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NOTES FROM THE DIRECTOR

By William W. Fitzhugh

The year 2020, I am sure, will remain etched in our memories even more clearly than other recent decadal anniversaries like Y2K and 2010, not because of astronomical calendrics, but for the pain, widespread suffering, and strangeness of the COVID-19 pandemic experience across the globe. The Smithsonian has been closed to staff and the public since March; office files, collections, and research materials have been unavailable to scholars, curators, and visitors; borders have been closed to fieldwork and conferencing; and we have lost direct contact with our friends and colleagues—some permanently.

2020 is also likely to be remembered as a watershed for the changes it brought to our lives. Our explosive entry into the "zoom" era is revolutionizing how we work and interact with colleagues in both our professional and personal lives. While personally distant, we are electronically only a finger stroke away from multitudes, and we are more connected than ever to distant families and friends. Zoom meetings and webinars have crowded our calendars and competed with normal work and personal schedules. Physical isolating, the muffled voices of masked communicating, and the unending uncertainty of 'where we go from here' have left lives in limbo and futures uncertain. More broadly, COVID is forcing momentous changes in societies worldwide, with unknown outcomes. Gone is the future we expected. Change is everywhere.

Despite 'these strange times,' life at the ASC, Museum, and Smithsonian moved forward. At the Natural History Museum we welcomed Dr. **Rebecca Johnson** as NMNH Assistant Director for Science, bringing outstanding credentials in conservation biology and genetics from the Australian Museum. **Ian Owens** announced his departure from Deputy Director to head the Ornithological Laboratory at Cornell University. At the SI Castle, SI Secretary **Lonnie Bunch** settled his leadership team and initiated a broad set of Smithsonian policies promoting social justice and reflection on how the Smithsonian can improve itself and strengthen its role as a morally tuned educational institution. With the rise of the 'Black Lives Matter' movement, the urgency to address the continuing inequity, social injustice,



The ASC virtual meeting on April 9, 2021, left to right: Nancy Shorey, Igor Chechushkov, John Cloud, Dawn Biddison, Fiona Steiwer, Bernadette Engelstad, Stephen Loring, Aron Crowell, William Fitzhugh, Igor Krupnik, and Schuyler Litten

Empire of Genghis Khan. About 700 km northwest of the Delgerkhaan Uul project, the northern Mongolian Tarvagatai Valley has been explored since 2010. During a reconnaissance along a dry riverbed, we noticed a partial human burial eroding out of the river bank. We carefully extracted the burial remains and studied the complicated soil stratigraphy on either side of the burial feature which indicated the presence of an extensive settlement site. Mongolia is well known for its horse-riding nomads and herders who move seasonally with their herd animals, but excavations and analysis of what is now known as the Tsagaan Ereg settlement has revealed the importance of farming as well.

Tsagaan Ereg is a large settlement made up of several round pit-houses with wooden supports for roof coverings, hearths, and birch bark flooring dating to 1220 AD. These habitations were probably used as seasonal dwellings during the warmer months when the neighboring floodplain could be plowed and sown with grain. Analysis of plant remains from each pithouse yielded grains of wheat, barley, and millet and copious amounts of wheat pollen indicating a nearby farming plot. On the far edge of the settlement, a granite threshing stone was unearthed with organic materials dating to the Mongolian Empire. This evidence from Tsagaan Ereg supports historical accounts describing



Excavation of a Bronze Age stone-built burial made with large stones. Local herders arrived to assist! Photo by William Honeychurch



Mouth of the Tarvagatai Valley looking south. Photo by Patricia Glass

Genghis Khan's conquest of the region in order to secure its great agricultural potential for the expanding empire.

These results are now in the process of publication, but we already have our eye on a future project to take place in 2021. Our eastern archaeological team will begin work at the Gobi Desert site of Chandmani Khar Uul near the Mongolian border with China in order to further study the Bronze Age horse trade southwards. To complement our data collection, we will collaborate with another team of archaeologists working on the Inner Mongolian side of the border and compare results. This will be the first cross-border archaeological project between Mongolia and Inner Mongolia and should uncover important new information on the beginning of horse riding in East Asia.

