

The Rock Carvings of Taru Thang

**The mountain goat:
A religious and social symbol of the Dardic speaking
people of the Trans-Himalayas**



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All photos by Lars Reinholt Aas (2006 – 2007) except Fig. 3.4 Fig. 3.5, Fig 4.7, Fig. 4.10, Fig. 5.1, Fig. 7.1.

Abstract

The rock art of Taru Thang in Ladakh offers us a chance to learn more about the past cultures of the mountain regions of northern Pakistan, eastern Afghanistan and north western India. The dominating motif is the mountain goat, and I believe there is a possible connection between the rock art of Taru Thang and the ancient religious beliefs of the Dardic speaking people. My aim is to provide a possible theory of why, and by whom the carvings were made.

The Dardic speaking people living in the mountain regions of the trans-Himalayas have preserved parts of their ancient religious beliefs, as well as their social structure despite Muslim and Buddhist influence. Ethnographic sources tell of how they believe their society to be divided in pure and impure spheres, based on the verticality of their landscape. Each sphere is assigned to the sexes respectively, based on an extreme division of labour: The men spend half the year in the mountain pastures with the livestock and are associated with the high mountain zones, while the women working with agriculture in the villages are associated with the low valley zones.

The Dards believe that the pure zones of the mountains are inhabited by supernatural beings, ambiguous creatures capable of bringing fortune and prosperity, but also sickness and misfortune. The society of the supernatural beings is believed to be a mirror image of the Dard society, and the spirits keep mountain goats as domestic animals like humans keep goats. Therefore, the mountain goat is regarded the most pure amongst animals, being in touch with the pure sphere of the mountains and the supernatural beings.

By using a combination of theories including totemism, bricolage, myths and binary oppositions, I believe it is possible to connect the rock art of Taru Thang with the Dardic speaking groups of Central Asia, and show how they use natural symbols in their surroundings to explain the differences in their culture. Especially, I wish to show how the rock carvings can be seen as expressions of maleness and of how male dominance can be recreated through rock art. I believe a research combining the ethnographic evidence of the Dards and the rock art material from Taru Thang can enhance our understanding of the images, as well as stand as an example of how it is possible to interpret rock art symbols through the use of local ethnographic sources.

Chapter 1: Ladakh and the Dards



http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/kashmir_disputed_2003.jpg

Fig 1.1 Map of Jammu & Kashmir

Ladakh (including Zaskar) is situated in the remote state of Jammu & Kashmir, and constitutes the northernmost extension of India. It borders to Tibet to the north and south-east, to Kashmir to the west and the Lahul and Spiti districts of Himachal Pradesh to the south. As part of the *trans-Himalayas*, Ladakh lies within a vast area of high altitude semi-desert and steppe, often described as a “cold desert”. This description is sensible when looking at the barren Ladakhi landscape of rocky fields and high mountains with spread snow-clad peaks. The altitudes in Ladakh range from 2560 meters in Kargil area to the 7672 meters high Saser Kangri peak in the Karakoram (Bray 2005:1). These elevation variations contribute to Ladakh’s inhospitable expression.

Ladakh has the lowest population density of India, with only 4 persons per sq. km. counting a total population of approximately 235 000. With its 242 villages, and only 2 towns, the inhabitants of Ladakh are overwhelmingly rural, though urbanization is proceeding at a rapid pace (Humbert-Droz 2004:7), as more and more young people move to Leh, the “capital” of Ladakh from the rural areas to take part in the economic gain caused by tourism.

The name *Ladakh* is said to mean “the land of mountain passes”, and a Ladakhi saying states that the only people coming to Ladakh, is either your best friend or your worst enemy. This is a saying with moderations as Ladakh is, and has always been, in Janet Rizvi’s words, a “crossroads of High Asia” (Rizvi 1983). In the same way as mountains divide people and cultures, mountain passes and valleys connect them. Even though the rivers and mountain ranges in Ladakh may seem incoherent there is a geographically coherent pattern in the disposition of mountains, rivers and valleys. When viewed from the ground this can not be seen, but a satellite view would reveal their parallelism which the pastoral nomads and travellers had to find out the hard way in the past. They did not have the luxury of modern transport and surveying, but worked out the routes from north to south and east to west in the inhospitable land, making it an important trade route in the network that went through south and Central Asia (Rizvi 1983:21-22). These routes have been in continuous use since before recorded history (Bray 2005:2), and being a natural mid stop along the important trade routes, Ladakh has throughout history been visited by a variety of people from different cultural backgrounds and with different religious beliefs. The most important of these trade routes, was without doubt the Silk Road. This pathway, following the Indus River was noted by the 4th century Chinese traveller Fa Hian to be nothing shorter than a line to hell. For many centuries caravans loaded with silk, gold, spices, ivory, tea or other luxury goods braved the

deceptive mountains, travelling along the goat tracks and narrow paths sometimes providing shortcuts between the caravan towns of Central Asia, like Leh once was (Raza 1996:37-38).

Because of the numerous passes, it is easier to travel north into Tibet and the northern parts of Pakistan than to travel south to the subcontinent, and because of this the people of Ladakh speak a dialect of Tibetan tongue (Nordberg-Hodge 1991:XI). Ladakh is often referred to as “Little Tibet”, and its ties with Tibet are obvious. Although Ladakh displays a wide variety of religions and local variants of religions, the Tibetan Buddhism has a strong foothold in the region. The Buddhism of Ladakh and the whole so-called Tibetan cultural area is universally valid, encompassing and influencing every aspect of life and the people’s way of thinking. The religious understanding of their environment is further reflected in how the people of Ladakh cope with life in the Indian Himalayas (ibid.).

Living in the harsh and hostile environment of the dry and cold Ladakh, life is made possible by skilful use of the thin soil and scarce water and by their hardy domestic animals like sheep, goats, donkeys and in particular the *dzo*, a hybrid of archaic Asian cattle and yak. The Ladakhi life is to a very high degree dictated by the seasons. While the sun scorches the region in the summer, it freezes solid for eight months in winter, and the temperatures drop to as low as -40°C . During the short summer, the high elevations below the glacier at about 4500 – 5500 meter are filled with vast stretches of grazing land. Unlike the temperate regions of Europe, the arid land turns greener at high altitudes, supporting wildlife such as blue sheep, ibex, wolves and snow leopard. In the months from July to September, some of the Ladakhi families spend time here, caring for their animals and making butter and cheese for the winter. The majority of the Ladakhis are self supported through farming, where the principal crop is barley, as elsewhere on the Tibetan plateau. The size of each village depends on the availability of water which comes from the melted snow and ice of the mountains, and many generations ago there were built channels, tapping the melt water bringing it down to the fields and making sedentary settlement possible (Nordberg-Hodge 1991:13). The landscape of Ladakh is thus tiered in two zones: One high lying zone with pastures, glaciers and wild animals and a lower zone with valleys, villages and domestic animals. These zones, as I will show in later chapters, are of great importance to how the people of the Himalayan regions experience their society and contribute in shaping their religious lives.

In the traditional Ladakhi household nothing goes to waste, but is recycled and put to good use. This includes almost everything: the animal dung is gathered in wicker baskets and used for fuel, residues from brewing are dried and later ground and eaten and human excrement is used as fertilizer on the fields. Ladakhis patch their homespun robes until they can't be patched no more, and when it no longer can be stitched together it is packed with mud into the weak part of an irrigation channel to prevent leakage. Even the used dishwater has a second use, and is often being fed to the animals which can do with the extra nourishment in the little bits of food leftovers. This self-reliance and recycling systems has always been essential in Ladakh due to the scarce resources at disposal in the harsh climate (Nordberg-Hodge 1991:25-26).

It is easy to imagine how various religious beliefs and awareness of life and death entangle in with everyday life and a hope that this year, and the next to come, will bring what is necessary for survival. Just as they rely on heavy practical planning and knowledge in sowing, harvesting in animal husbandry and earlier in hunting, they also rely on religious practice. With the danger of an infertile year looming, all measures necessary will be undertaken to ensure prosperity and fertility in a fallacious environment as that of Ladakh. As we shall see however, despite the barren landscape and harsh climate the inhabitants do not succumb only to the basic needs of survival, but are indeed capable of intellectual disinterested thinking, which I will return to in later chapters.

1.1 The Dardic speaking people

The cultural group of main interest in this thesis is not the majority of people living in Ladakh today, but a specific group of people spread out over the trans-Himalayan regions whose origin is connected through linguistic and cultural similarities. These people are known as *Dards* and will be referred to as the Dardic speaking people. The reason why I have chosen to focus on the Dards is that I believe their ancient religious beliefs can be connected with the rock art of Taru Thang. Parallels of their religion must, according to Professor Karl Jettmar, belong to a common heritage of the whole ethnic group, thus making it possible to use ethnographic examples from a wide range of Dardic speaking groups (Jettmar 2002:7). To explain *who* these Dards are is difficult not only because they are spread over a vast area, but also because their dialects have been influenced by, and separated from, other language groups over time.

Simplified, the Indo-Iranian language group constitutes the easternmost branch of the Indo-European family of languages, and two of these languages are Dardic and Nuristani. The Dards, Indians and Iranians had already separated from each other at the time they migrated to Iran and the Indian subcontinent from the north and the north-west, around the 2nd millennium B.C., and their ancient homeland is therefore probably to be found north of the Iranian plateau and India (Harmatta 1999:357-378). In this context, I will use the word *Dard* to include tribes and groups that have survived with similar linguistic and cultural features in the remote regions of north Pakistan, eastern Afghanistan and north western India. This means, for instance, that the Nuristani speaking people of Afghanistan will be included in the thesis, as they derive from the same language group and have a similar culture as that of the Dardic speaking people.

Ladakh and Zaskar were populated by Dards until the 7th and 8th centuries A.D., when the Tibetans attacked and conquered the kingdom of Zhang-zhung which most likely contained parts of Zaskar. Today, a few Dardic speaking groups still live in Ladakh in the villages known as Da and Hanu, approximately 100 km west of Leh along the Indus Valley, where they practice a form of Buddhism. They have however preserved bits and pieces of their ancient religions and pantheon of deities and supernatural beings (Dargyay 1988:124-126). Just as the Dards in Ladakh to some extent have survived Buddhist influence, Dardic speaking groups living in the remote mountain regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan have survived Muslim influence. This is why it is possible for me to use the ethnographic material collected by anthropologists to analyse and explain the rock art of Taru Thang.

1.2 The Dards subsistence

I will not claim that the various Dardic speaking cultural groups maintains, neither today nor in the past, an entirely common economy. Still, some basic similarities can be pointed out. Their economy is mostly based on small-scale agriculture with transhumant goat husbandry. This is a point of great importance, as livestock husbandry has had a paramount ritual and ideological significance, especially in relation to transhumance and the male and female dichotomization, to which we shall return in later chapters (Parkes 1987:638-639). In accordance with the physical conditions of the mountain areas, farming techniques and methods, compositions of animal herds and diary production differs between the regional areas. In some parts, wide valley bottoms provide land which is easily exploited allowing

ploughs, but the lack of forests, make it difficult to keep large herds of goats. This contrasts other areas where it is only possible to maintain rather small plots of terraced fields where the soil can only be dug up with traction forks. The most common cultivated crops are various kinds of millet, barley, wheat, maize, beans, potatoes and onions (Klimburg 1999:47).

A characteristic of the Dards (attested amongst the Shina speaking Dards of Gilgit and Baltistan), is a taboo against cows and hens whose flesh, milk or eggs will not be eaten. Traces of such customs can still be observed in Ladakhi villages, where households do not keep hens, consume their eggs, nor consume any product from cows. In recent years, the younger generations have however begun to keep hens for economic reasons, and also feed tinned powder milk to children (Vohra 1989b:36). Later in the thesis, I will return to both the religion and social structure of the Dards.

1.3 Rock Art research in Ladakh

Little research has been done regarding the rock art of Ladakh, contrasting the intensive work that was started by a Pakistan-German research group, who started their first survey in 1979. Shortly after the construction of the Karakoram Highway connecting Pakistan and China through the Himalayan and Karakoram mountains, in 1978, Prof. Karl Jettmar (Heidelberg, Germany) and Prof. A.H. Dani (Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad, Pakistan) discovered thousands of rock carvings and inscriptions along the Indus valley. A systematic documentation and publication of this material has been executed since 1989 under the directorate of Prof. Harald Hauptmann, and the project keeps a close collaboration with scholars from Pakistan, England, France and Germany. The aim of this research is a complete documentation and publication of all major rock art sites in this region, and an archive of the collected material has been installed in the Heidelberg Academy. A vast number of rock carvings have been discovered, and up to now about 30 sites are registered on a stretch of ca. 100 km to both sides of the Indus bearing ca. 30,000 rock carvings and 5,000 inscriptions in more than 10 writing systems (Bandini-König & Bemann 2003).

However, on the Indian side of the borders, not many publications are known and little scientific work has been undertaken. Of noteworthy interest, are the discoveries of the German scholar Dr. A.H Francke of the Moravian Mission, who during his travels through Ladakh made several early notes on the rock carvings in the regions (Francke 1914).

Of further interest, and especially for this thesis, are the preliminary studies of Henri-Paul Francfort, Daniel Klodzinski and Georges Mascle. They show through a selection of rock carvings that tribes of the steppic groups were present in Ladakh, Zaskar and western Tibet from the Bronze Age to at least the 4th century B.C (Francfort, Klodzinski & Mascle 1992:147).

In more recent times, an NGO, the “Upper Indus Rock Art Society” (UIRAS) has been started with its headquarters at “Central Institute of Buddhist Studies” (CIBS) in Leh. This has been done to ensure interest and involvement of local communities from all parts in the exploration and documentation of rock carvings so that the project will attain a satisfactory outcome. This is mainly due to the initiative of the Mr. Shiv Darshan Singh Jamwal, an Indian Police Service officer presently posted as SSP Vigilance of Jammu, who has been working on the subject since 2001. Mr. Jamwal has taken the rock art of Ladakh “under his wings”, and helped preserving the art from the looming destruction of the art due to road building and general vandalism, which I will return to in the very last chapter of the thesis.

Hopefully, this thesis will help creating an enhanced interest in the rock art of Ladakh, and in the end contribute to keeping the carvings preserved for future generations of rock art researchers.

Chapter 2: Theoretic approaches

2.1 Introduction

During my fieldwork in Ladakh, I often asked the local people what they associated with the mountain goat, due to the large number of carvings I had observed in Taru Thang. What does the mountain goat symbol mean to you? The recurring answer was that it brings good luck. Why? Why does the mountain goat represent good luck? While the answers given differed from person to person, a common essence could be withdrawn: The mountain goats symbolic value is its natural grace and stance, its agility and skills at evading predators and survive in the rugged mountainous areas of the region. This is one of the reasons the Ladakhi Scouts, the local military troop, have the mountain goat as their symbol. The natural inherent values of the mountain goats represent a cultural group of people associating themselves with the animal.

In this chapter I will present theories which can be used to discuss whether rock carvings and paintings of animals can be seen as natural symbols expressing and explaining differences and dichotomies within the culture. My theoretic starting points will be *totemism* and the works of the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, and in particular the books “Totemism” (1969) and “The Savage Mind” (1966). According to Lévi-Strauss, there are two ways of thinking: the modern and scientific way of thinking and a “primitive” way of thinking. To demonstrate the differences between the two modes of thinking, Lévi-Strauss introduced the concept of *bricolage*. I will look into how Lévi-Strauss suggests that so-called primitive cultures structure and explain the world around them by using differences found between objects, animals and plants in the natural world as an expression of social differences. The central point in Lévi-Strauss’ theory is that cultural phenomena is given their meaning by being organized in contrasting categories, so-called binary oppositions, which will be explained further in this chapter. Simplified, I will explain how animals that already exist in the local environment not necessarily were pictured in rock art because they were good to eat, but because they were good to think with (Lévi-Strauss 1962, 1966). I have chosen to include these theoretic approaches because I believe there are indications in the ethnographic material suggesting that the Dardic speaking people of north-western India, north Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan turned animals in their local environment into symbols in an attempt at

explaining and understanding the world and society in which they live. I will apply these theoretic approaches on the ethnographic material and on the rock art of Taru Thang.

2.2 Structuralism

Next to Marxism, structuralism was the most important source of inspiration for the post-processual turn archaeology took in the 1980s, changing the way material culture was perceived (Håland & Håland 1999:9, Olsen 2002:194). Still, the development of structuralism in archaeology can not simply be explained through the post-processual turn. The French archaeologist André Leroi-Gourhan made use of structuralist theories as early as in the 1960s in his analysis of the cave paintings of Southern France (Leroi-Gourhan 1968, 1982), closely connected with Lévi-Strauss' analysis of myths. Other early examples of structuralism being used in archaeological research can be seen through David Lewis-Williams study of South African rock art (Lewis-Williams 1983). Still, structuralism was not widely recognized as a usable theoretic alternative in archaeology until the 1980s (Olsen 2002:194-195). I will return to both Leroi-Gourhan and Lewis-Williams rock art research later in the chapter.

2.3 Totemism in Rock Art

Rock art was earlier often interpreted as being part of the so-called hunting magic paradigm, where the single rock art figures were analyzed and believed depicted because of the hunters and gatherers communities' basic needs. The figures were only seen in relation with each other when the depictions could be interpreted as part of a scene, and the scenes were interpreted as an expression for man's struggle for survival. The individual animal figures were believed to represent food, and the more abstract figures were objectified and interpreted as tools, buildings etc. (Hesjedal 1990:133). As we shall see, this perspective was challenged by the introduction of other theories where the rock art images no longer were seen as representing a primal wish for food, but as symbols whose function was based on another need, the need to understand and structure the world. In other words, the so-called primitive cultures had other more intellectual needs than simply ensuring survival.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, explorers and ethnographers in Australia and in North America told of a strange phenomenon: The indigenous inhabitants identified themselves with various animal species. A person claiming "I am an eagle" didn't seem logic to the explorers,

and the statement was explained by pointing out the so-called primitive people's lack of rational way of thinking. Over time, anthropologists developed an interest in the phenomenon and interpreted it as a form of primitive, animistic religion (Frazer 1963:533, Olsen 2002:294). In the beginning of the 20th century, the totemic debate was central in anthropology, and in 1910 Sir James Frazer's "Totemism and Exogamy" was published. Frazer presented the known facts about totemism, as an attempt to establish the term as a system and explaining its origin (Frazer 1935).

When functionalism won scientific ground, the interpretations changed to seeing totemism as an expression for practical and biological needs related to the different species' economic significance for the various cultural groups. In most societies where the people are dependent on hunting wild animals and gathering wild plants, the humans will at all times maintain a ritual relationship to those animals and plants. Totemism, according to functionalist theories, is a special development of the general ritual relationship between humans and natural species (Radcliffe-Brown 1976:117-125). It was believed that when societies became separated in different totemic groups, the groups would establish a specialized ritual association with one or more of the societies' sacred animal or plant species. The group's totems would still be held as sacred for the whole society, but be of special ritual significance for the segment it was totem for (Hesjedal 1990:152).

It wasn't until 1951, when the British social anthropologist Alfred Radcliffe-Brown published the article "The Comparative Method in Social Anthropology" (1951) that the interest for totemism was renewed. The article became the starting point for Claude Lévi-Strauss, whose work would change the concept and understanding of totemism (Hesjedal 1990:148). He tried to generalize the functionalist approach to totemism that up to this point was the accepted norm. Radcliffe-Brown applied the term totemism to what he explained as the ritual expression for the intimate connection between the social systems and the physical environment (Leach 1970:40, Hesjedal 1990: 151-152). The fundament of Radcliff-Brown's article was the Australian tribal communities of New South Wales, organized in matrilineal exogamic groups called *Eaglehawk* and *Crow*. On the Queen Charlotte isles in British Columbia a similar pattern could be seen amongst the Haida people, where the groups were named *Eagle* and *Raven*. The mythic fundament concerning these birds were so similar that Radcliffe-Brown suggested that if we were to follow the criteria proposed by diffusionism, there existed "evidence" historically connecting Australia and North-America (Radcliffe-

Brown 1951:15-17). Instead Radcliffe-Brown suggests that totemism is a part of our ability to think in oppositions, and that the same underlying structure that governs our mind also governs totemism. Radcliffe-Brown maintains that the ritualization of relations between humans and animals is part of a more general frame than totemism, from which he proposes totemism has derived. This ritual attitude is documented amongst societies without totemic beliefs, and shows according to Radcliffe-Brown that these modes of behaviour are found universally in hunting societies (Radcliffe-Brown 1951). When social segmentation is produced, ritual and religious segmentation will follow automatically. Lévi-Strauss demonstrates this through examples drawn from Roman Catholicism, where the worship of saints developed together with the organization of parishes and religious individualization, the same tendency we can see amongst hunter- and gather societies (Lévi-Strauss 1962:131).

