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# Gods, Hunting and Society

## Animals in the Ancient Cave Paintings of Celestial Lake in Northern Tibet

by JOHN VINCENT BELLEZZA

### INTRODUCTION

The largest of the great lakes in the Tibet Autonomous Region <sup>(1)</sup> is gNam mtsho, the 'Celestial Lake'. This huge body of brackish water situated north of Lhasa in 'Dam gzhung and dPal mgon counties is home to an astounding array of rock paintings <sup>(2)</sup>. Found in six far-flung locations along the shore of gNam mtsho, in more than three dozen caves and rock faces, are paintings of diverse themes and styles. Encompassing aboriginal, Bon and Buddhist culture, these paintings constitute a visual record of the development of Tibetan civilization over a period of some three millennia <sup>(3)</sup>. To date, rock art has been discovered in northern and

\* I wish to express my gratitude to the Shang Shung Institute (Italy and USA) for their generous financial support which helped defray the expenses of my most recent expedition (September, 1997) to gNam mtsho. I am also indebted to the Spalding Trust (England) for their kind contribution towards the writing of this paper. The focus of the present study is rock paintings which have not been previously published. See n. 2.

All photos, maps and drawings and photos have been made by the Author.

<sup>(1)</sup> The Tibetan Autonomous Region was created by the People's Republic of China in 1965. It includes the traditional provinces of sTod mNga ris, dBus gTsang and parts of Khams.

<sup>(2)</sup> Beginning in 1987, rock art in Tibet has been documented by several researchers. See, Zhang Jian-Ling 1987; Heffner III 1990; Suolang Wangdui, Li Yongxian & Huo Wei, *Art of Tibetan Rock Paintings* 1994; Bellezza 1997a, 1997b, 1999, 2000. References to rock art in *Art of Tibetan Rock Paintings* in this paper will include the name Suolang Wangdui (compiler of the Work) and the relevant plate number, while references to the trilingual introduction of the book will carry the names Li Yongxian and Huo Wei (the authors of the introduction). *Art of Tibetan Rock Paintings* includes 40 photographs of gNam mtsho rock paintings. See Bellezza 1997a (chapters 4 and 5) for further information on the cultural history, content and chronology of gNam mtsho rock paintings.

<sup>(3)</sup> In the absence of archaeometric (direct dating and pigment sourcing) or collateral archaeological data the maximum age of Tibetan rock art cannot be positively determined. On the basis of the use of metal tools to engrave petroglyphs or on content and style of the art, there is a general consensus that rock art in Tibet began roughly 3000 years ago, either at the end of the Neolithic or the beginning of the Metal Age (Hu Xu Tru 1993; Chen Zhao Fu 1996: 130; Li Yongxian & Huo Wei 1994: 33). The present author, relying on the cultural history of the Byang thang and archaeological data from Inner Asia (such as the rise of nomadism and the widespread domestication of the horse in the 1st

western Tibet (in the Byang thang) <sup>(4)</sup> in over thirty places including rock paintings in Ru thog, 'Brong pa, mTsho chen, Shan rtsa and Nag chu counties <sup>(5)</sup>. However, it is at gNam mtsho that the bulk of the paintings have been discovered (Fig. 1).

The iconic representations of hunting, war, supernatural scenes, and symbols inscriptions, lines, blotches and other unintelligible content at gNam mtsho totals at least two thousand pigment applications and constitutes by far the largest known source of rock paintings in Tibet. These paintings are found at six locations around the lake: bKra shis do, Ra mo do, Khyi rgan gag pa do, sTong shong phug, Rigs lnga do and lCe do <sup>(6)</sup>. Approximately 75% of the paintings of gNam mtsho are located in thirty-two of the caves, niches and rock faces of bKra shis do, the ten kilometer long headland on the southeast side of the lake (Fig. 2). This headland terminates in two limestone escarpments called bKra shis do chung (small) and bKra shis do chen (large). The average size of animal compositions ranges from four to twenty-five centimeters in length, with only a very small percentage of the total number of figures falling outside of this range.

The creators of this art are the ancestors of the 'brog pa, the yak and sheep herders of the Byang thang. While their origins are far from clear it seems that they are an amalgam of various peoples some of which were the aboriginal inhabitants of the Byang thang <sup>(7)</sup>. Indeed, according to the oral history of the 'brog pa, it was their descendants that created the rock paintings from ancient times <sup>(8)</sup>. Alternatively, the local people believe that the paintings were self-created (rang byung) as an expression of the holiness of the region and its association with great saints of former times.

Millennium B.C.), also estimates that the rock art so far discovered in the Byang thang began around 3000 years ago in the Aeneolithic (Bellezza 1997a: 239-40). Nevertheless, until archaeometric data is forthcoming, the possibility that certain paintings are much older cannot be discounted.

<sup>(4)</sup> In popular parlance, the Byang thang ('Northern Plains') has come to be equated with regions of the Tibet Autonomous Region lying north of the Trans-Himalaya. This includes not only districts north of Lhasa such as Nag chu and gNam ru but Nag tshang, and sTod in mNga' ris province, as well.

<sup>(5)</sup> Rock paintings have been discovered in Chos dkar byang and rDo dmar in Ru thog county, and in Lu ma g.yangs, Lha mtsho lung pa and sNgo khra ri in Shan rtsa county, and Hor sbrug in Nag chu county (Suolang Wangdui 1994: 79-80, 82-86, 159-63, 207-8). Paintings have also been discovered at bKra ri gnam mtsho (Mu ro ri), in mTsho chen county, and at Da rog mtsho (Lha khang dmar chag), in 'Brong pa county (Bellezza 1999).

<sup>(6)</sup> I have recently been informed by the reincarnate lama sGrup pa mthar phyin who visited the island of Srin mo do, gNam mtsho, in December 1997, that there is a least one cave here with cave paintings of animals and Bon motifs.

<sup>(7)</sup> For a discussion of the racial make-up of Tibetans and early migrations of people across the Tibetan plateau see Smith 1996: 1-78.

<sup>(8)</sup> In an attempt to gauge the ethnographic significance of the rock paintings and to identify motifs, I have shown them to many Tibetans. The most notable individual who viewed images of the paintings was His Holiness The Dalai Lama, in March of 1998 and 1999. The Dalai Lama, like certain other senior lamas, recognizes the importance of the study of rock art as a means of elucidating Tibetan history.

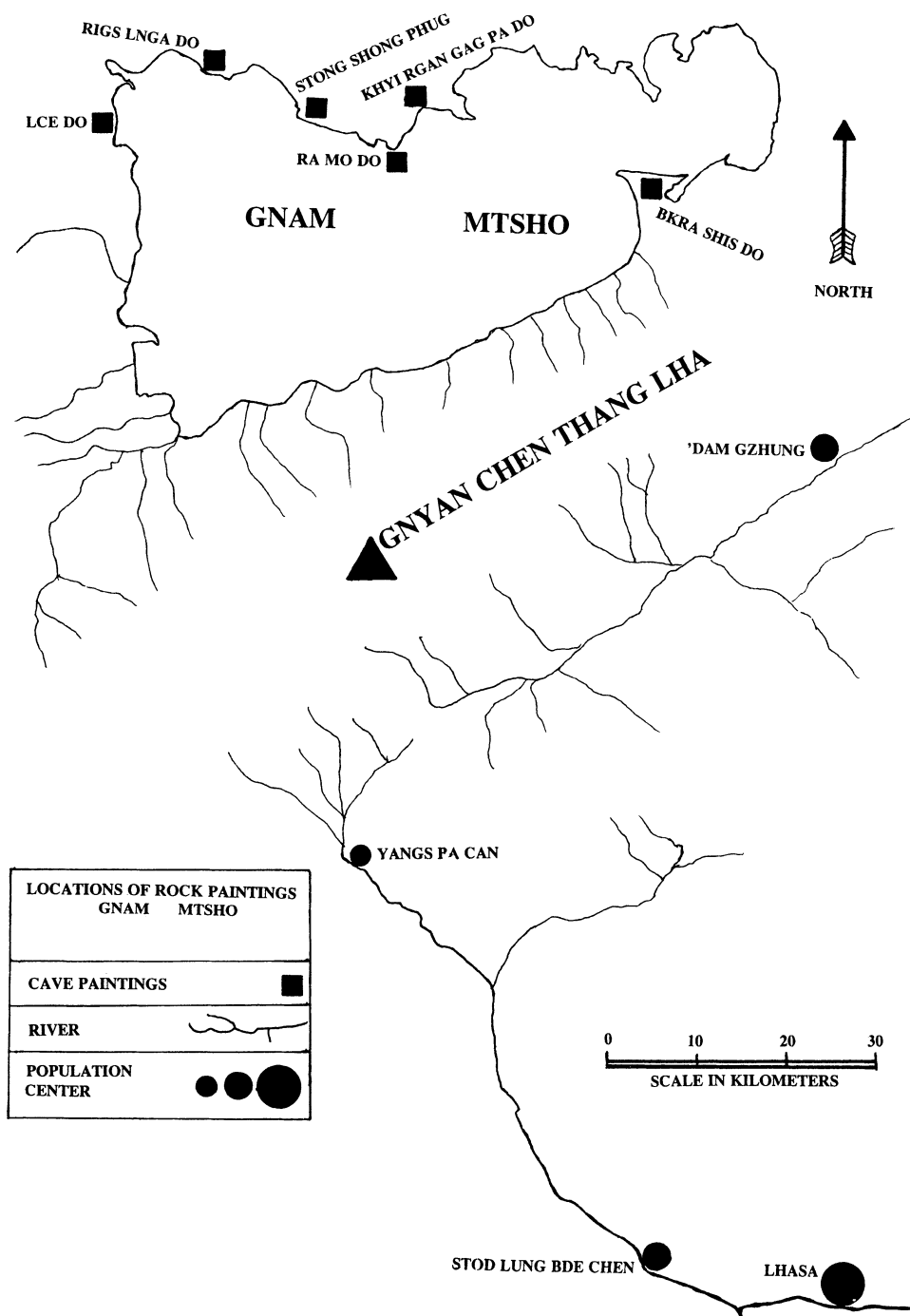


Fig. 1 - Map of gNam mtsho Cave Art.

Let us review the strains of people which could have well had an impact on gNam mtsho and its artistic heritage. A people known as the Mon might have been an aboriginal tribe as they are associated with the earliest Tibetan states (cf. Smith 1996: 9). Tibetan tradition speaks of the Mon being displaced as the Tibetans moved south and west (Tucci 1949: 6). Encounters between Tibet and early Indo-European groups cannot be discounted as another possible cultural vector which enriched the content of gNam mtsho paintings<sup>(9)</sup>. According to the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*, victory over Zhang zhung's King Lig myi rhya occurred in 644 or 645 (Uray 1972a: 35); prior to this we can expect that certain rock paintings came within the ambit of Zhang zhung culture. There is linguistic evidence to suggest that the Zhang zhung language was spoken in a swathe of territory from the western fringe of the Tibetan plateau at Khu nu and Zangs dkar, across the plateau to Gu ge Khyung lung, Dang ra g.yu mtsho and gNam mtsho (Stein 1971: 232-33).

Another early cultural influence which may have impinged upon gNam msho was the Ch'iang, a complex of many tribes which moved south and west from the Chinese frontier. In T'ang dynastic times it appears that the Sum pa were located around Nag chu (150 km north of gNam mtsho) and extended as far west as Khotan (Stein 1959: 42) and therefore, could constitute a cultural influence on the rock paintings of gNam mtsho. A documented influence in the region from the 13th century and perhaps even on prehistoric art, were various tribes of Mongols<sup>(10)</sup>. Research by the present author has shown that Tungusic speaking groups also reached gNam mtsho (Bellezza 2000).

Without the benefit of archaeometric data (AMS radiocarbon dating of paints, chemical and phase analysis of pigments etc.) the dating of the cave paintings with any precision is not possible except for certain inscriptions<sup>(11)</sup>. Nevertheless, using collateral evidence I have however, constructed a relative chronology based on physical evidence, the cultural history of the Byang thang and a comparative study of the rock art of Inner Asia. Using this evidence, I have been able to distinguish stylistic and thematic elements which seem to reflect certain cultural and chronological contexts. I hasten to add that a chronology assembled in an inductive manner is provisional and cannot be expected to serve as more than a general guide to the cultural development of the Byang thang.

The dates I provide are hypothetical and reflect the broadest possible chronological ranges: 1) aboriginal motifs – Aeneolithic to the beginning of the

<sup>(9)</sup> See Walter & Beckwith 1997, for an exposition of a theoretical Indo-European linguistic convergence with Tibetan and the implications this had for Tibetan cultural development.

<sup>(10)</sup> For an analysis of the history of the Mongols in Tibet during the Sa skya period see Petech 1990.

<sup>(11)</sup> The application of archaeometric techniques and methodology to rock paints is a costly proposition but it is my hope that such work will eventually be undertaken at gNam mtsho. Provided accurate dating is possible, it would significantly enrich our understanding of the prehistory of the Byang thang. For one such study consult Lorblanchet et al. 1992.

