



PETROGLYPHIC, ENGRAVED ROCKS IN NORTHERN KASHMIR



Version
française



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Christian Chabert delivers to us a passionate story about his research of pétroglyphes in Zanskar. Thank you Christian sharing to us his passion for the petroglyphs of Northern Kashmir.



Where I found "animals and humans dancing on stones" is way up on the map, stuck between Pakistan and Tibet, it's part of the huge Himalayan mountain range that makes travellers dream and makes scholars and photographers hallucinate - the Ladakh Zanskar. The country of "high passes" is subject to a harsh climate. Its lowest valleys are above 2500m and some summits are higher than 7000. A difficult region, protected from the monsoon by a main range of high mountains and where life depends on the water from the glaciers. The inhabitants manage untiringly, in tormented massifs, in valleys difficult to reach that become totally inaccessible during the winter

that lasts six months.

One of the contrasts of this region concerns isolation, a closed universe. On the one hand, the inhabitants, either monks or civilians, love to travel for their pleasure, a pilgrimage, a celebration or to exchange pashmina wool, salt and yak butter. On the other hand, along the running water, through the high passes of the Karakoram or the Himalayas, the men and the caravans never stopped to transit, bringing with them new ideas and products, to meet each other or exchange or sell. You should also be aware of the fact that "recent history - very recent" also witnessed the creation of new borders and their closing. (As in 1948 following the invasion of lower Ladakh by Pakistan and in 1962 China who obtained vast areas like Askat Chin).



A little bit of Geology

Just a little under 220 million of yrs, the "Indian Australian" sheet loosened itself from the mega continent, the Gondwana. It started drifting for approx. 90 million of yrs at an incredible speed of 20 cm per yr (the drifts usually are 5 cm). The Australian sheet loosens itself. The Indian sheet's now free and slides towards the north between two breaks. This migration, will finally, 65 million yrs later, collide with a brutal shock into the Eurasian sheet. The plates deform and organize themselves and the Indian sheet slides as good as it can, under the Eurasian. To be more precise, it fuses there, creating firstly an enormous mountain range : the great Himalayas. Further on, other massifs like the sturdy Karakoram which reaches 8000m or the Pamir complex. Other geological actions (sedimentary deposits, volcanic, erosion, etc) will come to complete the relief



For more than 3000 Km, the results of this collision, "organized" the mountains and depressions by aligning them "roughly", orienting them from south-east towards north-west.

Himalaya, an impassable barrier ? One must always keep in mind the restraints but also the facilities created by geology. After the obvious great obstacles, one needs to look at its "weaknesses" regarding the passes or large "passages" that follow the water currents. They use the natural depressions, make use of "breaks" to go

through the massifs, creating 90° turns allowing them to join other rivers, for eg. the Indus river and its nourishing basin that completes the Hunza.

Some rocks among others in Zanskar

Pippula Altar (3800m) :



After crossing a stream, a small alluvial platform, on top of the Tsarap, we can find various blocks of which about ten are engraved. One of them is beautifully decorated and organized. Orientation east-west. The originality of this rock is that it's the only one that I came across where I found people in "orant" positions (both arms held up, one can imagine, hands open and palms outstretched). On this rock, the subjects are not only suggested but on the contrary, they seem to dance around the animals.. Seeing that there's no evident hunting scene, it immediately reminded me of a praying altar. To the left, it could be a circling couple (or maybe symbolically they affront each other ?).

Char site (3850m)

This is one of the richest petroglyphic sites in Zanskar and which was one of the first to be photographed, KLODZINSKI's studies. (1) To note, it's situated approx 1 and a half Km before the junction with the Karigiak Chu, on the left bank of the Tsarap Zamthong. It's crossed by the main track of the valley. One can guess through the rocks polished by the glacier, the remnants of a very old bridge going towards the agricultural terrace of the chariot's homestead. On these stones, which could be like a "marvellous valley", the other area, flat, surrounded by big old land slides, we discover hunting scenes with either walking bow and arrow men or on horses. A lot of animals are before our eyes, snow leopards, wolves or dogs, old he-goats, bharals or urials, but also birds and yaks. One of these big blocks has recently been engraved with Buddhist motifs (chortens). Other sites (Hameling, Jal, Tangse) are before or follow the great passes of this area.



