Introduction

Overview

This archaeological and art-historical survey is woven around the ancient material culture of the Tibetan Plateau. At the heart of the study is a remarkable group of portable objects made of silver, gold and copper alloys. These objects are examined in tandem with complementary classes of rock art, a cultural legacy dating to the time of the Roman and Gupta empires and other important polities like them. The objects and art selected in this book have much to tell us about the cultural and technological progress made in in ancient Tibet. These materials highlight the impressive accomplishments of the Tibetan forebears and aid in restoring their homeland to its rightful place in world history and culture.

In this book, 'Tibet' is shorthand for the Tibetan Plateau, the largest elevated land mass on the planet outside Antarctica. Now divided up between several modern states,[1] this distinctive territory is home to one of the Old World's great civilisations. Although Tibet is well placed in popular imagination and academic enquiry, there is surprisingly little information available on the origins and development of her civilisation. For most people, Tibet remains synonymous with the Buddhist religion. However, long before the principal introduction of this faith in the seventh century CE, the Tibetan Plateau was home to a thriving cultural, social and technological order of much complexity, constituting a unique civilisation. In many ways, Tibet was just as highly developed as other civilisations in India, Persia and China, etc. While no single book can do justice to the vastness and profundity of human endeavour in early Tibet, the art and technology featured in this work provides the reader with a window on the region that few have yet taken the occasion to look through.

Of much beauty and rarity, the metallic vessels and ornaments of this monograph are focal points of art appreciation and connoisseurship; so too for much of the rock art presented. However, the significance of these art resources, most of which have never been published before, extends well beyond the aesthetic and modern rites of admiration. These allied objects and images contribute much to an understanding of culture and technology in ancient Tibet, speaking highly of the character of her civilisation (composed of various cultural and linguistic groups) before the advent of Buddhism and literature.[2] They prefigure the Tibetan cosmopolitanism of early historic times promoted through the spread of the Buddhist ideas, art and craft from abroad. Most importantly, the silver, gold and bronze objects and rock art of this study are markers of relationships between Tibet and her neighbours. In-depth analysis of the interregional transactions reflected in these materials uncovers a web of communications pulsating across much of Eurasia. This web enabled a fusing of indigenous innovation with foreign inventiveness, a synthesis of disparate ideas, aesthetics and technologies in the objects and rock art presented.

The first half of the work is devoted to a study of portable metallic objects attributed to the Tibetan Plateau and assigned to the pre-Buddhist era. Made of precious and sacred metals and adorned with captivating zoomorphic designs, these objects embody an artistic Zeitgeist that was widely diffused in Eurasia in that time. Assigned primarily to the Late Prehistoric era (ca. 1300 BCE to 600 CE), they include silver bowls and gold ornaments, as well as spouted jars, trapezoidal plaques and a variety of other copper-alloy figures and wares. The second half of the book is given over to an investigation of the ultimate sources and geographic lines of transmission of these objects. Rock carvings with similar animal art serve as beacons in tracing the cultural inspiration for the Tibetan articles and industries described to various quarters of the Central Eurasian continental mass. Unlike easily movable things whose origins are in question, rock art is a fixed feature of the landscape, supplying reliable information on the spread of cognate art forms. The analysis of Tibetan mobile and immobile assets focuses on their diverse sources of artistic inspiration and technological capabilities, shedding light on their transcultural dimension. Many metallic items and rock art from territories adjoining the Plateau are also investigated, with a mind to placing Tibetan examples in a comprehensive cultural and chronological framework.

In addition to an examination of the archaeological and artistic significance of the Tibetan metallic vessels and ornaments and corresponding rock art chosen for inclusion in this study, scrutiny of the intricate series of human interactions involved in their creation lends the work its thematic integrity. The fundamental thesis of the book revolves around the participation of a wide array of

[1] Including the PRC, Pakistan, India, Nepal and Bhutan.

[2] It is important to keep in mind that the Tibetan Plateau did not and does not support a monolithic culture; to the contrary, it constitutes a civilisational order of a multicultural and multilinguistic character. For an essay on this subject see (Bellezza) May 2014 *Flight of the Khyung*. According to a prevalent historical view in Tibetan literature, there were a number of major cultures, languages and polities on the Tibetan Plateau before the Imperial period (ca. 600–850 CE). These included entities such as Zhang Zhung (Western Tibetan Plateau), Sum-pa (north central Tibet), Spu-rgyal bod (Central Tibet), A-zha (north-eastern Tibet), Mi-nyag (far north-eastern Tibet), Ljang (south-eastern Tibet), and Mon (southern Tibet). Correlation of this historical lore with actual material remains and the comprehensive division of the Tibetan Plateau into various archaeological cultures is still under development.

peoples and regions in the conception and execution of interrelated Tibetan objects and rock art. By being bound up with the creative potential of others, inhabitants of the Tibetan Plateau were able to parlay some of the most useful and influential trends in Late Prehistoric Eurasia to their own advantage. Indeed, borrowing and sharing was the norm among many constituent groups of Eurasia in the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1300–700 BCE) and Iron Age (700–100 BCE). Interdependence was the cornerstone of that exchange, contacts of various kinds its currency. In situating the Tibetan silver, gold and bronze objects and rock art of this monograph within a dynamic network of communications interlacing ancient Eurasia, the nature and extent of the Plateau's outreach to other peoples becomes a good deal clearer.[3]

A word on how the interrelated categories of 'culture', 'ethnicity' and 'language' are applied in this work is in order. This triad of terms have variable meanings depending on the disciplinary and ideological lens through which they are viewed. In this monograph they are articulated within a modern anthropological and archaeological framework. Yet, even within this narrower purview, culture, ethnicity and language have a host of connotations and implications. In this work it is assumed that each term refers to phenomena subject to change and redefinition over time. I view culture, ethnicity and language from a constructivist perspective, as being largely self-identified categories invested with their full complement of meaning and significance by those who hold and practise them.

In ethnographic terms, culture is the sum total of the material production and abstract expression characterising a self-defined social, ethnic and/or linguistic community. Its physical manifestations include all technologies, industries, art, architecture and other goods and concrete symbols produced by those who perceive themselves as constituting a discrete population. Abstract culture encompasses the entire spectrum of shared knowledge (behaviours, beliefs, information, skills, customs, traditions etc.) articulated through collective systems of social organisation, economic activity and political regulation. In an archaeological context, culture (often referred to as 'material culture') denotes an interrelated body of empirical evidence (physical and biological remains) and the social, economic, political and environmental processes incumbent in it, which belong to a specified time and place. An archaeological culture may represent one or more groups of people that were bound by interrelated social, ethnic and linguistic factors and even by those who may have had little in common with one another. Thus, an archaeological culture does not necessarily correspond to a single society, polity or self-represented culture of the past.

In this work, the term 'ethnic' (var. ethnicity, ethnos) is defined as the self-represented set of genealogical and hereditary characteristics of a cultural, social and/or linguistic group which distinguish their perceived visceral and racial qualities from others. This autogenous notion of ethnicity may be correlatable (to varying degrees) to a spectrum of biological and molecular traits.

'Language' (and constituent dialects) denotes the mutually intelligible spoken and written communications of a group of people. An ethnographic culture may have more than one language (the elite versus the common parlance, mainstream idiom versus an argot etc.). An archaeological culture may also reflect the use of one or more languages, a correlation between ancient physical remains and what was spoken by those who left them often being difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain.

The contents of the study

This monograph is divided into seven chapters. The first four chapters are dedicated to the objects upon which this work rests, and the last three chapters to tracing their cultural and geographic sources. The conclusion to the work offers a novel perspective on interactive forces responsible for the intercommunication contributing to the formation of the objects and art of the study.

Chapter one presents two splendid silver bowls in the Jeremy Pine collection. These vessels are unique among known Tibetan objects for their great age and unusual form. Their ornamentation is comprised of lions and geometric motifs carved in high relief, which are subject to cultural and historical comparisons with kindred art in various media found both inside and outside Tibet. The silver bowls of the Pine collection are contrasted with silver and gold vessels from Tibet, Central Asia and China dating to the Imperial period. The artistic, cultural and historical origins of the silver bowls are then explored. These point to West Asia and conveyance to Tibet through convoluted geographic channels and mediation by intermediary agents of transfer. Tibetan textual references to early metallurgy and the ritual use of silver vessels are also reviewed. An appraisal of the age of the two silver bowls in the Pine collection is approached through a combined analysis of their aesthetic, historical and comparative traits.