The economic functionalistic interpretation was further challenged when it turned out the so-called primitive cultures had totems involving non-animalistic, inedible substances like corpses, vomit and female hair, inappropriate to the functionalist theories. Lévi-Strauss, building on Radcliffe-Brown's theories, points out another side of totemism: Animals and plants are not necessarily chosen as totems because they are good to eat, but because they are valuable tools used for *thinking*. The totems are useful tools in helping the cultures to "think" social differences and relationships. By making use of existing differences found in the culture's natural habitat, it is possible to express and explain the concrete differences in the society (Olsen 2002:205). Lévi-Strauss suggests through numerous ethnographic examples that the knowledge and ritual interest the so-called primitive people have in animals and plants is not necessarily a result of their economic value, but a result of the human need for understanding and structuring the world around them (Hesjedal 1990:156, Lévi-Strauss 1978:16).

The totemic expressions are in other words not produced to establish a link between the cultural group and the totem, but to think a set of cultural features or cultural differences in relation to a set of natural features. Therefore, what matters is not the relationship between group A and the totem, but between group A and group B, C and D. These similarities and differences can be understood as relations between species in the group's natural environment. Totemism can as such be seen as a means of manifesting a relationship between two series, one which is natural and the other which is cultural (Deliège 2004:77, Olsen 2002:205).

Totemism, according to Lévi-Strauss, can be explained as a “concrete logic” adapted to establish analogies between the structure of nature and the structure of society (Lévi-Strauss 1969:50). The relationships between animals are symbolic expressions for the relationships between groups of people. Animals possess various degrees of differences and similarities: While some are related, others are not, while some are friendly, some are hostile (Olsen 2002:205). But why does totemism so often call on elements from the natural world such as animals and plants? Radcliffe-Brown proposes that every object and every event which is of importance for the material and spiritual benefit of a society tends to become an object of ritual attitude: If a group chose an animal to serve as a social symbol for their society, it is because the animal was already an object of ritual attitude before totemism (Lévi-Strauss 1962:131).

The concept of totemism is relevant for the rock art of Taru Thang, not necessarily because the creators of the rock art physically identified themselves with the animals which the carvings depict, but because the animals’ natural habitat relate to a set of differences and dichotomies that can be observed in the social world. In this context it is therefore more rewarding to see totemism as a *model* for interpretation rather than a determined theoretic framework.

2.4 Bricolage

Lévi-Strauss introduced the image of the *bricoleur* in his major work on systems of classifications in small scale non-western societies (1966). The term *bricoleur* refers to the vagabonds of the French countryside, and whose closest equivalent is a do-it-yourself person, performing various patching up, repairing and construction tasks with whatever material happens to be at hand. The *bricoleur* does not use specialized tools or materials, but makes use of what is already available in his surroundings: a screw may be used when a nail is lacking, a hacksaw is substituted by a wood saw. The results and finishing of tasks engaged by the *bricoleur* supplies him or her with fresh or renewed tools and materials from the various construction and repairing projects he or she engages in. These left over tools and instruments are kept because they may be of use in later projects and at later dates, rather than in a particular set of future tasks in view. Bricolage is the act of using and adapting existing elements in fresh ways (Lévi-Strauss 1969:50, Olsen 2002:205). The term is a central component in what Lévi-Strauss calls the “untamed mind”: it permits means to be

transformed and vice versa. Associations and meanings are created through bricolage and building on each other. Through this activity, the untamed mind remains fundamentally different to the contemporary scientific mind, the western consciousness and the seemingly rational way of thinking related to industrialized societies, dependant on certain specializations and materials. According to Lévi-Strauss, a fundamental difference between the bricoleur and western thought is conceived through the terms of goal orientation, restricted by differing forms of logic (Lévi-Strauss 1969:50-52, 1966:19)

As for the engineer and the bricoleur, the execution of a task is dependant on prior sets of both theoretical and practical knowledge, restricting possible solutions to the task at hand. However, the engineer will try to surpass and transcend these constraints while the bricoleur will happily work within the frames of the existing operational set. According to Lévi-Strauss, the difference is caused by the fact that the engineer employs an abstract and theoretical symbol set, while the bricoleur employs a preset sign system (Lévi-Strauss 1969:50, Tilley 1991:91). Lévi-Strauss proposes that the fundamental difference between the engineer and the bricoleur is that the engineer employs concepts where the bricoleur employs signs (ibid.).

According to Christopher Tilley, the sign systems work by a process of reorganization. Sign systems are transformational in nature and does not renew or extend the set being worked on. These systems demand human culture to be actively imposed on reality rather than separated from it, according to abstract principles. Thus, the bricoleur communicates with the signs as well as through their medium. The engineer orders the world, generalizes and solves the problems through a science of the abstract while the bricoleur's knowledge, on the other hand, is a science of the concrete. These are different ways in which to approach the world, to give sense to it and solve the problems humans meet in life. Although the systems are different, they do not necessarily replace each other. Bricolage is of importance in all societies and to Lévi-Strauss it is a distinct human quality to think in this manner, when one is not following a restrictive series of "scientific" rules (Lévi-Strauss 1966, Tilley 1991:97). In the so-called primitive societies, the "savage mind" can only use what is at hand. Like the bricoleur who makes use of whatever is lying around, the "savage mind" is forced to make use of leftover, bits and pieces, but this does not in any way stand in the way of achieving results (Deliège 2004:83). The next section will demonstrate how the totemism and the concept of bricolage might effect the interpretation and understanding of rock art.

2.5 Totemism and bricolage in rock art

Lévi-Strauss' theories concerning totemism and bricolage, make way for new approaches in interpreting material cultures. With its many animal images, rock art is an obvious place to apply a totemic approach. The animals are depicted because they can be transformed into potent symbols, and by looking at the rock art as cognitive technology, helping cultures in making the abstract concrete, the rock art can express ideal social relationships between cultural groups and establish social structures (Lévi-Strauss 1969, Olsen 2002:206).

Christopher Tilley (1991) argues that the rock art site of Nämforsen and northern Scandinavian rock art sites can be explained and interpreted making use of totemism and bricolage. He proposes the site can be seen as a prime example of the untamed and “non-domesticated” human mind at work and a classic case of bricolage, involving a series of perspectives in which the human and the natural world reflect each other and help to establish each other, as if reflections in a set of mirrors (Tilley 1991:98). Tilley claims that the carvings actively make use of features drawn from the natural and cultural world, and thus create and maintain differentiation in the society they derive from. As such the symbols are being manipulated as parts of a sign system with connotative meanings going beyond themselves, expressing social differences. One of the main points of Tilley's example is that there are ready-made differences in the natural world, those existing between animal species and those existing between cultural phenomena. The natural species were being employed to map out and help to sustain and differentiate between different social groups at Nämforsen (ibid.). Tilley attempts to show that the relationship between designs signifies sets of social relations between groups of hunter-fisher-gatherers using the site of Nämforsen to encode information. Excluding the depictions showing humans, the six other design categories fall into two different groups, one on the basis of species differentiation and the other in terms of differences between objects created by humans. Tilley claims both these sets are linked back together on a metaphorical level in terms of signified natural elements in which each natural or cultural set reflects the other on another level (fig. 2.1) (Tilley 1991:99).

Tilley suggests that each of the designs at Nämforsen signifies a different hunter-gatherer clan using the site, and that the differences between the two design categories (nature and culture) are based on species and object differentiation, perhaps subdivided into three clans, each of which natural element is related to a cultural object. Tilley suggests the relationship being

symbolically represented on the carving surface, is that *elk is to fish is to bird as shoe sole is to boat is to tool* (Tilley 1991:99).

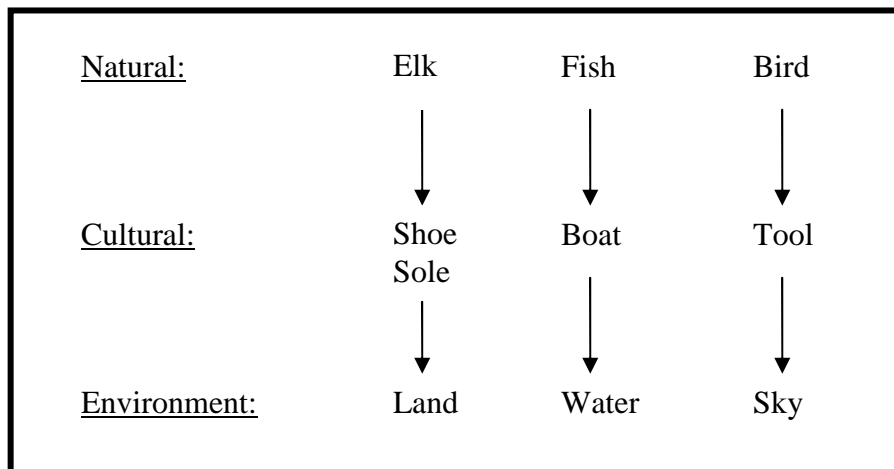


Fig. 2.1: The natural, cultural and environment in the rock carvings of Nämforsen

There are no obvious logical problems in connecting elk with land or fish with water. However, birds are ambiguous as they can live both in the sky, land and water. The same applies for the cultural designs: shoe soles are only useful on land and boats while tools can be employed both on land, in the water or in the air. Using this classificatory logic, Tilley shows why human designs do not occur on their own as isolated depictions on individual surfaces (ibid.). As we are dealing with a cultural logic making use of the concrete and the particular (individual species and cultural objects) as a means to map out social relations, representational designs were chosen rather than abstract depictions, because they are better at thinking differences with. According to Tilley, the difference between elk and fish was used to express social difference between hunter-gatherers in terms of both activities and subsistence. Social difference is thus created and maintained through mapping onto human groups concrete differences in the real world and the cultural group's environment (Tilley 1991:100). This point is of importance to my thesis, explaining how the rock art symbols are connected with nature and culture. Or more specifically, how the symbol (the natural) is manifested in the concrete (the rock art) to express and explain differences in the societies (the cultural).

As shown, the so-called primitive world of hunter-gatherers is not necessarily governed by instincts and basic needs for survival, but quite the contrary by requirements of an intellectual ordering of things. The mind of the hunter-gatherers is concerned with ordering of the world

around them, the society and the universe. The demand for ordering the world is a fundamental feature, where each thing must be in the proper place: any classification is better than chaos. And as the “savage mind” can only make use of what is at hand, like the handyman who make use of what he finds around, the “savage thinking” is a science of the concrete (Deliège 2004:83). It is important to make clear, however, that to say such a way of thinking is disinterested and that it is an intellectual way of thinking *does not mean it is equal* to a scientific way of thinking. Bricolage remains different because its aim is to reach, by the shortest way possible, a general and total understanding of the universe. It is a way of thinking that implies that if you do not understand everything, you can not explain everything, which contradicts a scientific way of thinking which proceeds step by step, trying to give explanations for very limited phenomena, and then continue on to other kinds of phenomena. *Scientific* thinking makes us able to achieve mastery over nature, while *myths* do not give us the opportunity to give man more material power over nature. On the other hand, it gives man another very important thing: the illusion that he can, and indeed *does* understand the universe (Lévi-Strauss 2001:13).

2.6 Myths

Theories concerning myths have like totemic theories primarily been seen within a functional and/or symbolic perspective. Myths were viewed as verbal expressions of ritual practice which could be used to maintain the social order and express the social realities and were as such closely related to the reality. Alternatively, it could be written off as mere fantasy and a “primitive thought process” contrasting the scientific logic (Tilley 1990:9-10). Lévi-Strauss, however, proposes the myth is a reality *sui generis* that must be studied in *itself*, without reference to any context, whether historical, sociological or physiological (Lévi-Strauss 1969:98). The myths are according to Lévi-Strauss, the very exercise of the savage mind (Lévi-Strauss 1966). To him the myths exist for themselves and are never tied up to the persons who relate them, and everything must be explained myth by myth. The myth is a closed reality and Lévi-Strauss suggests that the myth is a category of mind, and one of the main and deepest expressions of the thinking process (Deliège 2004:96-97). To Lévi-Strauss, myths and science are parallels, although different ways to obtain knowledge of the world: myths are a prime example of bricolage (Tilley 1990:10). In the myths nothing is restricted, anything can happen. The myth is not limited by any rule of logic or continuity and extraordinary things and events become ordinary. Animals have sexual intercourse with

humans, gods and heroes walk the earth, people are born from the earth, sky or water and animals and spirits talk and act like the humans. For Lévi-Strauss, there is a meaning, although hidden, in the mythic material and so-called “non-sense” (Deliège 2004:97). The following myth shows the close connection between the myth and the way cultural groups make use of it to turn “non-sense” into valuable information so that the cultures from which the myth derive, gain knowledge of the world around them.

The aborigines from South Australia say that the kangaroo and the wombat, which are the principal game of the culture, once were good friends. One day, the wombat began making a house for himself (the animal lives in holes in the ground), and the kangaroo made fun of him for doing so, thus annoying him. But when rain fell for the first time, the wombat sheltered in his house and refused to make room for the kangaroo claiming it was too small for both to fit in. The kangaroo became furious and struck the wombat on the head with a big stone, flattening his skull. The wombat retaliated and threw a spear at the kangaroo which fixed itself at the base of the backbone. This is the way things have been ever since. The wombat has a flat skull and lives in burrows in the ground, and the kangaroo has a long tail and lives in the open (Lévi-Strauss 1969:159-160).

The story might seem childish and appear as “non-sense”, but if dozens of these tales are examined, we will find they have the same themes: The similarities and differences of the animal- or plant species are translated into terms of friendship and conflict and solidarity and opposition. The world of animal life is represented through social relations similar to those of human society, and share as such similar traits as the concept of totemism (ibid.).

David Lewis-Williams works in Southern Africa (1983) provides a fruitful example of how animals in rock art, which otherwise has been interpreted as depictions of food, can be given new meaning through the use of myths and ethnography. The Eland so frequently depicted in South African rock art is the largest and fattest of all antelopes and is the most easily hunted animal. Its meat is highly valued and an eland can provide enough food for a large number of people for several days, and the Bushmen are very impressed by all the qualities connected with the eland and talk a great deal about it. These evidences alone seem to be more than enough to explain why there are so many eland images in the South African rock art, were it not for the ethnography and myths, providing additional information, showing that the eland was important in more ways than simply as food. The eland features in many myths and rites

which clearly show it as an important symbol in Bushman thought. Lewis-Williams suggests that it is this symbolic function rather than its value as food which explains the frequent occurrence of eland in the rock art. To support this suggestion, he turns to the complex mythic material recorded in a number of versions from different informants. The informants focused on the creation and the death of the eland: The eland was believed to be grown from a shoe thrown in a waterhole by a *mantis* demi-god or trickster-deity. Every day the mantis would feed the eland honey. One day however, the mantis found the eland dead, killed by *meerkats*. The mantis was furious and shot an arrow at the meerkats, in order to kill them. The arrow, however, was deflected back at him and he had to dodge it. Engaging in melee combat, the meerkats threw the mantis on the eland's horn, and the mantis fled, beaten (Lewis-Williams 2002: 76-78, Lewis-Williams 1983:45).

The behaviour of a dying eland is quite striking, with deeply sunk and hollow eyes the dying eland watches the approaching enemies, the animal's body trembles and it breathes heavily and soon its blood will gush from its nostrils. Some of these characteristics are accurately depicted by the Bushman artists, and Lewis-Williams suggests that the dying eland's behaviour is remarkably like the behaviour of the medicine men entering trance, and therefore he draws the conclusion that the death of an eland can be comparable with the "death" of a man in trance (Lewis-Williams 1983:44-51). Simplified, it can be said that the eland is a metaphor humans resort to as a means to change themselves, and each new painting with its own variation added new power to the Bushmen's concept of the medicine man, playing an important role in controlling people's response to the power of the medicine men. Lewis-Williams therefore argues that all the paintings of the dying eland in some way imbues the medicine men with eland-potency (Lewis-Williams 1983:52).

As can be seen in the example, myth construction is a fruitful example of acts of bricolage, as it makes use of the concrete features of the world, plants, human social relations, animals, on foreign and old myths to construct logic of the world. The myths are not merely produced in the minds of the people but, according to Lévi-Strauss and Tilley, aid in the very *formation* of these minds. As such, the study of myths can provide a quite unique opportunity to study the mind. In the world of myths everything is possible, it is a place filled with supernatural beings, creatures and happenings and seems to perform no obvious practical function and provide no information of immediate use. This does not, however, imply that the myth is just

“decorative” or a “myth for the myth’s sake”, but has fundamentally to do with making sense and ordering social reality (Tilley 1990:21).

The myths often, if not always, have various known versions, which have caused problems for interpretations. Lévi-Strauss (1967) claims the various myth versions form a system within a given cultural zone, and that it is possible to discover an underlying structure through this diversity. Lévi-Strauss proposes that the myths, through their transformative nature, are the opposite of poetry, which does not tolerate any transformation at all, but whose form must remain unaltered. For myth on the other hand, transformation is almost unavoidable, the form varies constantly, from one narrator to the next and from generation to generation. Still, what the analysis is supposed to show is the structure remains unchanged despite the countless versions of the same myth (Deliège 2004:98, Lévi-Strauss 1967:210-218). One of the central points of Lévi-Strauss theories concerning myths is that myths can only be understood in relation with other myths. A myth is understood through the “language” of myths it is a part of, and it is important to compare various myths to find the similarities exceeding the social context in which they appear in. The mythic meaning does not descend from isolated elements, but derive from the way its elements are combined (Olsen 2002:201).

Although Leroi-Gourhan did not have access to myths when analysing the Palaeolithic cave paintings of Southern France, he was in fact able to extract *mythic* information from the rock art. Earlier, the paintings in caves like Lascaux were seen as “art for the sake of art” and as isolated pictures or as parts of rituals involving hunting magic. Leroi-Gourhan was of a different opinion, proposing that the pictures were not randomly placed hunting figures but rather specific chosen signs placed in specific chosen positions on the cave walls and in relation to each other. He claimed it was important to see the figures as symbols and not as mere portraits, prioritizing the connotative meaning of the figures over the denotative. The paintings were, in other words, seen as a system of signs, where the value of studying the relations between pictures is more important than studying each picture in isolation (Leroi-Gourhan 1982:74-76, Olsen 2002:200).

To understand the underlying structure of the cave paintings, it is not sufficient to study the paintings in one cave, but according to Leroi-Gourhan to compare a greater number of manifestations. Leroi-Gourhan calls this a *mythographic* structure, a drawn myth. The cave walls become pages which upon these mythographic texts are written. He examined and

organized 60 different caves in Southern France with more than 6000 figures. He separated the caves into various parts and divided figures into two categories. The next analytic step in the process was to see how the different motif categories related to the various cave spaces. He found that the “female” group often represented dying or wounded animals, while “male” symbols represented weapons and predators, and that the two groups of images each occupied their own space in the caves (Leroi-Gourhan 1982:45-73, Olsen 2002:201-203).

Leroi-Gourhan’s mythographic work on the Southern France cave paintings might be interpreted as how life and death contradicts and depends on each other at the same time. Through life it is unavoidable to cause death: man, predators and weapon stand in opposition to woman, prey and wounded animals and people. To maintain life depend on two fundamental positions, one that causes death and pain and one that suffers pain and death. Through this interpretation, the cave mythography can be seen as a cognitive attempt to overcome the fundamental and inevitable opposition between life and death and thus as an attempt to explain something which in general is considered unintelligible (Olsen 2002:203). This leads us to another important theoretic concept of structuralistic thought.

2.7 Binary oppositions

The central point in Lévi-Strauss’ cultural structural theory is that the cultural phenomena is given their meaning by being organized in contrasting categories, so-called binary oppositions. The oppositions can be between life – death, man – woman, raw – cooked, light – dark and high – low. Each concept is only given meaning through how they relate to their opposite, their negation. As seen through the example of Leroi-Gourhan and the cave paintings of Southern France, life only gives meaning in relation with death, and in the same way light only gives meaning in relation with dark, man in relation to woman etc (Dark 2002:182-183, Lévi-Strauss 1994, Olsen 2002:201-203). Lévi-Strauss claims the way people think is based on such divisions of their surroundings in contrasts. He argues that the primary binary opposition which myths (and more broadly all other social productions) articulate, is that between nature and culture. The opposition includes everything in the perceived world like animals and plants standing outside humanity and its products. These binary oppositions stand in tension. According to Tilley, the uniqueness of the humanity resides in the culture, what which is not natural but socially constructed. However, this construction is in the end to

be discovered in nature, reaching the conclusion that *the cultural is natural*. The relations that exist in nature are used to produce the cultural products (Tilley 1990:22).