Char : A fragile and unique patrimony



In 2006, Char became a stone quarry !

Close to the house, in the gardens, some beautiful blocks have already been used as stone pits. Other engravings, along the path start to undergo recent damage (tourists and/or local people). What's really worse is the risk of unknowing destruction of a unique and exceptional space. The Char inhabitants walk on the engravings because they represent short cuts and then worse still, they break these rocks to use them. They don't recognize their value, their classification and the need of protection of the whole site. Flat, the closest prairie is well adapted for a natural camp for trekkers. And the worse following indications - this place is unfortunately retained

for the future road that the Indian State wants to construct (in 5 yrs - 10 yr ????)



The Indus Valley

The banks of the river have been very early used as a natural and principal means of communication. It already went for more than 500 Km from its spring in the east over the high "Great Tibet" plains, to finally collapse in the west between the Zaskar and Ladakh massifs. The latter is still more dry (90 mm of water per yr) and more mineral than the opposite. The living areas were thus set up along the mountain streams coming from crests and the vast dejecting cones of the rivers that flow into the Indus. The inhabitable zones serve as in between the two gravel terraces, two tight gorges, two practically deserted zones. The volume and violence of the flowing water have re-enforced the importance of some key points that allow a crossing. These areas had also to be without floods. The capital of "Little Tibet" - Leh represents all these characteristics. Ideally situated under the Kardung pass (5300m), its situation in all four directions, has made of its " bazaar" the unavoidable junction for caravans coming from Central Asia, China, India, Cachemir and Tibet.



The first petroglyphic studies in this part of the Himalaya were mainly made by Hermann FRANCKE (2). To add also those of Karl JETTMAR (3) of the rocks situated close to Pakistan. To note is that one of the main affluent of the legendary river, flows in this area. In the north south part of the Hunza river, the Karokoram Hwy was completed in 19/82. Many trucks, beautifully decorated, now replace the caravans, as well as the army, that ever since antiquity had no other choice but to use this natural passage between Central Asia and the Indian continent or go over the high passes of the Himalaya.



There's no shortage of engravings in Ladakh



Alchi, known for its monastery built in the 10th century, on the left bank of the Indus. It's classified as one of the main world art works. Totally ignored by many tourists and its inhabitants, a magnificent collection can be found further down on the flat surface that dominates the river. More than 10 rocks represent remarkable scenes. Hunts of the old he goats by men with bows and arrows accompanied by dogs, felines with striped bodies (tigers), squares, sun wheels, lightning signs or more animals. On some of these we sometimes find chortens, these more recent Buddhist engravings.

There too, I was surprised to notice that the concentration of petroglyphs seemed to be organized around ancient ways. This one goes to the only passage where a bridge could have been built. Certainly a very risky crossing when we see what's left of the ramps of the steep river banks.

Next to Leh, Phyang, Shey, Matho, Rumtek, Umla where the archaic petroglyphs have already been well classified (4) and Taru (5) where, for the last 3 yrs a "Rock Park" was established. I'd like to mention "Rapsa". Between Indus and a high pass, a lost valley. Between abrupt bare slopes, the stream flows through a pink granite canyon, so characteristic of Ladakh. On the side of the mule track, small rounded blocks are decorated. The sizes, the dimensions as well as the technique, the drawings and patinas, resemble all those already mentioned. However, overlooking the path, on the south face of a huge rock (3m - 3m) we can find an exceptional hunting scene. Old he goats (?) striped, are followed by walking hunters accompanied by dogs. The petroglyphs are of big dimensions, especially three animals (approx. 1m x 1m each). The work seems "fresh" (?) but still much older than the neighbouring Buddhist signs.

The captivating moments of discovery in Sept. 2005 and then with Solonge my wife in Sept. 2006, the desire to get to know more about the authors and period of engraving, makes me decide to do some research. Apart one photo in a tourist guide book (6), I can't practically find any texts or images (7) concerning the petroglyphs of Ladakh Zanskar. Finally I find the comparative study (8) of Henri Paul FRANCFORT (9), Research Director of CNRS, a joint venture with Daniel KLODZINSKI and Georges MASCLE (10). An exceptional opening regarding the engravers of the Bronze and Iron Age in vast Asia.