Chapter two is devoted to another item in the Pine collection, a gold finial. This impressive object was originally part of a larger assembly that may have constituted a crown, standard or ritual implement. In order to assess its cultural and technological significance, other Tibetan gold ornaments of the Late Prehistoric era are surveyed. The finial is adorned with a central zoomorph, birds and other creatures, furnishing an excellent point of comparison with small Tibetan copper-alloy objects known as 'primordial metal' (*thokcha*; Tibetan: *thog-*

[3] Aldenderfer and Yinong (2004: 48) observe that although bronze and iron technologies did not originate on the Tibetan Plateau, models of long-range demic inflows and diffusive processes affecting the already settled inhabitants of the Tibetan Plateau have been overlooked. This monograph addresses this matter directly, the second work of the author dedicated to the role of Eurasian cultural and technological interchange in the metallurgy of ancient Tibet. For the companion work, see February and March 2016 *Flight of the Khyung*. See also Bellezza 2020, ch. 7.

lcags). The age and cultural pedigree of the finial are also evaluated through bronze objects from western Iran and a gold torque discovered in the steppes.

Chapter three focuses on a copper-alloy bird-spouted jar of very fine workmanship of probable Tibetan production owned privately, as well as a cognate jar in a museum collection. Miniature Tibetan versions of this vessel are also inspected, suggesting that this kind of object was relatively well known in Tibet. The larger vessels in particular have strong affinities with a bird-spouted ceramic jar recovered from the Ziwiye hoard in north-western Iran. These metallic and ceramic jars are excellent examples of how artistic and technical communications travelled widely, transcending cultural, ethnic and linguistic divides to reappear in entirely different geographic settings.

Chapter four assesses copper-alloy trapezoidal plaques decorated with birds, wild ungulates, tigers, snakes and geometric designs. One of these plaques is in the Pine collection and is embossed with tigers and spiralling geometric patterns. These motifs are the subject of a comparative analysis that draws from both bronze art and rock art. The group of intricate trapezoidal openwork plaques also featured in this chapter comprise a distinctive class of Tibetan copper-alloy objects of unclear ritual and/or ceremonial function. They mostly appear in private collections but one specimen was obtained in a controlled archaeological excavation and is currently housed in a museum in China. Special attention is paid in this chapter to the tiger in Tibetan art and its relationship with tigrine depiction and symbolism in adjoining territories in the Late Prehistoric era.

Chapter five carries forward the task of tracing the ideological, artistic and technological inspiration behind the objects showcased in the first four chapters. The chapter begins with a review of the intermingling of pre-Achaemenid and Achaemenid Iranians and mobile pastoralist groups emanating from northern regions. An analysis of cultural links between Iran and Tibet is undertaken, concluding that by the Achaemenid period these ties were already attenuated. The role of the so-called Scythians and Saka as intermediaries in the circulation of objects and ideas from Iran to Tibet is weighed. The influential artistic legacy of these mainly pastoralist tribes is adjudged to be significant, paving the way to an investigation of the international art phenomenon called the Eurasian Animal Style (EAS). Through objects and rock art belonging to these allied modes of zoomorphic art, geographic conduits between Iran and points east are identified. In this chapter, the reconnaissance of routes to Tibet brings us as far as the Pamirs.

Chapter six resumes the search for ideological, artistic and technological channels leading from the west to Tibet. Northern Pakistan as a nexus of communications coupling the Pamirs and other western regions to the Tibetan Plateau are audited through both portable objects and rock art. Another territory culturally and geographically at the intersection between Central Asia and the Tibetan Plateau was the Tarim Basin. This entrepôt was instrumental in negotiating intercourse between west and east Asian peoples in the Bronze Age and Iron Age. Through grave goods and skeletal remains, pathways leading from the Tarim Basin to the Western Tibetan Plateau are charted, along which the abstract and material wherewithal for the objects of this study may have moved. Lines of communications and the dispersal of materials in the eastern portion of Xinjiang (East Turkestan) and the Northern Zone of China are then considered. These flows of information, goods and peoples are implicated in the progression of northern customs and traditions to North-east Tibet, the other major portal of interchange between the steppe, alpine and desert tracts of North Inner Asia and the Plateau. The final part of chapter six reconnoitres the formative role of the Eastern Steppe in enriching exchanges between the Tarim Basin, eastern Xinjiang and the Tibetan Plateau. The various conduits of interaction delineated in this chapter amply demonstrate that models of dispersal dependent on linear trajectories are inadequate in addressing mutability in the reticulated relations in which Tibet was once entwined.

Chapter seven brings the journey of the creation and recreation of the ideologies, art and technologies that infused Tibetan objects of this study full circle. In this chapter, examples of Tibetan rock art in branches of the Eurasian Animal Style are probed, delimiting cultural intercourse with northern territories in the Iron Age. This rock art is emblematic of a zone of contacts stretching across the breadth of Inner Asia. The allied zoomorphic rock art called the Eurasian Animal Style is the most thoroughgoing element of transcultural dispersion documented to date. These findings strongly suggest that the transmission of this cognate rock art contributed to the abstract and material effusion giving rise to objects central to this study. The final part of chapter seven augments the scope of this network of exchange to encompass parallel processes of transference between Inner Asia and the Central Plains (Han China) in the Iron Age. This sets the stage for the psychocultural model of interregional exchange presented in the Conclusion.

Geographic scope

A number of toponyms are employed in this work, each with a specific geographical space in mind. Some of these terms may vary somewhat in territorial scope from their use in other scholarship and in popular discourse. For the benefit of the reader, a table of the compass of these terms is provided (Table 1), together with Maps 1 and 2.

Chronology and localisation

The methods for gauging the age of the metallic objects and rock art upon which this study is built are set forth here. With few exceptions, these archaeological art-historical materials have not been subject to absolute dating techniques. To compensate for this lack of chronometric data, I have devised a system of non-direct methods to

Table 1. Toponyms employed in this book.

Central Asia	The five Central Asian republics, including Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, as well as north-eastern Iran and northern Afghanistan
Central Eurasia	Parts of Eastern Europe (including European Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, eastern Hungary, eastern Romania, eastern Bulgaria, Moldova), Turkey, Caucasus, West Asia, Central Asia, northern Iran, northern Afghanistan, north-western fringes of the Indian Subcontinent, Xinjiang, Tibetan Plateau, Mongolia, Russian Altai, Southern Siberia and north-western regions of the Peoples Republic of China (PRC; including Inner Mongolia, western Gansu, northern Shaanxi, northern Shanxi, northern Hebei, and adjacent areas to the north-west)
Central Plains	Henan, southern Hebei, southern Shanxi, southern Shaanxi, western Shandong, north-western Jiangsu, northern Anhui and northern Hubei in the PRC
Central Steppe	Western and central Kazakhstan, western and central Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan, extending south to contiguous deserts and basins
Central Tibet	The Dbus and Gtsang regions, now incorporated in parts of the Lhasa (Lha-sa), Shigtase (Gzhis-ka-rtse) and Lhokha (Lho-kha) prefectures of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR)
Eastern Steppe	Eastern Kazakhstan, Xinjiang north of the Tian-Shan, Mongolia, the Altai and Southern Siberia
Eastern Tibet	The Khams and A-mdo regions, now incorporated in the Chamdo (Chab-mdo) prefecture of the Tibet Autonomous Region and extending into adjacent regions of the Chinese provinces of Sichuan, Qinghai and Gansu where Tibetic and Gyalrongic languages are spoken
Far Western Tibet	The Ngari (Mnga'-ris) prefecture and Ru-'thor and Bar-yangs in Shigatse prefecture of the TAR
North Inner Asia	Eastern Kazakhstan, eastern Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, north-eastern Afghanistan, Xinjiang, the Altai, Mongolia, Southern Siberia, western Gansu, western Inner Mongolia and northern Ningxia
Northern Pakistan	Chitral, Gilgit, Hunza-Nagyr, Baltistan, Indus Kohistan, Astor, Deosai Plains and Kalam Kohistan. These regions mostly fall under the Gilgit-Baltistan (Northern Areas) administrative territory but also extend into the northern extremities of the provinces of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and the Punjab, as well as Pakistan-controlled Kashmir
North-east Tibet	Tibetan-speaking areas of Qinghai and Gansu provinces and the northern part of Sichuan province
Northern Zone	Northern China, including Inner Mongolia, western Gansu, northern Shaanxi, northern Shanxi, northern Ningxia, northern Hebei, as well as the northern and western fringes of the provinces of Liaoning, Jilin and Heilongjiang
North-west India	Gilgit-Baltistan, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, northern Punjab and Kashmir in Pakistan; and Jammu-Kashmir, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand in India
North-west Tibet	Ru-thog in the TAR and Aksai Chin in Xinjiang
Southern Siberia	The Altai, Minusinsk Basin, Tuva and the western part of Transbaikal in Russia
South Inner Asia	The Tibetan Plateau (covering approximately 2,400,000 km²) and the north-western fringes of the Indian Subcontinent
South-west Tibet	Gu-ge, Sgar, Pu-rang, and the headwaters region of the Gtsang-po (Brahmaputra) river in 'Brong-pa
Tibetan Plateau	All of the TAR, Qinghai province except the northernmost tier, far west southern Gansu, western Sichuan and extreme north-western Yunnan in the PRC; Baltistan in Pakistan; Ladakh and Spiti in India; and Humla, Dolpo and Mustang in Nepal. In this work, 'Tibet' and just 'Plateau' are used as equivalents for the Tibetan Plateau
Upper Tibet	The Transhimalayan parts of Tibet north and west of Lhasa (including Gnam-mtsho, Gnam-ru, G.yag-pa, Nag-tshang and Mnga'-ris) and the upper Tsangpo river valley west of Sa-dga' ('Brong-pa and Hor-pa), all of which are incorporated into the TAR
West Asia	The Levant, Arabian Peninsula, Turkey, Caucasus region, Iraq, Iran and western Afghanistan
Western Steppe	The Pontic–Caspian steppe, extending from east of the mouth of the Danube to the southern Urals
Western Tibetan Plateau	The Transhimalayan parts of Tibet north and west of Lhasa and the upper Tsangpo (Gtsang-po) river valley west of Sa-dga' in the TAR; Baltistan in Pakistan; Ladakh and Spiti in India; and Humla, Dolpo and Mustang in Nepal