I will not refrain from making use of the dichotomy between nature and culture in my thesis, although the opposition is debated. Basically, the critique of the nature versus culture dichotomy is based on the assumptions that the two concepts can not essentially stand alone, and that it is a partly false division as it always will be open for different interpretations to where nature ends and culture takes over. However, the binary opposition between nature and culture is in my opinion still important and a viable instrument in explaining phenomenon such as rock art, an in particular when used together with the concepts of totemism and bricolage.

2.8 Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have introduced the concepts of totemism, bricolage, myths and binary oppositions and shown how these tools might be used as means to interpret rock carvings. By associating animals, plants or objects found in their surroundings with differences found in their own society, people can structure and understand the world and universe in which they live. As acquiring food is an essential element in human lives, making sense in the world where you live is also a basic need found amongst humans. According to Lévi-Strauss, the people whom we usually considered completely submissive to the need of not starving are perfectly capable of disinterested thinking. They are moved by the need or the desire to understand the world around them, the nature and their society. This way they proceed by intellectual means in a similar way as a philosopher or even a scientist can and would do (Lévi-Strauss 2001:12). My aim will be to apply these theoretic and interpretative tools on the rock art material of Taru Thang and further with the ethnographic material introduced in Chapter 5. The idea is not to blindly implement the theories of totemism, bricolage and myths on the rock art material, but to propose a theory *based* on the concepts. For instance, *totemism* as referring to a type of religion (Layton 2000:169) will not be attempted forced upon the cultures in question, but be used as model.

Chapter 3: The Rock Art of Taru Thang

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will introduce Taru Thang, and describe the environment in which the rock art is found. It will include a description of the landscape and the site, and I will try to produce a clear image of how Taru Thang looks like to make it easier for the reader to understand how the site might have been experienced by the producers of the rock art and the inhabitants of Ladakh today. In this chapter I will also introduce the rock art material, which will be divided into five groups to separate the different types of images from each other. It is important to keep in mind, however, that these interpretations are based on my subjective perceptions, and by comparing the rock art figures from Taru Thang with those from other areas of Central Asia. This section will also include rock art size measurements, facing direction, pecking and carving depths etc.

Mr. Tsering Wangzhuk of the Archaeological Survey of India in Ladakh informed me that many of the rock carvings in the region were most likely made by the Dardic speaking groups of people during the summer and spring when they brought their livestock to the higher mountain pastures. According to Tsering Wangzhuk, the Dards made these rock carvings on specific places in the landscape, “base camp” areas with certain important features such as access to water, grass for their livestock and game animals for food. As we shall see, Taru Thang fulfils all these criteria, along with several other places along the Indus Valley in Ladakh. Mr. Tsering Wangzhuk could for instance mention rock carving sites near Khalatse, Nurla, Alchi, and Rizong, sites probably also connected with the pastoral nomadic activities of Dardic speaking groups.

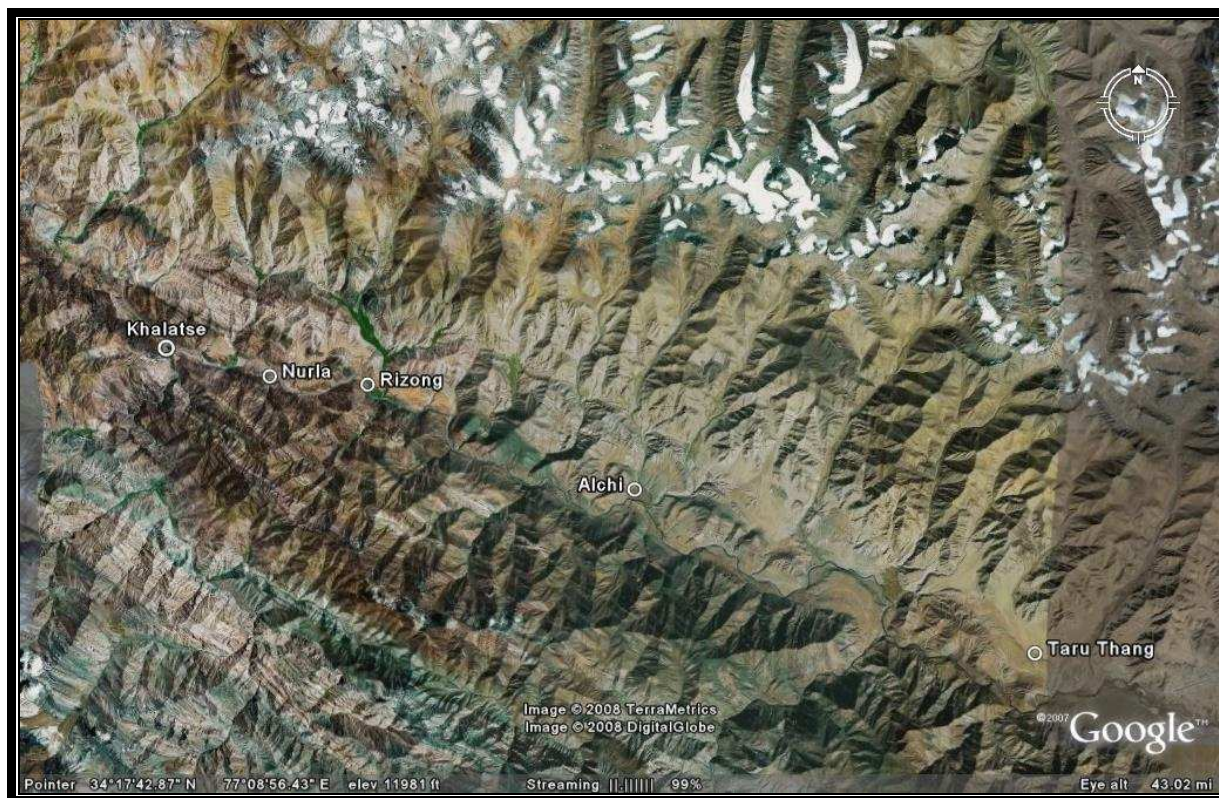


Fig. 3.1: Satellite photo showing the rock art sites near Khalatse, Nurla, Rizong, Alchi and Taru.

3.2 Taru Thang

The main road, coming from Leh follows the Indus River closely and is slowly climbing upwards until it reaches a flat plateau at about 3350 meters after 20 km. The view is spectacular, as the fertile patches of green vegetation sharply contrasts the barren mountainsides and snowy mountain tops. Following the road for another 3 km, one reaches Taru Thang on the right hand side. At the first glance, it is rather unnoticeable, seen as a barren field of rocks and sand, framed in by the Leh – Kargil road to the south and southwest, the mountains to the north and a steep brim of sand and rocks to the south. This natural barrier is shielding Taru Thang from the Indus River, lying 3 km south below the mound-like brim. To the west lies the small village of Taru and to the west the Buddhist monastery of Phyang. Lying in the Indus Valley in close proximity to the Indus River, the village of Taru and the village and monastery of Phyang are seen as green oasis in an environment that is otherwise wind-swept and barren. However, it is not the Indus River itself that provides the village and the field with water, but the mountain glaciers. During the spring and summer months the glaciers melt, creating streams or small rivers of water running down from the mountains. Such a small river, approximately between 4 and 5,5 meters deep can be found in

Taru Thang, coming from the village of Taru going all the way through the rock art site. Because of this river, the field of Taru Thang has sparse amount of vegetation spread between the rocks and boulders, where cattle can be seen grazing.

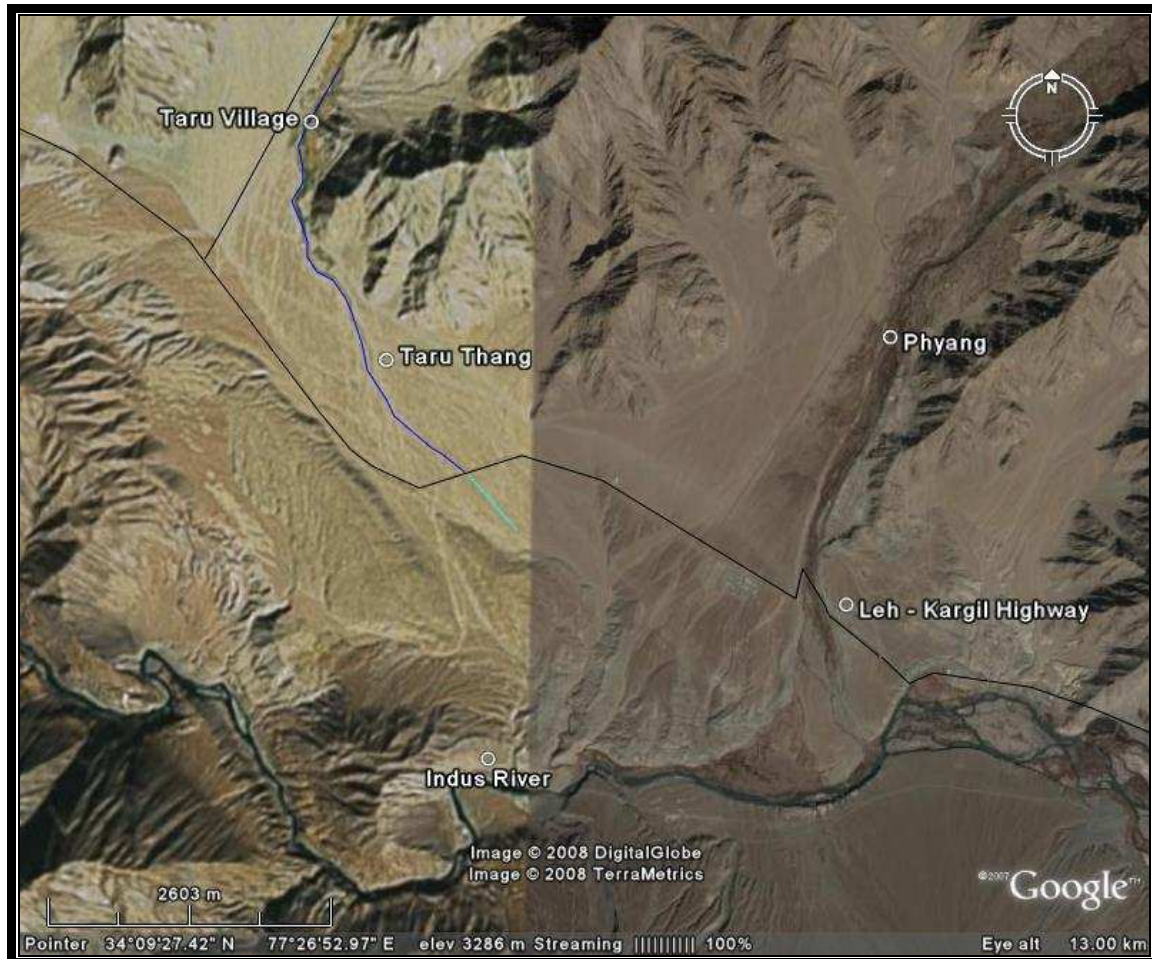


Fig. 3.2: Satellite photo showing Taru Thang. The left half of the map is blurred due to Google Earth resolution of the satellite photo.

The site measures 6,35 square km, limited by the road to the west and south, the mountains to the north and the village of Taru. I find this a viable border setting, as I could not locate more than three rock carvings on the southeast side of the road, and none west past Taru village. The lack of rock carvings probably has natural reasons, seeing as the field continuing past Taru does not display boulders and rocks suitable for making rock art, contrasting the area defined as Taru Thang. To a lesser degree this also goes for the area southeast of the road, closer to Phyang. Although this field do contain rocks and boulders, they appear less clustered and of smaller size than the ones in Taru Thang. These local differences might have been caused by natural reasons, but it is also possible industrial activity is to blame. Falling outside

of Taru Thang, which is protected by law, the rock art might have become victim of industrial projects, being that road building, house building or various military activities. I therefore find no reason to exclude the possibility that other areas, close to what I have limited to my research area, might have contained more rock art in the past. I will return to questions regarding the impending danger of rock art extinction in the very last part of the thesis.

3.3 The rock art of Taru Thang

The rock art is spread across the site, with a concentration area in the western and south-western part, close to the road and the small river. The amount of rock art decrease in density further east, and is near non existent close to Taru village. Some rock art panels consist of as many as 20 carvings and some as few as one single image. On panels with multiple rock art carvings, superimpositions might occur but definitely seem to be the exception rather than the norm. Mostly, each image occupies its own space, and even on boulders with many figures of various styles and varnishing, the carvings occupy their own space.

I discovered 288 carvings in Taru Thang during my two fieldworks. The rock art images display a variety of sizes with an average size of approximately 20 cm in both breadth and height. All the images were made on granite rocks or boulders covered with a dense crust of deep-brown, dark red or jet-black patina layer. The most favoured rocks are the ones which are darkest in colour and with a flat side to provide the most suitable canvas. They were made by scratching and/or with a pecking technique, and most carvings appear quite shallow, not exceeding 0,2 – 0,5 cm deep. Due to this, and cases of heavy varnishing, many of the carvings are difficult to spot and appear faded and hard to determine. The rock surfaces vary in size, and while some are small and diminutive, others are huge many sided boulders covered with numerous rock carvings. The majority of the rock carvings are found within a range of 150-250 metres from the small glacier melt water river, coming from the mountains and running all the way through the field.

3.4 Rock art motifs

I have divided the rock motifs in 5 groups, a simplification done due to this thesis' focus. The groups could have been made less general, but I fear that a more detailed division would be confusing and removed the focus from the main points of the thesis. I have chosen to base the

grouping of the rock carvings on variation in motifs rather than on styles and techniques due to the context of my work, thus leading to the following groups: 1: Mountain goat-motifs, subdivided into 1a (*ibex*) and 1b (*blue sheep/urial*), 2: Anthropomorphs, 3: Carnivorous animals, 4: Buddhist/pre Buddhist carvings and 5: Undefined/Miscellaneous carvings.

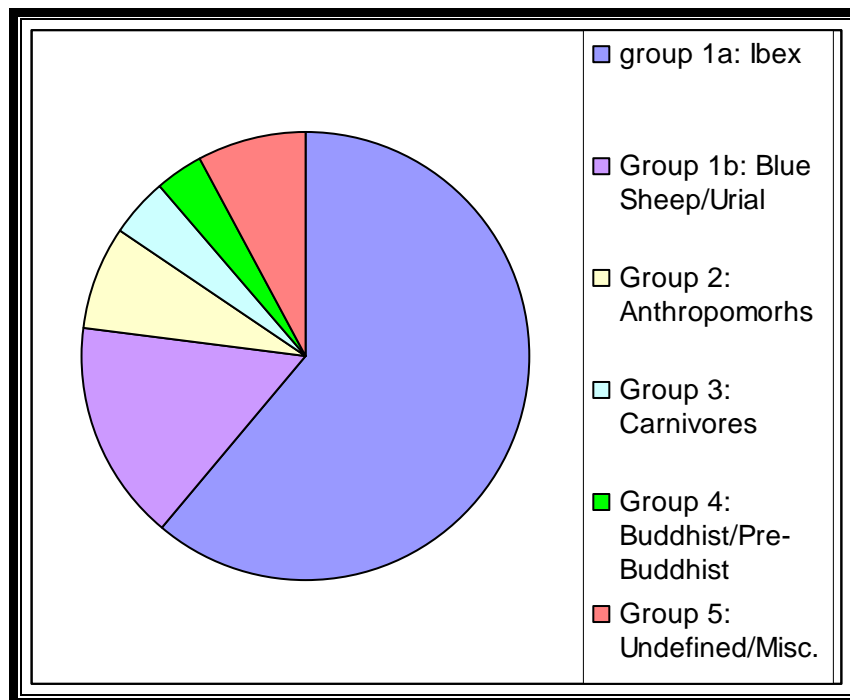


Fig. 3.3: Chart of the rock art motif distribution of Taru Thang

Group 1. Mountain goat

Group 1, the mountain goat is the most common motif found in Taru Thang, making out about 80% of the total number of carvings. As it is the dominating motif of the site, it is also the dominating theme in this thesis, being the link between Taru Thang, the supernatural world of the Dards and their social structure, which I will return to in later chapters. The carvings vary in size and styles. While some consist of simple, scratched lines others are elaborated, fully pecked and filled.

1a: The common feature of the overwhelming number of ibex carvings are the exaggerated horns stretching back almost touching the tail of the animal. The tails are almost without exceptions curved, sometimes in a full “loop”. The ibex images are depicted in profile, sometimes in a bitriangular manner, showing the body of the animal as an “X”. The bitriangular carvings are considerably narrower in the middle of the body, and we get the

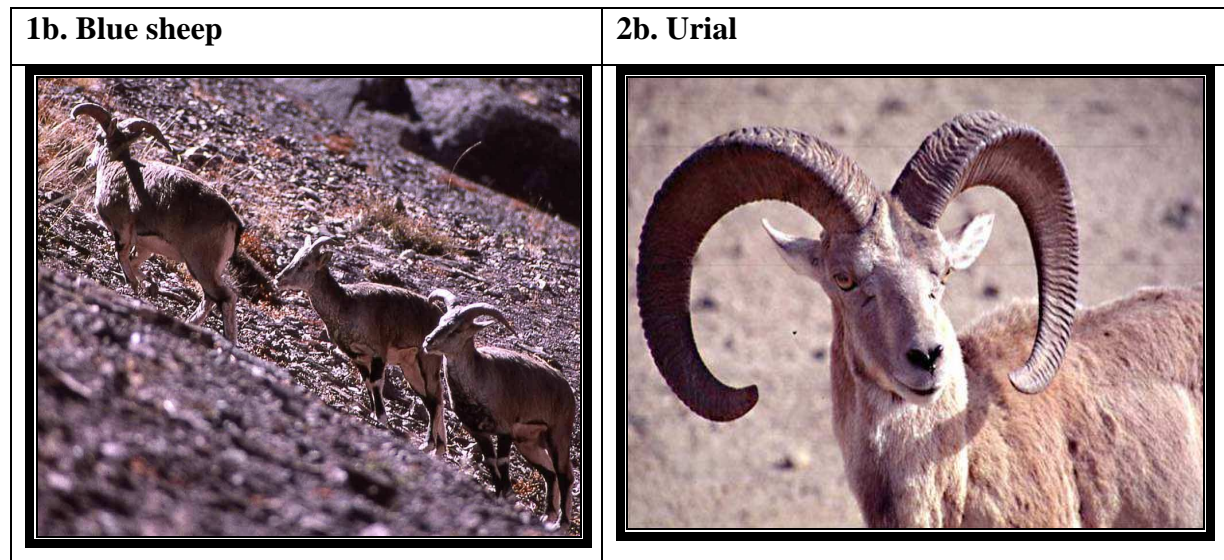
impression that it is composed of two triangles joined together at the middle. The images can be compared with that of an hourglass lying on its side. The ibex carvings are of a great variety of shapes and styles, and while some appear old and weathered and heavily varnished other seem recent and with little or no varnishing.



1. <http://christian.pourre.free.fr/p640/ibex.jpg>

Fig. 3.4: Photo of an ibex

1b: The blue sheep/urial group consists of goat like carvings representing animals with smaller horns, often depicted frontally with horns curved to the sides. As with carvings of 1a, the 1b carvings vary in size and style. While some are small and simple others are big and more elaborately depicted. Some carvings made in the bitriangular manner also occur among this group, although not as frequently as with ibex carvings from group 1a. As with the former group, the carvings are of different shapes and made by different techniques (some are fully pecked and some are merely outlined). One can say there is little point in separating this group from 1a, but in my opinion the 1b motifs are representing a completely different animal than the ibex of 1a, a point that should not be missed out.



1. http://www.myhimalayas.com/ladakh_tso_moriri/images/blue_sheep_4.jpg
2. <http://www.nwfpwildlifedep.gov.pk/af-urial.jpg>

Fig 3.5: Photos of blue sheep and urial.

Group 2. Anthropomorphs

The images representing anthropomorphs are sometimes found in compositions involving hunting activities, where they are pictured armed with bows and arrows, aimed at one or more mountain goats. The hunting compositions reflect the same crucial moment of the hunt: Mountain goats are surrounded by two or more hunters accompanied by dogs, and the huntsmen have just fired, or are about to fire their arrows. The compositions express the tension of the situation during the last decisive moment, about to determine whether the hunt will turn out successfully or fruitless. Some of the hunting scenes show the hunters mounted on horses. The anthropomorphs are, however, not only restricted to hunting scenes. Some images seem to represent a ritual or mythical behaviour, where the anthropomorphs arms are stretched out to the sides, surrounded by mountain goats. In these images the anthropomorphs appear non-hostile and seem to interact with the wild mountain goats. This category also includes the so-called “centaurs”, half anthropomorph and half animal, here interpreted as supernatural beings, and will be explained later in the thesis.

