable to the WTPS. These could include the hunting of caprids and cervids by bowman on foot, individual swastikas, sunbursts and curvilinear

motifs, etc. However, these kinds of subjects are more universally distributed in rock art, therefore, they are not as well suited for identifying common cultural elements peculiar to the the WTPS.

The WTPS, as defined in this article, is comprised of the following types of compositions:

1) Striped felines in the Eurasian animal style (Iron Age)
2) Horned eagles (Iron Age and Protohistoric period)
3) Wild yaks hunted on horseback (Iron Age and Protohistoric period)
4) Tiered ceremonial structures (Protohistoric period and Early Historic period)
5) Symbolic ensembles (Iron Age, Protohistoric period and Early historic period)

Figure 1a. Striped feline in the Eurasian animal style (20 cm long), Ris mo gdong, Ru thog, Upper Tibet. Iron Age or Protohistoric period. This carving was partially obliterated by the engraving of a Buddhist mantra over it.

Figure 1b. Striped feline in the Eurasian animal style, A lci, Ladakh. Iron Age. Photo courtesy of Rob Linrothe.

Figure 1c. Striped feline in the Eurasian animal style (36 cm long), Sum mdo, Spiti.

In Upper Tibet, Ladakh and Spiti there are striped feline carvings attributable to the 'Eurasian animal style', curvilinear forms of zoomorphic figuration that spread widely in the Iron Age.① As is well known, the Eurasian animal style is comprised of many regional idioms and was executed utilizing a variety of media. Felines of the WTPS in this genre exhibit flexed legs, long tails that curl over the back, angular stripes, upright ears (where visible) and gaping mouths.② Like much Eurasian animal style art, some WTPS examples are datable to the Iron Age (others belong to the Protohistoric period).③ In Upper Tibet and Ladakh there are a number of carved wild ungulates in the Eurasian animal style but no such examples have been documented in Spiti.

As demonstrated by the pervasive spread of the Eurasian animal style, powerful cultural and technological forces swept across Eurasia in the Iron Age. Striped feline rock art in the Eurasian animal style indicates that the WTP was subject to influences affecting much of the continent in that period. These left an indelible mark on the archaeological record of

① For the feline from Ladakh and two other examples on the same boulder in the Eurasian animal style, see Linrothe 2003. For another example from Ladakh in a comparable style, see Bruneau and Bellezza 2013, p. 66.

② On tiger rock art more widely in Upper Tibet, see Bellezza 2012a; on tiger rock art in Spiti, see Bellezza 2015b.

③ On Eurasian animal style rock art on the WTP see Francfort *et al*. 1992; Bellezza 2002, pp. 136–139; Bellezza 2014a; 2014d; Bruneau 2006—2007; Bruneau and Bellezza 2013, Bruneau and Vernier 2010.

the WTP.① Military, political, social, economic, religious, social and technological factors can be postulated to account for the dissemination of the Eurasian animal style to the WTP. While these factors remain hypothetical for lack of hard evidence, in one form or another they were also responsible for the riding horse, iron tools and weapons, bellicose socioreligious orders and other Iron Age traditions reaching the WTP. The presence of the Eurasian animal style on the WTPS strongly suggests that

Figure 2a. A raptor with diamond-shaped body, tail and wings (9 cm high). The left wing (the only one fully visible) consists of inwardly folding lines creating a nest of diamonds. The head of this highly worn engraving has been largely effaced, precluding an assessment of its style and individual motifs. Ri mo gdong, Ru thog, Upper Tibet. Protohistoric period.

① On Eurasian animal style bronze objects on the WTP, see Bellezza 2016.

Figure 2b. A raptor with diamond-shaped body, tail and wings. This specimen appears to have two horns on top of its head and two legs as well. Ya ru zam pa, Ladakh. Protohistoric period. Photo courtesy of Martin Vernier.

Figure 2c. A red ochre pictograph of a raptor with diamond-shaped body, tail and wings and what appear to be horns (14 cm high), Srin mo kha gdang, Spiti. Protohistoric period.

extraneous mechanisms were responsible for an amalgamative cultural trend on the WTP. To what degree this served to bind together pre-existing cultures of the region is still to be determined.

Horned eagles *(khyung)* in a number of styles have been documented in the rock art of Upper Tibet, Ladakh and Spiti.① The birds-of-prey chosen for illustration here share many stylistic features, bringing them into close esthetic correspondence with

Figure 3a. Wild yak hunting (wild yak:21 cm long). In this composition a mounted archer is attacking a lone wild yak. What appear to be arrows project from the back of the doomed animal. Ri rgyal, Sger rtse, Upper Tibet. Iron Age or Protohistoric period.

① On *khyung* rock art of Upper Tibet more generally, see Bellezza 2008, pp. 172 (fig. 303), 175 (fig. 310); 2002a, pp. 216 (fig. XI-17c), 217 (XI-17c, 18c), 221 (XI-26c), 234 (XI-4e, 5e) ; 2015g; 2013b; 2012b.

one another.① The horned eagle is one of Tibet's most iconic figures, occupying a prominent place in the cultural frameworks of both the archaic and Lamaist milieux. The distinctive nature of this avian figure constitutes an important piece of graphic evidence for interregional linkages on the WTP, which presumably originated in a common wellspring of cultural and religious traditions.

Figure 3b. Archer on horseback shooting at two wild yaks (one of which is partially obliterated). Zam thang, Ladakh. Protohistoric period. Photo courtesy of Martin Vernier.

① For a discussion of the Ladakh raptor carving, see Bruneau and Bellezza 2013, pp. 66, 67. For an analysis of the Spitian pictograph, see Bellezza 2015b.

Figure 3c. Bowman on horseback pursuing two wild yaks (horse:18 cm long). The lower yak has been hit with a projectile. Gyur mo, Spiti.rotohistoric period.

Although there are other forms of hunting on the WTP, wild yak hunting on horseback with bows and arrows best typifies the territory as a whole. It shows that the inhabitants of Upper Tibet, Ladakh and Spiti were versed in equestrian arts as early as the Iron Age and the spread of the bridle and saddle over a vast expanse of Eurasia. We can be reasonably confident that allied styles and themes (coursing on horseback, depiction of animals hit by projectiles, etc.) are indicative of cultural ties between the three regions, not just economic patterns of subsistence. Analogies drawn from the current ethnographic scene on the WTP indicate that ritual, mythic and cultic traditions were incumbent in the hunting of wild yaks.

Figure 4a. The carving of a ceremonial monument with four graduated tiers and projecting finial (24 cm high). Rwa ′ brog ′phrang, Ru thog, Upper Tibet. Protohistoric period.