assess their age. These methods are founded upon a visual and tactile inspection of the physical characteristics of the materials presented, to construct a relative chronology. This permits an understanding of what things are older in relation to others. The regimen employed yields provisional chronological values of limited resolution and unverified accuracy. As most of the chronological attributions provided in this work have not been checked through more objective testing methods, they must be viewed as suggestive rather than prescriptive of the age of the materials discussed. Also, the relative dating furnished in this work is open to adjustment should new findings warrant it.

In relative dating methods, the age of metallic objects and rock art are inferred through an appraisal of their intrinsic

Map 1. Central Eurasia and subsidiary territories (all gray-coloured background). Map by Brian Sebastian and John V. Bellezza.

and acquired qualities. Intrinsic qualities of archaeological and art-historical materials are those they were produced with, including their original style and form, techniques of manufacture and structural elements. Acquired qualities include signs of prolonged use, degradation and other alterations that have transpired since the production of metallic objects and rock art (e.g. build-up of patinas, mineral encrustations and corrosion products, wear, fracturing, fading etc.).

Chronological values assigned to the metallic objects of this study are made using the following criteria:

- Analysis of the style and form of objects
- Assessment of the identity and functions of objects
- Appraisal of the techniques used in the manufacture of objects
- Inspection of the colour, texture, lustre and density of metals
- Observation of ornamentation comparable to Tibetan rock art
- Identification of objects associated with particular historical contexts in textual sources
- Palaeographic assessment of objects with Tibetan inscriptions
- Comparison of objects with materials obtained from archaeologically secure contexts on the Tibetan Plateau
- Cross-cultural comparison of objects with those from other territories that have been dated, directly or indirectly

The loci of manufacture and original spheres of usage of the silver bowls, gold finial, copper-alloy spouted jar, trapezoidal plaques and other objects featured in this work have not been determined with any surety. The unprovenanced status of these objects is a formidable obstacle in setting parameters for their analysis, adding a level of uncertainty to what is meant by the label ‘Tibetan’. Until archaeological excavation and testing provide a clearer understanding of metallurgical traditions and their nuclei of production in ancient Tibet, tendering hypotheses on where objects discussed might have been made must suffice. For a host of technical, economic and political reasons, a regimen of high-quality systematic excavation has been slow to start up on all parts of the Tibetan Plateau. Thus, the main objects under examination are nominally attributed to the Tibetan Plateau. To provide more specificity, based on collateral evidence, I do suggest areas in this vast territory where it appears likely that certain things were produced. Attribution to the Tibetan Plateau of metallic objects in this study is made using one or more of the following identifications:

- Objects that form part of a larger class of materials regularly found on the Tibetan Plateau, which differ in form and design from those attributed to other territories
- Objects with artistic and technical elements recalling materials regularly found on the Tibetan Plateau, which are not characteristic of adjoining territories
- Comparison of objects with materials obtained from archaeologically secure contexts on the Tibetan Plateau
- Objects with ornamentation comparable to Tibetan rock art
- Objects (ritual, ceremonial, symbolic and utilitarian) tied to the Tibetan cultural and historical scene in textual sources

Map 2. Inner Asia and subsidiary territories (all grey-coloured background). Note that Inner Asia extends eastward beyond the bounds of this map to include the eastern half of Mongolia and the remainder of western Inner Mongolia. Map by Brian Sebastian and John V. Bellezza.

- Objects of the historic era with Tibetan inscriptions

Although progress has been made in the absolute dating of rock art, a widely accepted protocol has not yet been established. A variety of methods are being developed to objectively determine the age of rock art, but corroboration of their efficacy and reliability is still pending.[4] The relative chronology here devised for rock art is based on the following criteria:[5]

- Stylistic and thematic categorisation of motifs, subjects and scenes
- Appraisal of the general characteristics of the contents of sites
- Gauging ecological conditions depicted in rock art
- Assessment of the techniques used in carving and painting
- Examination of the degree of erosion and re-patination (chemical alterations to rock surfaces) of carvings and the degree of browning and ablation of pigments
- Determination of the placement of palimpsests
- Identification of elements of rock art associated with particular historical contexts in textual sources
- Palaeographic assessment of Tibetan inscriptions accompanying rock art

[4] On recent advances in the absolute dating of rock art worldwide, see Ruiz and Rowe 2014; David and McNiven 2019. On methods of direct dating attempted in the PRC (Tibetan Plateau included), see Bednarik 2015; Bednarik and Li 1991.

[5] On relative dating, see also Bellezza 2008, pp. 162, 163; 2017c, pp. 70–72; 2020; December 2013, July 2015, July 2016 and April 2017 *Flight of the Khyung*; Bruneau and Bellezza 2013.

The inductive methods used to estimate the age of archaeological resources in this study belong to two interrelated systems of analysis: typology and seriation. Dating through typological analysis relies on an assessment of the physical attributes of objects and rock art. Composed of their intrinsic and acquired qualities, the properties of these materials are assumed to have changed in fairly consistent ways over time. A morphological component of typology dating pertains to analyses of variations within the structural arrangements and methods of fabrication of objects. These are also inferred to be related to the passage of time. Dating through seriation incorporates both typological and morphological data to organise assemblages of metallic objects and rock art into sequences according to their physical properties and the manner and frequency in which these occur.[6] Provided that serial changes are distinguished from functional factors,[7] categories of archaeological materials ordered in this manner reflect a chronological progression. When sample sizes are large enough, the seriation of objects and rock art facilitates a grasp of their chronological development. Periodisation through seriation contributes to a better understanding of the changing social, economic and political relationships reflected in archaeological resources.

The relative dating of Tibetan archaeological and art-historical materials based on typology and seriation employs comparative analyses to check and refine chronological values obtained through an examination of their intrinsic and acquired qualities. The comparison of Tibetan metallic objects and rock art featured in this study with analogous classes of materials fixed in time through both relative and absolute methods adds considerable weight to typological dating. Determining how and to what degree archaeological assets are aesthetically and technically alike is derived through analogical reasoning. As to the major principles of analogical reasoning adhered to in this work, they can be summarised as follows:

- The more similarities there are between the art, objects and monuments being compared, the stronger the analogy;
- The more that is known about the age, source, transfer and function of similar archaeological materials, the stronger the analogy;
- In determining the validity of an analogy, the nature and extent of the similarities present must be weighed against differences observed therein;
- In drawing conclusions, multiple analogies are stronger than a single analogy.