Prehistoric complex



The situation is complex and little research has been made in Ladakh itself. One has thus to be careful, knowing though that prehistoric indications confirm an ancient human occupation. (Palaeolithic and Neolithic), one must go towards repertoires of the petroglyphes themselves, concerning dates.

When we go through the Himalayan world, one does not cease to see, to admire many evidences of beliefs of the Buddhist statues. Many were made on stone. Whether we talk about the giant statue (10 m) of Mulbek or the much smaller ones the "manis", these engraved stones which are deposited by millions onto the prayer walls. The mastery of this technique and intensive use of these supports ever since many centuries by local artists, is quite obvious

By the way, it's interesting to note that the chortens and other Buddhist engravings "superpose" the archaïque petroglyphes. The latter came thus before the introduction of this religion around the 8th century.



Birds

Because of the Buddhist religion of that region, they don't hunt them. More than 300 species are catalogued because other than the well adapted residential species, this part of the Himalaya is between two climate zones which make it an ideal place for migrating birds. However, one finds little birds on the rocks. In an animal composition, a hunt, it seems like there is only one (?) representation of a bird. Here a bird of prey (eagle ?) there a partridge (?) a duck (?) and then most curiously a royal peacock (?).



Maybe they are indicating birds ? Symbols ? Do they indicate a season ? For the researchers, the study and comparison of these birds and their specific style, allows them to date. Photographed by KLODINSKY on the chariot site, HP FRANCFORT dates the representation of a bird (.....) between 500 and 450 yrs B.C.



The Herbivores



The old he goats came into contact with the urial and/or bhoval. The deer, originating from Asia, is also often represented. It's a good chronicle indication because it's a theme often produced at all times in Central Asia. It has already been mentioned in all the rock drawings of this region. In Ladakh today, it's still a symbol of good luck and fertility. According to the drawing, its position, its head and other details, the researchers can compare with other findings that have been well dated.



The Carnivorous

The felines, lynx, snow leopards, wolves or fox. If the grass eaters are identified by the shape of their bodies, a detailed drawing of their horns, the meat eaters are generally bigger and distinguish themselves by rays of circles that suggest the body or the position of their tail (coiled up, straight up, in the centre, thin or thick).



The bovines



The bovines are much less present. Does that mean that there was no breeding then? The yak seems to be hunted and not yet domesticated. However, it's the most essential animal of the altitude population. Even though "relatively" untamed, it carries loads and allows to be sat on. It climbs well and is surer than a horse. From his meat and dung, everything's usable.



The equidae

The most represented animals in the graving are the horses. It's never harnessed to a chariot or other vehicle. The reproductions are of different sorts (size, form, art graving) whether it's mounted or alone. Free in this sense, is it still for "nourishment" or a prestigious "object". ? When mounted, its size is small, in balance with the rider and his equipment like its arrow (N.B. the one used today is always small. It either carries loads or a rider). (Research shows us that over 9000 yrs, the dog was always men's companion. As for the sheep and bovines, they were domesticated more than 5000 yrs ago. The horse, for a long time, represented nourishment, furnishing "materials" and, who knows, producer of milk. Certainly more difficult to capture, to control and train, it had to find its place in our surroundings only 3000 and 5000 yrs ago. All these dates vary of course according to each region of the world. On the mountains and in deserted zones, the known wheel is of little use for transport because of the difficult terrains.) (Yaks, lamas, camels, horses and other animals carry.)



gorie, l'animal le plus fréquemment représenté dans les gravures est le cheval. Il n'est jamais attelé à un char ou un araire. Les reproductions sont de factures différentes (taille, forme, piquetage) lorsqu'il est dessiné monté ou libre. Libre, dans ce cas est-il encore " nourriture " ou " objet " de prestige ? Monté, sa taille est petite, cohérente avec celle de son cavalier, celle de son équipement comme l'arc (N.B. celui utilisé actuellement est toujours petit, Il porte soit une charge soit un cavalier). (Les recherches nous indiquent que depuis bientôt 9000 ans, le chien a été le " collaborateur " puis le compagnon de l'homme. Quant aux ovins et aux bovins, ils ont été domestiqués il y a plus de 5000 ans. Le cheval lui est resté très longtemps nourriture, fournisseur de " matériaux " et à la rigueur producteur de lait. Certainement plus difficile à capturer, à maîtriser puis à dresser, il a du trouver sa place dans notre environnement, il y a seulement entre 5000 et 3000 ans. Toutes ces dates varient bien sûr, suivant les régions du monde. Dans les zones de montagnes, les déserts, la roue qui est connue, est de peu d'intérêt pour les transports en raison des difficultés du terrain).(Yacks, lamas, chameaux, chevaux et autres animaux portent....