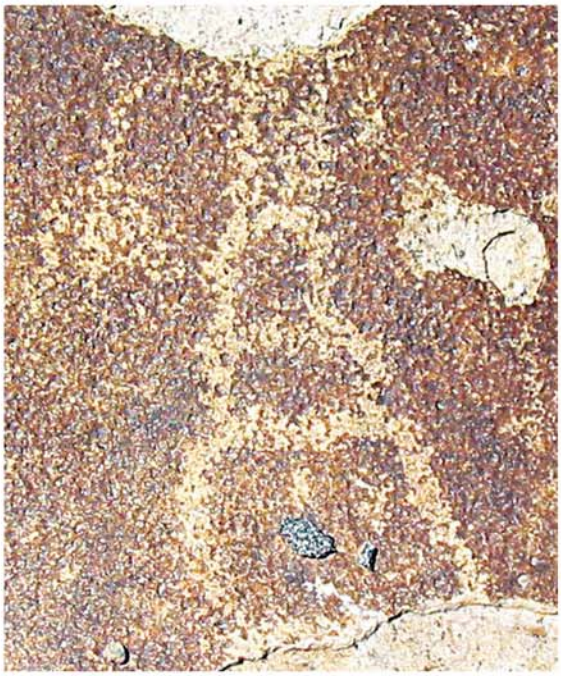

Figure 4b. A tiered ceremonial monument with three or four graduated stages. A lci zam pa thang, Ladakh. Protohistoric period. Photo courtesy of Martin Vernier.

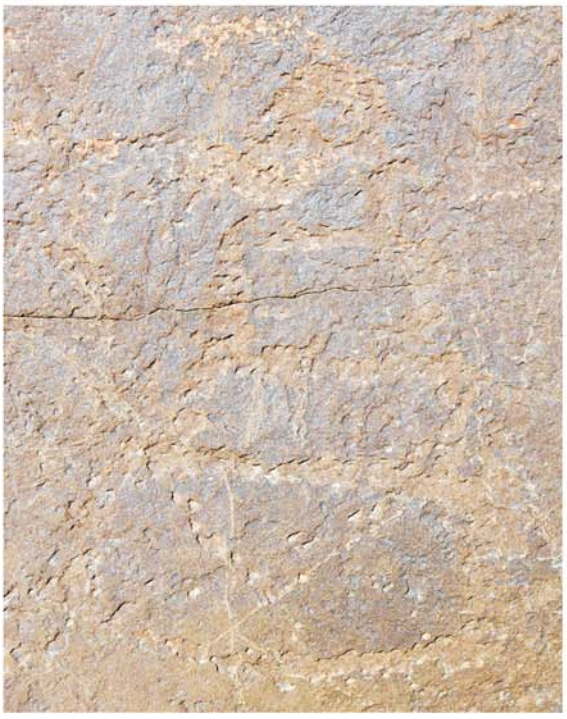

Figure 4c. A ceremonial monument of four or five graduated tiers (16 cm high). La ri ting mjug, Spiti. Protohistoric period.

Tiered structures, the precursors of the well-known *mchod rten* are another peculiar type of subject matter in the WTPS (similar types are also known in northern Pakistan).① These appear to be facsimiles of shrines. They may have functioned as cosmological models and in the propitiation of elemental and personal deities, as recorded in the religious literature of Tibet. Comparable ceremonial monuments documented in Upper Tibet, Ladakh and Spiti serve to place these regions inside the same cultural channels. The existence of more complex

① On tiered shrines and *mchod rten* in the rock art of different parts of the WTP, see Francke 1902; Denwood 1980; Francfort *et al.* ; Bellezza 1997, pp. 181, 184, 207; 2000; 2001; 2002a; 2008, pp. 182–186; 2014a, pp. 189–193; 2015b; forthcoming; Bruneau 2010; Orofino 1990.

carvings of *mchod rten* on the WTP establish that monumental interconnections continued in the Early Historic period, as part of the parallel religious and artistic development of the three regions of the WTP.

Figure 5a. Tree and counterclockwise swastika with unidentified subject on the upper right side of image, all painted in red ochre (tree:37 cm high). These pictographs are found on the face of a cliff. Chu mkhar gyam sgrub phug, Ru thog, Upper Tibet. Protohistoric period.

Figure 5b. Two trees with counterclockwise swastika between them and unidentified subject on the upper left side of image. Found on rock face, Tar, Ladakh. Protohistoric period. Photo courtesy of Jean Louis Taillefer.

Figure 5c. Tree and counterclockwise swastika in red ochre painted on the ceiling of a rock ledge (each figure approximately 10 cm high). Sku bum, Spiti. Protohistoric period.

All three compositions depict trees and counterclockwise swastikas and appear to date to the Protohistoric period. The physical forms of a tree notwithstanding, these appear to be symbolic representations, the concentration of immaterial correlates in signs and tokens. The Upper Tibetan and Spitian depictions of the trees (branches pointing downward) are closest in style and were made using red ochre (iron oxide) pigments. The branches of the two trees in the Ladakh example point upward. However, trees in a similar style to those in the Upper Tibetan and Spitian pictographs also occur in the petroglyphs of Ladakh (e.g., at Ya ru zam pa). There are boulders in Upper Tibet, Ladakh and Spiti adorned with a tree and swastika as well.

Relying on Tibetan literature as a benchmark, the rock art trees and swastikas might be seen as having cosmological or cosmogonic significance and good fortune-bestowing functions (e.g., the world tree *mu le grum shing*; the swastika *G•yung drung bkod legs*, etc.), but this assignation of semantics to WTP rock art cannot be verified. That ritual, mythic or narrative themes were intended by the trees and swastikas is strengthened by the larger artistic context in which they occur. The sun, moon, raptors, ungulates and other 'sacred' subjects are commonly found in close association with the tree and swastika in all three regions. This suggests rather convincingly that Upper Tibet, Ladakh and Spiti shared patterns of religious observance in the Protohistoric period. This reinforces evidence for common religious traditions reflected in the WTPS already considered: tiered shrines and horned raptors.

The signification of the term "*Bon*"

In order to better understand the cultural and religious dimensions of the common rock art tradition I have called WTPS, it is necessary to examine how they are related to two well-circulated terms in Tibetology: "Bon/*bon*" and "Zhang Zhung". As shall be shown, these two words have broad and even ambiguous applications. In traditional discourse and modern scholarship, *Bon* and Zhang Zhung have emerged as generic designations with a welter of different meanings

and connotations. As shall be shown, the variable application of these terms is not very conducive to the identification and interpretation of the WTPS.

Firstly, it must be determined which aspects of Bon/*bon* are applicable to the study of rock art on the WTP. The term is often used by scholars and non-scholars alike to describe a wide spectrum of religious and cultural traditions.① The disparate traditions defined by this word can be placed into three major categories: Lamaist Bon, folk *bon*, and ancient *bon*.

