

CULTURAL HERITAGE OF LADAKH

ROCK ART SITES



TANGTSE

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.

The rock art site of TANGTSE is the most important site of Ladakh for the HISTORICAL PERIOD with a great number of inscriptions and gives information about the role of Ladakh at the end of the 1st millenium AD.



ROCK ART OF TANGTSE

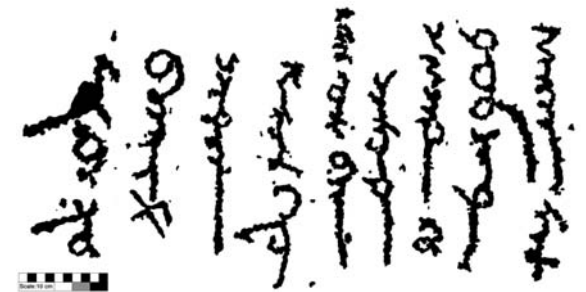
Tangtse is one of the largest village of Changthang region. Geographically it is located in the north-east of Ladakh. From Tangtse one can go east to Tibet via Rudok but also north to Yarkand and Khotan (Xinjiang, China) along the Shyok and then the Nubra river. Another longer route from Tangtse was used in the past to reach Khotan via the Changchenmo valley. From Tangtse one can also go south via the valleys of Sakti and Igu to reach the main Indus valley.

The rock carvings of Tangtse were first mentioned and published in the early 20th century. Since then their historical value has been acknowledged. There are about 300 petroglyphs in Tangtse and almost 70 rock inscriptions in various scripts. Tangtse is the only site in Ladakh where we find Arabic, Sogdian, Tocharian and Sārāda inscriptions.

There are 4 main boulders within the village itself (surrounded by four minor boulders).

Boulder 1: 81 petroglyphs (including 27 inscriptions). On this boulder there are tamgas, hunting scene, crosses and inscriptions. A tamga is a sign of personal reference and serves to identify property as belonging to a person, family, clan or ethnic group. There are Tibetan, Arabic and Sogdian inscriptions on the boulder. Sogdia was a region inhabited by Iranian people. The centre of Sodian territory was the city of Samarkand now in Uzbekistan. The Sogdian script is clearly recognisable, it is written in vertical columns (read from left to right). The longest inscription (9 vertical columns) is

inscribed next to a cross and can be translated as: 'In the year 210, we, Caitra of Samarkand, together with the monk Nosh-farn, were sent as messengers to the Qaghan of Tibet'.



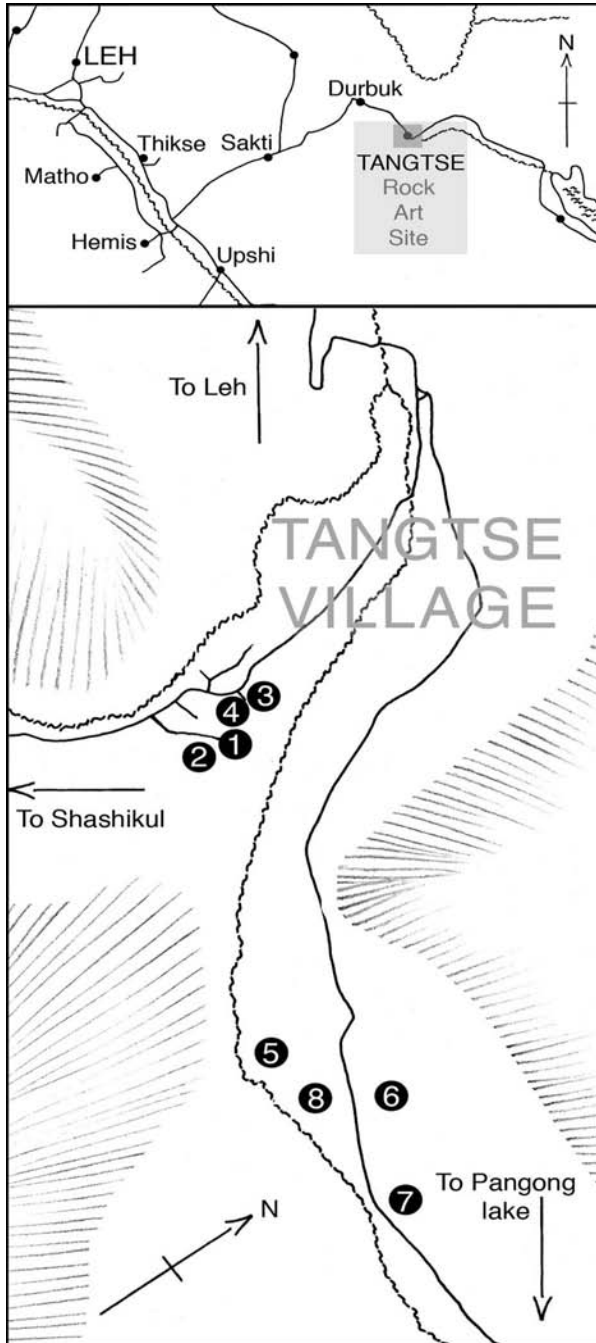
Sodian inscription

On the boulder there are also 16 Tibetan inscriptions, one Arabic inscription and the only Tocharian inscription known in Ladakh. Tocharian is a script derived from brāhmī that was exclusively used in the Tarim Basin (China) between the 6th and the 8th century AD.



Tocharian inscription

Boulder 2: 67 petroglyphs (including 24 inscriptions). On this boulder there is a large faded chorten, tamgas, a star, a hunting scene, svastikas, one tibetan inscription partly legible because the boulder is broken, one Arabic inscription mentioning the name of Allah (9th-11th century) and Sogdian inscriptions which are mainly personal names.



لصير صالح
ابو منصور

Arabic inscription

Boulder 3: 54 petroglyphs (including 10 inscriptions). This boulder is particular with its exquisite flower designs, birds, svastika, crosses, tamgas, ibex, chorten. One of the chorten contains a Śārāda inscription. Śārāda is a script used in Kashmir between the 8th and the 10th century AD. On this boulder there are also two Arabic inscriptions and six quite recent Tibetan inscriptions, including a Om.



Example of a tamga

འཕགས་མཚན་
འཕགས་མཚན་

Sarada inscription

Boulder 4: 15 petroglyphs (including 1 inscription). This boulder bears complex square designs, tamgas and one Sogdian inscription.

Boulder 5: below the gompa. There are dozens of faded carvings among which a Tibetan inscription.

Boulder 6: this boulder is located along the road, on the left, outside the village on the way to Pangong. The boulder bears a beautiful scene of

predation: one can see a tiger chasing a deer with its head turned backwards. Two other exquisite deers are carved on the same surface. This scene is similar to some find in the steppes in Central Asia and can be dated from the Iron age (1st millenium BC). It is a very rare scene in Ladakh.

Boulder 7: it is also located on the left handside of the road when leaving Tangtse village for Pangong lake. It bears a large figure of an anthropomorph in squatting position with clawed hands and radiating head. This peculiar image is surrounded by various circles. It is the only image of this kind known in Ladakh.

Boulder 8: this boulder is located on the right side of the road when leaving the village for Pangong lake. It bears red painted designs of animals but also painted chorten and inscriptions in black, white and red. Rock paintings of this kind are very rare in Ladakh.