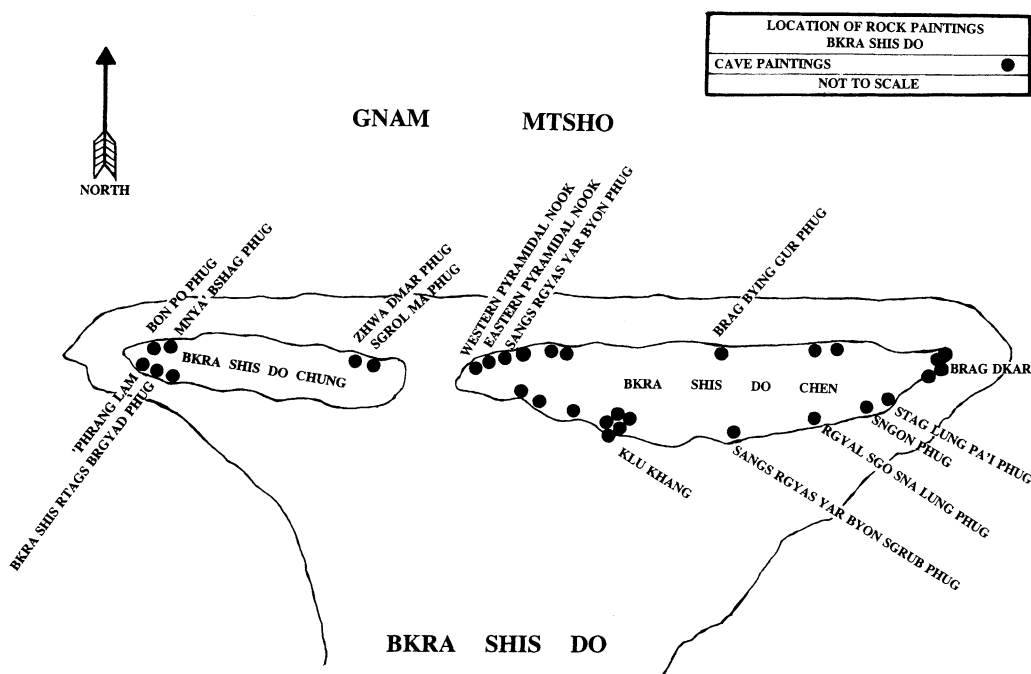


Fig. 2 - Map of bKra shis do Cave Art.

historical period (7th century); 2) Bon motifs – Metal Age – 13th century; 3) Buddhist motifs – 7th century to at least the 17th century; and folk motifs – contemporaneous with the Buddhist period. Bon motifs can potentially be further divided into those that either predate or postdate the introduction of the Tibetan script in the 7th century. Another development in Bon which is possibly reflected in the cave paintings are those painted after the advent of the assimilated form of the religion in the late 10th century.

Physical evidence I present is derived from a visual appraisal of the quality and color of pigments, the wear and aging of the paintings, formation of mineral accretions and the relative positions of superimposed compositions. For example, at lCe do the early phase of paintings is consistently painted over by compositions belonging to a later phase (Bellezza 1997a: 240-41). This superimposition of paintings is repeated in other locations at gNam mtsho and is useful in devising a relative chronology. The early phase paintings of lCe do are also painted using distinctively colored pigments (mustard, sienna, purplish brown etc.) which are not found in the late phase (*ibid.*: 240). The large majority of paintings come in a variety of hues and densities of red ochre (btsag). Brown colored paints are represented more often in earlier paintings as opposed to patently Buddhist inscriptions but there are notable exceptions. As red ochre ages in arid climates it does tend to

darken (Chakravarty & Bednarik 1997: 8); also as a general rule, the earlier paintings have undergone more fading and exfoliation than the Buddhist paintings. Another characteristic of early paintings is the more pronounced formation of translucent mineral skins and opaque depositions over them. While none of these observations of physical traits alone can be used to date the paintings they do provide an adjunct tool of analysis, which can be used in tandem with cultural data.

Various researchers over the last thirty years have attempted to date a large body of rock art, mostly petroglyphs, from Mongolia, South Siberia and Central Asia <sup>(12)</sup>. An important tool of analysis has been the correlation of rock art to dated artifacts from excavations which in some cases has been augmented with stratigraphical data obtained from rock art sites. A premise followed by many researchers in Inner Asia is that rock art is a schema reflecting stylistic and semantic elements which can be attributed to specific cultural and chronological contexts. Other techniques of dating have examined the physical characteristics exhibited by petroglyphs to determine rates of microerosion and whether the engraving were made with stone or metal tools, etc.

A vast amount of data involving thousands of rock art specimens and scores of researchers is involved, yet dates and identities obtained from areas north of Tibet are often unverifiable. Therefore, a good deal of caution must accompany the cross-cultural comparison of rock art at gNam mtsho with sites in north and central Asia. Nevertheless, there are many broad stylistic and thematic elements shared in common in Inner Asian rock art including that of the Byang thang. The exploration of these parallels is one tool of analysis that can potentially elucidate the cultural development of the prehistoric Byang thang. However, we cannot expect a comparative study of rock art to be more than a supplementary approach to questions of identity and chronology given the variable reliability of the available data and methodological problems inherent in drawing conclusions derived from foreign cultures.

At this juncture, perhaps the most promising tool of analysis is data derived from the cultural history of the Byang thang <sup>(13)</sup>. Both literary and oral sources of information exist which allude to the prehistory (prior to the 7th century) of the region. For example, *Sources for a History of Bon* (see bibliography) is a collection of texts with many references to personalities and events that are purported to have transpired in the pre-Buddhist period <sup>(14)</sup>. While there are legitimate questions

<sup>(12)</sup> For a general discussion of the subject and an extensive bibliography of regional works on rock art see Sher & Garyaeva 1996; Francfort et al. 1995. For a comprehensive review of dating techniques see Bednarik 1993.

<sup>(13)</sup> For a study of the cultural history of gNam mtsho and Dang ra g.yu mtsho see Bellezza 1997a.

<sup>(14)</sup> A text in this collection the *Rig 'dzin rig pa'i thugs rgyud* (fol. 203) informs us that among the ordinary accomplishments of the early Bon adept, gZing pa mthu chen, was his ability to manifest as a wolf and recover [wandering] souls. 'Thun mang du spyang khu'u sprul cing gron bla dngos [...]'. He is depicted holding a victory banner (rgyal mtshan) ornamented with a dragon in his right hand and in his left, holding a kind of singing cuckoo bird. 'g.Yas g.yon 'brug gi rgyal mtshan dang / khu gyug gsung snyan bsnyams pa'. Magical powers involving animals are recorded in the same text for the adept

pertaining to the reliability of this information which was recorded centuries after the fact, a perusal of the literature clearly demonstrates that it is relevant to pre-Buddhist culture. The *gsol kha* (praises written for sacred topographical features) and *g.yang's khugs* (rites for obtaining good fortune) texts are two among other genres of literature which in certain instances record pre-Buddhist lore <sup>(15)</sup>.

An extremely important literary source for the Imperial period in Tibet are the Dunhuang manuscripts. Oral sources of information germane to the ancient pantheon, mythology and lore can be checked against literary sources augmenting our understanding of prehistoric and early historic Byang thang <sup>(16)</sup>. This data in turn, can be applied to the cave art of gNam mtsho as a tool of analysis and interpretation. While these collateral approaches cannot provide an absolute chronology or positive identification of rock art motifs, they are important stepping stones to the further elucidation of the subject.

## THE ROLE AND SYMBOLISM OF ANIMALS IN BYANG THANG CULTURE

We will survey the position of animals in the various spheres of 'brog pa life as a prelude to the description of individual paintings. The subject matter of the rock

sPe bon thog rtse (fol. 205) who reposes on a cushion of an overlapping wild yak and chu srin (a kind of aquatic monster). 'g.Yag rgod dang chu srin snol ba'i gdan la bzugs pa'. The two animals represented here seem to be an allusion to the Saint's mastery of living creatures in the lower (yog) and upper (yar) realms of existence. Also in the *Rig 'dzin rig pa'i thugs rgyud* (fol. 207) another pre-Buddhist adept Shad bu ra khug, could manifest as a tiger or leopard to expel obstructions and manifest as a vulture and fly in the sky. 'Thun mong du stag gzig tu sprul nas 'gal byed sgro / bya rgod du sprul nas nam mkha' la 'phur zhing'. There are many other legends in Bon literature of ancient practitioners using animals for magical means, manifesting as animals and using animal motifs as religious symbols of status and power.

<sup>(15)</sup> In a Bon incense offering manuscript to the lakes of the Dang ra g.yu mtsho sisterhood entitled *Dang ra'i bsang mchod bzugs pa dbu'i gzigs phyogs legs par bzugs*, the mounts of the lake goddesses (sman mo) are enumerated. The mother goddess Dang ra las kyi dbang mo is mounted on a blue aquatic mdzo (yak hybrid). The lake goddess sMan chung g.yu yi za ma tog is mounted on a female antelope with a gray muzzle. Da yar se sman gong de sman is mounted on a young tigress, Dang chung g.yu yi zur phud can on a swiftly galloping horse, and sKre de chem mo ral cig rides a hornless turquoise doe. See Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956 for many examples of environment-based and other indigenous deities and their animal mounts. There are also many instances of indigenous deities transforming themselves into various animals. Among the most common manifestations are those of the eagle, yak, deer and wild ass; precisely the kinds of animals we find in the rock paintings of gNam mtsho. For example, in a Buddhist incense hymn of fairly recent origin belonging to the Karma bKa' brgyud subsect entitled *Da rogs g.yu mtsho gsol kha*, we learn that the lake goddess can manifest as both hooved and carnivorous animals. Another popular theme is that of indigenous deities having animals in their retinue as servants and messengers. See Bellezza 1997a for more examples of environment-based deities using and manifesting as animals.

<sup>(16)</sup> See Karmay 1983 for a discussion of the existence of the Bon Religion in the Imperial period.



paintings of gNam mtsho is highly diverse and includes compositions from the social, economic and religious spheres of life. In all of these spheres both wild and domesticated animals predominate.

In most cases, especially without the benefit of adjunct symbolism and inscriptions, it is not possible to discern what functions the painters had in mind for the animals they created. To avoid undue speculation, historical and ethnographic data will not be related to specific paintings except where evidence ascertained from the composition warrants it. In the interests of objectivity and methodological integrity, we are rarely able to assign specific cultural attributions to specific paintings. As we cannot know the motivations and compulsions of individual artists, background data relating to animals should be seen as part of the cultural framework in which the tradition of painting operated. Artists would have been well aware of the multifarious position of animals in their society and to a greater or lesser extent this was expressed in their paintings.

The 'brog pa of the Byang thang rely on pastoralism for their way of life and presumably have for about 3000 years (Bellezza 1997a: 191, 426). Their yaks, sheep and goats provide dairy products, meat hair, wool, horns, bones and other products on which their economy is based. The livestock of the 'brog pa also produce products which can be sold or bartered for other types of commodities. The economic preeminence of domestic and wild animals is reflected in pastoral matrimonial alliances. Depending on the means of the groom's family, they traditionally gave newlyweds series of nine pieces of silver and nine each of mares, stallions, 'bri (female yaks), colored cloth, fox furs, leopard skins and lynx skins (Norbu 1997: 62).

In the Byang thang, the hunting of wild animals has also been a traditional activity for thousands of years. Even today, hunting is an important supplemental source of income (cf. Tawa & Topgyal 1998: 42). It is this close and vital association with animals over the millennia which at least in part explains the prominent role of animals in the mythology and religious beliefs of the 'brog pa. It must be also remembered that with few exceptions agriculture did not develop in the high elevation (exceeding 4500 m) Byang thang which has served to enhance the status of animals. The 'brog pa's economic dependence on animals and their place in the spiritual life of the people is vividly reflected in the rock art of gNam mtsho.

Sacred functions of animals are embodied in the phenomenon of the spirit-mediumship of mountain deities<sup>(17)</sup>. This contemporary practice has ancient

<sup>(17)</sup> An important component of central and north Asian shamanism is spirit-mediumship and it is in such cultural phenomenon that we may ultimately find keys for interpreting parallels in the style and content of Byang thang and Inner Asian rock art. What is clear is that the supernatural roles and symbolism of animals bear similarities over a contiguous area extending from the Trans-Himalaya to the Arctic sea. I provide a few references to give an impression of the breadth of what appears to be a common cultural heritage of great antiquity. Nanai shamans had dogs and deer who resided in the ritual mirror and dispatched souls to the land of the dead (Smoljak 1984: 245). Yakut shamans had

precedents and preserves customs which must have been prevalent in the pre-Buddhist period. Spirit-mediums (dpa' bo / lha pa) for sacred mountains rely on various kinds of zoomorphic deities to cure a range of physical and psychological ailments. The well known spirit-medium Pho dbang phyug harnesses a deity called Khyi rgod rag pa, a russet colored wolf in the retinue of gNyan chen thang lha who removes certain types of defilements (sgrib) <sup>(18)</sup>. He also possesses helping deities in the form of an owl, bear and eagle. There are red, black and white forms of the eagle called gNam gyi khyung chen sder lnga ('Five-Clawed Great Eagle of the Sky') depending on what type of defilement the patient suffers from. A group of five mkha' 'gro ma (female sky-treading deities) are responsible for protecting Pho dbang phyug when he is in trance and serve to retrieve the soul of a patient which has wandered away causing serious illness. These five mkha' 'gro each have a horse, divine bird (lha bya) and dog to assist them whose functions and colors correspond to the cardinal directions.

At gNam mtsho the sacred status of animals is admirably reflected in the wild yak manifestations of the two most important territorial deities of the region, gNyan chen thang lha and gNam mtsho (Bellezza 1997a: 39, 88-89, 102-3) <sup>(19)</sup>. Many of the

patron spirits who appeared as bears, stallions, elks, wolves or oxen (Alekseev 1984: 269). Kachin Shamans had helping spirit including master spirits of the mountains which took diverse anthropomorphic and zoomorphic forms and Todji shamans had helping spirits in the form of ravens, eagles and hawks (*ibid.*: 272, 275). The Chelkan shamans of the north Altai also had helping spirits of the hills which had human, elk and mountain goat forms (*ibid.*: 271). For a discussion of cross-cultural comparisons between shamanism and Tibetan cultural practices see Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956: 538-54.

<sup>(18)</sup> This information was obtained in a series of interviews with the present author conducted in June and November of 1998. The late Kha mer, a well known spirit-medium from gZhung pa mtshan, is said to have ridden a thang dkar bird and to have had an argali sheep which carried the ritual implements of his profession. This information obtained in personal communications with Tshe ring chos 'phel of gZhung pa ma mtshan (dGe rga s county).