Analogies predicated on objective criteria (e.g. structural metrics, manufacturing techniques etc.) tend to be more reliable than those based on more subjective criteria (e.g. form, style, imputed function etc.). Moreover, analogies made between archaeological materials with demonstrable spatio-temporal links are more robust than those where causal relations have not been identified. Adhering to a basic set of analogical principles aids in systematising and validating cross-cultural comparative approaches. Furthermore, the identification of analogies in the rock art, metallic objects and monuments of different regions helps to diagnose the cultural, demographic, economic and political interactions to which they were subjected.

The comparative approach promoted in this work musters archaeological materials from the Tibetan Plateau and from outside the territory. Another approach exploited in this study is the cultural and historical comparison of metallic objects and rock art with complementary textual and ethnographic accounts. Historical and anthropological instruments are applied to archaeological and art-historical materials discovered on the Tibetan Plateau and from other territories to facilitate an understanding of their chronological framework, as well as the ideological, practical and symbolic functions they may have fulfilled.

Relying on the above methods and criteria, metallic objects and rock art of the Tibetan Plateau are assigned to specific chronological categories in this work. Due to the methodological shortcomings spotlighted, time frames are defined in broad terms only. Although this chronological scheme is designed specifically for archaeological research conducted on the Tibetan Plateau, it utilises nomenclature in accordance with the designation of analogous periods in other parts of Eurasia, particularly that of North Inner Asia. Chronological categories pertaining to the Historic era are applied both to archaeological and historical phenomena in this work. When germane to historical matters, text-related evidence (e.g. palaeography, grammar, orthography, syntax, semantics, rhetorical content etc.) underpins the formulation of chronological categories.

To enhance the rigour of the relative dating of the rock art, metallic objects and monuments in this study, a wide array of archaeological, cultural, artistic and historical data is examined in order to better ascertain their spatio-temporal characteristics. While no amount of informed enquiry into the objects and art featured can address many questions regarding age and provenance, it does allow for contextualisation in accordance with the physical characteristics, cross-cultural affinities and propagative forces characterising the origins and evolution of these materials. The analyses propounded in this work help set the agenda for subsequent enquiry by embedding

[6] Seriation works best across the full gamut of classes of objects, rather than among subgroups of them. Unlike that of the large assemblages of ceramics and stone tools that exist in many archaeological contexts, the seriation of the relatively small classes of Tibetan rock art, metallic objects and monuments currently available for study does not lend itself to the application of formal statistical tools. Atemporal changes in Tibetan archaeological materials further complicate the use of statistical methods for postulating chronological values.

[7] Chronological seriation is complicated by functional factors unrelated to the periodisation of archaeological assets. The personal proclivities of artists and builders, variable economic allocations of time and resources, and disparate social forces may all contribute to the more rapid adoption or abandonment of specific physical attributes of rock art, metallic objects and monuments. Anomalies that defy seriation operate within specific geographic areas and/or among specific groups of people. Uneven influences exerted on the constellation of traits making up an art form, object or monument can skew or obscure changes ordained by time.

Table 2. Chronological scheme.

Era	Period
Late Prehistoric era	Late Bronze Age (ca. 1300–700 BCE)
	Iron Age (ca. 700–100 BCE)
	Protohistoric period (ca. 100 BCE to 600 CE)
Historic era	Early Historic period (ca. 600–1000 CE) i. Imperial period (ca. 600–850 CE) ii. Post-Imperial period (ca. 850–1000 CE)
	Vestigial period (ca. 1000–1300 CE)

Tibetan archaeological resources in a comprehensive methodological template. This should continue to prove useful even when absolute dates are secured for a wider range of these physical entities.

Relying on the chronological criteria set forth above, the Tibetan objects and rock art of this study can be assigned provisional dates according to the scheme in Table 2. This chronological scheme has been devised specifically for archaeological research conducted on the Tibetan Plateau. The values given for the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age are more or less in accordance with those used for the same periods in other parts of Eurasia, especially North Inner Asia. A period discussed in the context of other regions of Eurasia is the (developed) 'Bronze Age' (ca. 2500–1500) BCE. Another chronological category commonly applied outside Tibet is styled the 'Early Iron Age', which refers to overlapping time spans. The Early Iron Age ranges from ca. 1000 BCE to 200 BCE, according to the region to which the term is applied. The chronological categories listed as part of the Early Historic period are particular to the historico-cultural circumstances on the Tibetan Plateau.[8]

Acutely aware that the objects and rock art of this study float quite freely in space and time, I have attempted to compensate for this by marshalling a wide array of archaeological, cultural, artistic and historical materials to better gauge their spatio-temporal characteristics. While no amount of informed enquiry into these materials can definitively address many questions of age and provenance, it does allow for contextualisation of these materials according to their physical characteristics, artistic affiliations, cross-cultural affinities and the propagative forces involved in their formation. The detailed picture of the objects and rock art given in this study should prove a useful point of departure when more of it finally undergoes laboratory testing and analysis. In a work such as this in which hitherto unknown objects form the core of study, some revision of its findings and conclusions may prove necessary once more information concerning their age and provenance becomes available.

[8] It is also acceptable to refer to the Protohistoric period in Ladakh and Baltistan as an 'early historic period' because of the occurrence there of non-Tibetic inscriptions predating the seventh century CE. However, in the interests of uniformity and simplicity, the same chronological scheme for the Tibetan Plateau is maintained throughout this work. On criteria used to date ancient monuments in Upper Tibet, see Bellezza 2014a, pp. xv–xix; 2020.

Pursuant technical matters

This monograph lays out the aesthetic features, cultural settings and web of interregional transmission for each of the main artefacts featured: two silver bowls, a golden finial and copper-alloy spouted jars and trapezoidal plaques etc. The findings, regimen of analysis and conclusions of this monograph comprise a foundation on which archaeometallurgical testing can add further qualitative means of investigation.

A chief objective of archaeometallurgy is to obtain an accurate picture of the structure and chemical composition of ancient metal objects and other metallic remains. In qualifying the physical and chemical constituents of ancient metals, an objective assessment of their properties is obtained, which can be examined against similar sets of characteristics in other metallic objects. The composition of metals is often indicative of their geographic sources and methods of refinement. The data so assembled can be used to build a profile of metal objects that characterise an archaeological culture or specific region. In correlating metal artefacts with geographical and chronological information, mines, centres of production and systems of exchange are potentially identifiable. For example, the precise measurements of variations in the abundance of isotopic copper and lead in silver objects can be exploited to possibly trace the source of the parent materials.

Archaeometallurgy focuses on ascertaining the age of ancient metal objects and associated remains through radiocarbon, accelerator mass spectrometry, archaeo-magnetic and thermoluminescence analyses etc. Archaeometallurgical techniques such as the ones outlined below each have their own merits and limitations. Once these tools are suitably and systematically applied, they should add significantly to our knowledge of ancient metallurgy in Tibet.

The major properties of metals germane to archaeometallurgical enquiry are hardness, density, ductility, lustre, tensile strength, conductivity etc. Also, an assessment of the melting point of metals can aid in reconstructing ancient smelting processes (techniques used to extract metals from ore, involving heating above its melting point so that the metal can be separated from waste products). Metallography, the science of determining the structure and physical properties of metals, relies heavily on the examination of prepared samples (often through polishing and etching) by reflected-light microscopy. Metals are morphous substances, in that they possess crystalline structures. The constituent particles of metals are made up of atoms and molecules arranged in repeating three-dimensional configurations, known as crystals or grains. Each crystal or grain represents the alignment of atoms and molecules in a particular directional matrix. Most pure metals have a crystalline structure consisting of repeating units in the form of cubes or hexagons. Metal alloys often have

crystalline structures distinguished by more complex atomic and molecular arrangements.

The chemical analysis of metals and their patinas (surface layers formed by reaction with the environment over time) is another key qualitative tool of archaeometallurgy. There are a variety of techniques used to identify the composition of metals and alloys in ancient artefacts. The most relied-upon techniques include several types of spectrography. Other state-of-the-art tools for determining the chemical makeup of metals include X-ray diffraction, X-ray fluorescence and atomic absorption analysis etc.