A VIEW NORTH FROM THE TIBETAN PLATEAU

By John Vincent Bellezza

Why the topic of Tibet in a newsletter devoted to Arctic studies? This elevated landmass extends almost to the 27th parallel, the same latitude that circumscribes central Florida, Saudi Arabia and southern Pakistan. Aside from the spread of Buddhism as far north as Tuva and Buryat, isn't it a bit counterintuitive to speak of the Tibetan Plateau in the same breadth as the Arctic? Afterall, in myriad archaeological, ethnohistorical and ethnological studies carried out in the West and Russia (and erstwhile Soviet Union) over the last century, the southern bounds of the North European-Siberian realm are usually set no further south than greater Mongolia and the boreal fringe forests and steppes of Central Asia. As has been repeatedly demonstrated, in terms of their material culture assemblages, ethnologies, genomes, and linguistic affiliations, these northern territories share manifold links through time and space and are well



Excavations at the Tsagaan Ereg settlement looking north along the Tarvagatai Valley. Photo by William Honeychurch

suited to allied programs of research and publication fora. Tibet (shorthand for the Tibetan Plateau, which is divided among five modern states) has been the odd man out in this equation. However, as I shall show, this view of the areal extent of the far northern world may be neither warranted nor helpful in understanding the full historical scope of cold-adapted human culture.

This article reviews prospects for conducting archaeological and ethnohistorical study of the Tibetan Plateau in association with (but not limited to) Siberia, Central Asia, Mongolia, Xinjiang (East Turkestan), and the Northern Zone of the PRC. I will briefly describe avenues of research I have been pursuing for more than two decades, before noting some of the promising areas of inquiry awaiting the attention of archaeologists and ethnohistorians (those who have traditionally set the geographic boundary of their work north of the Tibetan Plateau). I hasten to add that botanists, biogeographers and others working in the natural sciences have seen things quite differently, clearly aware of hundreds of palearctic species of flora and fauna found in Tibet and concepts such as the 'Himalayan third pole' (where, incidentally, average annual temperature increases in the last two decades are as great as the Arctic).

While certain aspects of ancient cultures in Tibet find correspondence with those in the far north, this is not to insinuate that Tibet is arctic in anything but analogy. It is not. The Plateau squarely sits in the middle latitudes and is subject to that celestial geometry, making for more equable diurnal cycles, higher minimum winter temperatures, monsoonal effects, etc. If it were not



Two herders belonging to the Apha Hor tribe, Upper Tibet

for its extreme altitude (averaging around 4,000 m), Tibet would be a warm temperate and subtropical land. In fact, in the southeastern region of Pemako, the Brahmaputra rivers cut a channel so deep that subtropical biomes exist north of the Himalayan crest. Farther east, in what is now northwestern Yunnan, grapes (and, yes, wine-making) prickly pears and pomegranates are cultivated in the Tibetan-speaking reaches of the Salween, Mekong and Yangtze river valleys in Mediterranean-like microclimates.

But this is only part of the picture; Tibet is also home to extremely high tablelands and valleys, where native inhabitants have biologically adapted and culturally adjusted to living permanently at elevations of up to 5200 m (with even higher seasonal habitation). Two-thirds of the Plateau is covered in montane steppe, alpine meadows and high altitude deserts, environments best suited to stockbreeding and hunting. These non-arable tracts of the Plateau have a frigid climate and are prone to snowfall even in the summer. The highest regions of Tibet are concentrated in the western half of what is now called the Tibet Autonomous Region (sometimes referred to as 'Inner Tibet') and the eastern half of Qinghai (traditionally, part of the Tibetan province of Amdo as well as



An Apha Hor family



Weaving on a backstrap loom, Purang, Ngari, Upper Tibet

containing enclaves inhabited by people of Mongolian stock). It is in the former territory, which I call Upper Tibet (after traditional ascriptions), that is the focus of my research. So, let's zoom in there, beginning with a quick look at its ethnohistory.