<sup>(19)</sup> Another sacred manifestation (sprul pa) of gNam mtsho is the deer (Bellezza 1997a: 103). The mythology of animals and sacred topography are closely linked in the Byang thang. In the oral tradition which appears to preserve pre-Buddhist lore, it is said that Mount gNyan chen thang lha is the sgo rdzi ('chief keeper') of all animals wild and domestic. The mountain is believed to be the gter kha ('treasure source') of all animals and to rule over their movements and behavior. Wolves are the Mountain's shepherd animals and bears his guard animals. In general, 'brog pa believe that the herds of wild asses (onagers) and yaks and other wild ungulates belong to the various yul lha (cf. Norbu 1997: 48). Also in the oral tradition, gNyan chen thang lha rides a divine white yak which functions to protect and increase wealth as does the wealth deity Dzam bha lha dkar po. In what is probably a remnant of an indigenous cosmogony, a primordial klu mo (female serpent deity) bestowed gNyan chen thang lha and gNam mtsho upon the first humans in order that they might prosper. The mountain and lake coupled producing essential resources for the development of human resources. Among their progeny was A mdo gro gad, a male mountain deity mounted on a white steed and dressed in white clothes, who gave human beings the first wild and domestic animals. Another child of gNyan chen thang lha and gNam mtsho was the female A dar tsha mtsho, a blue colored deity who provided salt and soda to humans. The information provided herein came primarily from a well known bard of central Tibet, bSam grub

animals we will encounter in this survey have parts to play in the sacred geography of the region and are the mounts or manifestations of deities belonging to the indigenous pantheon. The most important animal for the 'brog pa is the yak and it is well represented in the rock paintings of gNam mtsho <sup>(20)</sup>. Mostly found in its wild form ('brong), it figures in many hunting scenes as well as in mytho-religious compositions <sup>(21)</sup>. Cervids, of which no less than nine can be identified as deer, because of the depiction of their branched antlers, are also very popular animals in the cave art of gNam mtsho <sup>(22)</sup>. They are usually depicted as the quarry of hunters (rngon pa / khyi ra ba).

Among the most common animal in the paintings of gNam mtsho is the horse which with few exceptions, is mounted by a hunter or combatant and in certain

(aged 78), and bsTan grag lha ba (aged 74), in personal communications. Mountains immediately south of gNyan chen thang lha are said by local herders to be the lug rdzi ('sheep keeper') and khyi rdzi ('dog keeper') of the mountain god and further south, near the town of Yangs pa can, is the mountain rTa rdzi, the 'horse keeper' of gNyan chen thang lha.

<sup>(20)</sup> Yaks are also found in the mountainous areas of Tuva, Buryat, Mongolia and in the Pamirs. For data on the distribution of the yak see Kreutzmann 1996: 18. There is some evidence indicating that like Tibet, yaks in these regions have associations with ancient religious beliefs and practices. It is thought that yaks were domesticated in Tibet in ancient times and came to Tuva via Mongolia (Vainshtein 1980: 68). Realistic figures of yaks have been found in Hun burial grounds (*ibid.*: 68). Petroglyphs of yaks (and also deer, cattle, horses, ibex and sheep) are found in the Altai (Martynov 1991: 24). In Wahki speaking regions of extreme northern Pakistan, yaks are considered a sacred (mergich) animal and are the mounts of female deities called Mergichan. This information on Wahki customs was obtained in personal communication with John Mock, who recently completed his doctorate in Wahki cultural studies.

<sup>(21)</sup> The Sum pa were particularly associated with the yak.

<sup>(22)</sup> Although now largely extinct in the Byang thang, according to the oral history of the 'brog pa, the McNeil's deer or Tibetan red deer (sha ba) and musk deer (gla ba) once roamed there in large numbers. The deer is considered a highly auspicious animal by the 'brog pa. This is reflected in the folktale of the deer as the source of a highly prized medicinal substance called gi wang which is produced in the brain of the stag and appears in the form of a precious agate (gi gzi) at the base of his horns. The ancient sacred status of the deer is alluded to in the Tibetan literary tradition. In a Bon soul recall ritual (bla bslu) by Nyi ma bstan, 'dzin (b. 1813) entitled *Tshe 'gugs srog gi chad mthud*, it records that if the clan soul emblem (bla rtags) is not known the soul figurine (bla gzugs) should have a human body with the head of a deer (Karmay 1987: 327-28). According to Bon tradition, in the time of the first Tibetan king, gNya' khri btsan po, 12 lores were developed including the lDing shes sha ba ('Rites of the Deer, Lore of Flight') which is concerned with rites of ransom (Norbu 1995: 175-87). The Shamanist crowns bearing prongs representative of horns or deer antlers may be reminiscent of the headdress worn by ancient Bon priests (cf. Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956: 545). In rNying ma pa sect texts, the wind god (rlung lha) is depicted riding on a stag (*ibid.*: 469). Deer are very common in the rock art of Mongolia and Siberia and not surprisingly, the animal has a special economic and sacred status. In South Siberia, Tungus and Samed tribes, the ancient breeders of deer, made domestic deer offerings, dedicated the deer to heaven and had a special status for the white deer which had been adopted from nomadic stock breeders (Hoppal 1994, vol. 1: 105). It has been suggested that Evenk mistresses of the clans harken back to female deer and moose images in Siberian Neolithic and Bronze Age petroglyphs (Jacobson 1993: 242).

cases by a dignitary or deity <sup>(23)</sup>. The high cultural status of the horse in pastoral areas is reflected in its high price, said to be equivalent to four or five yaks (cf. Tawa & Topgyal 1998: 36). By contrast the rkyang (wild ass) is infrequently depicted. Birds, mostly raptors, are a common feature in the rock art of gNam mtsho and are found at bKra shis do, Khyi rgan gag pa do and lCe do. Eagle-like birds with anthropomorphic features are found in nine or ten instances (Bellezza 2000) <sup>(24)</sup>. A striking difference between the rock art of gNam mtsho (and evidently other sites in the Byang thang) and that of the northern steppe regions is the incidence of predators. I have identified only seven predators among nearly four hundred animals although there could be others among the unidentifiable compositions <sup>(25)</sup>. On the other hand, in the steppes carnivorous animals abound including those engaged in combat with other animals (Tang Huisheng 1993: 87).

A tally of animals in the rock paintings of gNam mtsho reveals: 50 yaks (bovids), 54 deer, antelope, wild sheep and goats (cervids) <sup>(26)</sup>, 35 animals which could either be bovids or cervids, 7 predatory animals, 1 dog, 4 rkyang, 45 birds, 70 horses, 2 camels and 3 fishes. There are also at least 100 paintings of animals that are so worn or

<sup>(23)</sup> The horse is the most common mount of the yul lha ('gods of the locale') and is ridden by both gNyan chen thang lha and gNam mtsho in her form as a brtan ma goddess. Other mounted indigenous Tibetan deities are the dgra lha, pho lha, btsan and Srid pa'i rgyal mo. Mounted riders are also commonly found in the rock art of central and north Asia (cf. Sher & Garyaeva 1996: 109-15).

<sup>(24)</sup> Raptors including eagles (khyung), falcons (khra) and vultures (bya rgod / thang dkar) have a special status in indigenous Tibetan lore and religion. In the Byang thang, a common theme is that of yul lha either manifesting as raptors or having them in their retinue. Most of the winged anthropomorphic figures in gNam mtsho rock art seem to belong to the pre-Buddhist period and probably have cultural correspondences to early literary references. In the tale of the travails of the lTong te'i mye kru family, in the Dunhuang manuscripts, the heroine grasps the tail of the thang dkar and is transported to the edge of the heavens (gnam / dgung) where she encounters the goddess Phyi byi gNam phyi gung rgyal (Thomas 1957, part 3: 31). In a text which preserves traditions of the royal age, the *rGyal rabs bon kyi 'byung gnas*, written by Khyung po blo gros rgyal mtshan in 1439, the royal gshen Khri ne khod helps the king of Lho brag escape from prison before turning into a conch eagle and flying away (Uray 1972a: 37-38). An account of creation in the *dBu nag mi'u 'dra chags* records that a white eagle, sNang ba 'od ldan and a black eagle, Mun pa zer ldan emerged from eggs on the primordial lake giving rise to the clans (Karmay 1986: 265). See Bellezza 2000 for other references to the sacred status of birds.

<sup>(25)</sup> From what has been published it can be deduced that the paucity of predators in rock art extends to other areas of the Byang thang. The only exception seems to be petroglyphs in Ri mo dong, Ru thog county (Suolang Wangdui 1994: 29, 30, 38) which are carved in the style of the steppes. The petroglyphs of deer, ibex, felines and bovines were probably made by the Sakas or Scythians during the Iron Age (Francfort et al. 1992: 165, 180-81). It has been proposed that petroglyphic evidence from Zanskar (Zangs dkar), Ladakh (La dwags) and western Tibet shows that Andronovian and later, Sako-Siberian steppe peoples, were present in the region from the Bronze Age to at least the 4th century A.D. (*ibid.*: 147, 181).

<sup>(26)</sup> In addition to the two species of deer mentioned above, the cervids of the Byang thang are: rna-blue sheep/*Pseudois nayaur*; gtsod-antelope / *Pantholops hodgsoni*; gnyan-argali / *Ovis ammon hodgsoni*; and dgo ba-gazelle / *Procapra plicatocaudata*.

ambiguously painted as to make their identification inconclusive. Most of these however are ungulates of one species or another. There are also at least 141 human figures or other types of anthropomorphs including those mounted on horses or other animals.

Approximately half of all anthropomorphic figures are mounted and the total number of animals (minimum of 370) outnumber the anthropomorphs by approximately two and one half to one. At bKra shis do, approximately 50% of paintings pertain to hunting, 75% at lCe do, and at the other sites 20% or less of the paintings are concerned with hunting. From a survey of more than 300 compositions of rock art across the Byang thang, it has been estimated that 80% of the figures are of animals (Li Yongxian & Huo Wei 1994: 30), a significantly higher figure than in the art of gNam mtsho alone <sup>(27)</sup>. The weapon of choice for the hunters is the bow and arrow but spears and pikes are also represented <sup>(28)</sup>. In numerous instances the quarry is shown impaled with an arrow or other projectile. However, unlike some rock art from the steppes, little attempt was made to differentiate the sex of the animals by depicting external sexual organs.

Single hunters and hunters in groups are found in the paintings. In contemporary times hunters in groups of up to 20 people still set off for the northern Byang thang to hunt 'brong, rkyang, wild sheep and antelope (Tawa & Topgyal 1998: 42). A minimum of 75% of all hunters are on horseback and the remainder are on foot in stalking or hiding positions. Here too, parallels can be drawn with the methods of hunting used today (cf. Norbu 1997: 48).

Very few paintings of herding can be conclusively identified at gNam mtsho <sup>(29)</sup>. This is curious because of the significance of pastoralism in the region. Yet the attribution of domestic animals versus wild animals cannot be easily made and in some cases domestic bovids and cervids are likely to be represented. In several paintings we have horsemen in close proximity to livestock who do not seem to brandish weapons or be in pursuit. It is such scenes which may portray the pastoralism of the Byang thang.

For the 'brog pa, yaks are synonymous with wealth, well being and prosperity. Yaks are often called nor ('wealth') or phyugs, a homophone of phyug ('riches') by

<sup>(27)</sup> Animals also dominate the rock art of central and north Asia and hunting is a common theme. See, for example, Sher 1980; Novgorodova 1984, 1989; Okladnikov 1980, 1981; Devlet 1980.

<sup>(28)</sup> Early petroglyphs of warriors with bows in Mongolia have been attributed to the Bronze Age (Novgorodova 1984: 167). Some analogous images in the rock art of gNam mtsho can probably be attributed to the same period.

<sup>(29)</sup> An ithyphallic figure with what appears to be a goat may depict a shepherd and is painted in the Brag bying gur phug, bKra shis do chen (Suolang Wangdui 1994: 202; Bellezza 1997a: 207). What has been identified as a tent (?) is depicted in a painting in Hor sbrug gully in Nag chu county (Suolang Wangdui 1994: 208). What may be depictions of tents are also found at Kham pa ri, Ru thog county, (*ibid.*: 52). Petroglyphic scenes, which probably depict herders (on foot and horseback) with their livestock, are found at gNa' bo lung and mTha' kham pa in Ru thog county and Tshwa Kha'i brag in dGe rgyas county (*ibid.*: 56, 73, 92, 97).

the herders. Even if we make an allowance for the likely depiction of domestic yaks, these may not convey the animals in the ordinary activities of resting and grazing. In 'brog pa culture domestic yaks can have a special or religious status. The best known of these is the *tshe thar* ('liberated life'), livestock which are set free as a mark of piety or gratitude<sup>(30)</sup>. Such animals are earmarked to spend their lives unmolested. *Tshe thar* are commonly created during the *Sa skya zla ba* festival, after recovery from an illness or during a marriage celebration<sup>(31)</sup>.

As regards the hunting of bovids we can assume that these represent the wild version of the species for domestic animals are not slaughtered in this fashion. Evidently the tradition of painting was mainly reserved for hunters, religious expressions and momentous social occasions (including combat) in both the Buddhist and pre-Buddhist periods. It appears that the painters saw little reason to depict mundane scenes, such as their livestock and tents. Even on modern textiles made by the 'brog pa there is still a preference for wild animal designs such as birds, wild asses, gazelle, deer and antelopes.

Hunting is a tradition-bound activity (even among contemporary 'brog pa) with many proscriptions and observances (cf. Tawa & Topgyal 1998: 44) highlighting religious anachronisms. These ancient hunting traditions appear to be associated with rock art as expressions of archaic forms of belief and worship. Traditional hunting activities require the accession of indigenous deities like the territorial gods (*yul lha*) and there are many rites designed to bring about this concord. In certain cases, it is likely that paintings of hunting activities fit into this pattern of preoccupation with the appeasement and winning over of environment-based deities. In any event, the special status of rock art is underscored by the inclusion of petroglyphs on boulders located in ancient graves (Li Yongxian & Huo Wei 1994: 33).

