

A GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Some three thousand years ago, the inhabitants of the loftiest reaches of the Tibetan Plateau began to develop a remarkable civilization. This high-altitude civilization of the Tibetan hinterland geographically corresponds to the kingdom traditionally known as Zhang-zhung. Its founders established formidable physical monuments, reflecting rich and varied lifeways. The ancient civilization of Upper Tibet,¹ sustained by a mixed agrarian and pastoral economy, possessed advanced cultural traditions. This primary legacy was to continue in a more or less uninterrupted stream of human endeavor until the historic period. Even in the present day Tibetan highland vestiges of the formative cultural record persist in the mythology, religious customs and secular pursuits of its people. Despite evidence pointing to significant historical continuity, this golden period in the cultural development of Upper Tibet has for centuries been largely ignored by succeeding generations of indigenous scholars. The study of the distant past simply for its own sake did not gain much ground in the scholastic environment of old Tibet.

This exposition of the antediluvian cultural assets of Upper Tibet aims to uncover the prodigious achievements of the early inhabitants of the region and bring them to the fore of informed dialogue. In order to realize this objective, archaeological, literary and anthropological data have been combined in an interdisciplinary study. This approach affords a unique perspective from which the cultural systems that took root in Upper Tibet before the dominance of Buddhism can be thoroughly explored. It would appear that during the Iron Age of the first millennium BCE interrelated cultures and polities spread across the lofty mountain ranges and interminable plains of the Tibetan upland, giving rise to a civilization that was specially adapted to the austere environment. The founding of a sedentary way of life at a higher altitude than any other on our globe is testimony to the tremendous resourcefulness of the Upper Tibetans. The monuments found across the grasslands and alpine tracts, some of them still standing, bespeak the hardiness and vibrancy of the former occupants of the region. Even today, physical traces of this long-lived civilization are found in an impressive series of ruined citadels, temples, necropoli, and rock art.

In order to elucidate the cultural activities of Upper Tibet in a period far removed from that of recent centuries, I have relied on the intensive study of Tibetan historical and ritual texts in tandem with extensive archaeological and ethnographic fieldwork. The Tibetan historical tradition, particularly Bon works, provide numerous chronicles of the cultural traditions of Upper Tibet in both the prehistoric (pre-seventh century CE) and historic epochs. These literary sources are especially useful in the identification of specific places in which ancient religious and political activities are thought to have taken place. Using these texts, I undertook to systematically survey

¹ The term Upper Tibet as used in this work is comprised of the overlapping sTod and Byang-thang regions. These traditional geographic provinces comprise all of Tibet north of the Transhimalayan Gangs-dkar and gNyan-chen thang-lha ranges, west of sNyan-rong; the Yar-lung gtsang-po drainage basin west of gTsang; and far western Tibet. I also include 'Dam-gzhung and sNying-drung, regions south of the gNyan-chen thang-lha range, within the compass of Upper Tibet, as their inhabitants are speakers of a northern dialect, they are primarily pastoral, and of relatively high elevation. The term Byang-thang (Northern Plains) betrays a Central Tibetan bias, referring to pastoral areas (*'brog-sa*) situated over the Transhimalayan ranges, north of Lhasa and Shigatse. sTod (Upper Region) is also a descriptive geographic (and linguistic) term denoting all of the western Tibetan uplands. There is no clear cultural or physiographic demarcation between sTod and the Byang-thang, and for the tablelands of western Tibet these toponyms are used interchangeably.

the various locales noted in them. Over time, it became apparent that some toponyms cited could not be positively identified, while evidence of the erstwhile civilization extended to a great many corners of Upper Tibet not directly recorded in the literature.

As my studies progressed, I refined a multi-pronged methodological approach to understanding the archaic cultural horizon of Upper Tibet, drawing far and wide from literary, ethnographic and archaeological sources. The foremost challenge has been to homologize information from these disparate disciplines so that an effective methodology for the investigation of Tibet's distant past could be formulated. Discrepancies between the archaeological facts on the ground and what Tibetan oral and written traditions have to say about the remote past linger, as some of these are irreconcilable. For example, it is highly improbable that sophisticated metallurgical traditions for the Upper Paleolithic will ever be documented, despite certain Bon claims that their iron-using religion and its founder can be traced back some 18,000 years. This need not worry us, however, because mythological and historical articulations of the past have expressed and will continue to express themselves in different intellectual idioms. Regarding native textual and oral sources, the most pragmatic approach has been to evaluate the fault lines between history and myth, and analyze how each of these categories of human knowledge illuminates the Tibetan cultural legacy. As this study will demonstrate, there are many correspondences between what the Tibetans say about their distant past and what the empirical evidence offers. It is within this arena of traditional and scientific convergence that I operate and to which this work is dedicated.