Group 3. Carnivorous animals

Group 3 includes carnivorous animals depicted in the rock art. These carvings are mostly interpreted as dogs aiding the huntsmen in killing mountain goats, but some might represent wolves, and others snow leopards. Carvings of carnivorous animals in non-hunting compositions or scenes with anthropomorphs are interpreted as wolves or snow leopards while images associated with hunting scenes are interpreted as dogs.

Group 4. Buddhist/pre-Buddhist carvings

Group 4 includes different Buddhist and pre-Buddhist carvings. The Buddhist carvings consist of text, namely the Buddhist mantra *Ohm Mani Padme Hum* (“Hail to the Jewel in the Lotus”). The pre-Buddhist carvings refer in this context to carvings of pre-Buddhist *stūpas* (a religious structure called *chortens* in Ladakh), a sun symbol and counter clockwise svastikas.

Group 5. Undefined/miscellaneous

Group 5 consists of images that do not readily fall into any of the groups presented above. The images are either too damaged or too faded to be determined, or they display figures and shapes I can not identify adequately. That being said, many of the carvings within this category have features resembling the mountain goat images, but for various reasons not enough to fall within the specific groups presented. In other words, this group is a “round up” category for rock carvings I at this point can not decipher or assign to a specific category.

| | Example 1 | Example 2 | Example 3 | Example 4 |
|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1 | | | | |
| 2 | | | | |
| 3 | | | | |
| 4 | | | | |
| 5 | | | | |

Fig 3.6: The table shows various images belonging to the different groups of motifs. The numbers on the left going down indicates to which group of motifs the images belong.

3.5 Compositions

While some carvings appear as single images on the rock surfaces, not connected with any other rock carvings, others are put together in expressive compositions. Roughly, the rock art compositions of Taru Thang can be divided in 3 different categories.

Group 1: Hunting scenes

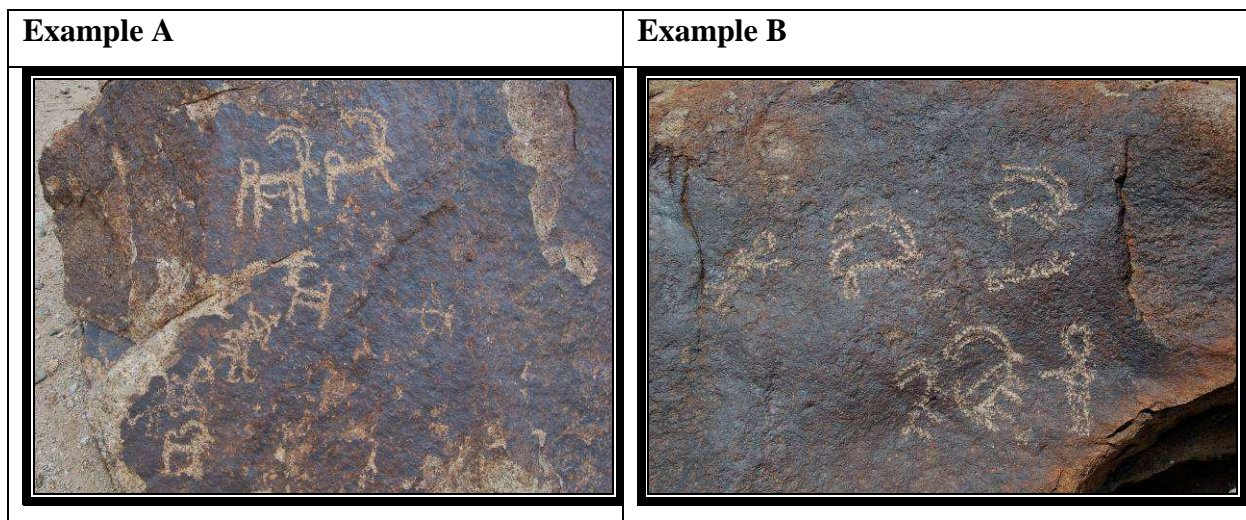


Fig. 3.7 (panel 7 & panel 3): Two different compositions showing hunting activity.

This group consists of hunting scenes where anthropomorphs armed with bows and arrows or guns are about to kill their prey, the mountain goats. The hunters are sometimes accompanied by dogs. Example A shows three hunters armed with bows stalking four ibex. Two hunters hunt by foot, while the third is mounted. Example B depicts two hunters armed with what I interpret as guns, about to kill four ibex. The depictions of hunters with bow and arrows and dogs are not rare, but compositions showing anthropomorphs with weapons and dogs but without prey is non-existent.

Group 2: Animal compositions

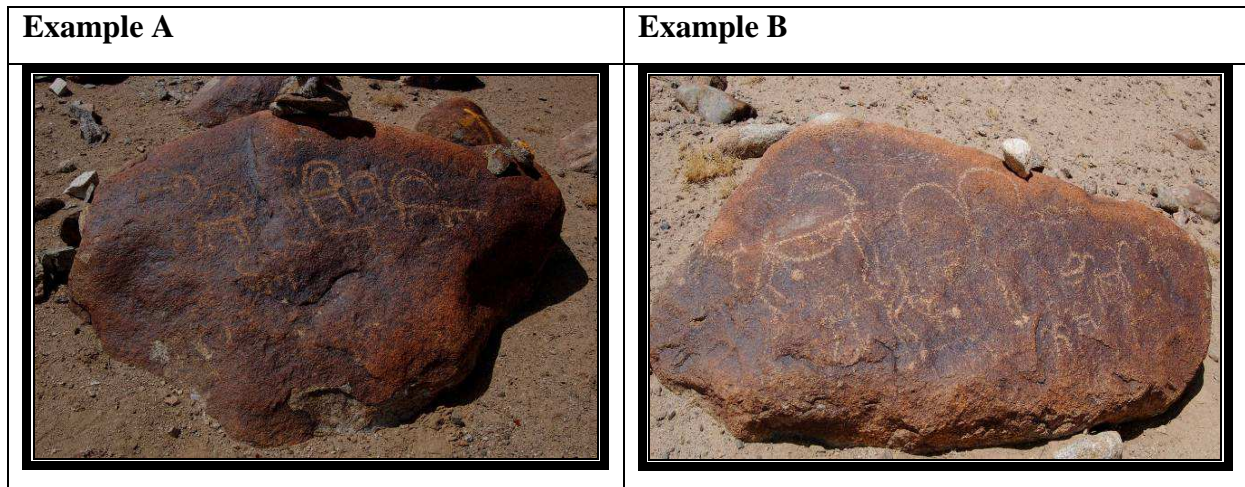


Fig. 3.8 (panel 6 & panel 4): Two compositions showing animal compositions with no anthropomorphs

This group contains only animal images. This is the dominating composition group, where animals are depicted in a non-hostile environment and often appear static. Ibex and blue sheep/urial are by far the most depicted animals. The compositions vary in style, and while some are elaborated and detailed, others are made in a simpler manner. Common for the compositions in group 2, is that the animals are depicted as if in a herd without human- or predator threats.

Group 3: Anthropomorphs and animals

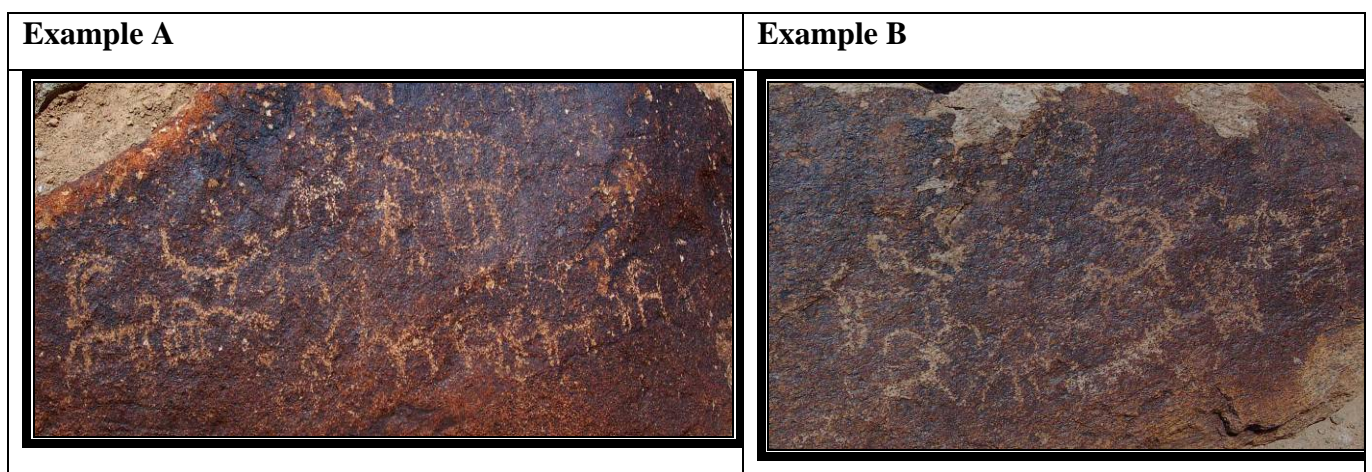


Fig. 3.9 (panel 9 & panel 1): Two compositions showing anthropomorphs and animals in non-hunting settings.

In the third group, we find compositions of anthropomorphs and animals where the anthropomorphs do not appear hostile. The compositions can both be interpreted as herding activities or as mytho-religious scenes, an important point which we will return to in chapter 6. In example A, the anthropomorph is surrounded by goats in the middle of the composition, standing besides a geometric symbol, possibly indicating some kind of structure. In example B, the anthropomorph can be seen in the rightmost part of the composition with his arms stretched out, holding an object which I will explain later.

3.6 The facing direction

There is a considerable regularity in the rock carving panels facing direction. As many as 75% of the panels are facing in a southern direction and 40% of the rock carving surfaces are facing south-east, a direction pointing towards and following the Indus River upstream and thus also the Indus Valley. Whether or not this is of noteworthy importance is uncertain, but as a southern direction is strikingly dominant it might have been an intentional choice by the creators of the art. Seeing as water in general is such a scarce resource in the dry environment of Ladakh, it can not be ruled out that the direction the rock carving surfaces are facing is chosen to correlate with the direction of the Indus River and the melt water stream. Further, as the rock carvings are situated alongside an important travel route, the art might have been made facing this way to make them visible to herders, nomads, merchants or other travellers journeying up along the Indus Valley.

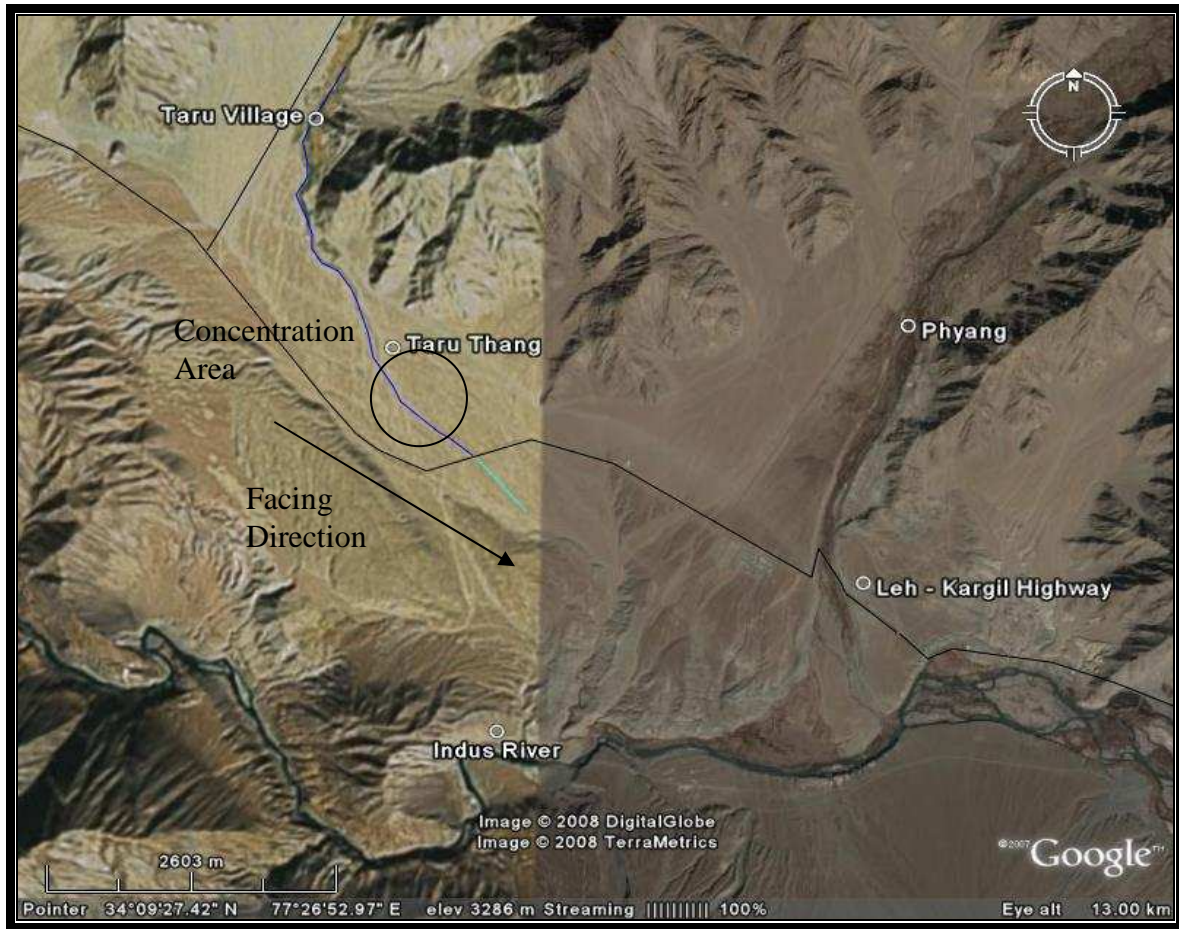


Fig. 3.10: Satellite photo showing concentration area and facing direction. The left half of the map is blurred due to Google Earth resolution of the satellite photo.

3.7 Other features and objects

During my fieldwork in Ladakh I discovered not only rock carvings, but also several other features in Taru Thang. These include stūpas and stūpa ruins, modern painted Buddhist mantras, *mani walls* (a wall consisting of polished rocks engraved with Buddhist mantras), animal pens, ruins of brick walls and pieces of broken ceramics. The stūpas and the mantra paintings clearly emphasize a recent Buddhist origin while some of the stūpa rock art images, the counter clockwise svastikas and the sun symbol, points to a pre-Buddhist tradition. The evidence as such strongly indicates a continuous religious and ritual use of Taru Thang. In a similar way, the occurrence of what seem like mundane features such as old animal shelters, animal pens, possible animal traps and the cattle grazing there today, suggests a long tradition of trivial use as well as a ritual religious use. In the south-western part of Taru Thang, just by the road, are several ruined huts, according to Francke built by the people who erected the

mani walls, to serve as hospitable stables for horses which had become exhausted on the long march across the plains (Francke 1914:85).

3.8 Summary

The field of Taru Thang is interesting in many ways. First of all, the site is placed along a trade route of historic importance with easy access to the luxury of water and vegetation and has probably been a convenient hunting ground. As it is used as grazing field for cattle today, it has most likely served the same purpose during earlier times, providing much needed food for the animals of the people living in the region in the past. The rock carvings of Taru Thang show a wide display of motifs, indicating a long, perhaps even continuing tradition of making art on the site. Hunting scenes with anthropomorphs armed with bows and arrows are depicted alongside carvings showing modern guns and more recent Buddhist symbols. The features and structures discovered enhance this suggestion, both regarding mundane and religious use. The variations of rock art motifs suggest a long continuous use of Taru Thang, from ancient pre-history right up to modern times, and in the following chapter I will attempt to provide a brief chronology and attempt to place the rock art of Taru Thang within a general time frame.

Chapter 4: Chronology

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will propose a time frame and establish a tentative chronology for the rock carvings of Taru Thang. The carvings should be understood in a geographic context, but more than that be placed in a wider perspective of rock art known from the surrounding areas of Ladakh. I propose this might be done based on the fact that cultures with similar features are spread throughout the mountain areas of the trans-Himalayas. Further, the rock art material in these areas shows great resemblance, both motifs and styles. I will compare the carvings of Taru Thang with carvings found in the adjoining areas along the Indus Valley in an attempt to establish a tentative chronology. It should be pointed out, however, that archaeologists rarely provide secure dates for the rock carvings in the trans-Himalayan regions of Central Asia, due to the research still being in its infancy. Therefore, based on the context of this thesis, I will not attempt to establish an in-depth rock art chronology, but aim to provide a general time-frame in which the carvings can be placed. Of special interest will be to see whether the emergence of rock art in Taru Thang correlates with the emergence of Dardic speaking people in the regions.

4.2 Basis for a comparative analysis

According to Henri-Paul Francfort, Daniel Klodzinski and Georges Mascle, the Upper Indus Valley and its prolongation in Tibet witnessed the passage of groups of people related to those of the Central Asian steppes during the 2nd and 1st millennia. Their study of rock art shows in a preliminary way that the steppic tribal groups were largely present in Ladakh and Zaskar and Western Tibet from the Bronze Age to at least the 4th century BC (Francfort, Klodzinski & Mascle 1992:147). These people probably brought with them Dardic and Indo-Aryan languages which have survived in sheltered mountain areas, preserving early words and linguistic form as well as parts of an ancient belief system with its mythological world of spirits, witches and demons (Allchin 1982:349). The various legends, myths and cosmological elements show an extensive network of parallels distributed throughout the entire hinterland of north-west India. Narrative motifs in Kalasha legends recur in Kafir myths which again have notable parallels in folk literature of other Dardic-speaking people of northern Pakistan

and in western Ladakh (Vohra 1989a), which I will come back to in chapter 5. Based on these parallels and cultural similarities I propose that it is possible to compare the rock art of Taru Thang with rock carvings in other areas of the trans-Himalayas.

I will go through the 5 motif groups from Chapter 3 and see if it is possible to extract enough information to provide a tentative chronology. I will look at the choice of motifs and variations in desert varnish as well as to attempt to connect the carvings of Taru Thang to a wider Central Asian steppic rock art tradition. To achieve this, I will look at the styles in which the mountain goats are depicted and objects that can be identified in the rock art.

4.3 Taru Thang motifs

In chapter 3, the rock art of Taru Thang was divided into 5 different motif groups and compositions. In the following part I will discuss whether or not it is possible to use these motif variations and compositions to create a chronology, or rather, to which *degree* it is possible to do so.

1. Mountain goat motif: It is difficult to establish a chronology based on the mountain goat motif alone, but certain observations can be made through the different styles in which the animals are depicted. First of all, it is worth noting that there are some, but few, examples in Taru Thang of animal depictions in the so-called animal steppe style (fig. 4.1). These carvings display an “S” shape with volutes or scrolls and spirals. The tails and horns and even the body of the animals can be carved in this particular way. The animal carvings belonging to this stylistic tradition usually includes yak, ibex, felines and deer and is often referred to as a *dynamic* and forceful style, showing the animals as more lifelike, not as *static* as carvings believed to belong to earlier traditions. The style is believed to be related to Schytian/Saka tribes (sometimes simply referred to as ancient nomads) and date from the 1st millennium to the 5th century BC, thus to the Central Asian Iron Age (Arif 2001:57, Jettmar 1967:180-178, Francfort, Klodzinski & Mascle 1992:152-153).

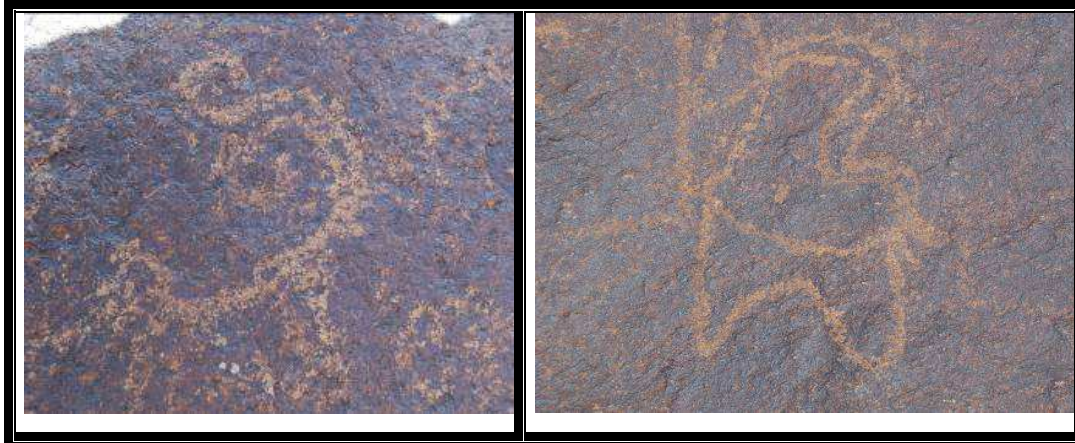


Fig 4.1 (fig 17 (panel 1, fig 236 (with fig 235))): Examples from Taru Thang displaying Scythian/Saka attributes, seen in the “S” shapes in the formation of the mountain goats horns.