<sup>(30)</sup> For more information on the *tshe thar* see Norbu 1997: 43-44.

<sup>(31)</sup> There are other possible identities for domestic yaks and other livestock which are derived from ancient beliefs. The rare, pure, white yaks are often likened to *Lha'i g.yag dkar po*, a divine yak manifestation of many *yul lha* but which is especially associated with *gNyan chen thang lha*. The stud yaks (*spo bo*) are also considered unique in that the 'brog pa say that they are closely allied with the *yul lha*. Another kind of domestic yak with special qualities are those said to have been sired by the *yul lha* and an ordinary 'bri (female yak). Certain yaks, goats, sheep and other animals are offered by individual families of 'brog pa as gifts to the *yul lha* and other environment-based deities at *Lo gsar* and during the summer grass cutting festival. This custom is prevalent all across the *Byang thang* and can even be found in southern Tibet and border areas. Perhaps the most elaborate offering of livestock occurs on the third to fifth day of *Lo gsar* in the *gZhung pa ma mtshan spyi khyab* in what is now *dGe rgyas* county. Called '*Dod 'bul* ('Desired Offerings'), animals of certain colorings and markings are ornamented and driven off in the four directions as offerings to the indigenous protectors. Ribbons of five colors are tied to the ears of the animals, their heads and horns are dabbed with butter and square markings (symbolizing saddles) are drawn with red ochre on the backs of the animals. Recipient deities include the *btsan*, *yul lha*, *klu mo* and *mgon po* all of which receive animals in their characteristic colors.

Animals are also important as subjects in thog lcags ('primordial metal'), a heterogeneous class of metallic talismans made from the earliest period of metallurgy in Tibet to medieval times <sup>(32)</sup>. Considered to be self-formed and of magical properties, these talismans are believed to protect against harm and attract good luck to the wearer. Prized for countless of generations, thog lcags are still worn by Tibetan, albeit by an increasingly smaller number. Animals are particularly important in pre-Buddhist thog lcags and ostensibly represented protective and clan deities. There are similarities of rendition between animal designs in thog lcags and rock art. There are also symbolic parallels between the talismans and paintings in that animals have supernatural functions in addition to their mundane roles.

Among the most popular thog lcag designs are the heads of yaks and rams. Argali and blue sheep heads are also known as well as thog lcags just representing their horns. Thog lcags of figures mounted on horses are found which must represent indigenous deities of the yul lha, dgra lha, btsan or pho lha classes. Birds, mainly eagles (khyung), were made in both the pre-Buddhist and Buddhist periods. Although it is not now known exactly why, from no later than the Imperial period, a design consisting of mchod rten (stupa-s) surmounting yak or ram heads were manufactured. These blend one of the holiest symbols of Bon and Buddhism with the most vital species of animals. A unique pre-Buddhist design melds the ritual mirror (me lung) with a yak head, two important symbols for example, of the gNam mtsho lake goddess. Other thog lcags designs include dragons, deer, frogs, scorpions and turtles.

## DESCRIPTION OF ROCK PAINTINGS

### *Hunting*

One of the most common themes for both early and more recent rock art is that of hunters on horseback with bows and arrows chasing wild yaks <sup>(33)</sup>. In some of these compositions the weapons and reins of the horse are distinctively drawn. As befits a theme composed over many centuries there is considerable variation in style and technique.

<sup>(32)</sup> See Bellezza 1998, for photographs of around 450 thog lcags and a discussion of the subject; also, Tucci 1973.

<sup>(33)</sup> In the Byang thang there are many petroglyphs featuring the hunting of wild yaks. At Lu ring la kha, Ru thog county, hunters on foot and horseback stalk yaks and other animals with bows and in two instances appear to draw the animals into traps (Suolang Wangdui 1994: 4). Also at Lu ring la kha, there is a petroglyph which seems to involve both hounds and birds in the yak hunt (*ibid.*: 14). A petroglyph in rGya gling, Shan rtsa county, also seems to involve a dog in the yak hunt (*ibid.*: 154). Petroglyphs in Ngang lung lung shar, Ru thog county, seem to feature riders whipping their horses as they take aim at the wild yaks (*ibid.*: 20-21). At Tshwa kha, dGe rgyas county, a petroglyph depicts a wild yak surrounded by three horsemen whilst a forth figure on foot takes aim at the animal with his bow (*ibid.*: 103).

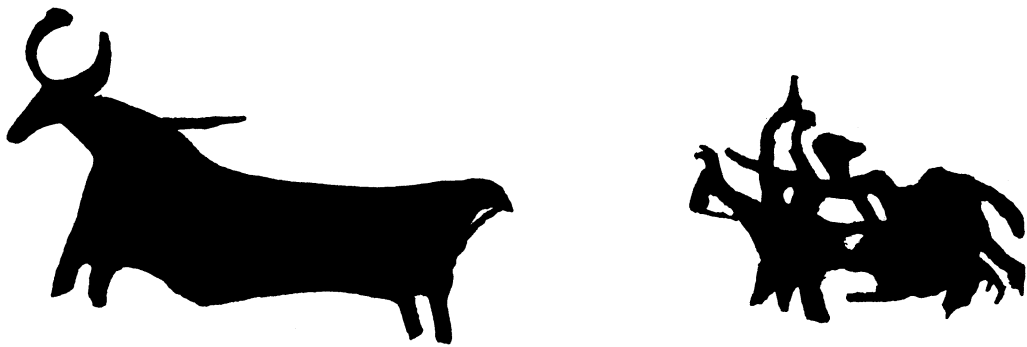


Fig. 3 - Eastern Pyramidal nook, hunter on horseback chasing wild yak.

Invariably hunting compositions depict the culmination of the hunt as the hunters swoop in for the final kill. The location of game and the butchering of slain animals do not seem to be represented. The majority of these paintings show the quarry wounded by projectiles protruding from their bodies demonstrating the success of the hunt. Clearly a successful hunt was an important activity which was must have been related to economic and social imperatives. A question that must be posed is: were these scenes of the kill customarily painted before or after the fact (or both)? If they were created before the hunt then it is likely that they were part of rites to insure its success. If the paintings were made after the completion of the hunt it would appear that social factors (i.e. portrayal of virility, luck, and thanksgiving) were the predominant motivation.

The characteristic trait of portraying animals wounded by hunters demonstrates their prowess and success – there is little question that they have bagged their trophies. I have observed that this zealous confidence might conceal the fact that big game was becoming scarce when the first phase of painting took place in lCe do (Bellezza 1997a: 239-40).

Among the oldest literary reference to hunting is found in one of a cycle of four poems in the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* (Uray 1972b: 6). This poem is concerned with the wild yak of Pho ma who lives in the byang 'brog ('northern wilderness') which is slain by several nomad clans (*ibid.*: 25). The yak hunt alluded to here is an allegory for war which portrays the role of six clans in the conquest of Zhang zhung (*ibid.*: 36-37).

In the Eastern Pyramidal nook, bKra shis do chen, are a number of hunting scenes including one which clearly shows a mounted rider in pursuit of a wild yak in an orange-red ochre (Fig. 3) (Suolang Wangdui 1994: 191) <sup>(34)</sup>. The rider chasing

<sup>(34)</sup> The illustrations presented in this paper were produced from tracings of computer generated images of the rock painting. Various artists in Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh, were engaged in this project.



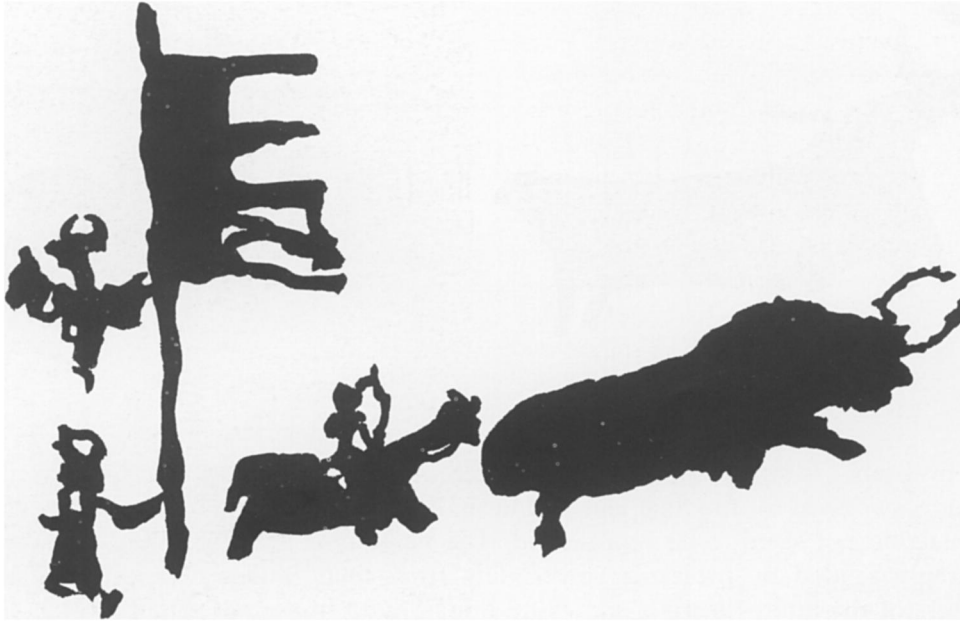


Fig. 4 - sGrol a phug, horseman in pursuit of wild yak and figure beside flag pole.

the wild yak is taken aim with his bow and arrow which is pointed directly at the animal. The 'brong is depicted with a line extending from its neck which seems to represent an arrow strike. Animals injured by projectiles are found across the chronological spectrum in gNam mtsho cave art and are one of the defining features of hunting motifs. This painting, as well as other hunting scenes and episodes from popular culture in the Eastern and Western Pyramidal nooks, belongs to the Buddhist period and seems to have been made within the last several centuries. The lack of wear and patination and the stilted realism of many of these paintings firmly places them in the category of folk art.

In the sGrol ma phug, bKra shis do chung, a horseman with a bow is in hot pursuit of a wild yak (Fig. 4) (*ibid.*: 183). The reins of the horse are distinguishable. Painted in red ochre, the yak is depicted as more than twice the size of the horse <sup>(35)</sup>. To the left of the hunt a figure stands beside a flag pole (dar lcog). As there are variations in the color of the pigments used, these motifs may not form an integral part of the horseman and wild yak composition. This painting, by virtue of wear, appears to be older than the majority of the paintings in the two Pyramidal nooks.

<sup>(35)</sup> It is said that 'a man can sit between the horns of a wild yak and find that his sides do not even touch his horns' (Tawa & Topgyal 1998: 43). The largest specimens of 'brong weigh up to a ton.

The greatest variety wild yak hunting paintings are located in lCe do on the west side of gNam mtsho, many of which can be attributed to the pre-Buddhist period (Bellezza 1997a: 239-45). This cave pululates with animals in various roles and attitudes. One of the hunting compositions in the rear of the cave portrays a rider running down a 'brong (Fig. 5). Drawn using a yellowish brown pigment slashes were used to ornament both the horse and rider. The rider himself is drawn as a series of sharp lines revealing little detail. Barbed lines on the legs and underside of the 'brong represent its long hairy fringe while a line extending from the back appears to represent a projectile. Below the hunting scene a 'brong is shown silhouetted in red ochre (Fig. 6). This painting accurately captures the movement and form of the wild yak. Its tail stands straight up in an attitude of alarm. It might represent a hunter's prey, but if so, the hunters have disappeared from the cave wall.

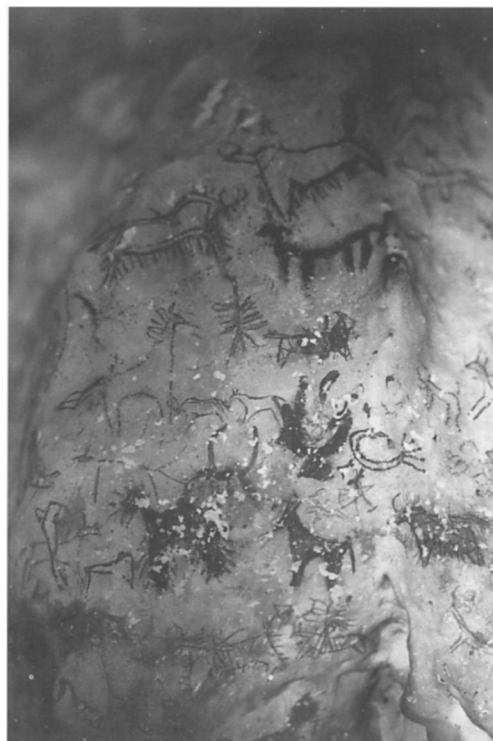


Fig. 5 - lCe do, rear panel of cave. Note the superimposing of images most visible in the center of the photograph.