Ever since the work of Nebesky-Wojkowitz and Helmut Hoffman in the mid-20th century, scholarship has been aware of uncanny similarities between Tibetan spirit-mediums and the shamans of central and north Asia. I follow a bit in the tracks of my predecessors in my book Calling Down the Gods (2005). Parallels between Tibetan and northern trance practitioners are manifold, embracing their worldview, healing ethos, bipartite or three-tiered cosmology, the composition and function of their helping spirits, as well as there being remarkable similarities in their material accoutrements (e.g., drums, arrows, use of feather and horned headdresses, animal horns, mirrors, etc.). For one thing, the resonance in mythologies regarding bear ancestors, cross-species marriage and ursine healing rites in Upper Tibet and northern Asia is most impressive.

Yet, before we get too carried away and start viewing Tibetans as long-lost cousins of hyperborean tribes, it is crucial to remember that abstract and material parallels between peoples are the result of many kinds of demographic, cultural and environmental forces, most of which do not signal direct spatio-temporal ties between far-flung societies. This observation is especially pertinent here, for genetic population histories conducted thus far indicate that Tibetans (speaking around 30 different languages) are most closely related to other Tibeto-Burman groups like the Tu and Nakhi, sharing in common far fewer haplogroups with Turco-Mongolian speaking peoples and others of north Asia. I will only mention in passing resemblances in the dress, coiffures, ornamentation, and comportment of Tibetan shepherds and northern groups. They are quite self-evident.

Again, this does not necessarily mean that any particular object or behavior was handed down from the taiga to the Plateau or vice versa. Maybe yes, maybe no. If you subscribe to shamanistic theory (seeing contemporary shamanism as a survival of Bronze Age or even Stone Age religions,) you will be more tempted to posit direct kinds of connections, perhaps as part of a Eurasian religious substrate. I am not so sanguine. The length and nature of historical continuities in shamanism are still questioned and there is dubious profit in lumping together the tribal religious traditions of boreal groups with Tibetan folk practices. There is a vast amount of specificity exhibited by contemporary cultures, let alone equate sophisticated religious traditions existing in ancient Tibet with household shamanism. One must be ever vigilant in attributing cause and effect.

The archaeological record (funerary, monumental, artifactual and artistic) is unambiguous: there were multiple cultural and technological congruences between Tibet and more northern territories, some of which were brought about through interregional exchanges (potentially comprising intellectual currents, religious trends, economic imperatives, political entanglements, demographic shifts, etc.). Before giving a bird's eye view of a few of these congruences, let us set our time parameters (modified to fit Tibetan archaeological evidence, a work still in progress). The Late Prehistoric era includes the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1200–700 BCE), [Early] Iron Age (ca. 700–100 BCE) and Protohistoric period (ca. 100 BCE to 600 CE). The Late Prehistoric era is followed by the Tibetan Early Historic period, which is made up of the Imperial period (c. 600-850 CE) and post-Imperial period (850–1000 CE). Later periods under Lamaist (Buddhist and Yungdrung Bon) domination need not concern us here (the role of the Mongols in the transmission of cultural and technological resources to and from Tibet is a story for another time). I refer readers to my website and works cited below. Here I will touch upon just a few areas vital for coming to grips with the full thrust of cross-cultural transmission in Late Prehistoric Inner Asia.

Funerary and monumental evidence-the erection of cognate unmarked menhirs (called long stones in Tibetan) in Upper Tibet, the Altai, and southern Siberia appears to have been part of an ongoing transcultural bequest of considerable proportions in the Late Prehistoric era. The main areas of correspondence are with the Deer Stone-Khrigsuur complex (Late Bronze Age), Tagar culture (Iron Age), and Turkic balbals (Protohistoric period). The orientation, geographic settings and funerary associations of menhirs and their complement of collateral monuments in the heart of Asia allude to the mutability of seminal ideals and technologies, those that cut across the bounds of sundry cultures. Although tombs of diverse types characterize Inner Asia in the Late Prehistoric era, there are certain widespread morphological commonalities, particularly among the burial structures of the Slab Grave culture of eastern Mongolia and Transbaikalia and the funerary slab enclosures of Upper Tibet belonging to a comparable time frame. More telling are parallels in grave goods with the remains of horses and caprids, equestrian gear, weapons, semi-precious stone beads (carnelians, agates, turquoise), and cowries diffusing far and wide in the north and in Tibet during the Late prehistoric era. An alternative point of reference are Tibetan archaic funerary ritual texts, which describe mortuary traditions with analogies in the burials of the so-called Scytho-Siberian cultures (e.g., horned headdresses, avian and cervid motifs, special treatment of the mane and tail of psychopomp horses, etc.).