The systematized *Bon* religion still practiced today arose circa 1000 CE with the rediscovery (and recreation) of texts supposedly hidden during a wave of persecution in the late 8th century CE. This Lamaist religion, which shares much of its ethics, doctrines, philosophy and mysticism with Tibetan Buddhism, has come to be referred to by its adherents as G•yung drung (Swastika) Bon. In G•yung drung Bon conceptions, *bon* more or less carries the same connotations as does the Sanskrit word *dharma* in Tibetan Buddhism (law, duty, religious path, etc.).

There are few historical indications for the G•yung drung Bon religion having taken root in Spiti or Ladakh, a hothouse of Buddhist activity and tradition since the time of the great translator Lo tsa ba Rin chen bzang po and the second diffusion of Buddhism (*bstan pa phyi dar*). Therefore, it can be concluded

① For discourse on the historical basis and semantics of the term Bon/*bon*, see, for example, Stein 1972; Karmay 1998, pp. 157–168; van Schaik 2013; Bjerken 1998

that the G•yung drung Bon legacy of the last one thousand years is not relevant as a designator of rock art on the WTP.

Sundry folk religious practices in the contemporary Tibetan world are often labeled *bon*. Comparisons made between such ethnographic phenomena and subjects and themes in the rock art of the WTP comprise an ethnoarchaeological approach to study. The term *bon* is sometimes applied to refer to localized religious activities further afield in places like the Hindu Kush, Pamirs, Siberia, Mongolia and China. These cult traditions may or may not be related to the ancient *bon* of Tibet. If there is a demonstrable relationship with Tibet, wide-ranging territorial links in the cross-cultural appraisal of the WTP constitute another sense of the term *bon* pertinent to archaeological discourse.

Tibetan customs, rituals, myths and historical lore predating the 11th century CE are commonly referred to as *bon* in Tibetan parlance and literature. Tibetan texts indicate that this amorphous body of religious tradition was organized along regional, tribal and political lines, and probably did not have a unified institutional basis or systematized creed. *Bon* as a generic designation for ancient religion in Tibet includes three major historical phases: 1) prehistoric (pre-7th century CE; predating the main introduction of Buddhism in Tibet), 2) Imperial (circa 630—850 CE; period marked by still not well understood encounters with Buddhism), and 3) post-Imperial (circa

850–1000 CE; period of cross-fertilization with Buddhism).[①]

It is this ancient *bon* that is most germane to the archeological nomenclature of the WTP in the pre-11th century CE era. A very important contemporaneous source of texts for the cultural and religious makeup of Tibet in the post-Imperial period is the Gathang Bumpa manuscripts. Several funerary and exorcistic manuscripts were recovered from an eponymous Buddhist *mchod rten* in southern Tibet during reconstruction in 2006. The term *bon* has wide circulation in these documents. The G•yung drung Bon religion has also preserved ritual texts that are attributable to the post-Imperial period, some of which have been subject to relatively few editorial and scribal modifications (e.g., *Klu 'bum, Mu ye pra phud phywa'i mthur thug*, etc.).

For both the post-Imperial and Imperial periods, the most extensive source of contemporaneous literature is the Dunhuang manuscripts, which were discovered in grottos on the edge of the Gobi desert a little over a century ago. Dunhuang texts in the Tibetan language containing cultural and religious data related to *bon* include the following major genres: funerary ritual, healing ritual, divination, and historical. Another contemporaneous Tibetan source for culture and religion in the Imperial period are wooden slips and other documents from Miran and Mazar Tagh

① The usage of *bon* to denote ancient non-Buddhist religion in Tibet in its entirety probably arose retroactively. In Tibetan texts dating to the Imperial period, bon is more narrowly defined as a corpus of rituals and myths and the priests who promoted them. See Bellezza 2013b.

in the Taklamakan desert.

There are many Buddhist and G•yung drung Bon texts composed or rewritten in the last 1000 years that purport to describe the prehistoric cultural and religious scene in Tibet, in which the word *bon* occurs. These vary greatly in style of composition, genre and historicity. Exegetical, philological, historiographic and linguistic methodologies must be brought to bear on these textual sources in order to ascertain their relevance to the archaeological records of the WTP.

The signification of the term "Zhang Zhung"

"Zhang Zhung" is used to variously denote an ancient kingdom on the WTP, a language, a culture, a civilization, a religious tradition (e.g., Zhang Zhung Bon), an ethnicity and an empire of mythic proportions. In recent years, with the popularization of Zhang Zhung by the media, this term has come to be wielded in an increasingly uncritical fashion. Claims about Zhang Zhung become ever more grandiose, with some commentators and writers of the opinion that it was the sole source of the Tibetan culture and people.① Others hold that it spread throughout Inner Asia and beyond.

There is a lack of scientific evidence to support the more preposterous claims made about Zhang Zhung.

① In fact, there were a number of other major regions situated on the Tibetan Plateau in early times, which played a role in the development of its multi-cultural

Nevertheless, even more valid uses of the term are so wide-ranging that its employment in an archaeological nomenclature throws up a variety of questions. That a single word can equally refer to a kingdom, language, culture and people complicates its application as a designator of specific archaeological materials and periods of time. If indeed there was once a unitary kingdom, language, culture, and people on the WTP this should be reflected in the homogeneity of the archaeological records in Upper Tibet, Ladakh and Spiti, but instead we find considerable variability in all periods from the Iron Age to the Early Historic period. As already noted, this is more in keeping with a certain degree of cultural dissimilarity and potentially political, linguistic and ethnic divisions as well. We may therefore have to speak about a number of Zhang Zhung-s, one for each place and time period.

As a general principle, it is very difficult to discern linguistic affiliations from archaeological materials belonging to preliterate peoples. Likewise, ethnicity or genomic affinities are seldom recognizable in the non-mortuary archaeological record. One may draw inferences about language and ethnicity from an assemblage of material objects but this evidence in itself tends to be inconclusive. As for kingdoms and other polities, these

and multi-linguistic civilization. According to Tibetan historical accounts, these included Spu rgyal bod (Central Tibet), Sum pa (north central Tibet), A zha (northeastern Tibet), Mi-nyag (far northeastern Tibet), lJang/'Jang (southeastern Tibet) and Mon (southern Tibet).

may or may not be explicitly manifest in the rock art record. It depends on whether symbols or emblems were consciously created to distinguish a political order or if certain motifs and subjects consistently articulate (consciously or otherwise) the spirit, ideology or organization of a ruling establishment.

We can take it as axiomatic, however, that a body of rock art over its entire area of distribution is a cultural elaboration, the output of a specific people in a specific time who possessed joint customs, traditions and ideologies, etc.The study of rock art, therefore, is well suited to the determination of cultural patterns on the WTP during the time in which it was produced.