The examples from fig. 4.1 are in my opinion not clear enough to securely date the carvings to the Iron Age and the Central Asian animal steppe style, but it might still help to contribute in establishing a tentative chronology for the Taru Thang rock art. It is important to note that the steppe animal style of the 1st millennium is spread all over Central Asia, and is not a homogenous group but varies locally. Tibet’s, Ladakh’s and Zanskar’s carvings differ for example from the ones from Gilgit and Hunza (Francfort, Klodzinski & Mascle 1992:173). Therefore, fig 4.1 can be local variants of the steppe animal style found elsewhere in Central Asia.

Secondly, the *bitriangular* mountain goat carvings (fig. 4.2) deserve a closer look concerning the construction of a chronology of the rock art of Taru Thang. According to Muhammad Arif, some of the bitriangular carvings, represented by ibexes outlined by two triangles belong to the Mesolithic, about 6000 BC (Arif 2001:71). One of the problems with dating the bitriangular carvings of Taru Thang arose when a local Ladakh informed me that he had personally carved the same specific style of ibex on a rock during one of his travels in the region, and that it was quite common to copy the older carvings. This does not mean, however, that the bitriangular style is without importance in establishing a relative chronology, but that other elements must be taken into consideration, like the desert varnish to which we shall return later.



Fig. 4.2 (Fig 280 (single), Fig 108 (panel 5)): Examples of two different bitriangular ibex representation from Taru Thang.

2. Anthropomorphs: Can a tentative chronology be established by looking at the variations in use of hunting weaponry (fig. 4.3)? Carvings depicting anthropomorphs armed with bows and arrows can be assumed to be of an earlier date than motifs showing anthropomorphs armed with guns. It is worth noting, however, that there is nostalgia connected with the use of bows and arrows which can be observed during festivals in Ladakh where archery competitions are arranged. The best archers in the region compete against each other, in an attempt to gain the honour of being the most esteemed marksman. As far as I can tell, no such status is associated with the use of guns, and therefore the ritualized use of bows and arrows can have led to them being depicted in rock art even in times after the introduction of guns.

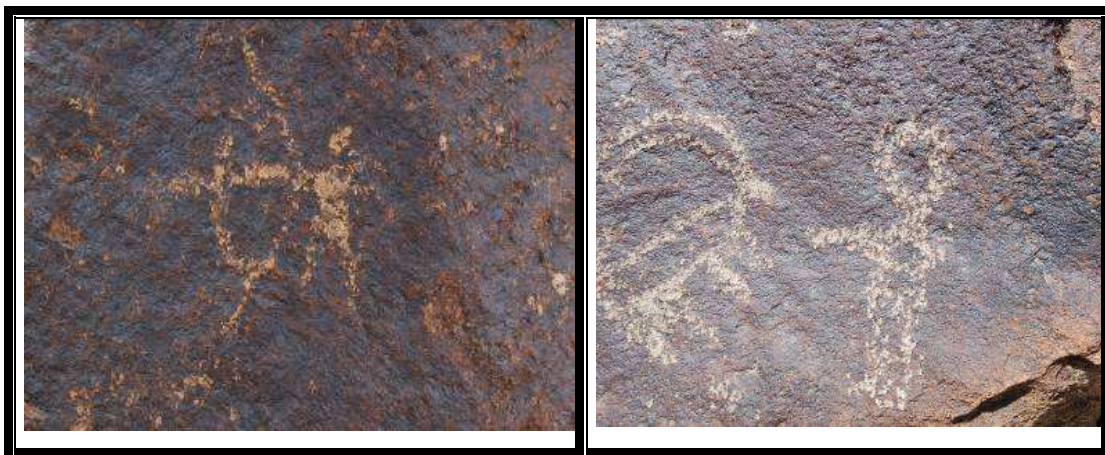


Fig. 4.3 (Fig 143 (panel 7), Fig 79 (panel 3)): Rock Carvings from Taru Thang depicting use of bow and arrows and gun.

However, the anthropomorphs carrying guns must necessarily have been depicted after the introduction of guns to the region, limiting the age of those specific carvings to the 1900's.

One more point should be made regarding the anthropomorphs. One of the human figures is holding what can be interpreted as a *tjurunga*, a bullroarer (Scandinavian “brummer”). These ritual objects are suitable to produce strange and frightening sounds and have an almost worldwide diffusion in the Old (Africa, Australia) and the New World. Jettmar suggests that their use in the plains, deserts and mountains of Central Asia, might possibly be designated to tribes still without domestic animals or with a merely incipient herding system (Jettmar 2002:94). Therefore, the carving might be dated prior to the introduction of agriculture and sedentary farming societies. Jettmar explains the hypothesis based on the assumption that the technical equipment of the indigenous population in Central Asia was certainly much closer to that of the sub-modern hunting nomads of Australia than to cultures of the mounted warriors or settled farmer during later periods (ibid.).

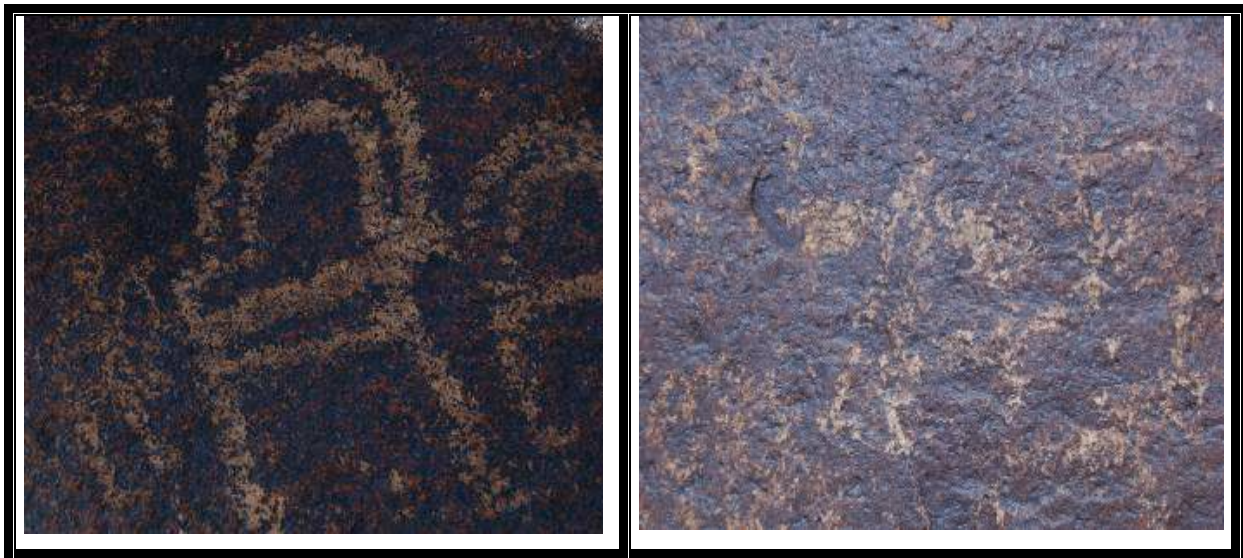


Fig. 4.4 (fig. 128 (panel 6), fig. 18 (panel 1)): Anthropomorphs, possibly with *tjurungas* (bullroarer), Taru Thang.

3. Carnivorous animals: The carnivore motifs of Taru Thang can to a certain degree be used to create a chronology, when seen in which context they appear. Most of the carvings interpreted as dogs are pictured accompanying anthropomorphs in hunting compositions. Arif and Dani suggest that human beings arrived so early in the Northern Areas of Pakistan that yaks were still hunted as wild animals by archers assisted by dogs. The earliest archaeological evidence of man in the Northern Areas comes from Chilas and consists of Mesolithic artefacts made of quartz including microlithic triangles and points, which according to Arif and Dani can be tentatively placed around 6000-3000 BC (Arif 2001:49, Dani 1995). Based on this, the dogs

in hunting compositions can be interpreted as evidence of a Mesolithic tradition. However, this *assumption* is hardly evidence enough to date the hunting composition featuring dogs to 6000-3000 BC, as the tradition of using dogs as hunting companions might have a much longer time span as noted by Dani who proposes that hunters, and later herdsmen, might have clung to their Mesolithic traditions. This can be demonstrated by looking at fig. 4.4, where a dog is assisting hunters armed with guns.

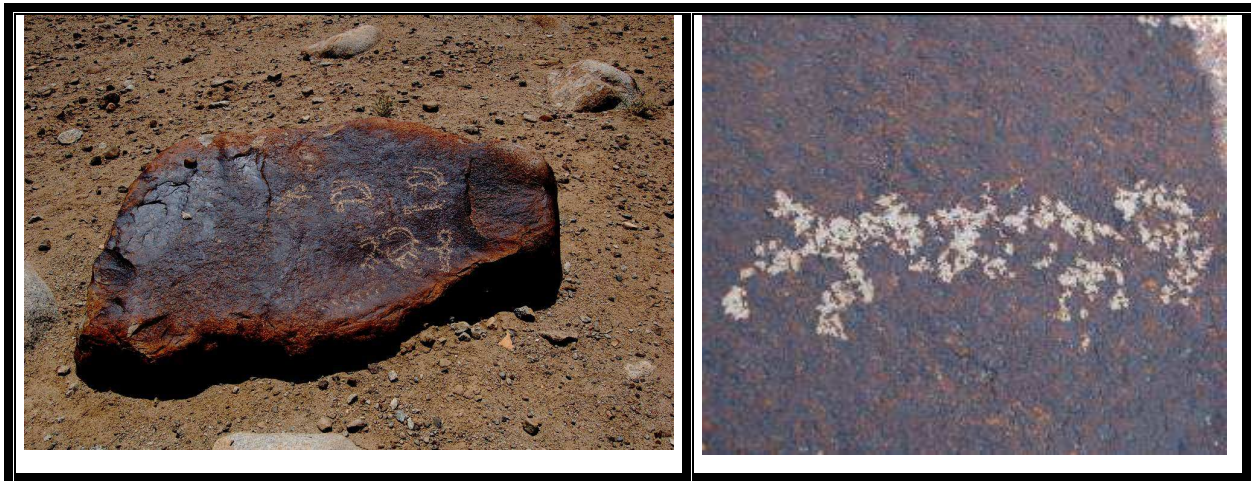


Fig. 4.5 (Panel 3, Fig 80): Example showing a hunting scene with anthropomorphs armed with guns assisted by what is interpreted as a dog, Taru Thang.

4. Buddhist/Early Buddhist motifs: Ladakh and Zaskar were inhabited by Dardic speaking people until the Tibetan empire expanded into adjacent areas in the 7th and 8th centuries. Tibet attacked and conquered the Zhang-zhung kingdoms which likely contained parts of Zaskar as well. Tibetan literary sources confirm that the local traditional religion of the Ladakhi Dards were absorbed by the Tibetan Buddhism, and their anti-Buddhist mountain spirits were said to have been converted into protectors of the new religion (Dargyay 1988:124-125). Can we therefore assume that the carvings depicting Buddhist and Early Buddhist symbols belong to a period after the 7th and 8th centuries? It is important to keep in mind that symbols like the counter clockwise svastika and the sun symbol, as well as wild herbivores probably were pre-Buddhist symbols adapted to encapsulate Buddhist tenets and philosophies in order to strengthen Buddhism amongst the locals, thus being reinterpreted at an early stage of Buddhism in the region. The *buddhification* can therefore be said to include both the religious beliefs as well as the religious symbols of the indigenous people in the region (Bellezza 2003). If the motifs interpreted as Buddhist symbols originally derived from pre-Buddhist local religions, the dating of the carvings is problematic as it is difficult to determine which

period they belong, the Buddhist or the pre-Buddhist. However, the Taru Thang stūpa carving seen in fig. 4.6 can probably be dated to circa 650 – 1000 AD, based on its similarities with carvings (fig. 4.7) documented and dated by John Vincent Bellezza in Tibet (Belezza 2003).



Fig. 4.6 (Fig 161): Stūpa motif from Taru Thang



Fig. 4.7: Stūpa motifs from Tibet

(<http://www.asianart.com/articles/vestiges/17c.html>)

Photo: John Vincent Bellezza (2000)

5. Undefined/Miscellaneous motifs: The most interesting carving in this group, from a chronological point of view, is the vehicle (fig. 4.8). Obviously, it is of a rather recent origin, made in modern times. The carving, probably dating from after the mid 1900's, can most likely be said to constitute the “late end” of the tentative chronology.



Fig. 4.8 (Fig 234): Carving depicting a vehicle/jeep, Taru Thang

4.4 Anthropomorph with a tail: A comparative example.

My next attempt at establishing a tentative chronology based on rock art comparison is taken from a hunting scene. Francfort, Klodzinski and Mascle describe a hunting scene from Char in Zanskar, where an archer is letting off arrows at a two footed animal coming towards him. The animal has a raised tail and two horns, with an arrow stuck in its forequarters. The hunter carries behind him some sort of a train at waist level. Four objects are hanging from this “tail” and one of the objects has a round-shaped end (fig 4.10) (Francfort, Klodzinski and Mascle 1992:149). Representations of mountain goat hunting scenes are frequent, and the characteristic element here is the “tail” depicted on the anthropomorph. According to the authors the objects carried at the waist are nothing else but maces, a warrior attribute used for duels, and when shooting with a bow the hunter or warrior keeps his mace at the waist. The spherical mace is according to Francfort, Klodzinski and Mascle related to representations from the 3rd to 2nd millennia in Central Asia, and therefore the hunting scene from Char is believed to belong to a series of Bronze Age representations and the 2nd millennia (ibid.). A carving showing similar attributes is found in Taru Thang (fig. 4.9). Although the anthropomorph from Taru Thang does not display a spherical mace, it does however have a tail-like object at the waist, an attribute that should be seen in relation to the waist-tail seen in the carving from Char. I therefore propose that the specific hunting scene of Taru Thang can be dated to the 2nd millennium and to a series of Bronze Age representations, like the one from Zanskar.



Fig. 4.9 (Fig 138 (panel 7)): Archer from Taru Thang with a tail-like object at the waist.

Fig. 4.10: Archer from Char, Zanskar with a tail-like object and a spherical mace at the waist (Francfort, Klodzinski & Mascle 1992:157).

4.5 Desert varnish

There is yet another aspect that should be brought to attention. The rock carvings of Taru Thang display a wide range of colour nuances. While some appear white and light in colour, others are brown, and some again almost the same shade as the rock surface they are carved upon. This is due to the fact that rock surfaces in arid or semi-arid climates, including Ladakh, has a thin dark coating of manganese and iron oxides concentrating on the rock by manganese-oxidizing bacteria. When the rock carving is pecked or carved through the layer, it exposes the lighter coloured interior of the stone and creates a negative image, and the light carving shows up against the dark background. If conditions for varnish development still exists after the carving is made, the rock varnish will gradually recreate on the newly exposed surface, thus making the design more and more like the surface colour of which it is made upon (Keyser 2001:126). Examples of varnishing can be seen in fig. 4.2, where the first carving appears bright white contrasting the almost black background, whereas the second carving is faded and varnished. This indicates that the second bitriangular ibex carving is of a much older date than the first. The same goes for the examples seen in fig. 4.3, where the anthropomorph wielding the bow and arrow is considerably darker than the one carrying a gun, stating what might seem like the obvious, that the carving with the gun is of a more recent date than the one with the bow and arrow. The most important conclusion that can be drawn from a study of the various degree of varnishing, is that there is a long tradition of

producing rock art in Taru Thang, and that the symbol of the mountain goat can be traced back to pre-history and up to recent times.

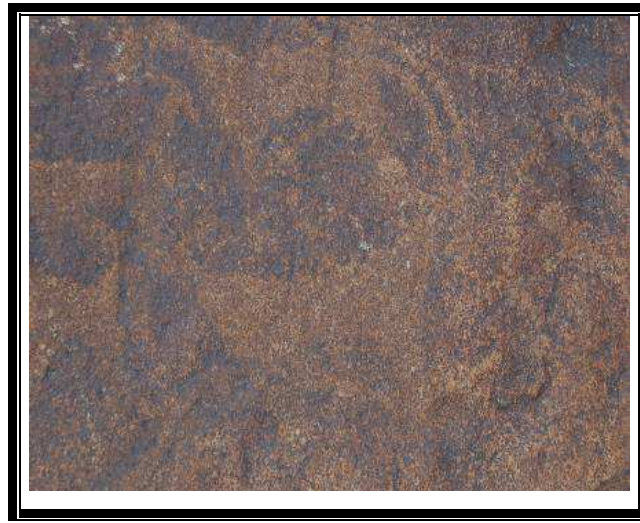


Fig. 4.11: (Fig 180) Example from Taru Thang displaying a mountain goat carving with high degree of varnishing.

If we can conclude that the ibex displaying Schytian/Saka attributes (fig. 4.1) can be dated to the Iron Age, then it is possible to conclude by looking at the variations in varnishing, that fig. 4.11 predates it. It should be noted, that in the future it might be possible to date the rock coatings that form over carvings directly. The ages must be interpreted as minimum-limiting constraints because the coating obviously must post-date the rock carving (Dorn 2001:173). As these methods are future concerns regarding the rock art of Taru Thang, I will not go in details of the possibility of proposing an absolute chronology based on scientific dating methods of the desert varnish.

4.6 Concluding remarks

The rock art research of the Northern Areas of Pakistan, Tibet and especially Ladakh is in its infancy and hopefully further research and excavations will help throw light upon the origin of the carvings and provide fundament for a more secure rock art chronology. The tentative chronology presented in this chapter, reflects the lack of archaeological excavations and research done in the region, and the only way to create a tentative chronology is by merging the little bits and pieces of information that can be extracted from the carvings. By connecting the carvings of Taru Thang with rock art from a wider geographic area, I believe our chances at establishing a chronology increases.

The tentative chronology I have provided in this chapter correlates with the results given by Francfort, Klodzinski and Mascle. They propose that the chronology given for Ladakh and Zaskar goes back to the pre-historic, although the carvings are not yet precisely dated. A little more information is available from the Bronze Age, as seen in fig. 4.9 and 4.10, but there seems to be a gap between the Bronze Age and the Iron Age. The Iron Age is characterized by the flourishing of the so-called steppe animal style as seen in fig. 4.1 (Francfort, Klodzinski and Mascle 1992:172-173). There is another gap from the Iron Age and up to the introduction of Buddhism and Buddhist motifs, which is shown through fig. 4.6 and 4.7. The more recent and modern carvings, as seen through the vehicle (fig. 4.8) and the anthropomorphs armed with guns (fig. 4.3) constitute the end of the chronology.

It can be argued that despite the difficulties in establishing a chronology for the rock art of Taru Thang, the mountain goat has survived as a symbol, stretching its origins back to pre-history and all the way up to present time. As the rock art shows similarities over a large geographic area, so does cultural features, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Dard religion, cosmology and social structure

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will introduce the Dardic world of spirits, their landscape, animals and the social structure. I will describe the religious beliefs and cosmology of the Dardic speaking groups and introduce the various deities, fairies and spirits of their religion, which will be collectively referred to as supernatural beings. I will also describe the myths surrounding these supernatural beings by using ethnographic evidence collected by anthropologists and scholars from various Dardic speaking parts of the Central Asian regions. These myths will contribute in understanding the Dardic speaking groups, their cosmology and communities. I believe the religious beliefs and social structure of the cultural groups discussed in this chapter can be seen reflected in the rock art material of Taru Thang, which will be demonstrated in chapter 6. This chapter is of uttermost importance to the thesis, as the ethnographic evidence gathered by anthropologists constitutes the *basis* of my interpretation of the mountain goat rock carvings of Taru Thang, and is thus my main method of reaching my conclusion.

In this chapter I will refer to several cultural groups, including the Kalasha and Kafirs of the Hindu Kush, the Nuristanis of Afghanistan and the people of Hunza in Northern Pakistan.

5.2 Ethnography: A source for interpreting prehistoric societies

For a long time archaeologists have used ethnographic material to explain past societies. Ethnographic analogies were applied to reconstruct the way of life amongst the Upper Palaeolithic and the Mesolithic hunters by comparing them without caution with the Eskimos or the Kalahari Bushmen (Håland 1988:131). The comparisons were done indiscriminately, to such an extent that it was often assumed that there existed a direct socio-cultural link between the prehistoric people and the hunter/gatherers of the present. As both archaeological excavations and ethnographic studies however showed that this simple use of analogy was indeed unsound, archaeologists became reluctant and worried about using ethnographic studies in the archaeological interpretations (*ibid.*). This is of course an important point, also relevant to my own studies. It should be pointed out that although we can not assume a

continuity of cultural traditions over the vast time present in the archaeological material of Taru Thang, we can withdraw from the ethnographic material an *essence* which can be used to get a little closer to the meaning behind the rock carvings of Taru Thang, and perhaps the whole trans-Himalayan area.