In this book, I correlate archaeological sites and processes to Tibetan historical traditions which affirm that Upper Tibet was once composed of two paleocultural entities and political orders known as Zhang-zhung and Sum-pa. Insofar as the territory encompassing the assemblage of monuments and rock art and that of the historical reckonings are virtually one and the same, I see it as justified to apply these traditional appellations to the nascent civilization of Upper Tibet. Nevertheless, in Tibetan literature Zhang-zhung and Sum-pa are generic designates having various facets of signification. These terms are used as inclusive indicators of cultural, linguistic and territorial affiliation and do not necessarily denote a particular time period or cultural phase in Upper Tibet. Zhang-zhung and Sum-pa can thus refer to the Upper Tibet of many thousands of years ago or to the royal period of Tibetan political ascendancy. In Buddhist sources, Zhang-zhung is often equated with Gu-ge (11th to 16th century CE), in far western Tibet. In addition to the chronological ambiguities incumbent in this native nomenclature, it is applied in Tibetan texts to variously describe kingdoms and languages. It is therefore not prudent to equate without qualification Zhang-zhung and Sum-pa with specific chronologic, political or cultural terminology.

From the outset, it is important to define the signification of the word 'archaic'. This term is used to denote material and abstract cultural phenomena (in an integral or fractional form) that originated before the introduction of Tibetan Buddhism or independent of this religion prior to 1200 CE. 'Archaic' is not used as a specific chronological classification but as a descriptive term to refer to cultural activities that span a length of time from the Metal Age to the early second millennium CE. This is the vast period of time with which the materials of this study must grapple. Before the rise of the Tibet imperium in the first half of the seventh century CE, cultural phenomena might also be called 'pre-Buddhist'. In past works, I have favored the label 'pre-Buddhist' in much the same way I now employ 'archaic' or 'archaic cultural horizon'. I have opted to make this substitution in terminology because the ancient civilization of Tibet was not dependent on Buddhist thought and culture, thus it is best defined along its own lines. In this work, 'archaic' or 'archaic cultural horizon' signifies the full gamut of material and abstract cultural traditions distinct from Buddhism in terms



of their origins, symbolic value and physical expression. These either passed into oblivion before the introduction of Buddhism in Tibet or coexisted with it for considerable lengths of time. In the archaeological record of Upper Tibet, there are ample inferential and chronometric indications demonstrating that certain types of monuments (tombs, for instance) continued to be built after the onset of the Tibetan imperial period (from the accession of the emperor Srong-btsan sgam-po, the first so-called Chos-rgyal, to the throne in 618/619 or 629 CE until the collapse of the sPu-rgyal dynasty in 846 CE). There is also evidence to suggest that archaic architectural forms as remnant cultural traditions (such as the construction of all-stone edifices) persisted to circa 1200 CE or perhaps even later. Using my culturally descriptive criteria, even cairns (*la-btsas/la-rdzas*) and stone registers (*tho*) constructed in contemporary times can be termed 'archaic' or ancient survivals on account of their hoary indigenous origins.

Part I of this study is devoted to a comprehensive explication of the archaic monument and rock art assemblages of Upper Tibet. It begins with a brief introduction to my expeditionary exertions and the nature of the surveys carried out.

In Section 2, this book sets forth archaeological, literary and ethnographic criteria in order to differentiate archaic monuments and rock art with those with a Lamaist pedigree. Lamaism, as defined in this work, denotes the ecclesiastic and clerical forms of Bon and Buddhism that began to develop in the early historic period and which have prevailed to the present day. The delineation of the architectural and artistic traditions of Upper Tibet into two great epochs of development, archaic and Lamaist, sets the course for the specific types of abstract and physical evidences that will be examined all through this work.