Another wild yak hunting pictograph in lCe do shows two horseman with their bows drawn flanking the animal (Fig. 7). A smaller ungulate in front of the upper hunter and a primitive swastika also appear to be part of this composition which is rendered in a magenta colored paint. These figures belong to what I call the early phase of painting at lCe do, characterized by the minimal use of angular lines to create the forms of the figures in an extensive range of red, brown and yellow hues. The heads and bodies of the two hunters are drawn with two lines that extend well below the body of the horse to show the legs of the riders. The bow of each of the hunters is drawn taunt by the stick arms of the figures capturing the suspense of the hunt. The 'brong appears to have been hit with an arrow in the withers. Its tail extends straight out expressing the distress of the animal. In close proximity are other ungulates and horseman drawn in a yellowish brown paint. A particularly clear red ochre painting shows the mane of the horse and a 'v' shaped extension on the top of the hunter's head reminiscent of feathers. In another composition painted in the early phase style a hunter on horseback chases a wild yak (Fig. 8). Adroitly drawn in red

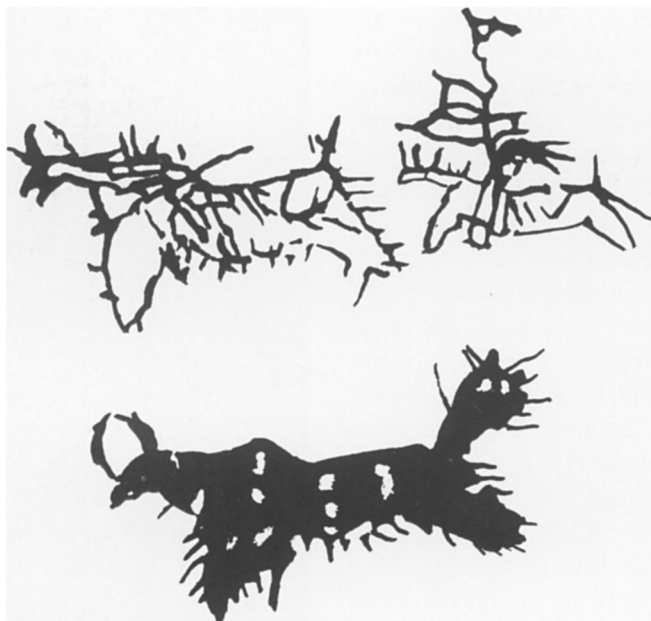


Fig. 6 - lCe do, hunter on horseback attacking wild yak, solitary wild yak.



Fig. 7 - lCe do, paintings on rear wall.



Fig. 8 - lCe do, 'brong hunter on horseback.

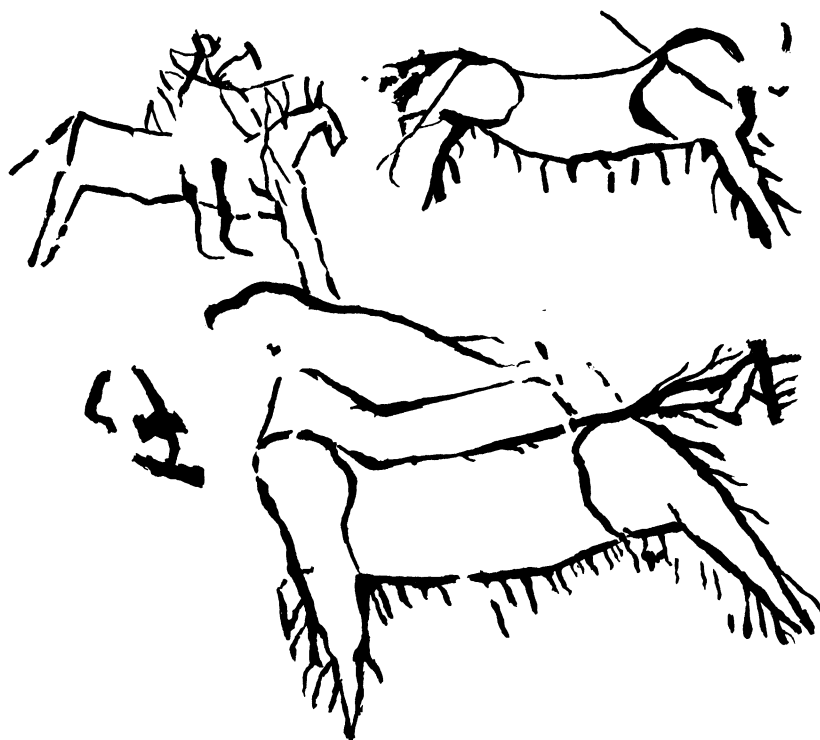


Fig. 9 - lCe do, wild yak hunter.



Fig. 10 - lCe do, hunting wild yaks. In upper hunt scene human figure appears to have thrown a lasso over the horn of the yak.

with graceful sweeping lines the painting chronicles the exhilaration and suspense of the hunt.

Another early phase painting found on the inner right wall of the lCe do cave shows a hunter on horseback chasing a wild yak in a grayish purple color (Fig. 9) (Suolang Wangdui 1994: 172). The 'brong below was painted in the same style and using the same color paint and therefore, appears to be integral part of the composition (Bellezza 1997a: 242). Two other prominent paintings of 'brong hunters in lCe do feature the same theme we have been exploring, that of horsemen charging after their quarry (Fig. 10) (Suolang Wangdui 1994: 169). There is a unique difference however, in the upper painting which evidently

depicts a figure on foot lassoing a horn of the 'brong <sup>(36)</sup>.

In what appears to be among the oldest paintings belonging to the early phase of lCe do, centrally located on the rear wall of the cave, five hunters on foot attack two 'brong with bows and arrows (Fig. 5) (Bellezza 1997a: 244-45; Suolang Wangdui 1994: 171) <sup>(37)</sup>. Each of the wild yaks is about 13 cm in length, well within the average size range of yak paintings at gNam mtsho. The drama, beauty and location of this composition make it one of the most eye-capturing at lCe do.

In another early phase painting of lCe do we again encounter a hunter on horseback armed with a bow and arrow in pursuit of an injured animal in a brownish red color (Fig. 11). The quarry however, cannot be positively identified. Instead of the horns which mark the pictographs of 'brong, this animal seems to have prominent ears reminiscent of the wild ass. Below the hunt scene are two bird-like figures painted in a deep red ochre. An animal which can be identified as a deer

<sup>(36)</sup> The lasso (zhags pa) is a traditional implement of the 'brog pa and a magical attribute of indigenous deities.

<sup>(37)</sup> In the steppes, where there is the benefit of far more archaeological data than in Tibet, it has been noted that horseman appeared in rock art no earlier than the middle of the 2nd Millennium B.C., while images of archers are not older than the Mesolithic (Sher & Garyaeva 1996: 121). We must await more archaeological research to see if such dates correspond with the Tibetan cultural milieu.



Fig. 11 - lCe do, hunter on horseback in pursuit of injured ungulate.

by its branched antlers is the target of an archer (Fig. 12) <sup>(38)</sup>. The deer already appears to have been impaled by four arrows which protrude from his hind quarters, back and chest. Clearly depicted in the throes of death, the massive loss of blood seems to be denoted by the line of pigment running down from the animal's belly. Painted in perhaps the same red ochre is a smaller animal below the deer and archer, which might be a hunting dog. Like other paintings on the right outer wall of the lCe do cave this one is in the midst of many other compositions featuring animals <sup>(39)</sup>.

At gNam mtsho there are many other paintings of hunting involving animals which frequently cannot be positively identified. Among the most striking of these is found in a cave adjacent to bKra shis rtags brgyad phug, bKra shis do chung, and features a mounted hunter who seems to be armed with both a spear and bow attacking what appears to be a stag and doe (Bellezza 1997a: 181-82; Suolang

<sup>(38)</sup> A petroglyph at rDo sgyur mtsho, Ru thog county, depicts a similar hunting scene (Suolang Wangdui 1994: 46). Also compare with another painting in lCe do showing a hunter on foot taking aim at a cervid (Bellezza 1997a: 242-43; Suolang Wangdui 1994: 170).

<sup>(39)</sup> Among the most prominent of these is the outline of a yak in close proximity to inscribed ma ni and vajra mantras. The style of the drawing and its superimposition on other paintings gives the impression that it belongs to the historical period.



Fig. 12 - lCe do, archer on foot slaying deer.

Wangdui 1994: 175). Painted in black, this composition might date to the pre-Buddhist period. In modern textile designs the 'brog pa often pair male and female deer, and male and female antelope.

In the Sangs rgyas yar byon phug, bKra shis do chen, a hunter on horseback painted in red ochre, points his weapon at a large animal which is rearing up (Fig. 13). Interestingly, the hunter was drawn in such a way that it resembles a swastika. In sGrol ma phug, bKra shis do chung, one possible hunting composition appears to integrate a horseman, deer and another cervid, probably a blue sheep (rna) or argalli sheep (gnyan) (Fig. 14) (Suolang Wangdui 1994: 179) <sup>(40)</sup>. The deer with its prominent antlers is painted several times larger than the horseman of which no details can be discerned other than what may be the reins for the horse. In close proximity to these figures is a yak painted in a darker red ochre (*ibid.*: 179).

In another sGrol ma phug pictograph two hunters on horseback brandish bows near two cervids (Suolang Wangdui 1994: 185). One of the animals appears to be

<sup>(40)</sup> Hunting of cervids is a common theme in the petroglyphs of the Byang thang (as its is in Mongolia).



Fig. 13 - Sangs rgyas yar byon phug, hunter attacking large ungulate (14 cm in length).



Fig. 14 - sGrol ma phug, horseman, yak, deer (25 cm in length) and other cervid.



bleeding from the mouth as if wounded by a projectile. This composition was painted immediately below a celestial burial scene (Bellezza 1997a: 184-85; Suolang Wangdui 1994: 180) in the same type of pigment and style, and exhibits similar wear characteristics. As such, it can be attributed to the pre-Buddhist period. Another early painting in sGrol ma phug portrays a figure riding a horse, with what appears to be a whip or lasso in his right hand, in pursuit of two or three animals. The identity of the animals is not clear but two of them appear to be cervids and the third, a predator or hunting dog (sha khyi) in pursuit of the largest animal.



Fig. 15 - Brag dkar, anthropomorph.

At Brag dkar, bKra shis do chen, are two pictographs which I believe belong to the earliest period of cave painting at gNam mtsho. Painted in tiny niches they both feature figures on foot in close proximity to cervids. One portrays two cervids sandwiched between two figures with their bows drawn in a magenta colored ochre <sup>(41)</sup>. The regimentation in the pair of animals and pair of hunters might be indicative of a ritualized hunting scene. In the other painting a figure follows a cervid drawn with exaggerated horns. Both of these Brag dkar paintings are unique in style and execution at gNam mtsho. The elongation of the bodies and small heads of the anthropomorphs are archaic features (Fig. 15). The manner of rendering the human figures and the forms of the animals, in my opinion, give good cause to consider that two paintings may in fact, depict life in the Byang thang before the introduction of the domestic horse.

In the Western Pyramidal nook, a painting of the historical period depicts the age-old theme of an archer stalking a cervid (Suolang Wangdui 1994: 189). This painting was made by using a chunk of red ochre as a crayon. In the Eastern Pyramidal nook a rider chases a cervid which appears to have been hit in the back by an arrow (*ibid.*: 193) (Fig. 16). The high level of preservation of the red ochre pigment and general design characteristics of this composition indicate that it is one of the majority of relatively recent paintings in the Pyramidal nooks. In the east chamber of Brag bying gur phug, a notable hunting scene shows a rider armed with a bow and arrow chasing a pair of deer (Bellezza 1997a: 203; Suolang Wangdui 1994: 199). The long and short horns of the animals seem to designate a pair of male and female animals. The bodies of the animals are highly ornamented with dots and lines. The parosol (gdugs) and endless knot (be'u) of the Eight Auspicious Symbols (bKra shis rtags brgyad) partially obscure the painting.

In what I refer to as the third ancillary chamber of the kLu khang bKra shis do chen, two riders with bows take aim at two animals in their paths, one of which is

<sup>(41)</sup> The hunter on the right side of the illustration could not be shown in its entirety because the position of the painting in an extremely small space precluded taking a complete photograph.



Fig. 16 - Eastern Pyramidal nook, figure on horseback making the kill of a cervid.

clearly a cervid. Painted in the same orange-red ochre and displaying similar wear characteristics, a larger anthropomorphic figure looms over the hunt. Perhaps it represents a spirit figure (Bellezza 1997a: 214). There also appear to be a few hunting scenes in the two shallow caves and two niches of Khyi rgan gag pa do but they are very obscured. The clearest two compositions show a rider pursuing an animal. One of these was simply sketched in outline form (Fig. 17).

#### *Horses and Yaks in Combat, Sporting and Symbolic Roles*

Horses also appear in combat roles in the rock paintings of gNam mtsho as the mounts of warriors (Bellezza 1997a: 185-86, 206-7; Suolang Wangdui 1994: 177, 181, 198) <sup>(42)</sup>. At the base of the Western Pyramidal nook, bKra shis do chen, two figures on horseback (?) are joined in sport or battle with one or two other

<sup>(42)</sup> Petroglyphs at Ngang lung lung shar and mTha' kham pa, Ru thog county, appear to show dueling figures armed with bows and spears (Suolang Wangdui 1994: 22, 24, 61).

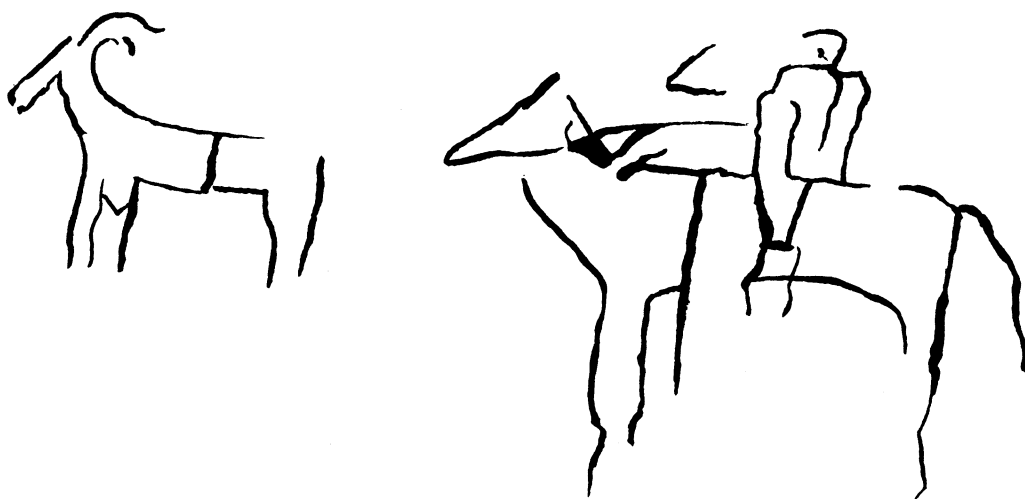


Fig. 17 - Khyi rgan gag pa do, horseman pursuing cervid.