5.3 Ehtnographic research of the Dards

Like the rock art of Ladakh, the religious, ritual and spiritual beliefs of the transhumant nomadic people throughout the Central Asian regions are noticeably neglected in anthropological and archaeological research. Although there is an increased anthropological interest in the significance of religion among Middle Eastern pastoralists, the detailed information we have on the symbolic and ritual dimension of their pastoral practice can not be compared with the rich cultural ethnography of, for example, cattle pastoralists of Africa (David & Kramer 2001:239, Parkes 1987:637). The seemingly absence of interest in ritual and symbolic expression amongst the Central Asian or Middle Eastern pastoralists, may derive from the basic problem of investigating the local religions from within Islamic cultures (Tapper 1979:12-17). It is not necessarily impossible, but it has nevertheless hindered the understanding we have of ideological, symbolic and ritual features that might separate or distinguish the pastoral religious representations from those characteristic of the sedentary and agrarian people throughout Asia (Parkes 1987:637-638).

As we will see, Islam and Buddhism have had a huge impact on the knowledge we have been able to retrieve from the Dards and their neighbours today. Of great importance for this thesis, is the work done on the people of Hindu Kush, which for more than 150 years has attracted attention from European scientists. Even though they have been surrounded by Islamic influence, they have stubbornly preserved parts of their traditional religious beliefs. As such, the Hindu Kush has in many ways become a “museum of archaic techniques, social institutions, rites and ideas” (Jettmar 1958:79).

A few years after Sir George Scott Robertson had started his expedition in the area (1896), the region was conquered by the Afghans, forcing the religion of Islam on the people of Hindu Kush. After this, European scholars were not able to extract more than fragments of their ancient, cultural traditions. British officers who ventured into the area wrote lengthy reports, but no thorough anthropological work was done. Still, there exists some exceptions: The

linguist David Lorimer wrote a brief paper called “The Supernatural in the Popular Belief of the Gilgit Region” (Lorimer 1929), and two native officials sent to Gilgit, Baltistan and Ladakh wrote compilations, which proved to be useful sources of information (Jettmar 1958:80).

The Kalash tribe had many similar cultural traits similar to those of the Kafirs of the Hindu Kush. On this subject Colonel R. C. F. Schomberg’s “Between the Oxus and the Indus” (1935) and Morgenstierne’s fieldwork in Afghanistan (1947), have provided useful, if incomplete, information (Jettmar 1958:79, Morgenstierne 1947). The same holds true for the easternmost Dardic areas, the villages of Da and Hanu. As they both belong to the Ladakhi side, they never became Islamic, and only accepted a superficial form of Buddhism. This made it possible for the German scholar A.H. Francke to write reports on their traditional culture by noting ceremonial songs (Francke 1914).

The situation changed for the better after World War II, as the Dards were discovered by professional anthropologists for the first time. Halfdan Siiger (1967) explored the Kalasha systematically, and Fredrik Barth (1969) followed in the footsteps of Sir Aurel Stein and penetrated the Indus Valley and Swat-Kohistan and wrote extensive reports and did ethnographic surveys. Since 1964, the South Asia Institute of Heidelberg University developed a particular interest for Nuristan, as the Austrian ethnologist Karl Jettmar explored the pre-Islamic traditions and religious beliefs of the Dardic population in northern Pakistan and their neighbours (Jettmar 1958, Klimburg 1999:11). The anthropologist Dr. Peter Parkes conducted fieldworks amongst people of the Hindu Kush, and of special interest is his article “Livestock Symbolism and Pastoral Ideology Among the Kafirs of the Hindu Kush” (1987). The article provides important information, and contributes to make connections between religion and symbolism with their pastoral identity, which is of uttermost interest for the context of my thesis.

5.4 Dualism and bipolarity

In the Himalayas a special emphasis must be given to the concept of vertical movement, and some even claim it is possible to speak of a special Himalayan concept of verticality which is manifested in the contrast between the high mountain tops and the low valley bottoms (Michaels 2003:17-18). This contrast is followed by a number of other dichotomies, reflecting

the society and the natural environment of the Dards. For the Dards, the verticality and the dichotomies attached to it, have greatly contributed in shaping their social structure, religious beliefs, pantheon and rituals. One of the most important concepts connected with the verticality of the landscape is the varying degrees of purity connected with each vertical “layer”. The high mountain tops, with glaciers, clear running water, and snow clad peaks, are believed to be of great purity while the villages lying in the low valley bottoms are considered impure (Parkes 1987). In essence the concept and degree of pureness is calculated by verticality and by high and higher up versus low and lower down. The bipolarities of purity and impurity encompass not only the specific altitudes, but also the flora, fauna and supernatural beings inhabiting the respective zones and each pure creature, plant or animal residing in the high mountain zones have their impure counterparts living in the lower zones below, in the villages in the valley bottoms (Parkes 1987:640).

The amounts of different dichotomies being influenced by the concept of the vertical landscape are vast, but in general we can assume that the ritual-geographical polarisation of High – Low, is represented by a belief in the loftiness of the pure, supernatural beings believed to be residing on the mountain tops and the general impurity of the unclean creatures believed to be living in the low valley bottoms (ibid.). As we shall see in the following examples, these dichotomies play important roles in organizing the structure of the Dardic speaking tribes of the trans-Himalayas, and especially the relationship between man and woman.

5.5 The Kalasha of the Hindu Kush

Amongst the Dardic speaking Kalasha of the Hindu Kush, the world is divided between the sacred and pure realm versus the profane and impure, where the specific polarity of Male – Female is closely associated with High – Low, Mountain – Valley, Right – Left, Light – Dark etc. as met with in many societies world wide. The high lying, light filled and pure zones of the world close to the pure supernatural beings, animals and plants, especially the wild mountain goats, are considered the *male* realm, while the impure low zones of the valleys and streams are considered the *female* spheres (Klimburg 1999:286). Corresponding to the spatial, vertical division of male and female, is a rigid division of labor: The tending of the animals, especially goats, dairy production and the political, public and religious activities are assigned to the male population. Being in close contact with the pure sphere of the high mountains,

they believe themselves getting rid of the pollution from the life down in the villages, a life they regard as full of refuse and strife being permanently exposed to disruption and contamination. The women, staying near the villages and performing various chores connected with farming and household, are constantly in contact with the polluting and impure sphere, and all sacred areas and objects are taboo for them (ibid). Women are therefore forbidden to approach the goat stables, in case their sexual pollution should attract evil spirits towards its herd (Parkes 1987:640). The primary sources of pollution are kept within the village or close by, like women, especially during menstruation or childbirth, bovines and the dead. Men and goats more than women and bovines function as intermediaries between the domestic polluted realms of the low valleys and the alpine, higher and purer realms. This mediating role of the goats and sheep is facilitated by the simple reason that these animals are far more mobile on the mountainous terrain than larger livestock like cattle, and can more easily be led to the high-altitude pastures that would be inaccessible to bovines (Parkes 1987).

As can be seen, the male sphere is associated with the spiritually pure domain, and is contrasted and distinguished by the quality of purity, reaching its maximum level in truly sacred surroundings, in this context the mountain areas of the regions. Certain substances, like clear running water such as streams, are seen as especially pure, taking their origin from the glacier and icy water in these areas. The steaming blood of a sacrifice the scent of burning juniper, certain flowers and even colours are pertinent to this sphere and seen as symbols of purity (Vohra 1989a:52). The juxtaposition to the above is the feminine sphere, where sexuality implies that the male is attracted by being pulled downwards in a ritual sense. It is imperative that no polluted person approach the sacred sphere without having first purified himself. If one breaks the taboo then the situation could be dangerous and the displeasure of the supernatural beings could be aroused. On the other hand, contact with the sacred and pure realms may enhance the purity of the “impure” villagers as well. Vohra suggests there is a one way relationship between the aspects of the male sphere which is considered to be pure, and the sacred realm of the mountains. The one way relationship is seen in the enhancement of purity of the person coming in contact with this sacred realm. Shepherds, and likewise hunters, who come down from the pasture grounds and the higher elevations of the mountains, are seen as imbued with purity. Thus, whoever ventures to these pure regions of the mountains and glaciers, will acquire some of that attribute. Similarly, approaching a sacred sphere of a deity, i.e. a shrine, enhances the purity of the one who goes there (ibid.).

The Kalasha herdsmen practice a form of alpine transhumance (Edelberg & Jones 1979). In the first period of June, shortly after women have begun working in the fields, the men drive their herds to the high summer pastures in the upper reaches of their valleys. The mountain pastures of the Kalasha are situated above the upper parts of their rivers, close to the Afghan-Nuristan frontier, 15 kilometers or more from the villages. Here they remain throughout the summer months, milking and making cheese. They move their camps to the higher areas of grassland as the snow retreats from the mountainside and then retracing their route back to the lower lying pasture areas as these recover in late summer. When autumn comes, following the main harvest in the valleys, they return home to the village and stables in the woodland zone near the villages, where the animals will be fed throughout the winter (Parkes 1987:642-643).

This seasonal transhumance of the Kalasha herdsmen also has an influence on the social life in the valleys. The social life is dichotomized into contrasting summer and winter periods, upon where men and women tend to inhabit distinct and geographically remote spheres of activity for 5 months of the year. Kalasha men experience two seasonal alternative social orders. The summer pastures represent an exclusively masculine and pure environment, whilst the winter stay in the villages represents a mixed heterosexual world. This opposition is even artificially maintained during the winter period through the ritually segregated zone of the goat stables, where the man will periodically pass back and forth between the two “modes” of society, the *pastoral* and the *domestic*, which otherwise never meet directly (Parkes 1987:644-645). This way the man can be in touch with the pureness, the sacredness and the *maleness* of the high mountain pastures all the year round, being in contact with the goats and goat stables which take on the role as a substitute of the sacred, pure realm of the mountains.

5.6 The runaway brides of the Kalasha

Amongst the Dardic speaking Kalasha, the village communities in the valleys is where woman’s agricultural dominance is matched by a strategic significance, involving not only social and political order, but also disorder. The Kalasha society follows a segmentary system of patrilineal descent and the lineages are defined by strict rules of exogamy, prohibiting intermarriage between agnates related within seven generations of a descent from a common ancestor. Lineage memberships are of importance due to the agnates mutual obligations of assistance in contributing to mortuary feasts and marriage payments, but the main public role is seen in the special context of *wife-elopment feuds* (Parkes 1987:640). Kalasha marriages

are very unstable in its early years, especially prior to birth of children and the dissolution of the marriages through elopement can occur long afterwards. According to Parkes, more than 70% of Kalasha marriages are dissolved due to runaway wives, and the majority of middle-aged men and women have passed through two or more spouses as a direct result of wife elopement. Compensations are paid to regulate the marital instability, and the “abductor” must pay compensation (goats) to the ex-husband. The wife elopements creates antagonisms and feuds between the lineages of ex-husband and “abductor”, and the seemingly “anarchic” nature of Kalasha wives can be seen as a freedom related to women productive monopoly of agriculture. No Kalasha household can survive without the continual field labor of its women. This institutional elopement of the Kalasha women, and their almost anarchic political powers, free to determine the domestic and political fortune of their men, can be placed within a cultural ethos of intersexual antagonism. Parkes suggests that patterns of “sexual anarchy” reflected in the opposition between male and female operative spheres can be seen as characteristic of transhumant mountain communities throughout the region of highland Asia, occurring wherever the male population of the societies is preoccupied with livestock husbandry (Parkes 1987:642). The runaway brides are of importance for interpreting the relationships between men and women of the Dardic groups, and might be related to the creation of the mountain goat rock carvings, which I will return to in the next chapter.

5.7 Goat symbolism

The goats are regarded as the foremost cultural goals of the Kalasha society. The ritual premises are founded upon the welfare of the sacred herds, transmitted from gods to the early ancestors, and hence upon the notion of reproducing a competent, able and ritually pure male community of herdsmen. The goats are seen as pure and sacred animals, which destiny is to be sacrificed to their respective owners, the supernatural mountain spirits. The goats can be said to be the essential mediators between man and the hidden world of supernatural powers that surround him. The sacrificial blood of the goats, provide means of protection against forces of decay, pollution and disintegration , the demonic influences thought to inhabit the domestic life of the villages (Parkes 1987:645).

The goat symbolism is visible in every facet of the Kalasha religious lives. Representation of the goats are found on carved on the doors and pillars of the houses and altars, images can be seen painted on the walls of clan temples, mould in dough or carved on the rocks. In short, the

Kalasha seems to be obsessed with goats and it can even be claimed that they have a *goat culture*. To understand this extreme value of the goats amongst the Kalasha, it is necessary to understand the intense emotional attachment that develops between man and animal in the summer pastures. At the age of seven, just after the pastoral rites of initiation into manhood and ritual purity, the boy spends most of his time away from the village, living and sleeping with the family herd, only in company with the senior male relatives. The goats thus become the “playmates” in male childhood. Even stronger is the bond between man and goats with the senior males, who have a favorite goat, usually a buck with prominent horns. These favorites will respond when they are being called, and many herdsmen compose special songs devoted to their favorite goat. Relations among men are also more intimately expressed in the pastures than the villages. Here, where young boys live side by side, sleeping and working together, the most intimate friendships may develop. Boys coming from different lineage groups become sworn bond-partners, and swearing eternal allegiance. Such friendships are more difficult to maintain in the valleys, where men of separate households are likely to become divided through feuds over land and women (Parkes 1987:645-646).

The ritual and religious significance of the goat as a sacred animal, is also related to their sacrificial role as the primary offering to the Kalasha deities and supernatural spirits. Sacrificial feasting is an important aspect of the Kalasha culture and a major motivation behind Kalasha livestock husbandry, affecting the age and sex of their herds in favor of mature bucks. The sacrificial value of the Kalasha goats can be related to the domestic goats association with wild mountain goats, which are considered especially pure and sacred. The wild mountain goats are believed to be the sacred herds of the supernatural beings and they are also thought to be the archaic predecessors of domestic goats, the primordial livestock of men and spirits, originally mixed together in the sacred mountain realm. The bond between the supernatural beings and the mountain goats are so strong, in fact, that it is believed that the supernatural beings can turn themselves into mountain goats (Jettmar 2002:6, Parkes 1987:645-646). The beliefs that wild animals are the domestic animals of spirits are not confined to the Dard society only. Marilyn Strathern explains in “Nature, Culture and Gender” how the spirits amongst the Hagen of Papa New Guinea are believed to be tending wild plants and animals as people do their domesticated varieties. The wild varieties are hunted and eaten (almost exclusively by men), and never attempted tamed and domesticated (Strathern 1980:192-193).

Contrasting the extreme ritual value of goats, sheep and cattle are of little importance to the Kalasha pastoral life. Cattle are certainly negatively valued, considered impure and unclean, and the Kalasha are known to avoid meat, milk and butter made from them (Biddulph 1971:133). Such ritual aversions against cattle appear to have been characteristic of most Dardic speaking people of the Karakoram region. In the contemporary Dardic societies this may have a simple explanation: One of the predominant environmental reasons, as the rough mountain pastures are much better suited for the more mobile goats than the environmentally “handicapped” cattle. Kalasha cattle therefore do not accompany the herdsmen and goats to the summer pastures (a common practice among the Nuristani people), but have a subsidiary and non-pastoral function in subsistence, mainly required for traction power. Cattle can thus be said to be conceptually assigned to the impure and demonic sphere of the valleys, being practically associated with the female sphere of agricultural production, and is hence the symbolic opposition of goats (Parkes 1987:647). The symbolic values of the Kalasha domestic and wild animals seem to be ordered based along a basic gradient of altitude, where their livestock together with the wild mountain goats of the mountains forms a series of categories that encompass the entire ritual spectrum from total purity to utter pollution (Parkes 1983:189).

As we have seen, the Kalasha livestock values are based on a fundamental religious dichotomy between the sacred and the polluting, which is mirrored through a large set of oppositions. The underlying opposition between the categories is proposed by Peter Parkes (1987) to concern the male and female spheres, corresponding with the distinct division of agro-pastoral labour. This opposition is particularly embodied in the topographical contrast between mountain and valley, where the high mountain pastures are considered the home of clean supernatural beings, thus being a sacred and pure place (Parkes 1987:649). In a ritual context, men are considered to have the necessary capacity to cope with the sacred once they are ritually purified. This innate capacity is according the myths acquired from their common ancestry with the supernatural spirits of the mountain zone and their subsequent legacy of the sacred livestock, the wild mountain goats. When the young boys are initiated into the male-pastoral sphere of the societies through the special rituals held in the goat stables, they are thought cleansed from the pollution of infantile dependence on women. From the initiation and until puberty the young boys are believed to be at the peak of male purity and become “sacred children” who alone may slaughter the male goat as an offering to the major deities (ibid.).

All adult women are considered to spread impurity through their periods of menstruation and through childbirth. During menstruation they are secluded within special buildings, *bashali*, where they are also confined during childbirth, and for about one month after. In everyday life, the women must be careful to observe numerous prohibitions to prevent polluting and contaminating the men, and be very careful not to touch any sacred objects or approach sacred places. Prepubescent girls and elderly women past menopause, have broken with the *bashali*, and are exceptionally allowed to approach the goat stables of their male relatives (Parkes 1987:652). Ideas about pollution and impurity seem associated with women, evil spirits and foreign life outside the valleys. A major, if not the most important preoccupation of the Kalasha religion, is an essentially masculine cult of communication with the divine powers of the mountain zone. And in order to achieve a positive contact it is absolutely imperative to keep women and goats segregated to prevent any potential contamination and from polluting the pastoral sphere thus angering the mountain spirits (*ibid.*). In the following I will present two myths in order to help explain how the supernatural world is interwoven in the Dard societies, and how contact with the supernatural sphere is enabled.

5.8 The supernatural beings of the mountains: Two myths

The belief in supernatural beings living in the mountains probably predates the agro-pastoral way of life seen in northern Pakistan, Afghanistan and India today. When groups of hunters were faced with diminishing stocks of game animals to hunt, and changing social and economic condition, they changed from a hunter's way of life to livestock-herding and farming. They may have compensated for the loss of the proposed "paradise" by building up cultural values and preserving their belief in supernatural beings herding their livestock, the wild mountain goats (Degener 2001:339).

One of the myths concerning the origin of this belief will be explained in the following story, first collected from the Nuristanis by the indologist Georg Budruss in 1969, here retold by Almuth Degener (2001). The myth is common and recurs in many different versions amongst the Dardic speaking groups:

A man is out hunting mountain goats, but finds himself surrounded by supernatural beings, who force him to follow them into a narrow cleft in a rock. The fairies' house is guarded by bears and leopards, and the house is filled with old, young, males and females. The hunter is

given food, similar to what they eat in the human world, and he hides some to show the other villagers. The fairies behave very much like humans, talking and playing. In the evening the fairies slaughter a mountain goat and each is given a piece of the animal. The hunter is given the upper part of the front leg. Upon finishing the meal, the hunter breaks the thigh-bone right up the middle to get to the marrow. The fairies shout at him to stop, and not break the bones. The hunter is afraid, and uses a little twig from a tree and joins the broken bone with it. After the meal the fairies put the bones of the mountain goat in its skin, throw it out the door and the animal springs back to life and looks into the house. The fairies tell the goat that it now belongs to a certain human, whereupon the mountain goat runs away. The hunter is released, unharmed, and returns to the village. He is invited for dinner, as two of his friends have killed a mountain goat. The hunter who was imprisoned finds the twig in the animal during the meal, and explains to the other what has happened. Since then people say that the mountain goats are the livestock of the fairies (Degener 2001:331-332, Tuite 1997).