In Section 3, a discussion about chronological controls ensues, which takes into account the typological diversity that characterizes archaic monument and rock art remains in Upper Tibet. This permits archaeological assets to be slotted into a provisional temporal framework, which will be elaborated upon as the study progresses.

Section 4 comprises a typological outline that encapsulates the full diversity of archaic archaeological assets visible in Upper Tibet. After this classification of physical structures and aesthetic forms, Sections 5 to 9 afford a detailed description of the various archaeological resources located in Upper Tibet, including treatment of their structural, temporal and environmental qualities. This is accompanied by an analysis of the roles played by monuments and rock art in the cultural life of the prehistoric epoch (circa 1000 BCE to 600 CE) and early historic period (circa 600 to 1000 CE) of the region. The archaeological record's place in charting the cultural development of Upper Tibet is accorded special consideration in these sections of the study. This exposition of the types and functions of archaic cultural horizon monuments and art lays the groundwork for the ethnoarchaeological model that runs through the entire work.

Sections 5 to 9 of Part I also devote considerable attention to probing the cross-cultural linkages that Upper Tibetan archaeological monuments and rock art share with other regions of Inner Asia.² Inner Asian intercultural exchange and interrelated stages of technological development are discussed in detail, heralding the way to a clearer understanding of the chronology and status of archaic archaeological resources in Upper Tibet. Through this multivalent analysis the

² For the purposes of this study, I define Inner Asia as encompassing Greater Tibet, Greater Mongolia, Eastern Turkestan (Xinjiang), the Altai, Transbaikalia, southern Siberia, and areas extending into Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kirghizia.

archaeological sites of Upper Tibet begin to find their rightful place in the paleocultural map of Eurasia. This broadly focused examination of cross-cultural archaeological materials and processes suggests that funerary monuments in the Tibetan upland began to develop no later than the late Bronze Age or early Iron Age (first third of the first millennium BCE). Systematic comparison of Upper Tibetan monuments with analogues in north Inner Asia illustrates that these funerary structures were part and parcel of technological and cultural innovations buffeting the hinterlands of Asia. The appearance of complex mortuary traditions in Upper Tibet was accompanied by the founding of substantial sedentary residential centers by no later than the middle of the first millennium BCE. These twin developments in settlement and burial patterns ushered in a new phase in Tibetan cultural development, terminating what appears to have been a protracted Neolithic (characterized by a mobile subsistence economy based on big game hunting and possibly agriculture). Such Metal Age cultural transformations mark the beginning of a civilization characterized by much technological and social variability.

Part II of this study scrutinizes Tibetan textual traditions useful in shedding light on the nature of the archaic cultural horizon, as they relate to the Upper Tibetan archaeological milieu. Tibetan texts are exploited as a means to contribute to an understanding of the society, economy, religious traditions, and political structures that gave rise to and developed in conjunction with the archaic monumental and artistic infrastructure of Upper Tibet. I examine how Tibetan literature in general is pertinent to the field of archaeology and identify specific references that are best dovetailed to the scientific study of the past. The selected texts supply generous references to the material culture of early times, which are correlated to the actual facts on the ground wherever possible. I place much emphasis on sources that enumerate the dress, weapons and ritual items of the archaic culture. These literary references should continue to prove useful interpretive tools as our scientific knowledge of ancient Tibetan material culture advances further.

In the textual study of bygone Upper Tibet, we are primarily confined to presenting indigenous versions of the past, and expounding upon how these accounts are applicable to the archaeological and historical study of the region. I conclude that there are indeed significant areas of correspondence between the Upper Tibetan archaeological record and literary sources but that the bulk of these respective bodies of information remain untied to one another. This lack of correlativity hinges on the different aspects of Tibetan cultural heritage that the literary and empirical approaches concentrate upon. Archaeological inquiry focuses on the tangible and quantifiable, while Tibetan texts devote themselves to perceptions of the cultural past as they developed endogenously over the centuries. An important component of this methodological approach is an evaluation of matters related to the historical validity of literary accounts, which deal with the archaic cultural horizon of Upper Tibet. As regards certain religious practices, myths and customs, I continue to argue that ancient cultural traditions live on to the present day, albeit in a much reduced or alloyed form.