In order to ascertain how the term Zhang Zhung can be optimally applied to the cultural complexion of the WTP, I will first present a range of textual materials, placing it in the clearest historical context possible.①

From the textual record we know that a Zhang Zhung kingdom existed in western Tibet at the dawn of Tibet's historical era (early 7th century CE). Among the oldest and most authoritative of these records are Tibetan historical manuscripts discovered in Dunhuang more than a century ago. According to the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* of Dunhuang (composed circa mid-9th century CE), Zhang Zhung suffered a partial defeat at the hands of Khyung po spung sad zu tse, one of the key ministers of the

① For a broad survey of Zhang Zhung derived from Tibetan literature, the oral tradition and archaeology, see Bellezza 2008; 2014a; Richardson 1998.

Tibetan King Gnam ri slon btsan, probably in the 610s or 620s CE (Richardson 1977: 13; Dotson 2009: 17; Uray 1972b: 40). This Zhang Zhung minister defected to the Central Tibetans *(ibid.)*. According to the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* and *Old Tibetan Annals* (composed circa late 8th century or early 9th century CE), circa 644 CE, the next Tibetan king, Srong brtsan sgam po, brought about the complete subjugation of Zhang Zhung by assassinating its king, Lig snya shur/Lig myĭ rhya.

Chinese sources serve as independent corroboration for historical events concerning Zhang Zhung. For example, the Chinese geographic work *Taiping huanyu ji*, completed in 983 CE, states that Zhang Zhung (Yangtong) was conquered by the Tibetans in 649 CE, leading to much destruction and the scattering of her people (Zeisler 2009—2010: 403, 404, after Pelliot 1963). Hence, in both Old Tibetan language and Chinese documents, Zhang Zhung is used to designate a kingdom traceable to a period not long before and during its defeat by the Spu rgyal dynasty of Central Tibet in the first half of the 7th century CE.

In the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*, we find "Ti se, the Mountain" and "Ma pang, the Lake". These prominent sacred topographical features in southwestern Tibet are mentioned in an allegory of shifting ministerial alliances (Beckwith 1987; Bacot *et al.* 1940—1946; Richardson 1998). The protagonist in this tale is Khyung po spung sad zu tse, conveying that Ti se and Ma pang were prizes or emblems of the Zhang Zhung kingdom won by the

Tibetans. In a catalogue of ancient principalities (PT 1286), another Upper Tibetan region known as Dar pa is connected to Lord (Jo bo) Lig snya shur. A localization in western Tibet for Dar pa can be inferred, for we know that King Lig snya shur had his headquarters at Khyung lung rngul mkhar. That this castle is situated in Upper Tibet is corroborated in the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*, in the tale of the disaffected wife of King Lig myǐ rhya (sic), Sad mar kar, who leaves Khyung lung rngul mkhar to go fishing at Lake Ma pang (Uray 1972a), presumably the closest freshwater lake. It is increasingly accepted in Tibetan scholarship that this capital of the Zhang Zhung kingdom can probably be identified with Mkhar gdong, a ruined hilltop fortress near the G•yung drung Bon monastery of Gur gyam. Khyung lung rngul mkhar/Khyung lung dngul mkhar is also cited in Dunhuang documents PT 1051 and PT 1052, but these are divination texts and do not furnish hard geographic or political data.

From the manuscripts cited above, we can conclude that beginning in the early 7th century, Zhang Zhung designated at minimum a western portion of Upper Tibet. That Zhang Zhung was a key kingdom on the Tibetan Plateau suggests some degree of additional historical depth measured in decades, if not centuries, but nowhere is this made manifest in Old Tibetan literature. In any event, the historical legacy of Zhang Zhung had both pre-conquest and conquest phases, possibly furnishing a historical footing for the varied applications of Zhang Zhung/

Yang tong in Tibetan and Chinese literature.

PT 1060, an Old Tibetan text written in the 8th or 9th century CE, expounds upon the ancestral lineages of horses *(do ma)* used in archaic funerary rites. This text is not a historical document per se; it belongs to a corpus of archaic funerary ritual texts. While set in the first half of the 7th century CE, its lineages of psychopomp horses are presented in a manner suggestive of considerable antiquity. In PT 1060, two Zhang Zhung gods (Mu rgyung and Stang rgyung) are mentioned in conjunction with King Lǐg snya shur and his castle, Khyung lung rngul mkhar, situated in the headwaters region around Mount Ti se, in southwestern Tibet (Bellezza 2008: 522, 523). The subjects of this king are stated to be the people of Gu ge and Gug lchog (probably present-day Rong chung and Chu gsum; cf. Hazod 2009: 168). This is added evidence for the political heart of Zhang Zhung in the 7th century CE being in western Tibet, corroborating geographic indications provided in the Old Tibetan historical texts examined above. PT 1060 augments the geographic compass of Zhang Zhung to include Gug lchog, apparently the badlands region bordering on Spiti and Kinnaur.

The same headwaters region as well as Gu ge are also noted in one of the origins myths of PT 1136, another funerary text devoted to psychopomp horses composed in the 8th or 9th century CE (Bellezza 2010: 38, 39; 2008: 526). Proclamation of mythic origins *(smrang)* in Old Tibetan ritual literature are often

set in primal or early times, allegorical or legendary affirmation of the great age and legitimacy of the funerary rites. No mention of Zhang Zhung is explicitly made in PT 1136, nor in other archaic funerary texts of Dunhuang I have examined (PT 1060 excepted).

As we have seen, in the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* and *Old Tibetan Annals* Zhang Zhung is not expressly associated with a pre-7th century CE antiquity. The designation of prehistoric regions of Upper Tibet in Old Tibetan ritual literature comes under different names. Four toponyms in Old Tibetan documents are specifically connected to early Upper Tibet (Bellezza 2010: 59, 67–70). One is Smra yul thang brgyad, a pastoral region with ancestral cultural connotations, which is also mentioned in G•yung drung Bon documents. Two others are Byang 'brog snam stod and Byang kha snam brgyad, the realm of wild yaks and other quarry of hunters in the far north. The fourth region localized in Upper Tibet is Dga' yul byang nams of PT 1136 (Bellezza: 2008: 518, 520, 521), which is also identified with the ancestral afterlife in other texts and is thus of considerable antiquity.

These four regions, as the geographic backdrop of archetypal myths, are in contradistinction to Zhang Zhung with its post-600 CE political connotations in Old Tibetan historical documents. The tribal groups associated with Dga' yul byang nams in PT 1136 are Smra and Rma. Smra is the tribal appellation of Zhang Zhung, according to a wealth of later Tibetan sources (such as the *La dwags rgyal rabs*). In Old Tibetan documents, Smra is both

a tribal epithet of regions in Upper Tibet ('man of Smra' = Smra myi in PT 1136; 'priest of Smra' = Smra *bon* in PT 1136 and PT 1285) and the name of an Upper Tibetan country of the same tribe (Smra yul in PT 1285, ITJ 731, ITJ 739, and *Byol rabs* of the Gathang Bumpa documents). Ergo, there can be no question that Smra and Zhang Zhung refer to the same territory or thereabouts.