One of the most important points that can be extracted from this Nuristani story is that the people believe the supernatural world to be almost an exact mirror image of their own society. The fairies live together in families like humans, with male and female, young and the old behaving like Nuristanis. They eat the same food and most likely speak the same language, as the human has no difficulty in understanding them. The fairies keep the wild mountain goats as livestock and bears and leopards for protection the same way as the agro-pastoral people of Nuristan keep goats and dogs. Another interesting and important aspect of the tale is the status involved being in contact with the fairies. As can be seen, the hunter brings back food as evidence for his supernatural contact and willingly tells the other villagers it was he who replaced the broken thigh-bone with a twig. The status-enhancing aspect of contact with the supernatural is probably strongly related to the cultural importance of purity and the purifying effect the sacred realm and the supernatural beings have on human beings in contact with them. By proving his involvement with the pure and sacred realm of supernatural fairies, the hunter is believed to have acquired some of the purity, and brought with him this purity back, thus transferring positive effects to the other people of the village (Sidky 1994:73). Another interesting point is that the fairies resurrect the mountain goat from its bones, a mythic component known from many places in the world (Eliade 1974:160). The fairies are, however, ambiguous creatures capable of both bringing prosperity and harm which will be demonstrating in the next story:

A man went hunting in the mountains, and takes aim at a mountain goat. Immediately the goat turns into a dog, and the hunter lowers his gun. The animal turns into a fox and looks at him. Suddenly, he is surrounded by fairies, advancing on him. They force him to go even further up in the mountains, complaining amongst themselves on how the man tried to kill a mountain goat they hadn't eaten before him. They decide to imprison him, until his sisters would lament for him. While his sisters composed an elegy in their brother's honour and began the necessary funeral rites, the husband of one of them, who was able to converse with the fairies, made up his mind to speak with them to make them free the man. Before he did so, he slaughtered a hornless goat in the name of the supernatural beings, calling their names. In consequence the hunter was released and returned to the village (Degener 2001:334-335).

The story indicates that the fairies are the natural protectors of the high pastures and the wild game found there, and that not obeying their rules can have grave consequences. The fairies do not however speak of killing the offender, but plan to incarcerate him for a few days. This is in accordance with other stories where a hunter or a shepherd has encountered the fairies, where the fairies are not really presented as malevolent, provided they are not offended. The humans do not see the spirits as not dangerous, and for humans, dealing with the fairies is indeed dangerous. The imprisoned person would be terrified, and the family of the abducted man would believe him dead (ibid.). The fairies both display life-giving, as well as life threatening powers. They jealously guard their domain against intruders and human encroachment, but can also provide prosperity and good fortune, as when they kill and resurrect a mountain goat, removing its life essence and making it possible for a specific hunter to kill it.

Not all people can communicate with the supernatural beings and negotiate with them in case of conflict. The hunter's brother-in-law is distinguished in the story as a man with the ability to speak with the fairies. He sacrifices a domestic goat in their honour as a ransom for the imprisoned hunter, which in addition with burning juniper are common sacrifices. The smell of burning juniper attracts the fairies, which will then approach the sacrificial places (Degener 2001:334-336). Amongst the Hunzakut, living in the high western Karakoram Mountains of northern Pakistan, the religious specialist with the ability to communicate with the supernatural beings is known as a *bitan*, and is the local shaman.

5.9 Communicating with the supernatural

Hunza is located in the far north western part of the South Asian subcontinent, in Pakistan's Northern Areas District, a mountain area where the Hindu Kush, Karakoram and Himalaya ranges meet, producing a large network of valleys, peaks and glaciers. The Hunzakuts speak *Burushaski*, a language related to the Dardic language.

Being semi-isolated throughout most of their history, the local religious beliefs of the Hunzakuts have survived Islamization to some degree. Here, as wherever Islam has gone it has overshadowed the local indigenous shamanistic and polytheistic beliefs and practices, and the local deities have most often been reduced to the ranks of mountain spirits (Lorimer 1929:511, Staley 1969:176). Only few places is the old gods still remembered, and the rituals related to them still practiced, sacrificing of goats, burning of juniper and the drinking of fresh, goat blood. The Hunzakut has to a certain degree refused to let go of their ancient, traditional religious beliefs and practices. They continue to honour the *pari*, the mountain spirits, and to venerate their bitan the shaman and mediator between the supernatural world and the human world (Sidky 1994:72). The most important role of the shaman in the Hunzakut society, is communicating with the supernatural beings, believed to inhabit the alpine meadows high above the human settlements, a belief common to many cultures of the trans-Himalayan region. They claim to hear the *pari* voices in "the howling of the wind, the roar of mountain streams, the thundering echoes of falling rocks, and the creaking of the juniper trees (Sidky 1994:73)", and often the shepherds tending their herd of goats in the high alpine pastures would casually tell the villagers they had heard the *pari* voices and their music in the mountains (ibid.).

The *pari* are the natural protectors of the high mountain areas, the flora and fauna, believed by the Hunzakut to be sacred. Like seen amongst the Nuristani, the supernatural beings are assumed to be the herdsman of the wild mountain goats, and the spirits therefore favour domestic goats which they will let safely be taken to the upland pastures. Contrasting their liking for goats, the *pari* are offended by the presence of women because of their menstrual periods, and cattle which they regard as impure. The connection between the *pari* and goats are considered the basis for both the traditional religious beliefs of the Hunzakut as well as for the ritual role of goats during the initiation and oracular performances of the bitan (ibid.). Breaking of the taboos connected to the supernatural beings is considered dangerous, as the

pari are believed to be ambiguous creatures, capable of harming trespassers, striking them with altitude sickness, kill them with tumbling boulders or bury them with roaring avalanches. The spirits are also known to steal children, harm villagers, injury their livestock and destroy their crops. On the other hand, they bring prosperity and good fortune to those who know how to honour and avoid offending them (ibid.). Keeping the pari content is thus of extreme importance to the Hunzakuts to secure their own safety and avoid failed harvests, deaths in the families and injured livestock. The bitan, capable of personally communicating with these ambiguous creatures, inhabit an important and powerful position in the Hunzakut societies, exercising their supernatural powers for the good of the community (Sidky 1994:73-74). In terms of crisis, the bitan will communicate with the supernatural world and converse with the supernatural beings, asking for assistance, and then deliver the answer from the pari to the community during a public ceremony.



Fig 5.1: The ecstatic bitan conversing with the pari (Sidky 1994:85).

The bitan's role as mediator between the supernatural world and the human world in the Hunzakut society reflects the indigenous beliefs, ritual and religion as the basis of their survival. Without the spirits help and goodwill, their whole culture would be endangered. In summary, the supernatural beings intervene in favour of the people, an intervention that manifests itself through symptoms beyond human control, like ecstatic dancing etc. (Siiger

1967:80). Similar kind of religious practitioners are found in most of the cultures in the mountainous areas of northern Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. The shamans have so many peculiarities in common that it is assumed that the shamanism of Hindu Kush and the Western Himalayas areas represent a peculiar branch of the well-known Asiatic shamanism. It is important to point out that according to Schomberg, the bitan of the Hunza are often female (Schomberg 1935:209), which to some degree contrasts the seemingly general Dardic opinion that men are purer than women and more suitable for establishing contact with the supernatural.

5.10 Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have introduced the ancient religious beliefs and the social structure of the Dardic speakers of the Karakoram. The dualisms of their society is based on the notion of verticality and a separation of the landscape in pure and impure spheres, where the mountains are considered pure and the home of supernatural spirits and the lower valleys as impure. The different zones correspond to a division of the sexes based on each genders subsistence activity. Females are associated with agriculture and the lower zones, and males with herding, hunting and the higher lying zones. The religious beliefs are structured around the supernatural beings, which are believed to be able to cure sickness and bring fortune, fertility and prosperity to the people if the mediators (shamans) are purified and can perform the necessary rituals and possess the spiritual connection. The mountain goat is believed to belong to the supernatural beings as their domestic animal, the same way as people keep domestic goats. In the next chapter we shall see how the religious-ritual role of the goat and mountain goat can be linked with the rock carvings of Taru Thang and the social structure of the Dardic speaking people of Central Asia.

Chapter 6: The Rock Carvings of Taru Thang: An analysis

6.1 Introduction

In the following analysis of the rock carvings of Taru Thang, I will try to show how the carvings can be connected with the religious beliefs and what purpose the symbol might have had for the Dardic speakers of the Indian Himalayas, the Northern Areas of Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan. I will bring together the theoretic framework presented in chapter 2, the rock art material from Taru Thang from chapter 3 and the ethnographic material from chapter 5. By merging these components, I will construct a possible scenario of why these carvings were produced. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the hypothesis about to be proposed is only one possible interpretation amongst numerous others, and that the path to reach the conclusion might be just as important as the conclusion itself. The main goal in this chapter is to show how the mountain goat image in the rock art material can be seen as an expression of how manifestations of natural symbols taken from a cultural group's local environment can be used as tools in which to make social differences visible. I therefore propose that by using a theoretic approach involving totemism, bricolage, myths and binary oppositions on the mountain goat symbols found as rock carvings in Taru Thang, we can gain a new understanding and new knowledge of its creators. Totemism, however, is a very broad term and I do not wish to imply that it can be applied directly on the rock art material nor to the Dardic speaking people, but function as a framework for the following analysis.

There have been few, if any, attempts at interpreting the mountain goat images so frequently depicted in rock art sites in the Indus Valley, but with the following analysis I take the first steps at demonstrating it is possible to do so.

6.2 Mountain goat: Thinking the differences

The Himalayan emphasis on vertical movement and the contrast between the high mountain tops and the low valley bottoms is the key for understanding the rest of the chain of binary oppositions that contribute in defining the Dard culture. We will start by tracing the mountain goat symbol in Dard societies back through a chain of binary oppositions, using the verticality of the landscape as base:

| Mountain | Valley |
|-----------------|---------------|
| Purity | Impurity |
| Male | Female |
| Mountain Goat | Cattle |

Fig 6.1: Binary oppositions linked to landscape verticality.

These binary oppositions can to some extent be compared with the approach Tilley used in interpreting the rock art of Nämforsen. Tilley suggests that the natural designs elk, fish and bird relates to cultural designs like shoe sole, boat and tool. He propose that *elk is to fish is to bird as shoe sole is to boat is to tool* (Tilley 1991:99). In a similar way, it might be suggested that in the Dard world, *mountain goat is to cattle what men are to women and what mountain is to village* (fig 6.1). By making use of the concrete and the particular, as a means to map out the social relations, here the dichotomy between man and woman, mountain goat and cattle are valuable tools as concrete symbols, better at thinking differences with than the abstract (ibid.). The ready-made difference in the natural world, in this instance between the mountain goat and cattle, can be seen through the different animals' mobility which again corresponds to the natural environment. The mountain goats are agile and have no problems moving in the mountains with rocky slopes and rugged terrain, while cattle do not inhabit such traits. This ready-made natural difference is transferred upon man and woman, since the woman and man is part of a symbolic polarity of extreme division of agro-pastoral labour: the women work with agriculture and tend the domestic sphere while man herds and tends the goats in the mountains. The symbolic dichotomy between male-pastoral and female-domestic domains orchestrates basic features of sexual polarity and antagonism (Parkes 1987:638), reflected and made "concrete" through the different species habitat.

There are therefore several reasons as to why it is possible to associate the symbol of the mountain goat with the male population of the Dardic speaking communities. However, it is not only in the ethnography we can trace the link between the mountain goats and the male sphere. Stylistic features that can be seen in mountain goat representations of Taru Thang further enhance this assumption, as we shall see through the following examples (Fig. 6.1):

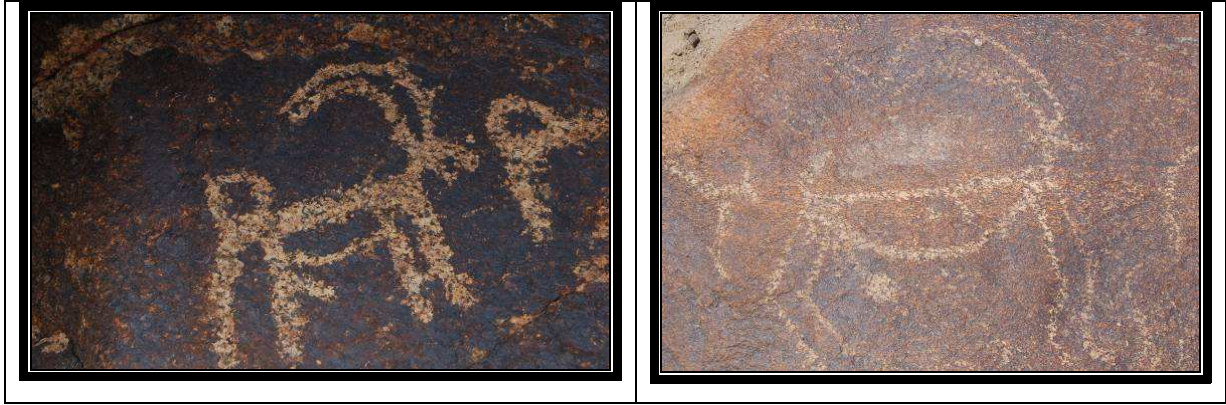


Fig. 6.2 (fig. 140 (panel 7), fig. 88 (panel 4)): Rock carvings showing ibex with genitals depicted.

First of all, the majority of the mountain goat carvings represent male animals, an interpretation done on behalf of the exaggerated horns, which is exclusive to the male mountain goat. More than this, many of the goats are depicted with male genitalia (Fig 6.2). This might be interpreted as either an expression of *fertility* or as an expression of *maleness*. As will be shown, both these explanations are viable regarding the rock art of Taru Thang. Animals, and in particular goats, represent amongst the Dards a type of fertility which is primarily associated with men. However, the fertility has strong social associations as well, as men through their identification with communal concerns take much of the responsibility (and credit) for initiating and carrying out certain activities and rituals designed to prevent misfortune or to re-establish order after misfortune have occurred. The underlying theme for these rituals, are that they must be done according to tradition, and in a way that manifests the respect that is expected. Thus, the goat is associated with fertility through their superior animal ancestor, the mountain goat, and with the rituals performed by men to ensure prosperity (Jettmar 2002:6). I believe that the mountain goat phallic representations in Taru Thang reflect both the *fertility* associated with the goats and the *male power* connected with rituals in which the fertility of the goat is used to benefit the society. The goat can therefore be assumed to symbolize a fertility which is predominantly male and social.

The positive ritual value of goats among the Dardic speaking cultures and the contrasting negative evaluation of cattle as impure animals, associated with the female and demonic pollution is however not the case amongst all the cultures of the region. Amongst certain other groups, displaying the same dualistic division of the mountain environment into pure and impure zones, cattle and sheep are seen as the most valued livestock and plays the same role in the religious iconography as the goats and wild mountain goats plays among the Dards (Parkes 1987:653-654).

| | High Value (pure) | Neutral | Low Value (Impure) |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------|
| Dardic-speakers: | Goats | Sheep | Cattle |
| Kati Kafirs, Bashgal: | Cattle | Goats | Sheep |
| Pamir Tajiks: | Sheep | Cattle | Goats |

Fig 6.3 (Parkes 1987:654): The value associated with goats, sheep and cattle varies between cultures found within the same cultural area.

The important point governing the regional contrasts in livestock codes is according to Parkes that animal metaphors amongst mountain pastoralists is employed to discriminate sets of moral and behavioural categories of relative identity, where the extensive range of domestic and wild animals may represent an equivalent spectrum of moral values and personal categories ordered in their relation to a social difference. In reference to these contrasting livestock codes and values, we might talk of a kind of *pastoral totemism* (Parkes 1987:655; Smith 1927:354-355). William Robertson Smith suggests in “Lectures on the Religion of the Semites” (1927) that it is important to distinguish between the sacred and domestic animals of pastoral tribes, between “milk-givers” and sacred wild or half-domesticated kinds. He claims that the belief in sacred wild animals attains its development in tribes that have not yet learned to breed cattle and goats and to live on their milk. He further proposes that the introduction of pastoral life has been one of the most powerful agencies in breaking up the old totem-religions: As the totem clans began to breed cattle and goats and live on their secondary products, they transferred the sanctity and kinship which used to be related to the wild animals, to the herds. But, the key point to his theory in this context is that primitive religious beliefs are practically *indestructible*, except by the destruction of the culture itself which the beliefs are ingrained, and thus we find that the new ideas of what Smith calls the pastoral religions are overlaid the old notions, but have not extinguished them (Smith 1927:355-356).

I believe that totemism, might be a valuable tool in interpreting the rock carvings of Taru Thang. Combined with the binary oppositions, defining the Dards social structure and religious beliefs, we have a base on which we can interpret the mountain goat carvings, the symbol dominating the site of Taru Thang. The following part will attempt to connect the mythological world of the Dards with the rock carvings, in an attempt to draw a line from the

religious beliefs to the social structure and show how the Dards have made use of myths to create logic in their world.

6.3 The mind and the myth

According to Robert Deliège, myths tell of the establishment and the meaning of culture as mediator between the (infra-human) nature and the (supra-human) sacred realm. In other words, these myths help in resolving a problem and to even a basic contradiction. Through the myths people come to understand themselves as intermediary beings rooted in nature but at the same time able to instituting an order of rules other than that of the nature. Simplified and summarized: *In myth we define ourselves as cultural beings* (Deliège 2004:99). But is it possible to link the mountain goat carvings of Taru Thang with the myths and the supernatural beings, and further as a tool in which to explain the social reality of the Dards?

Again, the dualism between the pure and the impure zones based on the verticality of the Himalayan landscape is the background. The high lying zones where the mountain goats roam is considered the male sphere while the low zones are impure and considered the female sphere. This dualism is what constitutes the background of the hunting myths and their meaning: on the one side of the polarity is the pure world of the supernatural beings and their animals (mountain goats) and on the other side the impure world of the village and the animals belonging to that sphere (cattle). The traditional stories and myths presuppose the dualistic world of pure and impure spheres which is essential to the audience's social and cultural identity. By preserving myths and telling stories along the lines prescribed by tradition, the storyteller recreates the ideal world order of which the audience is actually a part. This way, the listeners actively take part in the story and confirm their own role within the system of the world. Thus, the lore and myths provides for both the storyteller and the listener a means to experience themselves as a part of the cosmic order (Degener 2001:338). It can be argued that our minds structure the myths, and in a feedback loop the myths instruct our perceptions on the universe around us (MacCormack 1980:6).

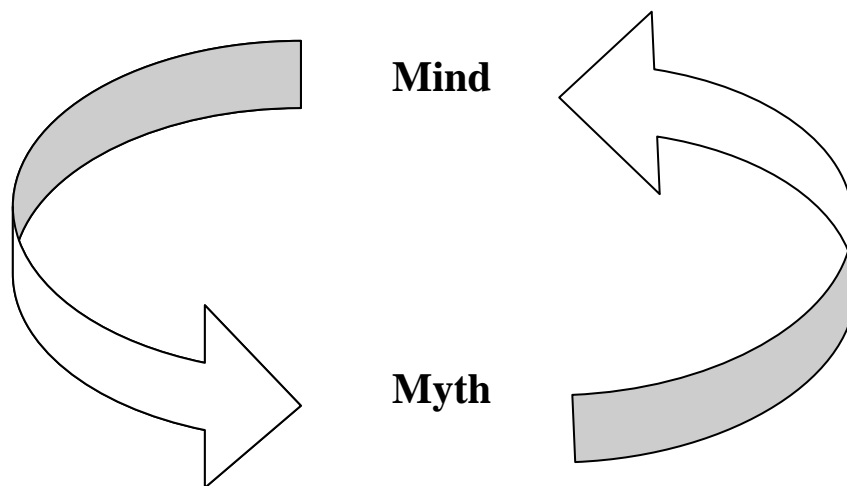


Fig. 6.4: Figure demonstrating the myth/mind feedback loop.

I will suggest here that the mountain goats can be viewed as the concrete manifestations of the dualisms and as an important component of the cosmic order that Dardic speaking people define themselves through. If the people believe that the mountain goats are the domestic animals of the supernatural beings, the mountain goats themselves become the sole visible proof, the concrete connection between man and the sacred. In other words: it can be seen as the *concrete logic* creating an analogy between the animals, an active use of bricolage with the natural environment of the Dard world as the medium.

The mythic world of the Dards is further ritualized and enacted through religious specialists as shown through the examples drawn from Hunza in Pakistan's Northern Areas. The shaman is the mediator between the domestic sphere and supernatural sphere, and through making use of natural substances from the sacred zones (juniper smoke and goat blood) he is believed able to mediate between the supernatural beings and the humans, and thus bring fortune and prosperity to the people (Sidky 1994:87, Siiger 1967:80). The example of the shaman from Hunza demonstrates how the myths in Lévi-Strauss' own words is "the very exercise of the savage mind" (Deliège 2004:97). The supernatural world is not separated from the mundane world, but is quite contrary an important tool in helping to explain the natural processes like life, death, sickness and prosperity. In other words, the shamanistic rituals are the *actions*, in which the myths are put to practical use, believed to directly influencing human lives. In 1975 there was a serious crisis in the pastoral economy of the Kalasha, as a livestock epidemic devastated their goat herds. The Kalasha responded with an upsurge of ritual activity, where the epidemic was interpreted as an attack of supernatural beings that had invaded the valleys

due to ritual negligence. A shaman immediately demanded more stringent respect to the traditional rules of ritual purity and impurity, whose breach he deemed responsible for the misfortune (Parkes 1990:11). This demonstrates the way natural processes in Dard societies, in this example an epidemic, is explained through myths and believed caused by supernatural beings. The following examples will attempt to show how the mythic components might be seen in the rock art of Taru Thang.