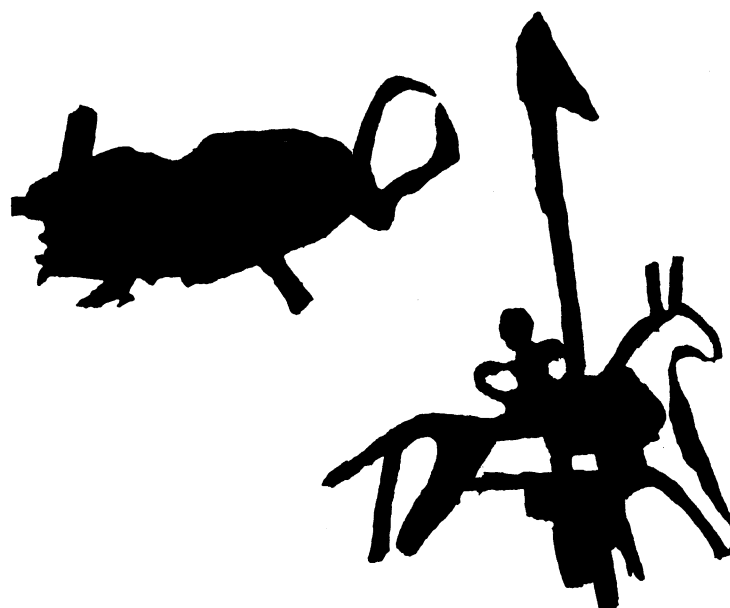


Fig. 18 - sGrol ma phug, horseman with long upright object and yak.

horseman riding into the action. Each rider holds a long, upright object, either a weapon or some kind of banner. This object may represent a spear with a flag attached to it (*dar mdung*), a popular weapon, power symbol and attribute of indigenous deities in the Byang thang. In the Eastern Pyramidal nook is a similar hastily painted red ochre composition of two riders facing each other holding upright objects. However, instead of horses they appear to be riding yaks (<sup>43</sup>).

A similar theme of dueling men is found in a much older painting situated in lCe do phug (<sup>44</sup>). Mounted on horses or yaks they point long spear-like objects at each other. The *ma ni mantra* and 'Om ba dza sa twa Hum' were carved over this red ochre composition at a much later date.

In sGrol ma phug, bKra shis do chung, a horseman holds a very long upright object which looks like a banner (*ru dar*) or a spear with a flag attached (*dar mdung*) (Fig. 18). Above the rider is a yak painted in the same shade of red ochre. There is another painting in sGrol ma phug which appears to integrate a horseman with a long upright object in hand and a large running animal. This crudely painted composition was partially painted over a *ma ni mantra* incontrovertibly dating it to the historic period. In Zhwa damr phug, a lone rider holds a spear-like object upright. The horseman either wears his hair in a top knot (*thor gtsug*) or has something on his head.

At the mouth of the third ancillary chamber of the kLu khang, bKra shis do chen, a mounted figure holds a large object overhead which is reminiscent of a banner (Fig. 19) (<sup>45</sup>). Painted crudely in red ochre and suffering from pigment



Fig. 19 - Third ancillary chamber of the kLu khang, figure on horseback with banner.

(<sup>43</sup>) A petroglyph of a figure riding a yak is found at Tshwa kha, dGe rgyas county (Suolang Wangdui 1994: 98). Another petroglyph at the same site shows a swastika and sun or rosette and what may be a mounted yak (*ibid.*: 93).

(<sup>44</sup>) As for ancient weapons and implements of war the Dunhuang documents mention the catapult (*sgyogs*), coat of mail (*rgya khrab* / *zhub can*), leg wrappings (*rkang bkris*), sword (*rgyal gri*), spear (*mdung*), dagger (*phur*), and as the most common weapon the bow and arrow (*gzhu* and *mda'*) (Thomas 1933: 387).

(<sup>45</sup>) According to the Ge sar epic, the *ru dar* was a banner distinguishing various divisions of an army (Norbu 1997: 79). According to the senior Bon scholar Tenzin Namdag, the *dbal dar* was a triangular shaped ensign used by armies in Tibet in ancient times. The *dar dkar ru mtshon*, a white silk banner, was used by ancient regiments. Banners are also attributes of indigenous deities. For example in the Bon manuscript *Dang ra'i bsang mchod bzbugs pa dbu'i gzigs phyogs legs par shugs* the well known mountain deity rTa rgo lha btsan displays a *dbal dar*, his assistant, Yul sa dkar po, holds a spear with a flag attached to it (*dar mdung*) (fol. 2a), while the lake goddess Dang chung g.yu yi zur phud can hoists a *dar dkar ru mtshon* (fol. 1b).



Fig. 20 - Sangs rgyas yar byon phug, ungulate.

migration, the details of the horse and rider cannot be ascertained. Among the most interesting mounted figures are those of two horned anthropomorphs from the pre-Buddhist period (Bellezza 2000) and what appears to be a zoomorphic figure holding a large upright object (Bellezza 1997a: 217).

Wild yaks (and perhaps the domesticated variety of the animal) are commonly depicted alone, which in certain instances must have had social and religious significance<sup>(46)</sup>. In a cave next to bKra shis rtags brgyad phug, bKra shis do chung, the images of two yaks are painted using a black pigment. Heavily worn

<sup>(46)</sup> Yaks in non-hunting roles are found in Byang thang petroglyphs. Several of these carvings appear to have religious significance. At Tshwa kha, dGe rgyas county, yaks, cervids and other animals, as well as a sun and counterclockwise swastika, ornament a boulder (Suolang Wangdui 1994: 99). Sun symbols, bovids and cervids were also carved on a boulder in Shan chan township sGer rtse county (*ibid.*: 104). A fine example of animals in mytho-religious attitudes is found in red ochre painting at Lha mtsho lung, Shan rtse county (*ibid.*: 161). Centered around a counterclockwise swastika are yaks, raptors, cervids, some other animals, plants, a sun, a crescent moon and other motifs. This painting appears to embody the pre-Buddhist symbolism of the cosmogonic g.yung drung.

these two figures (the largest of which is 20 cm in length) might represent aboriginal motifs. In the west chamber of Brag bying gur phug, bKra shis do chen, a historic period painting features a yak-like animal and a Buddhist swastika (g.yung drung). Another relatively recent composition in Sangs rgyas yar byon phug, bKra shis do chen, shows the outline of a yak-like animal crudely painted in black in the bitriangular style (Fig. 20). An individual yak painted in orange-red ochre is found in the west chamber of Brag bying gur phug (Fig. 21) as well as the simple outline of a yak in the bitriangular style (Fig. 22)

At Brag dkar a badly faded composition portrays a yak, sun and other motifs. In the first ancillary chamber of the kLu khang, bKra shis do chen, are the heads of three black-colored yaks whose bodies have been obliterated. In the third ancillary chamber of the kLu khang, a heavily worn composition seems to show a yak with its calf <sup>(47)</sup>. In lCe do phug, a raptor flies above a 'brong. Painted in a deep red ochre this painting may encapsulate religious and cosmological symbolism. Among these cave paintings, charged with symbolism, are two triads of animals featuring a yak, eagle and wild ass (Fig. 5), and yak, cervid and bird-like creature (Bellezza 1997a: 245-46).

A rare depiction of a galloping horse without a rider is found in the sGrol ma phug, bKra shis do chung (Fig. 23). The ears, nose, one eye, hooves, mane and exceptionally long tail of the animal were carefully painted. Swift horses are particularly valued by the 'brog pa.

### *Cervids in Non-Hunting Roles*

Cervids in a variety of styles and aspects are found in the rock art of gNam mtsho. The diversity of styles reflects differences in species and a broad

<sup>(47)</sup> A yak suckling her calf along with other yaks and cervids is shown in a painting found at rDo dmar, Ru thog county (*ibid.*: 83-84).



Fig. 21 - West chamber of Brag bying gur phug, yak.

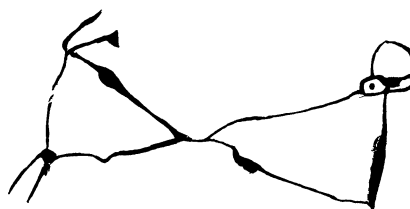


Fig. 22 - West chamber of Brag bying gur phug, yak in the bitriangular style (13 cm in length).

chronological range for the paintings. A major point of contrast between these gNam mtsho paintings and certain counterparts in central and north Asia is that the cervids are not shown with male reproductive organs.

In a cave adjacent to bKra shis rtags brgyad phug, bKra shis do chung, are several cervids painted using the less common black pigment. A deer with branched antlers, painted in the bitriangular style, stands alone (Fig. 24) <sup>(48)</sup>. While this pictograph seems archaic, it appears that at gNam mtsho, like central and north Asia, and Indus Kohistan, the bitriangular style of drawing ungulates continued for a very long time. In the same cave and in the same color pigment, a cervid turns his

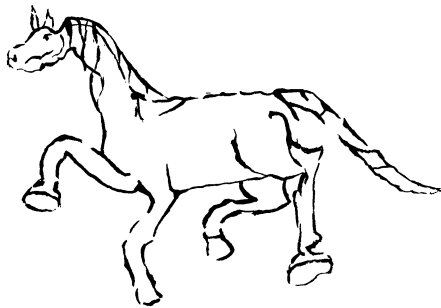


Fig. 23 - sGrol ma phug, galloping horse.

head to look back at an animal which, by its branched antlers, can be identified as a deer (Fig. 25). This also appears to be an archaic painting and red ochre applications partially obscure it.

Another composition in the same cave features the outline of a cervid and anthropomorph (Fig. 26). Painted in black, the anthropomorph has a teardrop-shaped head and seems to be holding a pair of antlers <sup>(49)</sup>. This composition is a fine example of the folk art genre which continues to the present time in wall and textile paintings. Unquestionably this composition belongs to the historic period

<sup>(48)</sup> Fine examples of deer not being expressly hunted are found at mTha kham pa, Ru thog county (Suolang Wangdui 1994: 59, 71). Both of these petroglyphs integrate other animals and human figures and thus probably allude to social or religious phenomena. An example of the sacred status of the deer is found in a petroglyph from Shar tshang, Om bu county, portraying the animal in conjunction with a counterclockwise swastika (*ibid.*: 116).

<sup>(49)</sup> Deer antlers and horns of other cervids are used as offerings to the territorial deities (yul lha). Other uses of deer antlers may parallel those of antelope horns. Antelope horns are thought to have inherent magical power and are used to subdue the earth spirits. Before new construction begins, mystic markings are drawn on the site with the horns and they are used for the first excavation of soil. Antelope horns were also used as a weapon and are still used by 'brog pa to dig up edible tubers.



Fig. 24 - Cave adjacent to bKra shis rtags brgyad phug, deer (16 cm in length).

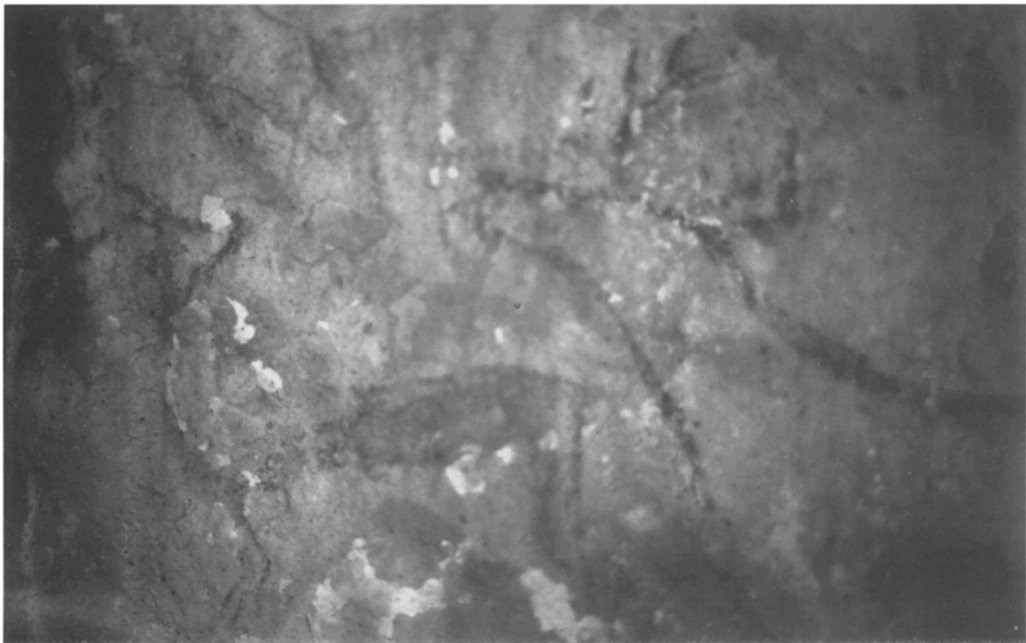


Fig. 25 - Cave adjacent to bKra shis rtags brgyad phug, two cervids.





Fig. 26 - Cave adjacent to bKra shis rtags brgyad phug, cervid (15 cm in length) and anthropomorph (23 cm in length).

demonstrated by its superimposition on 'Om 'du' and other Tibetan lettering rendered in red ochre. This lettering probably formed part of a Bon mantra.