While Zhang Zhung is not directly equated with prehistoric Upper Tibet in the archaic ritual manuscripts of Dunhuang, it is in another Old Tibetan source. This text, *Rnel dri 'dul ba'i thabs sogs*, belongs to the Gathang Bumpa collection of documents recently discovered in southern Tibet, and is best dated to circa 850–1000 CE (Bellezza 2010; 2013b). *Rnel dri 'dul ba'i thabs sogs* boasts a number of origins myths set in the distant past. In one of these tales, Zhang Zhung is explicitly tied to Mtsho mu le Ōd, which, as we know from G•yung drung Bon sources, denotes La ngag mtsho or possibly Ma pang g•yu mtsho in southwestern Tibet (Bellezza 2013b: 173, 174). This is the oldest known textual reference to Zhang Zhung as a designation for areas of prehistoric Upper Tibet. This document, written roughly 1100 years ago, sets the historical precedent for Zhang Zhung being lent expansive chronological semantics by the G•yung drung Bon religion beginning around 1000 CE.①

The *Old Tibetan Chronicle* states that after the conquest of

① Zhung Zhung also denotes an ancient language. Van Driem (2001: 39) argues that Zhang Zhung and related Western Himalayish languages probably reached

Zhang Zhung, Khyung lung dngul mkhar was the residence of administrative chiefs from Central Tibet (Uray 1972b: 41, 42, 44). After its subjugation, Zhang Zhung and the other high plateau kingdom of ancient Tibet, Sum pa, were organized into administrative and military units know as *stong sde*. Each *stong sde* consisted of 1000 residential camps. The *Old Tibetan Annals* states that Zhang Zhung was divided into lower *(smad)* and upper *(stod)* halves, each with five *stong sde* (Dotson 2009: 39, 41).

The extent of the Zhang Zhung kingdom before its downfall and whether it included Ladakh remains an unsolved mystery.① Scholars such as Philip Denwood (2005; 2008) believe that little if any of Ladakh was part of the Zhang Zhung kingdom. A crucial bit of evidence supporting his position is the registering of able-bodied men in both Zhang Zhung and Mar (Mard/Mar yul, an old name for greater Ladakh), in the entry of 719 CE of

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western Tibet in the middle of the third millennium BCE. If Neolithic origins for Zhang Zhung are validated through further study, it indicates that a long established linguistic substrate underpinned at least some of the archaeological heritage of the WTP considered in this article. A Zhang Zhung language dating to the Neolithic accords with G•yung drung Bon conceptions about the political, cultural and religious antiquity of Zhang Zhung.

① According to Petech (1977: 10), Baltistan was conquered by the Tibetans circa 720 CE; therefore, the Tibetan occupation of Ladakh must have come somewhat earlier. Petech (*ibid.*) believes, nonetheless, that the Tibetanization of Ladakh did not begin until after circa 900 CE. In my opinion, his chronology of the linguistic and cultural integration of Ladakh into Tibet appears to be too late. The wealth of Old Tibetan language inscriptions in Ladakh indicate that this process (through widespread visitation of Tibetans of military rank) began no later than the 8th

the *Old Tibetan Annals* (Dotson 2009: 111; Uray 1990: 218). Thus, according to this source, these two territories were distinguished from one another. Nevertheless, how Zhang Zhung and Mard differed from each other vis-à-vis their political positions in the Tibetan empire is unclear. It is likely that both Zhang Zhung and Mard denoted two traditional territories or erstwhile kingdoms in the *Old Tibetan Annals* and not merely subsequent political divisions of the Tibetan empire.

Bettina Zeisler (2010—2011) holds that Lower Zhang Zhung and Greater Yangtong designate upper Ladakh, western Tibet

century CE. For these inscriptions, see Orofino 1990; Takeuchi 2012; Snellgrove *et al*. 1980. Moreover, pre-existing cultural ties between Upper Ladakh and Upper Tibet would have facilitated a process of Tibetanization. Tibetan influences in Ladakh prior to the 9th century CE are also supported on linguistic grounds by Denwood (2005), who states that the initial letter clusters in Ladakhi and Balti may preserve a stage in the development of archaic Tibetan languages predating the earliest examples of the Tibetan script. Furthermore, Zeisler (2005) considers that the archaic dialects of the west and those of Amdo probably formed a linguistic continuum in the time when Old Tibetan was spoken in the Byang thang. Zeisler (*ibid*.) observes that initial clusters had disappeared from the central Tibetan dialects by the beginning of the 9th century CE, as inferred from Chinese renderings of Tibetan names. That the Ladakhis and Baltis retained these clusters suggests that they began adopting the Tibetan language as early as the 7th century CE, embracing its old-fashioned phonological structures. Likewise, Uray (1990:217) is of the opinion that Tibetan was spoken in Ladakh in the 7th century CE. Prior to the 7th century CE, the linguistic composition of Ladakh is unclear. Perhaps Zhang Zhung or closely allied languages were used in the upper portion. A group of languages that appear to be related to Zhang Zhung are still spoken in Kinnaur, Lahaul, Kullu, and in border areas of Uttarakhand. On these languages, see van Driem 2001; Matisoff 2001; Jacques 2009.

and a portion of the Changthang in the Imperial period. Zeisler (*ibid.*) is also of the opinion that Upper Zhang Zhung of Tibetan sources and Lesser Yangtong of Chinese sources not only included Lower Ladakh, but Baltistan, Gilgit and Hunza, all the way to the Pamirs. A key piece of evidence used by Zeisler to make her determination is that the list of five districts (*stong sde*) of Upper Zhang Zhung cited in the historical text *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston* includes the word *bag/bag ga,* which is probably of Turkic or Iranic origins (*ibid*, 390—392). The names of the five districts of Lower Zhang Zhung in *Mkhas pai' dga' ston* are regions in Upper Tibet and adjoining Spiti (see below for discussion). There are problems, however, in reading the districts of Zhang Zhung in the widely embracing manner that Zeisler does. First of all, Ladakh (Mar yul, *sic*) is nowhere explicitly mentioned in this list. As noted above, Mard (Ladakh) and Zhang Zhung are presented as different territories in the *Old Tibetan Annals*. Moreover, in the time of his pilgrimage in 726 CE, Huei-ch'ao lists Great Bolor (Baltistan/Sbal ti) and Yang-t'ung *(sic)* as individual kingdoms under Tibetan domination, which were separate from Kashmir (Vitali 1996: 325, after Fuchs).

The possible consolidation of non-Tibetan regions into the Zhang Zhung of the Tibetan empire, however, cannot be discounted entirely. In the dynamics of conquest there may have been political and economic incentives to include plundered Indo-Iranic territories northwest of the Tibetan plateau into what

must have been seen as part of the imperial homeland. Any such incorporation however is likely to have been more ideological or aspirational in nature than an actual administrative arrangement on the ground, for Tibet's grip on Indo-Iranic lands was relatively short-lived and subject to military reversals.