Artifactual and rock art evidence: there is a growing body of copper alloy objects with zoomorphic and geometric motifs produced in Tibet in the Late Prehistoric era available for study, which can be compared stylistically to those produced elsewhere in Inner Asia. Research recently carried out by others has identified Central Asian traits in the ceramics of lower Ladakh (on the western margin of the Tibetan Plateau) dating to the Protohistoric period. Finally, there is rock art, the various geographic groupings of which bring to light many cognate themes and subjects. These include mascoids, chariots, big game hunting, dueling scenes, so-called 'giants', handprints, Eurasian animal style figures, etc. Through an abundance of evidence, Tibet might be best classified as 'South Inner Asia', while 'North Inner Asia' encompasses all territories typically seen as making up Inner Asia.

The foregoing discussion is just a glimpse into a field of study with great potential, but one that will demand many kinds of expertise going forward. A rigorous regimen of excavation and analysis in Tibetan regions, one that goes well beyond the glorified treasure hunting approach of many recent campaigns (where molecular, isotopic and botanical evidence is frequently discarded), is the order of the day. Of high priority is the sequencing of DNA extracted from ancient osteological materials, both human and animal. Analytical methods and chronometric technologies meeting international standards must be brought to bear on all parts of the Tibetan Plateau. This is essential if we are to secure the basis for a more refined investigation of the Tibetan legacy and its place in the Eurasian cultural mosaic of antiquity.

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[*Editor's note:* John Belezza is a Senior Fellow, Institute for the Science of Religion and Central Asian Studies, Bern University. See Book section for reviews of two recent Bellezza books. For the author's full bibliography, extensive series of articles and other information about his research work, see **www. tibetarchaeology.com.** All photos by John V. Bellezza, 1999–2005; all portraits were taken with the express permission of the subjects.]

NUNAMIT WORKSHOP EXPLORED QUEBEC LNS INUIT HERITAGE

By William Fitzhugh

In January 2019, a conference of academics and community residents of the Quebec Lower North Shore (LNS) spent two days exploring Inuit culture and heritage in Quebec City. Hosted by Laval University and with support from an SSHRC grant, thirty participants presented papers on what is known and remains unknown about the Inuit who have lived on this coast and whose culture, language, and history have been overshadowed by European dominance and government neglect. **Nicolas Shattler** of St. Augustine led the Inuit delegation, which included several other Inuit from the LNS. Among the participants were historians, linguists, anthropologists, archaeologists, folklorists, genealogists, lawyers, and included a strong Laval student contingent.

Unlike the Inuit of Nunavut and Labrador, Quebec Inuit have not had formal land claims discussions with their governments. The purpose of the conference was to share information on what is known about Inuit history, culture, and life in the northeastern Gulf of St. Lawrence-a neglected part of the Inuit worldand make plans for future partnerships. Despite their many contributions to traditional European life here (dog sleds, harpoons, ulus, sea mammal hunting, etc.), Quebec Inuit have not received much attention from anthropologists or historians. Many aspects of their culture and history have not been recorded and exist only as oral history in today's Inuit population. Early historical reports are spotty and vague and emphasize confrontation and hostilities. And until recently, their history has been obscured by the absence of physical evidence in the form of documented archaeological sites. Recent archaeological work has confirmed Groswater and Dorset Paleo-Inuit occupations between 2500–2000 years ago, and Inuit winter villages during the 17-18th centuries. So while Inuit presence has been sporadic historically, their reappearance as a new



Nicholas Shattler of St. Augustine, Quebec. Photo by Will Richard 2011