As the chemical composition of most objects featured in this study has not been determined, cuprous metals are referred to as 'copper alloy'. This designation potentially includes objects made of pure copper (with trace metals), bronze (alloys of copper and tin), leaded bronze, arsenical copper alloys and brass (alloys of copper and zinc).[9]

Provenance

As this work contains many ancient metallic objects and even entire classes of articles that have never been published before, it is imperative that questions surrounding their provenance and suitability for publication be addressed head-on in the introduction. Many of the objects featured are in the hands of private collectors, some of whom wish to remain anonymous, raising questions concerning legitimacy and transparency. Even the holdings of well-known museums, like those mentioned in this monograph, are not above scrutiny. Questions concerning acquisition and rightful ownership of antiquities loom large in today's world, and with good reason. Renfrew and Bahn (2016: 549) observe that through construction, reclamation, intensification of agriculture, looting, tourism and war, 'more ancient remains have been looted in the last two decades than ever before in the history of the world'. This statement is no mere hyperbole but that of two highly respected archaeologists who are well placed to assess the destruction of fixed sites, the theft of artefacts and the international trade in antiquities that are rife in the world today.

It cannot be stressed enough that irreparable damage is being done by looting, vandalism, encroachment and the dismantling of Tibetan archaeological sites. These activities seriously compromise or even make impossible the conduct of much archaeological research, drastically reducing (often irrevocably) what can be known about ancient societies on the Plateau, their ways of life and their true impact on today's world. Next to the outright destruction of the Tibetan sites themselves, the unregulated movement of artefacts from damaged archaeological structures is the greatest impediment to archaeological progress in the contemporary period, greater even than political and ideological constraints. The grave state of affairs in the PRC is summed up in a UNESCO report:

> In recent years, driven by huge profits, illegal excavations of ancient culture sites and ancient tombs have occurred time and again and become increasingly professional, violence-oriented and intelligent, causing serious damage to not only sites and monuments themselves but also their historical settings and posing severe challenges on the safety of cultural relics. Recurrent illegal excavations happened primarily due to following reasons: 1) a great wealth of underground cultural relics resources widely distributed around the country have posed huge difficulty on protection work; 2) higher profits but lower risks brought by illegal trade of cultural relics have pushed criminals to run ahead into danger; 3) infrastructure to guarantee the safety of cultural relics is still inadequate and safety prevention conditions of cultural relics entities have yet to be fundamentally improved.[10]

Fortunately, there is growing political pressure to strengthen international conventions and the statutory regimes of individual states to better regulate the legal protections afforded Tibetan antiquities. Given the scope of the problem worldwide, there are some archaeologists who advocate for the outlawing of the international trade in antiquities. The harsher voices among them call for a complete ban on the private ownership of all ancient objects and measures instituted to return them to their original countries.

The moral outrage behind such sentiments is readily understandable. However, a total ban on the ownership and exchange of ancient things is likely to be just as ineffective as the periodic proscription of other social phenomena that might be perceived as harmful, like prostitution and recreational drug use. Individuals have been collecting, studying and exchanging antiquities since the days of ancient Greece and Rome, and antiquarian interest has continued uninterrupted to the present day. Legal remedies to eradicate the illicit trade in antiquities, while essential, are in themselves insufficient. Recognition that a more comprehensive approach to the problem is required is gaining ground worldwide.[11]

[9] For a spectrographic analysis of Tibetan copper-alloy objects known as *thokcha* (*thog-lcags*), see John 2006, pp. 203–28. In this analysis of 44 diverse objects, the majority were determined to be composed of lead-tin bronze and zinc-lead-tin bronze, while only two of the tested objects are of a tin bronze (*ibid.*, 217).

[10] See 'People's Republic of China National Report on the Implementation of the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. 2011–2015': www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/pdf/Rapport_Chine.pdf. On recent measures to ameliorate the many threats to cultural property in one province of China, see Lawler 2009.

[11] In the Introduction and Conclusion to her book, Waxman (2008) makes and excellent case for transparency, with museums being more open about how and where their objects were obtained and about any controversies associated with them. Waxman calls for collaboration between countries, museums and cultural institutions, the rich ones aiding the poor ones and the poor ones honestly assessing their capability to conserve and safeguard repatriated antiquities. Furthermore, Waxman argues that institutional finance stoppage would not halt the trade in antiquities but rather drive it underground. I propose extending the principle of

By spotlighting the cultural significance and artistic value of selected objects and their role in interregional exchange, this study makes some contribution to mitigating the ignorance and opacity surrounding the export of Tibetan antiquities. It is in the interests of transparency and the willingness to share with others that the collectors of the artefacts featured in this study wish to take part (insofar as these collectors are still alive). In staging their ancient objects here, materials crucial to the elucidation of the cultural makeup of ancient Tibet are brought to the fore of archaeological enquiry and to the attention of a much larger public audience. Hopefully, this will augment an appreciation of the rich civilisation and cultural feats of the Tibetan peoples. It is only by considering new materials and ideas that advances in our understanding of the archaeology, culture and art of Tibet can be achieved.

I oppose the point of view that advocates for research to never be conducted on objects coming from private collections. It is precisely because of the cloak of secrecy surrounding such things that Tibetan tombs have been looted with impunity for several decades.[12] While this type of publication might stimulate further interest in collecting Tibetan silver, bronze and gold objects, that collecting continued unabated prior to its publication and there is no reason to believe that had it not been published the desire to possess these wares would have somehow diminished. An unquantifiable pool of Tibetan artefacts is now dispersed throughout the world (mostly in wealthy countries, including the PRC), many of which are unpublished and unaccounted for, precluding an assessment of their current whereabouts, scientific value, cultural relevance and legal status. Efforts to conserve, restrict the movement of and recover such properties are hardly possible in this environment. By shedding light on the kinds of objects produced in ancient times and their significance to the study of Tibet, this work helps set the course for a more informed discussion about how they might best be safeguarded for posterity.

However, matters concerning the legitimate status of the various artefacts used in this monograph cannot be sidestepped by noble intentions. For this reason, the featured objects and their transfer from the Tibetan cultural world to their current owners must be vetted as thoroughly as possible. In doing so, fundamental questions concerning how these objects might have reached collectors are raised. The discussion that follows is the product of my expertise in Tibetan studies and archaeology as well as my observations in the field for the last 35 years. Nevertheless, regarding the legal status of the ancient objects displayed in this work, I am unqualified to make judgements that carry weight in any jurisdiction. Neither am I able to determine the applicability of specific provisions in international law to the objects of this study. Rather than attempting to fix the legal footing of the featured objects, the aim of this investigation is to present the rudiments of a case history that justifies their publication. The analysis furnished should prove useful in qualifying the challenges affecting the suitability for publication of other Tibetan antiquities.

There are no indications whatsoever that any of the Tibetan artefacts privately owned and featured in this work were obtained through theft, extortion or other immoral means. All collectors (some noted by name, others remaining anonymous) whose objects are discussed in this work aver purchasing them in good faith. To the best of my knowledge, none of the antiquities featured in this work are the object of a warrant or lien issued by the legal authorities of any sovereign state. I am unable to offer comment on the details of procurement of objects in other publications or in museums discussed and illustrated in this work. It is can only be presumed that due diligence was exercised in obtaining and publishing these things.

In fixing the provenance of archaeological and art historical materials it is helpful to categorise their origins and pedigree as part of an *in situ*, museological or oral tradition.[13] *In situ* materials are fixed features in the landscape, such as tombs and other ancient monuments, portable objects in their original find contexts, and frescoes and rock art. Museological materials are monuments and objects housed in museums and other cultural institutions, which are frequently seen as their lawful custodians. Most structures and portable objects in museums are translocated materials, many of which have moved across international borders to their current locations. The level of care and attention that the staff of museums exercise in how acquisitions are obtained varies in rigour as per the historical circumstances surrounding acquisition, institutional customs and policies and the competence and moral integrity of individual curators. The nature of holdings, how they were acquired and their relative placement in the wider collections of a museum constitute a body of evidence for determining the provenance of individual objects. An initiative is now under way worldwide to establish widely agreed-upon collecting

transparency to individuals by the creation of an international registry of all ancient items, however minor or redundant. Recent advances in communication and information capabilities now make such a worldwide inventory technically feasible. I envision the creation of an environment in which every person would be legally bound to divulge the identity of all cultural artefacts in their possession. A one-time amnesty could be instituted so that all antique items would remain with their present owners, so long as those items are shown not to have been stolen within a set period. In that way, a comprehensive picture of the world's ancient heritage could be built up, previously unknown collections opened for study, and provision made, where desirable, for the public acquisition of private holdings. Ultimately, the security of the world's ancient heritage may depend on the creation of such an ambitious partnership between governments, institutions and individuals. The tragic loss to fire of the National Museum of Brazil in Rio de Janeiro in 2018 brings home the fact that caching the world's cultural heritage in large, centrally run repositories is insufficient to ensure their continued existence.