The best known G•yung drung Bon claim that Ladakh was a constituent part of the Zhang Zhung kingdom comes from the *Ti se'i dkar chag*, written by Dkar ru grub dbang circa 1844 (see Bellezza 2011: 83, 87, 88). In this account, one of the 18 kings of Zhang Zhung was based in Ladakh: Nye lo wer ya, holder of a crown of bird horns (*bya ru*) made from meteoric iron (*gnam lcags*). The historical validity of this account, however, is difficult to gauge, as it is late in origin and not readily attributable to older sources. Furthermore, it was composed as part of resurgence in Bonpo interest in Zhang Zhung (which has continued to the present day). Thus Ti se'i dkar chag may have embellished or recreated history in a variety of ways for it own purposes. A historical revision is recognizable in its antiquation of the tradition of monastic discipline (*'dul ba*). Still, the reality of a Zhang Zhung king of Ladakh cannot be dismissed out of hand. This is more so true if we take the *Ti se'i dkar chag* account as a metaphor for prehistoric cultural interconnections between Upper Tibet and Ladakh. Other royal centers of Zhang Zhung catalogued in this text are associated with significant concentrations of archaic residential and ceremonial monuments, demonstrating that

these sites had a well-developed material cultural basis before the Imperial period (Bellezza 2011).

While Ladakh is not explicitly included, Tibetan historical texts state that Spiti was one of ten administrative/military districts comprising Zhang Zhung (Tashi Tsering 2013; Bellezza 2015e). As noted, these districts were known as *stong sde* (divisions of a thousand), indicating that they were each composed of 1000 units each. It seems that these units consisted of individual households or small groups of closely related agriculturalists or pastoralists.

There are two well known Tibetan historical references to Spiti pertaining to its inclusion in the ten *stong sde* of Upper *(Stod)* and Lower *(Smad)* Zhang Zhung during the Tibetan empire period (circa 629—851 CE). The earliest source is the religious history *Lde'u chos 'byung* (13th century CE), where Spiti is one of five stong sde in Lower Zhang Zhung. Known as Spyi ti stong bu chung, its placement at the end of the list and the literal meaning of *stong bu chung* (little [divisions of] a thousand) connotes that Spiti formed a smaller district than others enumerated in the list (cf. Tashi Tsering 2013: 535). In the historical text *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston* (mid-16th century CE), an analogously structured account renders the district of Spiti: Ci de stong bu chung, *ci* reflecting phonological qualities of central and eastern Tibetan dialects (cf.

Tashi Tsering 2013: 536, 537).[①]

As with Ladakh, it is worth pondering over what is actually signified by the inclusion of Spiti in Zhang Zhung territory, as maintained in the two Tibetan historical references given above. The material citing the ten *stong sde* of Zhang Zhung refers to an administrative system instituted by the Tibetan emperors (*btsan po*) sometime after the defeat of Zhang Zhung in the 640s CE. This administration had military overtones; each *stong sde* or district was commanded by a *stong dpon*.[②] Thus, the "little" *stong sde* of

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① The locations of the ten *stong sde* of Zhang Zhung given in *Lde'u chos 'byung and Mkhas pa'i dga' ston* have been the object of much scholarly debate, some of it well reasoned, some of it highly speculative. On the districts of Lower Zhang Zhung, see Bellezza 2008, p. 271; Bellezza 2011, pp. 58, 59; Vitali 1996, p. 433 (n. 722). For a discussion of the localization of the districts of Lower Zhang Zhung, which also cites the work of other scholars, see Zeisler 2009—2010, pp. 391; Tashi Tsering 2013, pp. 535, 536; Bellezza 2013c. With the inclusion of Spiti, all five districts of Lower Zhang Zhung appear to be located on the southwestern portion of the Tibetan plateau: Gug ge/Gu ge (well-known district in what is now Rtsa mda' county), Gu cog/Cog la (probably badlands region in western Rtsa mda' county), Spyir rtsang/Spyi gtsang (appears to refer to headwaters region in the vicinity of Mount Ti se/Kailash), and Yar rtsang/Yar tshang (appears to refer to the upper stretch of the Yar lung gtsang po/Brahmaputra river). The word (l) cog in Gu cog seems to describe the peculiar geography of the region and could allude to both its many pinnacles and flat-topped mountains. In the Old Tibetan funerary ritual text PT 1060, the people of Guge and Gug lchog (*sic*) are subjects of the Zhang Zhung king (Bellezza 2008: 523). Spyir rtsang/Spyi gtsang, (if we minimize the significance of what appears to be the adjectival form *spyir*) could literally mean 'head of the river' (from *spyi mo*), 'common river'/general river (from *spyi*) or 'all-covering river' (from *spyi khyab*). In each of these glosses a common riverine source or nexus is suggested, as is found around Mount Ti se.

② The ten *stong sde* enumerated in Buddhist historical sources formed a *khri sde*

Spiti indicates that this region was not only an administrative subdivision of Lower Zhang Zhung (southwestern Tibet), but also a source of soldiers and military provisions for its war machine, as well as a possible staging area for military operations. It is important to stress that this association of Spiti with Zhang Zhung territory says very little in itself about the cultural, linguistic, political or ethnic makeup of the region prior to the mid-7th century CE. Prehistoric political associations of Spiti with Zhang Zhung are only hinted at in G•yung drung Bon sources, and these are mythic and legendary accounts, not historical ones per se. It is therefore not clear whether Spiti was a constituent part or subsidiary of any prehistoric Zhang Zhung polity or if it had some other kind of political status.

As we have seen, the term Zhang Zhung is of variable chronological and geographic signification in the Tibetan textual tradition. In Old Tibetan historical literature, Zhang Zhung denotes places in western Tibet from circa the 610s CE through much of the Imperial period, while in G•yung drung Bon literature it is tantamount to a much larger territory envisioned as having existed for millennia. The bridge between these disparate

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(divisions/units of 10, 000). This term is often used to characterize the Zhang Zhung polity in Bon religious texts. In Bon literature, however, one or more *khri sde* (18 in some accounts) of Zhang Zhung are set in prehistoric times, and are associated with legendary figures such as the founder of the kingdom, Khri wer la rje. On the *khri sde* of Zhang Zhung in Bon sources, see Bellezza 2008, pp. 251, 255, 256; 2011, pp. 69, 70, 81–83.

historical notions is the text from Gathang Bumpa cited in the discussion above.

Applying "*Bon*" and "*Zhang Zhung*" to the archaeological records of the Western Tibetan Plateau

The multifarious application of the terms Zhang Zhung and *Bon* in Tibetan literature and modern scholarship poses challenges to their usage in an archaeological nomenclature of the WTP. As has been shown, questions regarding the chronological significance, cultural makeup and geographic delimits of these terms loom large.