In sGrol ma phug, bKra shis do chung, on an overhang, a cervid resembling a blue sheep or antelope was painted with black pigment in a primitive style (Fig. 27). Also in sGrol ma phug is a red ochre composition depicting two or three animals which may be cervids. Only one of the animals is clearly visible due to the high degree of pigment exfoliation. In Sangs rgyas yar byon phug, bKra shis do chen, a bird, eagle (khyung), deer and dog belonging to the historic period were adeptly painted in a realistic style (Fig. 28) (Suolang Wangdui 1994: 196) <sup>(50)</sup>. As a result, many anatomical details are discernible. The identification of the figures is verified by the accompanying inscriptions written in *dbu can* script. While the pigment has migrated creating a blotchy appearance, the paintings have undergone considerably less exfoliation than pre-Buddhist specimens. In a pair of recesses in

<sup>(50)</sup> The purpose of painting this set of animals could possibly have some thing to do with the tradition of spirit-mediumship as all four of these animals serve as helping deities. These animals are also found in the retinue of yul lha and other indigenous deities.



Fig. 27 - sGrol ma phug, cervid (15 cm in length).



Fig. 28 - Sangs rgyas yar byon phug, bird, deer, dog and khyung with inscriptions.

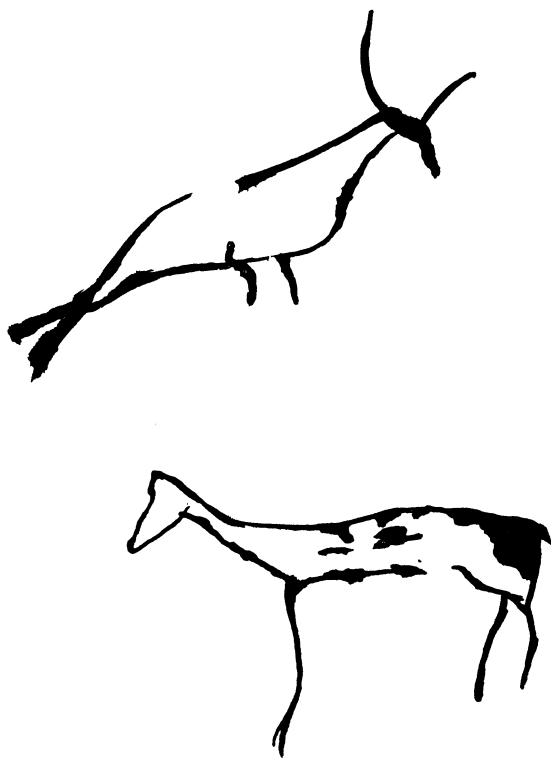


Fig. 29 - Twin Caves, cervid and bird-like creature.

the limestone escarpment of bKra shis do chen, east of Sangs rgyas yar byon phug, which I refer to as the Twin Caves, a cervid and bird-like creature were made with black pigment (Fig. 29). These figures have been partially effaced by the infiltration of moisture and the resulting calcareous deposition.

In the east chamber of Brag bying gur phug, bKra shis do chen, are what appear to be three different species of ungulates and an anthropomorph in red ochre (Fig. 30). The tines on the horns of the upper-most animal identify it as a deer. Rather than an integral composition the animals appear to have been painted at different times. In the vicinity are other animals including a yak painted in a similar pigment and style. A painting reminiscent of Mongolian petroglyphs showing two humans with highly elongated animals is located in the west chamber of

Brag bying gur phug (Bellezza 1997a: 207-8; Suolang Wangdui 1994: 195). At Brag dkar, bKra shis do chen, the long rectangular body of a cervid was segmented by vertical lines (Fig. 31). Due to advanced wear the length of its horns is uncertain.

In the second ancillary chamber of the kLu khang, bKra shis do chen, a cervid with short gazelle-like horns has been painted (Fig. 32). Its oval-shaped is divided by a horizontal line and several vertical lines. The design of the body of this animal is unique at gNam mtsho. The deep browning of the pigment and the formation of opaque depositions over the pictograph indicate that it is of considerable age. In the next cave to the west of the kLu khang with paintings is a scene of what appears to be two ungulates mating <sup>(51)</sup>. A much larger and heavier horned animal seems to be mounting another animal with horns. Painted in red ochre this composition has undergone much wear.

<sup>(51)</sup> Animals mating can be found in a petroglyph at Lu ring la kha, Ru thog county (Suolang Wangdui 1994: 4).



Fig. 30 - East chamber of Brag bying gur phug, three ungulates and anthropomorph.

In the last cave with paintings, on the southwest side of bKra shis do chen, is a composition of what appears to be a rider mounted on a horned animal <sup>(52)</sup>. This rider is part of a montage of a highly stylized depiction of anthropomorphs, plants

<sup>(52)</sup> At Tshwa kha brag, dGe rgyas county, is a petroglyph which has been interpreted as representing two riders mounted on cervids (Suolang Wangdui 1994: 101). At Lha klu mkhar, dPa' shod county, in eastern Tibet, a petroglyph clearly shows an anthropomorph mounted on a large deer. Indigenous goddesses such as the brtan ma and sman mo are often conceived as riding deer. The domestication of deer for riding and other purposes was carried out in central and north Asia but thus far there is little direct evidence for this in Tibet. In a poem in the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*, set in Khyung lung ngul mkhar in far western Tibet, Queen Sad Mar kar scorns her herd of deer and rkyang calling them 'wild' (Uray 1972b: 7). In any event, this common theme of mounted deer may underline linkages between Tibet and the reindeer cultures of Asia. The Boyar engravings of the Minusin Depression, c. 1000 B.C., show men riding deer (Vainshtein 1980: 120). However, the riding of reindeer in Inner Asia did not become commonplace until the first few centuries of the Common Era (Vajnshtejn 1984: 366).

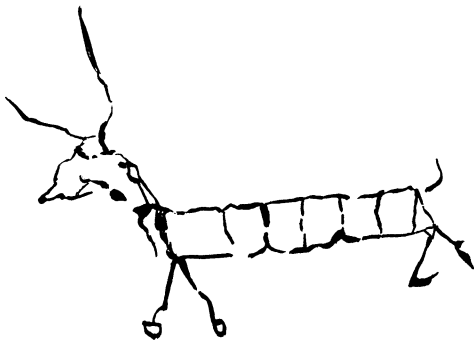


Fig. 31 - Brag dkar, cervid.



Fig. 32 - kLu khang, cervid.

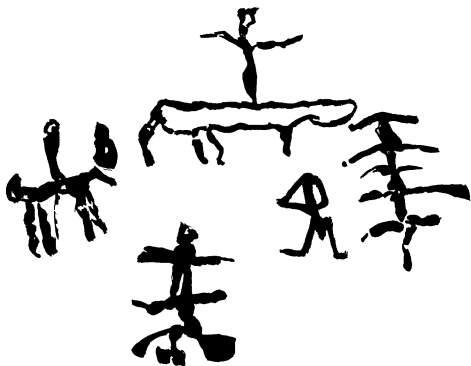


Fig. 33 - Southwest side of bKra shis do chen, montage consisting of two mounted figures, vegetation and at least one other anthropomorph.

and another rider mounted on an animal (Fig. 33). The two riders are clearly mounted on animals with very different forms. This composite scene appears to illustrate social realities of the 'brog pa on either a mundane or supramundane level. There is a high level of integration between the physical and spiritual worlds of the Tibetan herdsman. Consequently a composition such as this may well bridge both worlds. Above the painting is the ma ni mantra painted in the same orange-red pigment suggesting that this is a historic composition. In the west cave of Khyi gag pa do is a herbivore of an indeterminate species (Fig. 34). The wear and darkening of the pigment indicate it as of substantial age.

The styles and forms of animals in lCe do are noteworthy. For example, a deer with a highly elongated form shares a panel with several other animals (Fig. 35). The uppermost animal is a yak which appears to have been painted over an elongated form. The two elongated animals, one of which is a deer, were rendered in a dark red pigment, while the yak is in a lighter hue. The ungulate at the bottom of the illustration is characteristic of the early phase and was painted in a sienna pigment. On another panel in lCe do, four red ochre paintings of cervids, among which may have been others, have partially survived. Pigment and wear characteristics as well as the unelaborated and delicate realism of these figures certainly suggest that these are ancient paintings.

### *Pastoralism*

As mentioned earlier, there are few palpable scenes of pastoralism in the

rock painting of gNam mtsho<sup>(53)</sup>. One of the most convincing is found on the left outer wall of the west chamber of Brag bying gur phug, bKra shis do chen (Fig. 36). It consists of two riders with several animals in close proximity painted in a juvenile fashion. The horses and some of the other animals have striped bodies. This painting shows little sign of aging and therefore must have been painted relatively recently. In what may be a herding composition in the east chamber of Brag bying gur phug, an ithyphallic figure seems to be pulling a goat (Bellezza 1997a: 207; Suolang Wangdui 1994: 202)<sup>(54)</sup>. Perhaps the most significant painting of pastoralism is found in sGrol ma phug (Bellezza 1997a: 186; Suolang Wangdui 1994: 182). An anthropomorph with lines extending from the top of his head extends his arm over the head of a yak. Below the anthropomorph another human-like figure makes contact with it and the yak. The juxtaposition of the anthropomorphs and yak lends a supernatural aura to the composition. The underworld serpents (klu) and the taming of animals (phyugs 'dul) may be themes in this archaic pictograph.

<sup>(53)</sup> What might be scenes of migratory shepherds or hunters on foot are found in the petroglyphs of mTha' kham pa, Ru thog county (*ibid.*: 66-67, 73-74). A petroglyph which better captures the tradition of herding in its contemporary form is found at Tshwa kha, dGe rgyas county, and features three unarmed horsemen (*ibid.*: 97).

<sup>(54)</sup> For information on phallic symbolism in Tibet see Richardson 1972.



Fig. 34 - Khyi rgan gag pa do, a herbivore.



Fig. 35 - lCe do, deer, yak and other ungulates.



Fig. 36 - West chamber of Brag bying gur phug, two horsemen and several other animals in close proximity.

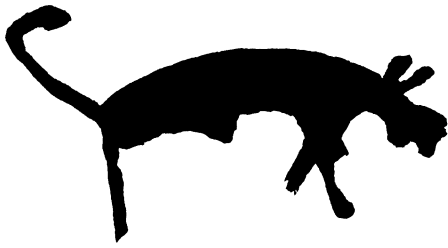


Fig. 37 - Eastern Pyramidal nook, carnivorous animal. (Drawing by the Author).

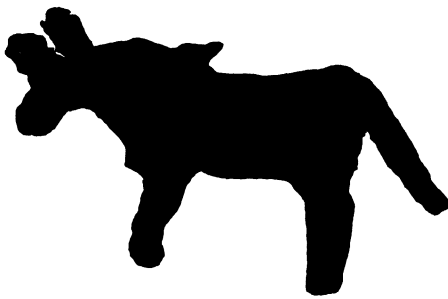


Fig. 38 - East chamber of Brag bying gur phug, carnivorous animal?

### *Predators*

Let us now examine the few predatory animals represented in the rock paintings of gNam mtsho. At the bottom left side of the Eastern Pyramidal nook are two gamboling predators which have been interpreted as a wolf and leopard (Bellezza 1997a: 199-200; Suolang Wangdui 1994: 192). The absence of anatomical details precludes the positive identification of the figures and alternatively, the tiger and leopard might be represented in the painting, the animal forms respectively of the indigenous deity of males, sTag lha khra bo and deity of females, gZig lha khra mo<sup>(55)</sup>. In the Eastern Pyramidal nook (Bellezza 1997a: 199) painted just above a deer is what looks like a stalking predator (Fig. 37). The long tail and heavy-set jaw are reminiscent of carnivores. The running of the red ochre paint over the figure precludes definitive identification.

In the east chamber of Brag bying gur phug, bKra shis do chen, is a red ochre animal with a massive body, rounded ears and a longish tail which may represent a carnivorous animal (Fig. 38) (Suolang Wangdui 1994: 208). At Brag dkar, bKra shis do chen, identified by its stripes, long tail and prominent gaping jaws, a tiger was painted in red ochre. In lCe do, an animal with prominent claws, its head turned back, is shown walking (Fig. 39). The curved lines decorating its body could represent the stripes of the tiger. Just above the predator which is painted in a deep red color, is a raptor in a brownish red pigment. Below the predator is what appears to be the highly stylized body of a yak. Also in lCe do, on the outer right wall, is a damaged red ochre painting of what looks to be a wolf or fox<sup>(56)</sup>.

<sup>(55)</sup> It has been noted that traditionally the tiger symbolizes men and the leopard most likely women (Norbu 1997: 28-29, 78-79).

<sup>(56)</sup> It is believed that men embarking on trade or war who see these animals will have their desires fulfilled (Norbu 1997: 79). Deities in the form of wolves were commonly part of the pantheon of Byang thang spirit-mediums. For example, a spirit-medium of a generation ago, Kha mer of gZhung pa ma mtshan, had a wolf ally named sGrib rog spyang mo sngon nag. This wolf deity was instrumental in removing various types of contamination which caused diseases. Without accompanying motifs it is not often possible to discern the physical and symbolic functions of animals. As pointed out, virtually every

## Birds

A considerable variety of birds grace the rock paintings of gNam mtsho, some of which have already been examined (Bellezza 1997a, 2000). The largest single painting at gNam mtsho features a khyung and what appears to be the bodhisattva of skillful means, Phyang na rdo rje (Vajrapani) below it. Located in the cave adjacent to bKra shis rtags brgyad phug with the figures of cervids we have already surveyed, this red ochre painting attains a height of 1.1 m<sup>(57)</sup>. The Buddhist mantras 'Om' ma ni pad me hum' and 'Om' bardza pa ni hum' were boldly painted in the cave. The khyung (a kind of eagle deity), shown in its assimilated form analogous to the Vaishnav Garuda, has a wing span of 80 cm (Fig. 40). The Bon sacred geography of bKra shis do is closely associated with the serpent deities (klu) and the khyung is often depicted as the subduer of these semi-divine beings<sup>(58)</sup>.