In Section 2, I begin translations with a presentation of texts describing old religious practitioners (*gshen*, *bon-po*). These figures are portrayed as representatives of a coherent religious tradition known as Bon. While the institutional organization of Tibetan religion in prehistoric and early historic times is highly obscure, these biographies and hagiographies allude to religious practices and other cultural traditions that underlie the establishment of the monumental and artistic infrastructure of Upper Tibet. Generally speaking, the dominance of the priestly class in textual sources is reflected in the preponderance of ceremonial monuments and religious hermitages in the Tibetan upland. Texts pertaining to the royal priests (*sku-gshen*) of Central Tibet and Zhang-

zhung are presented in order to depict the political and legal dimensions of life on the early Plateau as seen by the Tibetans themselves. I shall then introduce literary materials to illustrate how geographically wide-ranging the Bon religion is traditionally thought to have been. This material is of special interest when compared to the nature of foreign contacts adduced by the Upper Tibetan archaeological record.

Much of Tibetan literature set in the prehistoric epoch is comprised of the annals of the Tibetan and Zhang-zhung kings and their royal priests. These are dealt with in Sections 3 and 4 of Part Two. The royal narratives tend to glorify and exaggerate past doings to the point that history and myth become largely inseparable, in the sense of creating a holistic view of the past. As fabulous as these accounts may be, they serve as symbolic and normative representations of the past that are historically verifiable to varying degrees. In its own culturally idiosyncratic manner, this quasi-historic literature refers to real past religious and political greatness. This halcyon version of Tibet's past cannot be completely denied, as the rich archaeological record of the Plateau demonstrates. Clearly, the Upper Tibet of prehistory was host to highly developed cultural traditions, which existed in and around complex monumental trappings. The traditional vehicle for this past grandeur is Bon in its legendary form as a coherent religious, cultural and political instrument that informed the lives of the ancient Tibetans. The existence of a monolithic religious institution in prehistory calling itself Bon is highly uncertain, as there appear to have been a number of different proto-tribal and linguistic groups co-inhabiting the Tibetan Plateau. They are not likely to have all practiced the same religious traditions. This does not, however, detract from Bon being the prime denominator and metaphor of the cultural complexion of the Tibetan distant past. The impact of Bon, the religion proper, not so much as a historical fact, but as a grand abstraction of how the Tibetans once pursued their lives, cannot be underestimated. In Tibetan literature, Bon emerges as the fabric of an idealized past; but one nevertheless embedded in an actual historical substrate.

On a more solid historical footing are literary references to the *bon/bon-po/bon-mo* and *gshen*, sacerdotal classes that played an instrumental role in the religious life of early historic Tibet. They are first mentioned in Dunhuang manuscripts contemporaneous with this period. As character depictions, the *bon* and *gshen* religious functionaries personify the gambit of momentous ancient customs and traditions. Textual and oral traditions pertaining to the clans of Upper Tibet also appear to be fairly well grounded in early historic social traditions. While this material is much attenuated (most clan lore was transmitted orally and has disappeared with time), we get some inkling of the important place that clans occupied in the formation of the Upper Tibetan polity.

In Section 5, textual references to the archaic architectural traditions of Tibet also lay bare a secure historical foundation. A comparison of ancient Bon sites in the literary tradition to the archaeological record of Upper Tibet yields highly significant areas of agreement. This is further evidence that the collective Tibetan memory is not an unreliable window on the past or merely a mythic occlusion. As we shall see, this historical grounding is strengthened by an architectural description of prehistoric religious centers called 'palaces of the *gshen*'. Here we have evidence not of a hazy or diffuse racial recollection but a recalling of the past that is remarkably in focus.