Parallels in the rock art of Upper Tibet, Ladakh and Spiti indicating cultural affinities between these regions are a conspicuous part of the archaeological record.① In addition to cognate rock art, there are similarities in ceramics recovered from tombs in Upper Tibet, Ladakh and Spiti.② These ceramics were used in mortuary rites, suggesting a shared sphere of funerary and eschatological traditions on the WTP.

The existence of closely related rock art and pottery types in Upper Tibet, Ladakh and Spiti can be seen through the lens

① Place names with Zhang Zhung linguistic origins in Upper Tibet, Ladakh and Spiti are also indicative of prehistoric cultural links between these regions. Systematic toponymic studies are needed to further develop this observation.

② The study of ancient ceramics on the WTP is still in its infancy. Sources include Francke 1914, pp. 64, 65, pl. XXVIIIa; Chinese Institute of Tibetology 2001; Yao Jun 2004; Bellezza 2010a; 2012c; 2015d; 2015f.

of geography, for their common borders straddle a frontier potentially open year round. Relatively easy access must have promoted the flow of people, trade and ideas between the three regions since earliest times.①

It is interregional cultural and religious manifestations on the WTP that are best labelled *bon*, if this term is to be applied without further qualification. It is of course cognate art, architecture and artifacts that are likely to point to overarching cultural and religious traditions and processes throughout the region. Using the term *bon* as a blanket term for the WTPS is in keeping with indigenous conceptions about its widespread occurrence in ancient times. In an archaeological nomenclature, however, it should be amended with specific chronological

① Tibetan literary sources regarding the prehistoric origins of the tribes and clans support cultural and ethnical linkages between Upper Tibet, Ladakh and Spiti. According to Tibetan 'clan treasury' (*rus mdzod*) literature, two early tribes, the Dmu/Rmu and the Bru, migrated to western Tibet from the northwest. The Dmu, one of Tibet's most fundamental lineages, is supposed to have originated in the Indo-Iranic region of Stag gzigs. The Bru came from Tho gar (probably an Iranic region in Central Asia), Bru sha (Gilgit and Hunza) and O rgyan (probably Swat and Chitral). Vitali (2003: 39) ascribes these migrations and others associated with the six proto-tribes of Tibet to a period predating the Twelve Principalities (Rgyal phran bcu gnyis). In his reckoning, this can be dated well before the 2nd century BCE. Given their stated geographic sources, the Dmu and Bru are likely to have passed through Ladakh on any migration to Upper Tibet. Furthermore, an important source for genealogical information, *Dbu nag mi'u 'dra chags*, holds that the ancient clan of Dbra was distributed in both Mar yul and Zhang Zhung (Bellezza 2008: 262). By no later than the Imperial period the well known Cog ro and 'Bro clans were distributed across the WTP. Unfortunately, molecular analyses of ancient human remains in Upper Tibet, Ladakh and Spiti have not yet been undertaken.

values; e.g., Iron Age *bon*, Protohistoric *bon*, Early Historic *bon*.

Nonetheless, the term *bon* may not be ideally suited as a designator of differences in the archaeological records of the WTP. In the rock art of Upper Tibet, Ladakh and Spiti there are many idiosyncratic subjects, themes and styles suggestive of considerable cultural variability. The same general observation can be made for burial structures and large residential monuments as well: there is much regional diversification suggestive of cultural variability. To paint all these as *bon* does nothing to differentiate one corpus of rock art and monuments from another. To attain a sufficient level of specificity, this term, if used at all, should also be qualified geographically; e.g., the *bon* of Upper Tibet, the *bon* of Ladakh, the *bon* of Spiti.

Uncertainties surrounding the territorial extent and chronology of Zhang Zhung call for further qualification of this term, if is to be attached with any rigor to allied categories of archaeological materials on the WTP. Amendments to Zhang Zhung as archaeological nomenclature should specify the time period and region being highlighted. Thus, we might speak of Iron Age/Protohistoric period/Early Historic period Zhang Zhung in Upper Tibet/Ladakh/Spiti. Furthermore, sundry regions of Ladakh may have to be differentiated from one another in any nomenclature that employs the term Zhang Zhung.

As I have demonstrated in various publications, there is an

integral paleo-cultural zone discernable in Upper Tibet, based on the regional distribution of two kinds of *sui generis* funerary pillars, as well as on the geographic scope of all-stone corbelled buildings, quadrate funerary enclosures, mountaintop cubic tombs, tiered shrines and rock art. This coherent assemblage of monumental features is situated between Gnam ru in the east and the far western border of Tibet. The dating of these monuments has not been established with precision, but indications from the radiocarbon dating of tombs and organic remains associated with residential structures, typological survey of monuments, historical study, and analysis of adventitious rock art indicate a periodization from the early or middle 1st millennium BCE to the time of the Tibetan empire (7th—9th centuries CE; Bellezza 2014b; 2014c). This assemblage of like residential and ceremonial monuments combined with the unitary rock art tradition in the same 300, 000 km² province define a spectrum of common cultural features. These are likely to have extended to religious, ideological, economic and technological facets of ancient life in Upper Tibet.①

It is this paleo-cultural complex, stretching from Gnam ru to Pu hreng, Gu ge and Ru thog, which is best correlated with

① The two *sui generis* funerary pillar monuments and cubic tombs of Upper Tibet have not been detected in the badlands region of Gu ge. The absence of these defining monuments of the Upper Tibetan paleo-cultural zone in Gu ge may be explained by its different topography, lack of suitable stones (structural aspects) and/or by cultural variations (functional aspects). That some kind of minor divide

the Zhang Zhung polity mentioned in Old Tibetan documents. However, the geographic bounds of these two entities are not per force equatable, as their political scope may have varied widely. As for the Zhang Zhung language or languages, these may have spread over a wider area than Upper Tibet alone (with its interrelated assemblage of ancient monuments and rock art). Whatever the actual extent of a political and a linguistic Zhang Zhung, regions lying outside of Upper Tibet exhibit divergent cultural features.①

While cultural differences between Gu ge and Gnam mtsho and conterminous parts of Upper Tibet appear to have been minimal in antiquity, links between Upper Tibet and Ladakh and Spiti are decidedly weaker. No funerary pillars or large burial mounds have been documented in Ladakh and only a few

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separated Gu ge and the higher adjacent regions of Tibet is noted in the G•yung drung Bon tradition, but the nature of this partition in unclear (Bellezza 2011: 61, 62, 68). Nevertheless, Gu ge and other parts of Upper Tibet share in common a rock art tradition, all-stone corbelled residential structures and ceramic types, crucial archaeological evidence for a cultural groundwork of significant breadth. Areas of Upper Tibet situated east of Gnam ru include Lake Gnam mtsho and western Nag chu. The rock art of this southeastern swathe of the Byang thang is closely related to other areas of Upper Tibet. However, the ancient monumental infrastructure of far eastern Upper Tibet is less developed and somewhat at variance with regions to the west (*ibid.*, 62–64).