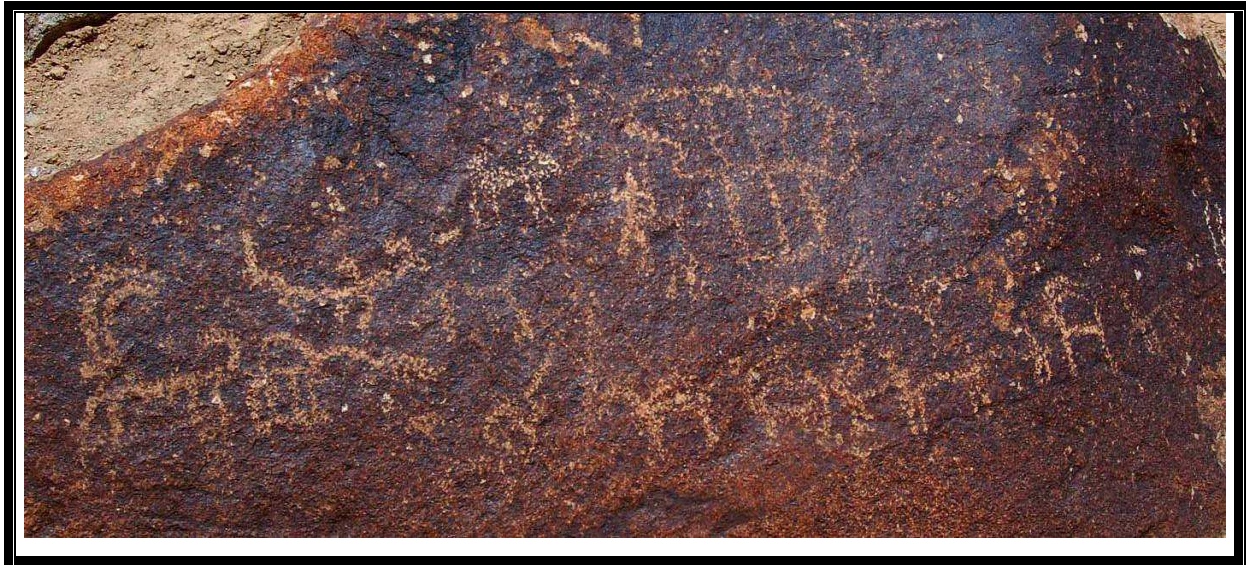


Fig. 6.5 (panel 9): Composition displaying one or more supernatural beings and possibly a building surrounded by mountain goats and a mythical creature.

Rock art composition fig. 6.5 is here not interpreted as human herding activity, as the animals depicted are certainly mountain goats and not domestic animals. And as the anthropomorph figures in the middle and the right do not seem to be wielding any kind of weaponry, I will assume it is not a hunting scene. Quite the contrary, it looks as if the anthropomorphs are holding the mountain goats by a leash. Therefore, the anthropomorphs can possibly be interpreted as *supernatural beings* herding their domestic animals, the mountain goats. As the supernatural world is believed to be a copy of the human world, as seen in the myth from chapter 5, we can suggest the supernatural beings look like humans as well, explaining the human-like form seen in fig. 6.5. The mythology of the Dards can be interpreted as represented through this composition, mirror-imaging the pastoral (masculine) activity of the male population. The mythological world of the Dards can thus be said to be recreated through the rock carving, both affecting and manifesting their view on the structure of society.

The next indication of supernatural beings being depicted in the rock art comes from fig. 6.6. As seen in chapter 5, the supernatural beings are believed to be able to take the form of mountain goats. Fig 6.6 depicts centaur-like creatures, which I have interpreted as “cross-over” representation, displaying both mountain goat attributes and human attributes. As I have not found any indications of humans (shamans) believed to be able to take mountain goat forms, nor found myths indicating belief in centaurs, I suggest the centaur motifs represent supernatural beings.

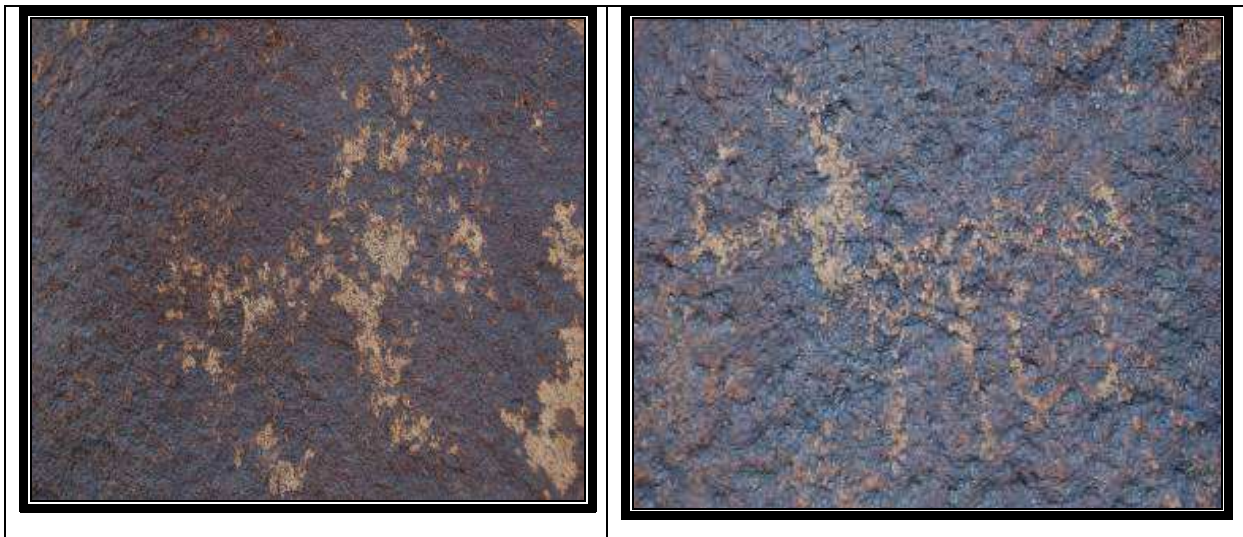


Fig. 6.6 (Fig 65 (panel 12), Fig 24 (single)): Representations of centaur-like creatures, here interpreted as supernatural beings: half anthropomorphs, half mountain goats.

The depth of time connected with the mountain goat image of Taru Thang is of course a problem for interpretation. By covering several thousands of years, from the Central Asian Bronze age and up to the present, it remains difficult to relate the rock carvings to one single interpretation. According to Lévi-Strauss the different versions of the same myth form a system within a given cultural zone. By superimposing these different versions, it might be possible to grasp the underlying structure. The myths change, and the form changes constantly, from one narrator to the next and from one generation to the next. What I propose is therefore that the analysis shows an underlying structure that has been left unchanged despite countless of mythic versions. I believe, like Lévi-Strauss, that myths can be told in different ways, translated and paraphrased without changing or altering their *value* (Deliège 2004:97-98). In other words, despite the continuity and depth of time present in Taru Thang and the mountain goat symbol, the myths connected to the symbol might have changed, but

the underlying meaning expressing a wish to explaining contradictions in the society have remained the same.

6.4 The invisibility of woman

The interpretations are however not without difficulties, and deserve another look. The ethnographic material I have used is recorded by male anthropologists and might be considered expressing a male dominated culture emphasizing a “man’s world” neglecting the woman’s impact and influence on society. However, it is important to keep in mind, that this might not necessarily be the only possible interpretation. In the book “Space, Text and Gender” (1996) written by the anthropologist Henrietta L. Moore, the invisibility of women is being questioned through an analysis of the Endo and Marakwet of Kenya. Why do women seem to have a minimal impact on the cultural-social organization (Moore 1996:170-171)? And in this context do the women in Dardic speaking tribes have an alternate understanding of the world, contrasting the “man’s world” proposed by the ethnographic material presented by the anthropologists? It can be argued that the organization of space and its gender based division of landscape into pure and impure zones is an objectification of the male view of the world. Just as Moore shows through her analysis, the hierarchy implies a set of valuations that indicates that male qualities are positively valued in contrast to those associated with the female, which are not. The positively valued social qualities like the human connection with the spiritual sphere and the social and ritual responsibilities are associated with the male, and these predominant values are articulated in terms of a male world position. Within the male-oriented culture, according to Moore, male and female are cultural categories and part of a symbolic order which constructs masculinity and femininity in particular ways (Moore 1996:171-173). The opposition between male - female and the corresponding pair, goat – cattle, can therefore be assumed to be ways of thinking about the world. Different values (positive - negative) are assigned to these animals, but the values are not necessarily fixed, as women may be associated with the providing *mother* and *producer* in one context (positive) and in another the potential dangerous and autonomous powers of the anarchic *wife*, who might be threatening the male order (negative). The contradiction in value orientation is noted by Fredrik Barth amongst the Swat Pathans of Pakistan, where the emphasis on masculinity and virility implies a high valuation of males and male company over females, although it must be through the company of females that the masculinity and virility is consummated (Barth 1998:122). Thus it can be argued that if the mountain goat is a symbolic expression of

masculinity, it is through its *negation*, the female, it is infused with energy that makes it a potent social symbol. While it seems women are invisible in the rock art material of Taru Thang it may be suggested that the mountain goat symbol speaks out and explains just as much for its antagonism as it does for its objective.

It can be argued that one of the problems with the study of gender is that cultural notions concerning men and women rarely reflect the true nature of gender relations of what men and women actually do, and what men and women can be observed to contribute back to society (Moore 1996:177). For example, seen in the ethnographic material of the Kalasha, the extreme division of agro-pastoral labour by sex does not necessarily reflect the true subsistence or political value of the actual labour conducted. The antagonism between male and female is enhanced by the custom of wife elopement, giving women both domestic control and political power, connected with their dominance through agricultural labour which the society is dependant on. It is therefore the *illusion* (Lévi-Strauss 2001:13) that the rituals performed by the male population contribute in ensuring prosperity through their bond with the supernatural beings of the mountains reflecting the masculine pastoral part of the Dards subsistence activity.

The power of ideological persuasion and conviction can be inherent in visual symbols, and they can have a mediating function in periods of stress (Barth 1969). This applies to relations between groups as well as between women and men. When people realize the power of the image, they will try to manipulate the content of the image as to promote their own interests (Mandt 2001:293). It might be possible to relate such stress to the custom of wife elopement and to the transhumant life of the men, and in the following part I will discuss how the rock art can have been used to recreate and renegotiate male dominance.

6.5 Recreating power: The production of rock art

It should be pointed out that social and ideological dominance of men is not given, but something that has to be constantly renegotiated and recreated. Thus, the mountain goat rock carvings could be viewed as a means of recreating the male dominance over women. The most powerful tool in reproducing the model of a society is to construct a “common sense” world where the dominance appear both legitimate and natural, as amongst the Dards could be seen as expressed through myths and rituals connected to the male sphere as a necessity for

survival. As mentioned, by preserving the myths and stories, the storyteller recreates the *ideal world*, where the audience confirms their role in the society. Through the lore and the myths, the listeners experience themselves as part of the universe, and in the same way that our minds structure the myths, the myths structure our minds. If this is so, the *storyteller* in this context, is the *creator* of the rock art. The mountain goat motif has been reproduced over and over again in Taru Thang over a time span covering several thousand years which is attested through the rock art chronology. By producing and recreating powerful ideological symbols like the mountain goat, the rock art producers recreate an “ideal world” and thus legitimize the male dominance in the society. I do not believe this necessarily is a *conscious act*, but that it is an effect like seen in the myth – mind feedback loop (fig. 6.4): The myth effects the way the mind understands its surrounding (society), and this reflects back at the myth, recreating it and confirming the message. In this case, the myth and the message is manifested in the rock art in Taru Thang, emitting its content to the next people who arrive at the site and who have the necessary mythic knowledge and cultural antennas adapted to read it. This person, unconsciously affected by the symbolism of the mountain goat, recreates the message by producing another mountain goat on the site. In a way, this correlates with Lewis-Williams theory concerning the Bushman myth of the eland from chapter 2, where each new painting representing a dying eland is believed to imbue the medicine man in eland-potency, and thus enhancing and recreating his power and influence.

According to Ian Hodder, each material symbol has three broad types of meaning. First, is that the objects meaning is the effect it has on the world, its *action*. Second, we can say that the object has a meaning because it is part of a code or set, its *structure*. Third, there is the *content* of the meaning (Hodder 1987:1). The *action* of the mountain goat rock carvings is the recreating of the male dominance over women amongst the Dardic speaking groups. The *structure* of which the symbol appears is the religious beliefs of the group, and thus leading us to its *content* of the meaning, which is the message the symbol conveys to the person who perceives it. And the place where it is perceived, is the rock art site and in this case Taru Thang.

So, where does Taru Thang as a rock art site fit into this system of reproducing and negotiating ideology? Bryan C. Hood explains how social relations, ideology and space articulate among the Aborigines of the western and central desert of Australia and the Saami of northern Scandinavia. The Aborigines lived in a meaningful constructed totemic landscape,

where the symbolic construction of geography articulated with the symbolic construction of the social categories, the totemic groups. Each of the totemic groups had dedicated a ceremonial centre to the totem, and the different totemic centres across the region were mythologically related (Hood 1988:69). Hood concludes that the totemic sites can be seen as non-portable information nodes in the social geography (ibid.). With this in mind, it can be argued that Taru Thang is an informative “library” in the landscape, reproducing the male dominance based on religious control, and thus negotiating the male – female relations. In other words, Taru Thang as a totemic site serves as a focal point for legitimizing social knowledge systems. Further research including a comparison of the multiple rock art sites in Ladakh, might throw light upon the relationships between these totemic rock art centres. I believe it is not sufficient to compare and analyse rock carvings within Taru Thang itself, but that it is necessary to compare carvings from multiple sites in Ladakh to discover the mythographic underlying structure as seen from the example taken from Leroi-Gourhan’s work in Southern France. Hopefully, future research will make us able to compare the rock carvings of Taru Thang with other sites in Ladakh and bring us closer to understanding their true meaning and origin.

6.6 Concluding remarks

As has been shown, the verticality of the Himalayan landscape corresponds to a chain of binary opposition clearly present in the Dard society. The most important of these binary oppositions following the concept of verticality is that of male – female, a symbolic polarity that corresponds to an extreme division of agro-pastoral labour by sex. This basic dichotomization of the natural environment as a ritual-geographic hierarchy is manifested in rock art by images favouring the mountain goats. The mountain goats inhabit the high lying pure zones believed to be the domestic animals of the supernatural creatures. This does not, however, mean that the mountain goat is the *male* totem or cattle is the *female* totem in the traditional sense of the word, but that the symbolic systems favour different genders and that totemism is a powerful theoretic tool to help explain why these natural and concrete symbols were chosen to represent the antagonism between the sexes. This can be demonstrated through the linking of a chain of binary oppositions: *mountain goat is to cattle what men are to women and what mountain is to village*. The extreme division of labour between men and women should be taken into account, and especially how institutions of marital rivalry or “wife-stealing” play an important role in their society. The transhumant life of the Dards

might have created stress between the sexes, which can have resulted in the creation of rock carvings as an expression of a male wish for dominance.

I therefore suggest that the antagonism between the sexes can be seen in the rock art material symbolizing the pure (ordered) male sphere through the mountain goat contrasting the (anarchic) female sphere of the villages. Simplified, the mountain goats' connection with the spiritual and pure sphere of the mountains is the reason for its dominance on the rock art site, where the symbol is recreated over and over again. The recreation of the mountain goat symbol in Taru Thang might have contributed in recreating the *meaning* of the symbol and thus the male dominance in Dard society. I believe there is a hidden meaning behind the mountain goat symbol of Taru Thang, a message which has to do with the resolution of a contradiction (Deliège 2004:97). This message, I believe is connected with an internal wish for understanding the Dardic speaking society and in particular the opposition between man and woman. Thus, reaching the basic conclusion that the mountain goat rock carvings of Taru Thang were not produced because the animal was *good to eat*, but because it was *good to think with*.

Thus, like the bricoleur, making use of bits and pieces of materials and tools found in his environment, I have made use of the bits and pieces of information found in the ethnographic material of the Dards societies. Hopefully, the “left over tools and instruments” my work leaves behind, can be used again, when future archaeologists engage further in the interpretation of Ladakhi rock art.

Chapter 7: Future challenges

During one of my early visits to Ladakh, some friends and I went to visit the oracle of Saboo village. She lived in a little house with a hole in the roof, letting out the juniper smoke coming from a small tin box fire. The old woman was dressed in red, with a scarf covering her face and was chanting and rattling a bell in a corner as the crowd shuffled in, both tourists and locals. After a short while, the oracle entered a trance thus enabling contact with the spirits of the supernatural world. The attendants could either be cured of disease and sickness or present the oracle with questions concerning their future whereupon she would give advice. When in trance, the oracle appeared uncontrollable and would occasionally hit the attendants with a stick if they didn't behave as she would have it. The curing of sickness was more than often done by having the patient lifting their shirt whereupon she would remove her scarf and suck at the person's chest. When she retreated from the patient the oracle would spit out what seemed to be half a litre of mucus and blood in a mug, claiming to have sucked the disease from the body of the patient. I received a blessing (purification), having my head held over the little tin box of burning juniper, inhaling the smoke while the oracle chanted, touching the top of my head with her *vajra*, a Buddhist sacred object looking like a short metal staff.



Fig. 7.1: The oracle of Saboo gives me a blessing. Photograph by Ingrid Jæger 2005.

This story shows that some parts of the ancient religious beliefs survives and are accepted as part of the local Buddhist religion. Sadly, as will be shown in the following, other aspects of the ancient Ladakhi religious traditions do not survive to the same extent.

7.1 The destruction of Ladakhi Rock Art

There are without doubt more rock art to be discovered and documented in Ladakh, such as the potential rock art sites near Khalatse, Nurla, Alchi, and Rizong as mentioned by Mr. Tsering Wangzhuk of the Archaeological Survey of India. The carvings have existed for several millennia, but without immediate attention I fear the carvings, along with their secrets, will be lost for ever. The rock art is in danger of being victim to a fate similar to what has happened to the ancient religion of the Dardic speaking groups in Central Asia. Many rock art sites like Taru Thang are situated along the Indus River and the Leh – Kargil road, and are as such placed both in a geographical and political space threatening their existence. Military activity and road and house building are the main reasons for rock art destruction in Ladakh, and immediate actions need to be undertaken to prevent further destruction and to preserve the rock art sites. Within very short time the rock art of Taru Thang will more or less disappear. In order to maintain and build roads, gravel is needed. The gravel is produced through manual labour by shattering rocks and boulders with sledgehammers (Fig. 7.1 and 7.2), and sadly the rocks and boulders are suitable for both rock carvings and for gravel making. I painfully observed how this activity was being performed in Taru Thang, even though the carvings are under protection by law. I estimate that without the necessary awareness of the historical value of the rock art, the site of Taru Thang will be ruined within few years.



Fig. 7.2: Men working in Taru Thang near the rock art concentration area.



Fig. 7.3: Photo of a man working in Taru Thang

7.2 Preserving the Rock Art

Urbanization and modernization are rapidly changing the traditional way of life in Ladakh. Ever since the Indian Government opened Ladakh to foreigners in 1974, tourists have poured into the regions seeking to experience the untouched environment of the Indian Himalayas. Trekking is the most popular tourist attraction, and thousands of people visit Ladakh every year to go hiking in the mountains. Adventure tourism has a huge impact on the economic growth of Ladakh, and is a business still increasing. I will not go into how tourism affects the traditional Ladakhi society, although it is worthy lengthy discussions.

With tourism comes the potential of personal economic gain, seen in the numerous trekking and adventure agencies spread all around Leh. If it was possible to introduce rock art sites as tourist attractions, this might help preserve the carvings. Protecting ones income is an obvious measure, and by making rock art sites a way of accumulating wealth the rock carvings' future might look brighter. The first step would be to provide information to the travel agencies. Similar "awareness programs" have been undertaken regarding environmental protection which has proven somewhat successful. The environmental protection program is based on the same principle: By preserving and protecting something that is value to tourists, they are also preserving and protecting their own source of income. This would in any case not be without problems, as directed tourism would attract other destructive problems such as the carvings being worn down or even vandalism.

However, it is just as important to create an archaeological interest and awareness in the rock art of Ladakh. There is an abundance of rock carvings waiting to be recorded and documented, debates to be had and secrets to be revealed. I hope to contribute in making the carvings visible to other archaeologists, and in the future to help establish a fundament for further research on the rock carvings of Ladakh.

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