[12] On the wholesale destruction and looting of ancient sites in Upper Tibet, see April 2015 *Flight of the Khyung*. This article is based on a lecture delivered at the Conference of Tibet Archaeology, History and Culture held at Sichuan University in 2011. For unknown reasons, the paper submitted to the hosts of that conference was not published.

[13] My classification of archaeological and art-historical materials in a threefold scheme benefitted from conversations with Katherine Anne Paul, Curator, Arts of Asia, the Newark Museum of Art.

protocols and ethical standards that museums and other cultural institutions can follow.[14]

It is the oral tradition obtained from sellers, collectors and Tibetans in general that concerns us most in this study. The oral tradition applies to artefacts that are the object of verbally transmitted reports and popular traditions concerning aspects of provenance. When the oral tradition furnishes consistent information on geographic sources and the succession of ownership, it is an important tool for assessing the pedigree of ancient objects. This type of approach to understanding the provenance of artefacts is essentially anthropological in nature. It relies on methods enabling the gathering of oral records and the correlation of multiple accounts containing the same information to assess widely held beliefs and perceptions about the recent possession, transfer and sale of artefacts. Beyond the bounds of living memory, the oral tradition potentially provides congruous information on the origins and longstanding use of culturally active artefacts. The oral tradition can be employed in tandem with empirical means to corroborate its veracity as well as to pinpoint its limitations.

Many of the objects of this study, including vessels, fibulae, pendants, pectorals and other articles, are part of an extensive Tibetan oral tradition. Most of these objects are regarded by Tibetans as being *thokcha*, objects believed to have fallen from the sky (for more details, see p. 25 n. 40). The mythologisation of Tibetan antiquities establishes a framework for understanding their cultural value. Certain ancient things are thought to have been the property of the demigods, which eventually came into the possession of lucky individuals and families. The conviction that many *thokcha* have been handed down for generations is supported by their remarkable physical condition. Although highly worn, these objects show little or no signs of corrosion, confirming that they were carefully conserved for long periods of time. Multigenerational conservation was enabled through the wearing of smaller objects, enshrining them in tabernacles and deposition in secret places for religious purposes. The heirloom quality of many lovingly polished copper-alloy objects in the Tibetan cultural world sets them apart from those in most other Eurasian territories. In other locations, artefacts of comparable age were frequently buried and exhibit significant levels of degradation. Ancient copper-alloy objects handed down as talismans and ornaments also occur in the Mongolian cultural world, but this phenomenon is not as commonplace there as it is in Tibet.

[14] The International Council of Museums (ICOM) has developed a set of minimum ethical standards for museums that cover all aspects of acquisition, conservation, protection and disposal of art and antiquities. In Section 2.3 ('Provenance and Due Diligence'), it states that, 'Every effort must be made before acquisition to ensure that any object or specimen offered for purchase, gift, loan, bequest, or exchange has not been illegally obtained in, or exported from its country of origin or any intermediate country in which it might have been owned legally (including the museum's own country). Due diligence in this regard should establish the full history of the item since discovery or production.' See: https://icom.museum/en/standards-guidelines/code-of-ethics/.

So exceptional is the degree of preservation of many Tibetan metallic objects showcased in this monograph that the calibration of scientific testing methods to adjust for the absence of corrosion products significantly penetrating their surfaces has yet to be undertaken (see p. 50 n. 129). The extremely high and dry conditions of the Tibetan Plateau may also retard the degradation of silver and copper-alloy objects that were deliberately buried in tombs or through happenstance. Nevertheless, in non-aureate objects, telltale signs that they have come into contact with the ground include verdigris, rust, mineral encrustation and pitting. These and other forms of deterioration come about through electrochemical reaction with the surrounding environment.

The highly conserved and traditionally curated Tibetan copper-alloy objects known as *thokcha* were not pilfered from tombs or otherwise obtained from subterranean locations. Most objects in this book quite self-evidently belong to that group of non-excavated objects. The physical state of a few objects in the study may suggest that they came from tombs or other underground sources at some point in time, although there is no conclusive evidence to indicate that they actually did. In only one case does a copper-alloy object featured in this work (Figs. 4.8, 4.9) exhibit the heavy degradation associated with deposition in the ground for extended periods of time. As of 2018, this trapezoidal openwork plaque remained in a private collection in the PRC, where I was able to photograph it. Traditionally, Tibetans avoid disturbing tombs and excavating in general. There are well-articulated religious customs in place that prohibit tampering with the earth and the spirits believed to reside in it. While these cultural inhibitions to digging are hardly sufficient to dissuade modern looting, they explain the preference for inherited artefacts.

The pristine condition of the silver vessels illustrated in the first part of chapter one indicates that they are very unlikely to have been recovered from underground. Other sources for these vessels must be considered. Tibetan monasteries have a long history of collecting valuable textiles, vessels and other wares obtained through donation. Although there is little archival information still available, it appears that older and richer religious institutions in Tibet regularly kept objects acquired over many centuries. The storage of valuable goods parallels the keeping of books and manuscripts, some of which are known to have been in monastic collections for hundreds of years. Tibetans hold that their major monasteries were repositories of vast wealth, a source of civic pride that reflects the piety and devotion of the people. Unfortunately, with the desecration and razing of most monasteries (as well as the palaces and fortresses) in Tibetan regions incorporated into the PRC, many inventories of valuable articles were lost, along with the objects themselves. Starting in 1959, much of this fabulous Tibetan wealth was expropriated or destroyed by the Chinese Communist regime. However, some items of value resurfaced with the liberalisation of Chinese politics beginning in 1979. This period marks the revival of an

open and vibrant domestic trade in antique objects that continues today.

The sale and exchange of culturally valuable objects in Tibetan cultural regions is nothing new. In the premodern era, commodities as well as antiques, curios and relics were frequently bartered, reducing reliance on currencies. In particular, smaller objects (such as beads and metallic amulets) were worn or alternatively displayed by Tibetans and traded and gifted regularly. Tibetan residents of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) and other Tibetan regions in the PRC, as well as Tibetan-speakers in Baltistan, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh, have long been regarded for their entrepreneurial skill, trade being a key part of the economy of these austere, high-elevation lands. In the 1930s, the Tibetologist Giuseppe Tucci (1935, 1973) readily assembled a collection of ancient copper-alloy objects purchased or otherwise received from traders, monks, government officials and ordinary people. While the sale for profit of scrolls and statutes depicting the Buddha or other enlightened figures was and still is frowned upon, Tibetans appeared to have far fewer compunctions regarding the disposal for profit of pre-Buddhist artefacts as well as smaller, less conspicuous religious and utilitarian items. Tibetan Buddhist leaders I have queried on the subject are unanimous in maintaining that property rightfully held can be sold so long as it has not undergone formal consecration (*rab-gnas*). This prohibition precludes the sale of ritually empowered statues and painted scrolls. Many other classes of artefacts including *thokcha* are also endowed with religious value and are perceived as culturally, historically or personally significant. While it may not strictly be considered a sin (*sdig-pa*) in Lamaism to dispose of such things, most modern Tibetans do not engage in the sale of antiques, or do so only occasionally.

Religious and cultural restrictions notwithstanding, the liberalisation of politics in Tibetan regions of the PRC in the aftermath of the Chinese Cultural Revolution led to the reawakening of a large and vibrant commercial sector centred around artefacts. This trade spread throughout Tibetan cultural areas as well as in major cities in mainland China, including Lanzhou, Chengdu and Beijing. Commerce was made possible by the large stores of ancient things that were not confiscated during the Cultural Revolution that remained with their Tibetan owners. While gold and silver were routinely rounded up by marauding Red Guards, other things like *thokcha* and patterned agate beads were seen as essentially worthless, and largely ignored. That these supposedly inconsequential objects were left untouched provided much grist for the commercial mill once trade resumed in the late 1970s.[15] Moreover, in a territory as vast as the Tibetan cultural realm, some silver and gold objects were overlooked by the revolutionary forces. Others were hidden away. I have received many credible reports that, in order to elude crusading elements in Mao Tse-tung's regime, religious icons and other valuable objects were buried, thrown into lakes, deposited in caves, or spirited out of the country during the Cultural Revolution.