① In a similar vein, Aldenderfer (2009) holds that the variable archaeological record of Upper Tibet and Transhimalayan regions are probably indicative of places with and without Zhang Zhung cultural and ethnic affiliations.

all-stone corbelled castles are found there.① There are quadrate and ellipsoidal enclosures in both Upper Tibet and Ladakh (many of these appear to be funerary superstructures), but it is not yet known how these structures might be related to one another. In Spiti there are no major pre-Buddhist residential or ceremonial monuments visible.② This does not appear to be only a matter of detection, because even in the Buddhist era the built environment of Spiti was demonstrably less developed than in Upper Tibet and Ladakh.

The rock art of Ladakh manifests stronger affinities with Bronze Age Central Asia than does the rock art of Upper Tibet. It is evident from the rock art of Ladakh that the cultural complexes of the steppes known as Andronovo and Okunev had a greater impact there, persuasive but still not well understood evidence for its unique historical and cultural trajectory. Few such Bronze Age affinities have been discovered in Spitian rock art. The rock art record also indicates that Ladakh was a conduit between Central Asia, Upper Tibet and Spiti in the transfer of elements of the Eurasian animal style. The most plausible carrier of this artistic tradition was the Saka-Scythian cultural complex of the Iron Age.

The rock art of Spiti is characterized by a high percentage of

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① On the early archaeological monuments of Ladakh, see Devers 2014; 2013; Howard 1989; 1995; Bellezza 2013c; 2012d; Vernier 2012.

② On the ancient monuments of Spiti, see Bellezza 2015d.

indigenous subject matter and styles of figuration, setting it apart in many ways from both Upper Tibet and Ladakh. The rock art of Spiti is thematically less diverse than Upper Tibet and far less varied than Ladakh. The rock art evidence and the paucity of pre-Buddhist monumental remains suggest that Spiti was not as culturally and technologically advanced as its two neighbours on the WTP. The archaeological evidence also seems to show that Spiti was more insulated from the extraneous cultural forces buffeting Upper Tibet and Ladakh.

The contrasts in the archaeological records we have been considering do not necessarily mean that Upper Tibet, Ladakh and Spiti viewed each other as foreign or belonging to different orders of human beings in antiquity. Perceptions of a common cultural belonging may have prevailed, at least in certain times and places on the WTP. An analogy to the contemporary world can be drawn: regional variability in dress, ornamentation, art and other aspects of materiality often mark large cohorts of people who view themselves as belonging to a single culture and language. Likewise, regional factors and not cultural identification may explain some of the differences in the artistic and monumental resources of the WTP. Similarly, the individual predilections of artists may also have had strong bearing on styles of rock art.

Even accounting for these extra-cultural factors, the variable monumental, artistic and artifactual resources of the WTP

reflect key differences in the cultural, sociopolitical, economic and technological fabric of early Upper Tibet, Ladakh and Spiti, distinguishing these regions from each other.① Given the contrasting archaeological records of the WTP, it can be concluded that these three regions should not be equated with one another by simply labeling them Zhang Zhung or by characterizing their religion as *bon*. These terms are not sufficiently precise to describe all of the individualized cultural, economic, political and environmental patterns of Upper Tibet, Ladakh and Spiti from the Iron Age to the Early Historic period.②

Conclusion

As we have seen, the traditional terms *bon* and Zhang Zhung are useful designators for the genre of rock art called WTPS, in as much as it represents a common cultural, linguistic and/or political idiom. The same observation holds true for parallel sets

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① Given its geographic location on the edge of the Tibetan plateau, one might speculate that Spiti was more influenced by cis-Himalayan peoples and cultures than Upper Tibet. However, the archaeological, epigraphic, artistic, architectural, cultural or linguistic evidence to adduce such influences prior to the 10th century CE is lacking.

② The distinctive cultural makeup of these regions before the 7th century CE, as seen in their extensive rock art and burials, is likely to have eroded with the coming of the Tibetan empire. As part of the large Zhang Zhung administrative subdivision, Tibetanization characterizes the Imperial period (circa 630—850 CE), which lead to the adoption of the Tibetan language and the creation of pan-Tibetan cultural and social structures.

of archaeological monuments and artifacts. Differences in the rock art and monumental records of the WTP, however, call for a more refined set of chronological and geographic modifiers.

No archaeological nomenclature for the WTP can hope to capture all of its past human complexity with perfect fidelity. Culture (both in its abstract and material forms) is and has been a mutable phenomenon, elements of which can be appropriated and reworked in any manner of evolving configurations by peoples of varying languages and ethnic backgrounds. These dynamic arrangements in human affairs are not especially conducive to static labels imposed by a system of nomenclature. Therefore, the optimum approach going forward may be a reconsideration of terms as new data is admitted. In this way any system of archaeological nomenclature for the WTP can be revised when required.

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བོན་དང་ཞང་ཞུང་ཞིབ་འདྲུག་དེའི་ཚོགས།

མདོ་དབྱས་མཛོ་སྒང་གི་གནའ་བོའི་ཤེས་རིག

གཙོ་སྐྱེག་པ། སྟོང་རྩོར་ཚེ་རིང་ཐར། ཤར་གཞོན་ཚེ་རིང་རྒྱ་བ།

མཚོ་སྔོན་མི་རིགས་དེའི་རྒྱུན་ཁང་།

སྡེད་གནས། མཚོ་སྔོན་ཞིང་ཆེན་ཟི་ཡིང་གྲོང་ཁྱེར་ཁྲན་རིན་ལམ་སྒོ་ཨང 10པ། (810001)

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དཔེ་ཚིགས་རྩོམ་འགོད་པ། བསོད་ཚེ།

རྩོམ་སྒྲིག་འགན་འཁྲུར་པ། གཙོད་པ་ཚེ་རིང་། བཀྲ་ཤིས་དབང་ཨོ།

མདུན་ཤོག་འཚར་འགོད་པ། ཏུའུ་ལི་ན།

དཔར་སྐྲུན་འགན་ལེན་པ། ཞེ་ཁང་ཏེ།

འགྲེམས་སྟེལ། མཚོ་སྔོན་མི་རིགས་དཔེ་སྐྲུན་ཁང་པར་སྐྲུན་འགེམས་སྒེལ་ཐུའུ།

བརྙུད་འཛིངས། ཞིན་ཏུ་དཔེ་ཁང་། པར་འདེབས། མཚོ་སྔོན་ཟི་ཡིང་པར་ཁང་།

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(ཤོག་ངོས་ཚད་ནོར་སྒོག་སྐྱོན་གང་རྙེད་ཚེ་པར་ཁང་ལ་འབྲེལ་གཏུག་བྱོས)