The Personalities



The subjects are small and even if the sizes stay the same, they are generally smaller than those of the hunted animals. On foot, they are well placed upon their legs, the masculine sex very evident. Sometimes he seems to be dressed with a long coat similar to the traditional masculine clothes of the high areas. Even if the "goncha" Ladakhi or the Tibetan "chuba" can't be mistaken for a feminine garment which has a corset or a large belt, one must note that the Normans Chang Pa, men or women's clothing, both wear the same long garment called paska. On a horse, he always looks armed and in a hunting position.



The Attributes

The bow and arrow : The one reproduced here, is small and seems identical to the rider or walking man. It's very big and here too, it seems to be of homogenised size with its user. (A big bow and arrow is not used when riding).

According to this fact, it can be considered to be the "little" arrow (90 cm to 1m20) well known in those times. Very much used all over because of its easy functioning and its easy fabrication with local materials. Robust and less precise, it will



evolve to the "composite" arrow (also called "Asiatic") which is an assembly of wooden planks, bone and tree coarse. A new improvement will produce a model where the extremities are rounded up towards the front.

A deadly weapon : All these versions are always used by the inhabitants in competition or ritual celebrations that particularly mark spring. (12). The ritual of the arrow can be found in myths, in the names (13). The name Dah

(translated by arrow) is the name of a village close to the Indus in lower Ladakh. The Brogpas, who live there, still sculpt old he goats on schist plates. The arrow can also be found in the power symbols of the kings of Ladakh and Zanskar (on the contrary to spears, blades, axes).

The bulk of the weapon :

Much more difficult to identify on the rocks - the bulk of the weapon is represented at the belt or held up. This weapon is common in the petroglyphes of Central Asia. It's characteristic of the Bronze Age of this region.



Dating

The precise dating is up to specialists. For now, we can use the reference of the preliminary study which was published by HP FRANCFORT and his colleagues. They proved that some engravings, specific in style and iconography, could be related to Central Protohistoric Asia (Bronze and Iron Age, i.e. 2500 and 500 BC) Threatened to disappear, however luckily, the rock drawing art of Ladakh and Zanskar, has for the last years become an object of interest and various studies. Laurianne BRUNEAU (14) is preparing a theses on rock drawings art in Ladakh Zanskar. She hopes that the interpretation of data will allow to understand the role played by Ladakh Zanskar at different times between India, Tibet, China and Central Asia.



Location



Over more than 4000 yrs, in the high massifs of the Himalaya, important signs (could ?) indicate itineraries along the "easiest" crossings.

We can mention for eg., between Mongolia and Pakistan, the Gilgit rocks (15) on the banks of the Hunza which twists itself a passage between the summits of the Karakoram and the Hindu Kush. In Nepal, the stones of the Kak Nyinba (Kagbeni) (16) occupy the Kali Gandaki banks. It rolls its pebble from the Tibetan Mustang towards the Indian Gange at the bottom of the biggest break of the world, between 8000m of the Annapurnas and the Dhaulagiri. However, I've also noticed that the decorated stones seem to multiply themselves in zones close to difficult passages : gorges, passes and water crossings like the Chariot or at Alchi. A flat space, a platform, & possibility found on the banks of the Doda, the Itsarap (becoming Zanskar after Padum) just like on the banks of the Indus at Khatse, at Dah or even further (in Pakistan) in China. So what is the nature of these sites ? The marking of paths, hunting ground, itineraries towards prairies or more waiting zones, a sacred space, territory limitation ? And the engravings, are they marked with prestige, prayers or thanks ? It's up to research to let us get to know better the men of their origin.