I am unaware of any official statistics kept by the Chinese government regarding the many hundreds of individual entrepreneurs actively buying and selling antiquities and other old things in Lhasa (Lha-sa), Shigatse (Gzhis-ka-rtse), Xining (Zi-ling), Labrang (Bla-brang) and in dozens of more minor prefectural and county markets across the Plateau. Many of these marketplaces are still viable today, and trade continues to be conducted by Tibetan entrepreneurs openly. Beginning in 1984, when travel to Tibetan cultural regions in the PRC became far less restrictive, commercial centres were financially invigorated by foreign tourists shopping for souvenirs and mementos. In some cases, these foreigners were uninformed as to the age and status of the things they were purchasing. Petty dealers and collectors from abroad also began patronising Tibetan antique markets in the PRC in the mid-1980s. These commercial centres were not only tolerated by the authorities but accorded the full range of municipal services. In turn, dealers paid for rental spaces and other fees levied by cities and municipalities.[16] This remains the current state of affairs across the PRC. For instance, on any normal business day in Beijing, its extensive antiques markets are frequented by thousands of persons, including foreigners from many different countries.

Over the last 40 years, there has been a huge outpouring of Tibetan cultural relics to Hong Kong and Kathmandu, the major international hubs for ongoing international trade. The volume of Tibetan antiquities reaching these entrepôts appears to have been greatest in the 1980s and 1990s, with a gradual tailing off of the supply over the first two decades of this century. The reduction in the amount of culturally valuable articles reaching Hong Kong and Kathmandu in recent years appears to be largely due to a diminution of

[15] It is alleged by a number of people that I have spoken to about the matter that some confiscated gold and silver objects were not melted down during the Cultural Revolution but were disposed of in the international market, with Hong Kong acting as a primary outlet. I am unable to provide documentary evidence to either support or discredit this allegation.

[16] How the open sale of Tibetan antiquities to PRC citizens and foreigners alike in the marketplaces of the PRC over the last 40 years squares with the legal regime in that state is a subject to be taken up by qualified scholars (see below). According to the UNESCO report entitled 'People's Republic of China National Report on the Implementation of the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. 2011–2015', 'Legal dealers of cultural goods in China include cultural relics shops and cultural relics auction houses. As of December 31, 2013, there had been 71 antique shops in China, with a total annual turnover of 874 million RMB yuan. The number of antique auction houses had added up to 382, registering an annual transaction volume of 27.354 billion RMB yuan'. See: www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/pdf/Rapport_Chine.pdf. Chai and Li (2019: 138) write that, 'Judging from the repeated revision of the content of the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Cultural Relics over the past few years, China's legislation on the protection of cultural relics presents a trend of expanding local government autonomy and guaranteeing gradual market activity. Of course, this trend is accompanied by regulations that are specific to the actual development of the society, but overall, it is still a legal change in the law for the diversification of cultural relics protection and the rationalization of use of cultural relics.'

available sources in Tibetan cultural areas. Since around 2010, Chinese nationals have also become keen collectors of Tibetan antiques. It may be no exaggeration to state that the bulk of Tibetan artefacts are now in mainland China and other countries. As the trade has been tolerated with seemingly little governmental interference, there are few records available that could be used to accurately judge the quality and quantity of Tibetan-produced ancient objects that now lie outside the Plateau.

Matters of provenance are further complicated by the fact that the material culture of the Tibetan Plateau is far from being confined to the PRC. It also extends to Plateau regions in Pakistan, India, Nepal and Bhutan. Thus, ancient objects attributed to Tibet fall under five different sovereign jurisdictions, internal provincial, state and district administrations within the jurisdictional purview of these states notwithstanding. From observations I made in Pakistan, India and Nepal in the 1980s and 1990s, it appears that markets for antiquities in those countries were exposed to public scrutiny and operated with a minimum degree of interference from the authorities. Furthermore, markets in Pakistan, India and Nepal were often housed in facilities supported by municipal services. As in the PRC, the antiques markets in these three countries appear to have been receptive to the participation of foreign buyers. Nevertheless, the primary source country for Tibetan antiquities is the PRC, which claims jurisdiction over approximately 85 per cent of the Tibetan Plateau.

The ancient objects that appear exclusively in this work are reported by foreign owners to have been purchased in Nepal, Hong Kong and in Western countries, mostly in the 1980s. I was informed by these collectors that their holdings were obtained from petty dealers who provided little documentation to buyers. It appears that multiple agents were usually involved in the transfer of the antiquities presented in this book from their owners in Tibetan cultural regions up the chain of trade from itinerant dealers to regional markets and international commercial hubs. So standard and widespread has the international trade in Tibetan antiquities become in the last 40 years, that acquiring them had become little more difficult than obtaining modern Tibetan handicrafts and other specialised commodities.

Although we can be reasonably assured that none of the Tibetan antiquities in private collections highlighted in this monograph were procured using nefarious means, there are other considerations germane to their current legal status in international law. This is an exceedingly complex subject and only international legal experts can offer definitive comment. Nevertheless, professional archaeologists, cultural historians and art experts in the twenty-first century can no longer turn a blind eye to questions of legitimacy concerning objects in private collections and museums they study and publish. To this end, I will examine how the objects of this study might relate to the 'Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property – 1970' and the complementary instrument known as the '1995 UNIDROIT Convention'. While I am unqualified to pass judgement on issues affecting the legal status of ancient objects in this study, as contained in the articles of the two named international conventions, my remarks may serve as a useful starting point on the matter.

Hereinafter, the 'Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property – 1970' will simply be called the 'UNESCO Convention', and '1995 UNIDROIT Convention' the 'UNIDROIT Convention'. The UNESCO Convention came into effect on 24 April 1972, and was ratified by the State Council of the People's Republic of China on 25 September 1989. The UNESCO Convention was the first comprehensive international initiative to address the growing problem of illicit trafficking in cultural objects (including antiquities). It provides a legal framework for securing the return of stolen cultural objects to their countries of origin. The UNIDROIT Convention was devised at the behest of UNESCO and came into force on 1 July 1998.[17] The articles of this convention complement the UNESCO Convention by more effectively formulating rules for the uniform restitution of illicitly acquired cultural property.

The UNESCO Convention requires State Parties to take action in three main fields: preventative measures (monitoring international trade and imposition of penal and administrative sanctions); restitution provisions (appropriate steps to recover and return imported cultural property and payment of compensation to innocent purchasers who have valid title to that property); and an international cooperation framework (designed to strengthen cooperation between State Parties).[18] These measures are laid down in 26 articles.[19]

[17] UNIDROIT is an independent intergovernmental organisation headquartered in Rome. According to the UNESCO website, 'Its purpose is to study needs and methods for modernizing, harmonizing and coordinating private and, in particular, commercial law between States and groups of States … The UNIDROIT Convention covers all stolen cultural objects, not just inventoried and declared ones and stipulates that all cultural property must be returned.' See: www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/illicit-trafficking-of-cultural-property/1995-unidroit-convention/.

[18] 'Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property – 1970': www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/illicit-trafficking-of-cultural-property/1970-convention/.

