

CULTURAL HERITAGE OF LADAKH

ROCK ART



Rock art is a universal expression of mankind, it is the striking testimony of the cultures of the past. Ladakh is one of the richest region of the world for rock art with its continuous corridor of almost 60 kilometers along the Indus.

In Ladakh rock art is at present the only reliable source of information about the late past of the country, that is why it needs to be protected.



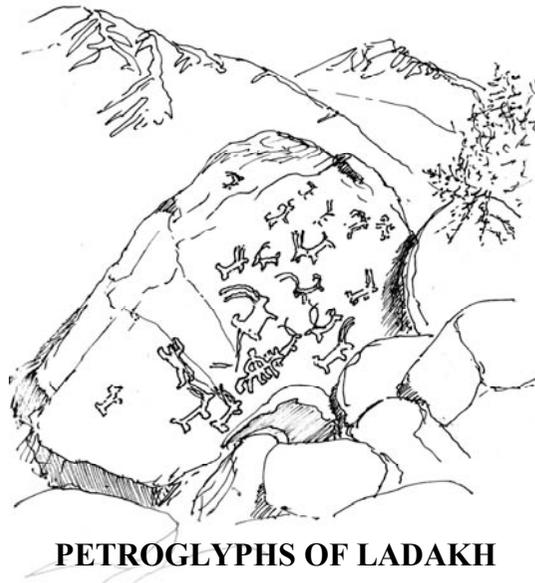
TED AHL



WHAT IS ROCK ART?

“Rock art” includes: reliefs, steles, paintings and petroglyphs. A petroglyph is an image created by removing part of a rock surface by incising, pecking, carving, and scratching. Specialists often use terms such as "carving", "engraving" to refer to such images.

Rock art is an important aspect of human culture and tells us about a community, its identity, thoughts, beliefs, ancient legends and myths.



PETROGLYPHS OF LADAKH

Ladakh is one of the richest region of the world for rock art: 20,000 carved images located at 130 sites are known. In Ladakh petroglyphs are found in open air galleries, very often located along the banks of the Indus and other rivers. The images represent mainly animals, humans, and symbols. The engravings date back from Prehistory down to the present times.



Hand prints



Foot prints

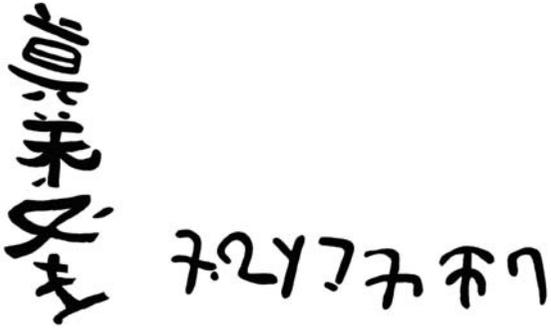
Prehistoric petroglyphs

A number of petroglyphs from Ladakh (yaks, ibex, hunting scenes) are similar to those documented in Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Mongolia, Pakistan) and shed light on the old links between Ladakh and Central Asia (2nd and 1st millenium BC).



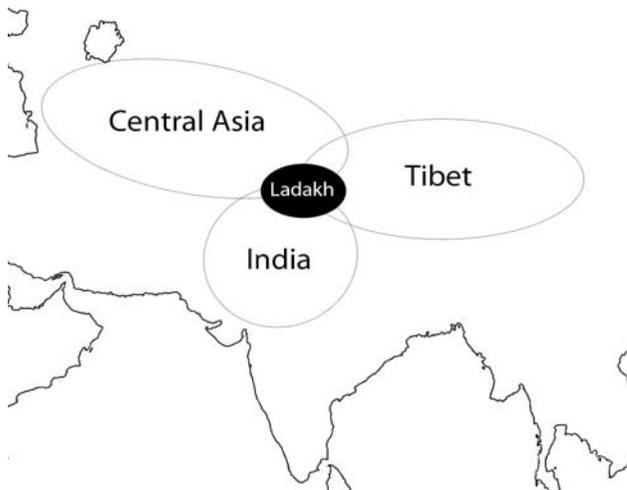
These links with Central Asia are confirmed with historic rock inscriptions carved in Chinese, Sogdian and even Arabic dated from the end of the 1st millenium AD. The earliest Tibetan inscriptions of Ladakh were written down in the late 8th century or early 9th century at the apogee of the Tibetan Empire by army officers.





There are also rock inscriptions in Indian scripts (*kharosthī*, *brāhmī* and *śārāda*) which prove that Ladakh was also in contact with the Indian subcontinent throughout the first millennium AD.

PETROGLYPHS SHOW THAT MOUNTAINS HAVE NEVER BEEN A BARRIER, AND THAT LADAKH IS CULTURALLY LINKED TO CENTRAL ASIA, TIBET AND INDIA SINCE ANCIENT TIMES.



CONSERVATION OF ROCK ART

The recent economic development of the region leads to the construction of many new roads in the valleys, as well as bridges and dams. They are often built in the surroundings of rock art sites: virgin rocks or those bearing images are equally smashed to be used as building material! In the last years, numerous sites have been destroyed totally or in part. Vandalism (graffiti, erasing or paintings drawn over existing petroglyphs) and new construction methods using stones rather than mud-bricks are further threats. Development is expending fast and rock art sites need to be preserved. Rock art is a common heritage and everyone is concerned by its preservation: competent authorities, local inhabitants and tourists. Ideally petroglyphs should be preserved in their original setting. But when the destruction of a site is inevitable – by flooding or road construction – the most important images should be moved, after a careful recording of their original position, to a dedicated location – a museum for example – where they can be stored and eventually displayed.

**THE PRESERVATION OF THIS
PRECIOUS AND
IRREPLACCEABLE HERITAGE
IS THE RESPONSABILITY OF
ALL.**

YOU CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THE PRESERVATION OF ROCK ART

- do not walk or touch the rocks that bear images,
- do not scratch or paint them,
- do not move or smash them.
- when using stones for construction, do not break down boulders with images: Ladakh has plenty of uncarved stones.

If a rock art site is endangered (dam, road or house construction, vandalism, etc.), please inform TEDAHL.