According to local lore this painting of the khyung helps protect people from harmful serpents arising out of gNam mtsho<sup>(59)</sup>. The association of the



Fig. 39 - lCe do, Carnivore, raptor (wingspan of 7 cm), yak.

animal found in the rock paintings have parts to play in indigenous religious lore and mythology. The wolf is no exception, and together with the falcon and eagle, are the principal manifestations of the dgra lha'i wer ma bcu gsum, 13 warrior gods of the epic hero, Ge sar (*ibid.*: 28, 79).

<sup>(57)</sup> Before the discovery of this painting, I had reported that the largest painting (outline of anthropomorph) was located in the west chamber of Brag bying gur phug (Bellezza 1997a: 208).

<sup>(58)</sup> The role of the khyung in Tibetan religion and culture is complex as a befits a popular ancient figure which was assimilated into Tibetan Buddhism. For a review of its identity and function see Bellezza 1997a: 80-83.

<sup>(59)</sup> In the Bon tradition, gNam mtsho is inhabited by a quincunx of serpent faced deities which are part of a geographic mandala of 24 sets of theriomorphic female deities (mkha' 'gro ma). In a cave north of the village of La sbug, on the east shore of Pad khud mtsho, there is an ancient large and elaborate painting of a sow representing the center node of five boar-headed deities belonging to this circle. I visited this site in June 1994.





Fig. 40 - Cave adjacent to bKra shis rtags brgyad phug, close-up of khyung (wingspan 80 cm in length).



Fig. 41 - Vajrapani.

composition with the klu is strengthened by the inclusion of Phyag na rdo rje who also has a klu subduing function. Unfortunately, the painting is heavily damaged and thus many iconographical details have disappeared. The structure of the tri-foliated lotus base (not visible in Fig. 41) on which Phyag na rdo rje stands, the style of the flaming aureole surrounding him, the darkening of the pigment and general wear of the painting indicate that it was created many centuries ago, perhaps during the era of pilgrimage of many notable Buddhist saints to gNam mtsho, *c.* the 11th to 14th centuries (Bellezza 1997a: 162-73).

In sGrol ma phug, bKra shis do chung, a raptor with outstretched wings was painted in black (Fig. 42). Next to it is a winged anthropomorphic figure, also painted using a black pigment (Bellezza 2000). Raptors, of which there are eagles, hawks, falcons and vultures in the Byang thang, are characteristically depicted with open wings simulating flight<sup>(60)</sup>. Another composition in sGrol ma phug portrays a khyung and immediately above it a cervid painted in the same hand with red ochre pigment<sup>(61)</sup>. The horns of the bird

<sup>(60)</sup> For petroglyphs of raptors in the Byang thang see Suolang Wangdui 1994: pls. 3, 7, 14, 29, 77, 113, 117.

<sup>(61)</sup> A similar petroglyphic composition is found in Shar tshang, 'Om bu county, except that the order is reversed: the upper position is occupied by the horned khyung

identify it as a khyung, a kind of protective eagle deity.

In Zhwa dmar phug, bKra shis do chung, there is a highly worn figure of what seems to be a raptor with exaggerated tail feathers or a human body (Fig. 43). As mentioned there are several paintings at gNam mtsho of ornithomorphs with anthropomorphic features and this is another. In Sangs rgyas yar byon phug, bKra shis do chen, there is an example of an archaic ornithic figure which resembles a swastika (Bellezza 2000). Near it is the painting of another raptor exhibiting the same high level of wear and pigment ablation (Fig. 44).

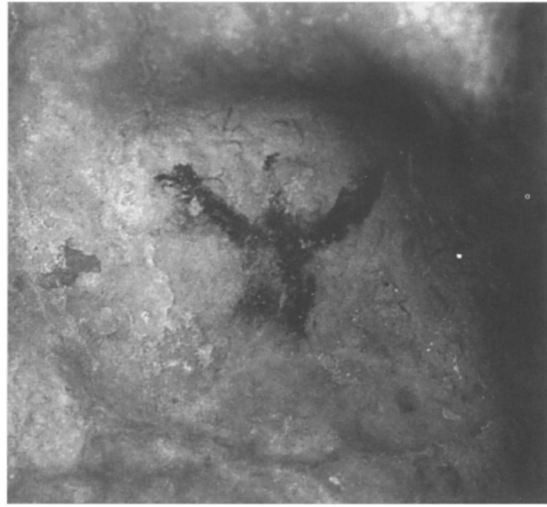


Fig. 42 - sGrol ma phug, raptor (3 cm in height).

In the west chamber of Brag bying gur phug, bKra shis do chen, is another raptor with outstretched wings (Fig. 45). Part of its tail has been obscured by the infiltration of moisture into the paint. Unlike many of the ungulates, these birds are always depicted in solitary compositions. On the rear wall of the west chamber, a man on horseback is shown with a bird perched on his left arm (Fig. 46). If this is so, it is the only explicit example of falconry in the rock paintings of gNam mtsho. The inscription on the left side of the painting identifies it as being created by a Tungusic language speaker. As such, this painting probably dates from the 10th to 13th centuries. There are several other distinctive paintings in the same vicinity belonging to this genre (Bellezza 1997a: 208-10). In the east chamber of Brag bying gur phug, an ostensible lamaist figure appears to be releasing an object, perhaps a bird, into a painting of a battle (*ibid.*: 206-7). His peaked hat and what appears to be a drum on his back are clearly distinguishable (Fig. 47).

At Khyi rgan gag pa do, the outline of a khyung and clockwise swastika rise above a monastic vignette of stick figures in a temple painted in black. The khyung and swastika function as apotropaions. In another of the small caves of Khyi rgan gag pa do is a crude red ochre drawing of a raptor with outstretched wings.

In lCe do phug there are several raptors, two of which we already examined (e.g. Fig. 39). In a typically solitary aspect another raptor hovers, painted in red ochre on

(Suolang Wangdui 1994: 113). This arrangement, with the bird above, better conforms with the indigenous cosmological schemes found in 'brog pa society. The theme of a cervid paired with a raptor is also known in the petroglyphs of central and north Asia.



Fig. 43 - Zhwa dmar phug, probably a raptor.



Fig. 44 - Sangs rgyas yar byon phug, raptor  
(6 cm in height).



Fig. 45 - West chamber of  
Brag bying gur phug, raptor.



Fig. 46 - West chamber of Brag bying gur phug, man on horseback possibly with bird, and Tungusic language inscription.



Fig. 47 - East chamber of Brag bying gur phug, lamaist figure?



Fig. 48 - lCe do, raptor (wingspan of 8 cm).

the cave wall (Fig. 48). In a painting with deep religious overtones, five human figures are arrayed around a raptor (Bellezza 1997a: 246). Immediately above this composition is a line drawing in red ochre of a khyung, identified by its horns (Fig. 49). It could well be an integral part of the larger composition which seems to have been painted by at least two different hands. This is indicated by the different painting techniques used. Another horned khyung in lCe do, painted in a brownish pigment, has been obscured by black markings.

Water fowl are also represented in the rock paintings of gNam mtsho, albeit to a lesser extent than raptors. A painting of what might be a duck or goose in flight is found on the upper extremity of the outer right wall of lCe do (Fig. 50) <sup>(62)</sup>. The formation of a distinctive mineral skin over the painting, the darkening of the pigment and the style of painting suggest that it belongs to the pre-Buddhist period. Also in lCe do, is an adeptly painted duck which has been partially damaged by an

<sup>(62)</sup> A waterfowl petroglyph is found at Ngang lung lung shar, Ru thog county (Suolang Wangdui 1994: 19).



Fig. 49 - lCe do, khyung.

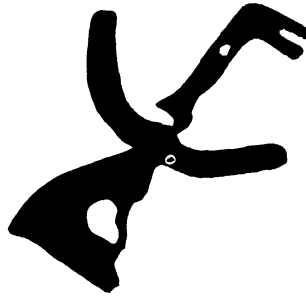


Fig. 50 - lCe do, waterfowl?  
(7 cm in height).



Fig. 51 - lCe do, duck.

inscribed mantra (Fig. 51). The literal execution of the painting and the fact that the pigment appears to match the nearby lettering 'ka ga kha' indicates that it was made in the historic period.

In Khyi rgan gag pa do at least four birds resembling water fowl were painted in a juvenile fashion in the historic period. Using black pigment (charcoal?) in the manner of a crayon the bodies of the birds are divided into four squares in each of which is a dot. In the west chamber of Brag bying gur phug, bKra shis do chen, a water fowl is portrayed in flight. Drawn over an Om' using red ochre as a crayon, it clearly dates from the historic period.

### *Other Animals*

The exact number of species represented in the rock paintings of gNam mtsho is open to debate as there are dozens of images which cannot be positively identified. Among them are a scorpion-like creature and what may represent a lake crustacean (Bellezza 1997a: 208, 213-14). Another painting seems to combine a human head with the tail of the scorpion (Suolang Wangdui 1994: 176) <sup>(63)</sup>.

At the base of the wall dividing the east and west chambers of Brag bying gur phug, bKra shis do chen, a figure is in repose with a long-tailed animal reminiscent of a dog painted in a deep red ochre. Around the two figures are several delicately drawn trees suggestive of a variety of species. On the left side of the compositions are tiny Tungusic language characters drawn with the same pigment and exhibiting similar wear characteristics. Their inclusion in the painting indicates that it was painted by an individual belonging to Khitan or Jurchen ethnic groups, Altaic peoples who controlled north China and parts of central Asia before the rise of the

<sup>(63)</sup> This particular photograph was inadvertently published upside down; see Suolang Wangdui 1994: 142.



Fig. 52 - East chamber of Brag bying gur phug, Eight Auspicious Symbols.

Mongols in the early 13th century. Other Tungusic characters are obscured by the endless knot design to the right of the painting.

In the east chamber of Brag bying gur phug, a complete set of the Eight Auspicious Symbols of Buddhism was painted (Fig. 52). In some instances these cover up earlier paintings. Next to the eight symbols another partial set was drawn. Of these a single fish is of special interest because of its anatomical details (Fig. 53). Ordinarily, the auspicious fish symbol (called the golden fish) comes in pairs and is modeled on a fish with scales not unlike a trout. Here, however, the painting of the fish is modeled on the scale-less lake carp which live in gNam mtsho.

On the left wall of the east chamber of Brag bying gur phug is an animal which resembles a rkyang, the wild equestrian of Tibet (Fig. 54). Although the running of the paint has simulated a long tail, the prominent rounded ears, general body shape and the fact that it does not have a rider, point to the rkyang. Another painting of what may be a rkyang was rendered in a brownish pigment on the rear wall of the cave at lCe do (Fig. 5). In sTag lung phug, bKra shis do chen, a stick animal was painted on the left outer wall (Fig. 55). In the first ancillary chamber of the kLu khang, an unidentified animal and clockwise gYung drung painted in orange-red, seemed to have been painted using the same pigment (Fig. 56). The clockwise

swastika, the stiff execution of the animal and minimal pigment exfoliation suggest that this is a folk painting of the historic period.

In the cave at lCe do three different animals were painted in close proximity to one another in various shades of brownish ochre (Fig. 57). The central figure seems to represent a deer while the figures on the left and right have not been conclusively identified.

In the west chamber of Brag bying gur phug, a man leading two Bactrian camels has been painted on the right outer wall (the rear camel is not visible in photograph) (Fig. 58) <sup>(64)</sup>. Although wear and the running of the paint has taken its toll on this composition some distinctive features are discernible, including the humps of the camels. The head of the first camel is pointed backwards. The outline of the human figure with its flattened head and short robe is executed unlike any other at gNam mtsho. This painting is historically important not only for the camels but because it appears to preserve ancient contacts between northern Tibet and the steppes of Inner Asia.



Fig. 53 - East chamber of Brag bying gur phug, scale-less lake carp (42 cm in length).

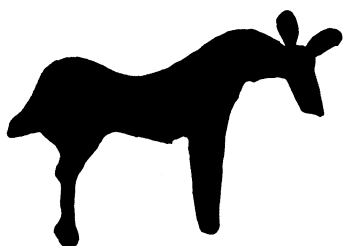


Fig. 54 - East chamber of Brag bying gur phug, rkyang (15 cm in length).

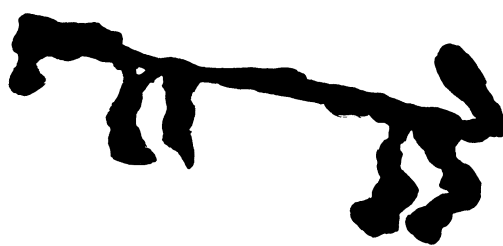


Fig. 55 - sTag lung phug, unidentified animal.

<sup>(64)</sup> In contrast with Mongolia and other steppe regions, camels in the rock art of the Byang thang are uncommon. A camel petroglyph is found at Ri mo dong, Ru thog county and another one at Shar tshang, 'Om bu county (Suolang Wangdui 1994: 34, 121). Scythian style petroglyphs in Ri mo dong, Ladakh and Spiti, and Nestorian and Sogdian rock inscriptions in Ladakh are important evidence for Central Asian cultural contacts on the Tibetan plateau in the prehistoric and early historic periods. The presence of Bactrian camels in Byang thang rock art reinforces this cultural presence.





Fig. 56 - First ancillary chamber of the kLu khang, unidentified animal and swastika.



Fig. 57 - lCe do, three animals.



Fig. 58 - West chamber of Brag bying gur phug, a man leading Bactrian camels.



Fig. 59 - lCe do, pair of anthropomorphs (10 cm in height).

To conclude this paper let us examine a painting (Fig. 59), in the inner recess of lCe do, of two anthropomorphs which perhaps represent the kinds of individuals who created this art. The figure on the left either has a coiffure or headdress resembling horns. Partially obscuring the figures are Tibetan letters crudely scrawled in much lighter red ochre. In accordance with cultural realities of the Byang thang, these two humans, or deities, must be attired and equipped in materials fabricated from animal products.

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