[19] Of special interest to this study is Article 1 of the UNESCO Convention, which defines the term 'cultural property' as 'being of importance for archaeology, prehistory, history, literature, art or science', including, but not restricted to 'products of archaeological excavations (including regular and clandestine) or of archaeological discoveries', 'antiquities more than one hundred years old, such as inscriptions, coins and engraved seals', and 'objects of ethnological interest'. Furthermore, Article 7 of the UNESCO Convention directs State Parties to 'take the necessary measures, consistent with national legislation, to prevent museums and similar institutions within their territories from acquiring cultural property originating in another State Party which has been illegally exported'; 'to prohibit the import of cultural property stolen from a museum or a religious or secular public monument or similar institution in another State Party'; and 'at the request of the State Party of origin, to take appropriate steps to recover and return any such cultural property imported after the entry into force of this Convention in both States concerned, provided, however, that the requesting State shall pay just

The UNIDROIT Convention essentially deems that, 'When a museum has reason to believe that a cultural object has been illegally exported from its country of origin, it is prevented from buying it by the ICOM Code of ethics. If the object in question is bought on the international art market by a person or institution acting in good faith, the country of origin presently has no option but to buy it back.'[20] The UNIDROIT Convention (Articles 3, 10) ensures that neither the original owner nor the good-faith buyer of a cultural object is unduly penalised. This is accomplished by enjoining buyers to check that any such item was being lawfully traded and requiring its return in the event it was illicitly trafficked. Original owners may be required to provide compensation to buyers who can prove that they purchased an object with due diligence. As pertains to market sellers and private and public collections, the payment of such compensation is widely accepted as providing them with a measure of legal security.[21]

Although I am unable to provide *ex officio* comment, in light of the provisions set forth in the UNESCO Convention and UNIDROIT Convention, as detailed above, the objects featured in this monograph obtained by collectors with due diligence do not appear to be in contravention of international agreements between State Parties. Furthermore, these owners can be construed as possessing valid title to that property. In the event that a State Party undertakes to reclaim any such objects, these collectors would probably be eligible for fair rates of compensation for that property, as determined by a legal process in conformance with the two international conventions discussed. The provisions of these conventions appear to justify on ethical grounds the publication of the objects featured in this work. Nevertheless, the conclusions reached in this study do not imply that any remedy under international agreements regarding these properties has been achieved. Furthermore, the rights and responsibilities of individual collectors under the laws of their home countries have not been addressed.

Markets operating in the public sphere and the hearty welcome of outside players and their cash in the PRC do not necessarily signify that foreign collectors and dealers are accorded protection under the laws of that country. The Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Cultural Relics was adopted by a meeting of the Standing Committee of the Fifth National Peoples Congress on 19 November 1982 and revised by the same governing body on 28 October 2002.[22] In their work on the evolving status of legal and administrative measures for the protection and conservation of cultural relics, Chai and Li (2019: 136) characterise this law as the foundation for Chinese legislation on ensuring the security of cultural relics. According to a UNESCO report on progress made in the implementation of the UNESCO Convention in China, it describes the same law as providing 'detailed articles on the system of cultural property entry and exit, including qualification of exit examination bodies and their staff, exit examination procedures, items to be examined, issuance of exit permit, use of exit logo, and legal consequences of exit permission'.[23]

It behoves us to scrutinise articles of the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Cultural Relics that pertain directly to the exchange of what are called 'cultural relics', which presumably includes at least some of the antiquities of this study that may have originated in Tibetan regions of the PRC. Article 2, Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Cultural Relics states, 'The State places under its protection the following cultural relics within the boundaries of the Peoples Republic of China: sites of ancient culture, ancient tombs, ancient architectural structures, cave temples, stone carvings and murals that are of historical, artistic or scientific value …'; and 'valuable works of art and handicraft articles dating from various historical periods'. Article 4 notes that, 'All cultural relics remaining underground or in the inland waters or territorial seas within the boundaries of the People's Republic of China shall be owned by the state.' Article 5 allows that, 'Ownership of memorial buildings, ancient architectural structures and cultural relics handed down from generation to generation which belong to collectives or individuals shall be protected by state laws.' According to Article 25, 'The resale of cultural relics in private collections at a profit shall be strictly forbidden, and so shall be the private sale of such relics to foreigners'; and Article 28 declares that, 'It shall be prohibited to take out of the country any cultural relics of significant historical, artistic or scientific value, with the exception of those to be shipped abroad for exhibition with the approval of the State Council.' Furthermore, Article 30, Section 3 of the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Cultural Relics states that persons involved in 'selling cultural relics in private collections to foreigners without permission … shall be fined by the departments for the administration of industry

compensation to an innocent purchaser or to a person who has valid title to that property'. See the UNESCO website: www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/illicit-trafficking-of-cultural-property/1970-convention/text-of-the-convention/.

[20] See 'Overview – UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects' (2014): www.unidroit.org/overviecp/english.

[21] See 'Overview - UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects' (2014). Furthermore, the UNIDRIOT Convention provides legal security to public and private collections by the provision of a relatively short limitation period of three years from the time a claimant becomes aware of the location and possessor of a cultural object.

[22] See the English-language website of the State Council of the People's Republic of China: http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/laws_regulations/2014/08/23/content_281474982987444.htm. For the full text, see 'Laws of the People's Republic of China', on the website *AsianLII*: www.asianlii.org/cn/legis/cen/laws/pocr304/#1.

[23] See 'People's Republic of China National Report on the Implementation of the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. 2011–2015': www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/pdf/Rapport_Chine.pdf.

and commerce, and the cultural relics in question and the illegal earnings derived therefrom may be confiscated'.[24]

The Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Cultural Relics avows that all ancient monuments defined as cultural relics as well as portable cultural relics contained in the ground or bodies of water in the territory of the PRC belong to the State. Legal provision is made for cultural relics under private ownership handed down over the generations. These are not permitted to be disposed of for profit or sold to foreigners. Moreover, the export of cultural relics of 'significant historical, artistic or scientific value' is not allowed. However, the transfer of ownership of cultural relics to foreigners is legally sanctioned under special (but not well-specified) conditions in Article 30 of the legislation. That the sale of cultural relics to foreigners is not completely banned provides a legal rationale in particular cases for their direct or indirect participation in the antiquities trade of the PRC. The manner in which markets selling antiquities function in the PRC and their relationship to legislation regulating the protection and transfer of cultural artefacts in the PRC indicate that the acquiring of such items by foreigners exercising due diligence may establish that they enjoy valid title. While offering comment on the legality of individual artefacts in this work or those contained in museums and other private collections outside the PRC is beyond the purview of this study, there is cause to believe that in certain circumstances these cultural relics were acquired with tacit recognition of the fact that they were destined for export from China, if not in a manner entirely consistent with the letter and spirit of the law as it stands in PRC.

Despite furnishing lawful pathways to the export of cultural artefacts, the interpretation of Chinese laws and how they are to be applied to the sale of antiquities in the PRC raises many unresolved questions. China is still in the process of developing a fully modern legal system, and there is some evidence to suggest that the law may not have fully caught up with established market activities.[25] The public nature of the markets and the participation of a large spectrum of buyers and sellers suggest that criteria for determining what is a 'cultural relic' and which of these are deemed 'significant' might not be fully addressed in the existing legislation. Thus, some marketplace activities may possibly fall into a grey area, permitting a wider selection of ancient goods to be traded than is intended by the law. Muddying the waters still further is the fact that around half of the Tibetan cultural area in the PRC known as the TAR was a *de facto* independent entity until 1951 (Goldstein 1989). The implications of this historical situation continue to have a profound effect on Tibetan perceptions and attitudes towards the legal structures of the PRC.

However legal conventions and provisions governing the export of antiquities from the PRC and the other four nations from which Tibetan antiquities originate evolve in the future, it is certain that restitution is impossible to contemplate for the majority of significant ancient objects, for the very reason that they are hardly known to any but their owners. In this regard, the publication of a selection of ancient Tibetan objects in this work makes a small but not insignificant step towards ensuring transparency. In the long run, it is only by bringing Tibetan cultural artefacts, wherever they may lie above ground, into the public light that informed decisions pertaining to their provenance, ownership and protection can be made.

[24] Another major piece of legislation governing the ownership and exchange of cultural relics in the PRC is that entitled Rules for the Implementation of the Protection of Cultural Relics, which was promulgated on 5 May 1992 and revised in 2003. Article 2 of this law affirms that, 'Cultural relics such as memorial objects, works of art, handicraft articles, revolutionary documents, manuscripts, ancient or old books and materials, and typical material objects are classified into valuable cultural relics and ordinary cultural relics. Valuable cultural relics are classified into Grades One, Two, and Three.' For the text of this law, see 'Laws of the People's Republic of China' on the *AsianLII* website: www.asianlii.org/cn/legis/cen/laws/rftiottpocr671/. The most recent key legislation designed to safeguard cultural relics in the PRC is called the Law of the People's Republic of China on Protection of Cultural Relics (2015 Amendment). For the text of this law, see the Zhejiang Gongshang University website: http://orcp.hustoj.com/law-of-cultural-relics-2015-amendment/.

[25] According to the 'People's Republic of China National Report on the Implementation of the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. 2011–2015', 'China's cultural heritage departments have yet to conduct comprehensive surveys of private collection of cultural relics and have only obtained data about cultural relics auctioned within China and entering and exiting China.'