I can still see our Cachmiri driver who took us over the flooded bridge of the Doad. Other drivers had given up, trucks sank but he negotiated skilfully a scary passage with his car. When we got back inside, he takes a brush and red paint. With his big smile he explains to us that he's going to write his name on a close by rock to mark his adventure. Next to all these wonders, all the questions that can be discovered concerning the Ladakh Zanskar rocks is the answers of the future of the archaeological witnesses that surprise me most ! To





make them known, is also a means of conservation. To mention them to passing tourists or to show them, is not enough. It's actually sometimes a risk when the visitor, because of negligence, without knowledge, lack of precaution, non respect of the rules - even worse - stupid action, damages this unrepairable heritage. Often, tourists' actions end up in a worse accelerated destruction. The protection of the "Char" - Chariot, site goes first and foremost through the local population. The conscious knowledge of the specific value of the engravings is an immediate priority. It's part of their history, their ancestors, an inheritance and to be transmitted because they've

become the great guardians. Just like mythical snow leopards, these engraved rocks are worth all the protection. The remarkable initiatives already taken to make the population sensitive, the local authorities, national and world wide, educate the guides and other accompanying people, are the main means that assure the conservation of this fragile and unique patrimony. May these few lines be of some help..



Precisions

A. Orans : This terminology is usually used in a special context, those of Christian art. It represents a human figure that's praying, arms held up, or a funeral statue representing a praying person on knees.

B. the Animals : It's difficult to distinguish the animals. Forms, lengths, space between the horns can be a means to distinguish the old he goats (*Capra ibex siberica*). It's more difficult to make the difference between the Bharal (*Pseudois nayaur*) (the blue English sheep) and Urial (*Ovis vignei vignei*).

C. the Dzo is the hybrid between the yak and the cow, the yak female is called Dri and produces milk ... yak milk.

D. the Supports : a chronological repertory : just like nature, the shape of the engraved rocks, the colours are important. Therefore, some rocks are "rounded" and of "dark brown". This patina, called " the desert's varnish" is very intense and well conserved on the crystalline rocks because of the previous glacier conditions. Studies that were undertaken on the moraine deposits allowed to establish a chronology relating the variations of the glaciers whereas other engraved rocks can be found on blocks with sharp edges. They seem to be more recent with little or no patina.

E. The Dimensions Except for the huge Rapsta rock (3m x 3m) and some of the big ones of the Char, the size of the engraved rocks are rather 1m x 1m or less. The accessibility and the position of the engravers, are comfortable. The size of the subject is generally modest 5 to 10 cm).

F. the Drawing : It's either indicated only by an outline or the subject can also be totally filled up. One could distinguish a third family where the inside of the drawing was scratched, decorated with dots or circles.

G. The technique : Percussion (dots) by small impacts with a tool like an etcher's needle of hard stone (quartz ??) or maybe metal ?

H. The domestication of the horse : The Kirghize horse is only one and half meters high at the wither, its neck and withers are large and he's well adapted to the mountains. It's essential to the wandering tribes of Kirghizstan.

I. The Brogpas : called by some "aryens". A lower groupe of the population called "Dardes". A part of the "aryens" people who speak or have spoken the Indo - Iranian language. Their origin "aryenne ? " "Descendants" from Alexander the Great soldiers ?? Animists before being Buddhists. What is certain is that physically they are very different from the other ethnics of Ladakh Zanskar and that the ethnologies still have a lot of research to do.

J. Dates : In all of Central Asia, there are lots of petroglyphes very rich. (Ljangar, Saymal-Tash, Tamgaly..) These groupings also represents "panels" of horse riders, hunting scenes, animals. The researchers go back as far as the Bronze Age in their chronology. (more than 5000 engravings discovered in Tamgaly at Kazakhstan have, in this way, been dated in the second half of the second millenary B.C. up to the beginning of the XXth century.)

K. Glances : Mongolia, Tadjistan, Kirghistan, etc... the petroglyphic images immediately remind us of those found in Ladakh Zanskar.



Rules

It seems obvious not to walk on graven scenes just like not using sticks nearby. A little more supple, don't throw water onto them (which makes the "rocks crack") to take a photo.



Draw a little Mickey or the initials, try to tear one away or bring a piece of rock with you , are stupid gestures, dramatic and irresponsible.



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