Section 6 proffers ritual texts that also have much to say about the cultural makeup of the Upper Tibet of antiquity. The systematized Bon religion as it has come down to us contains prolific ritual traditions, which are affirmed to have prehistoric origins. Of particular interest are the performances and liturgies for the propitiation of Zhang-zhung deities, because they encapsulate

cultural traditions relevant to the kinds of monuments established in Upper Tibet. Incumbent in much of this ritual literature is an elite bias whereby the deities are made in the image and likeness of the rulers and priests (and vice versa). Using this mimetic tendency as a departure point for textual analysis, a wide vista of the past opens. The focus is on works that purport to describe the pantheon of prehistoric Zhang-zhung, in order to explore iconographic traditions that are likely to chronicle the costumes, weapons and architecture of the archaic cultural horizon in Upper Tibet. This ritual literature is also a fertile source for abstract cultural traditions of the prehistoric epoch and the early historic period. In many cases, the lore attached to the Zhang-zhung gods and goddesses reveals the cosmology, customs and ethos of ancient Upper Tibet with as much vigor as the narrative historical accounts. These myths disclose the existence of a hardy and warlike people engrossed in spiritual matters pertaining to their origins from a primal state of existence. The ritual texts also define a relationship that informed old conceptions about divine phenomena and their effect on human society. It is still difficult to know how much of the abstract culture thus portrayed is actually reflected in the monumental and artistic assemblage of Upper Tibet, but it appears to be significant. The skyward orientation of certain deities and cosmogonies is instructive and seems to be related to the altitudinous posture of many of Upper Tibet's strongholds and religious centers. Other affinities to the ancient culture of the region are concealed in the Zhang-zhung ritual texts as well. These are, however, still difficult to qualify within an archaeological frame of reference and remain conjectural determinants of the past.

Part III of this work is devoted to the archaic funerary traditions of Tibet, a formidable corpus of ritual texts written in both Old and Classical Tibetan. Priority is given to discerning the role archaic funerary traditions play in the ethnoarchaeological study of Upper Tibet. The most concrete elements of this literature have to do with burial customs and monuments, but unfortunately this material is highly limited in scope. The death rituals, however, constitute a superb resource as regards the eschatological and liturgical components of ancient Tibetan mortuary culture. Accordingly, these will be explored in depth. The elaborate conceptions and ritual activities set out in the funerary texts serve as building blocks for an analysis of the ideological aspects of the necropoli and burial systems of Upper Tibet.

A survey of the relevant texts demonstrates that, through the imperial period, Tibet possessed a soteriology very much at variance with the kind introduced by Buddhism. The existence of a soul as the irreducible essence of a person is repeatedly affirmed in the archaic funerary literature. There are sundry rituals conceived of as liberating the souls of the departed in order that they may reach the ancestral paradise. The texts inform us that in life the soul is inextricably linked to the body as the animating principle in which a concrete persona resides. This innate existence is believed to continue after death in the parallel world of the dead. The worldview thus formed supports the notion of human beings as emerging from a long line of ancestors, whose existence continues in the afterlife. In the archaic funerary traditions, the body as the receptacle of consciousness is accorded special care through a battery of mortuary procedures. These often include burial, once the soul is definitively freed from the corpse. It is likely that such beliefs surrounding the soul and body explain much of the tradition of tomb building in Tibet. There would be hardly any cause for costly inhumations if at death the body was merely seen as a useless and impersonal shell, as it largely is in the Lamaist religions (ecclesiastic Bon and Buddhism).

Part III begins with a presentation of questions related to the application of Tibetan archaic funerary traditions to the study of mortuary archaeology. Section 1 enumerates correspondences between the empirical and literary records in order to set the tone for the painstaking analysis of

the texts that follows. I review the limitations of relying upon texts composed between the imperial period and 18th century CE to comprehend prehistoric burial phenomena in Upper Tibet. These constraints regulate the methodological parameters I have chosen to facilitate the interpretation of the texts; these parameters were selected to minimize semantic and chronological ambiguities.

Section 2 compares archaic funerary traditions with those still prevailing in Tibetan religion, so as to highlight the most long-lived aspects of the death rituals. As we shall see, many of the fundamental themes remain the same, presupposing a good deal of historical continuity between the ancient traditions and those still practiced. Among these basic motifs, the distress of the deceased, ritual protection of the departed consciousness, and the destruction of the demons of death are paramount.

Section 3 introduces the reader to the *Mu-cho'i khrom-'dur*, a cycle of Bon literature enshrining many Tibetan archaic funerary traditions. As will be discussed, these exhibit a good deal of Buddhist transformation, making a clear delineation of materials belonging to the archaic cultural horizon and those postdating it problematic. The geographic placement of the *Mu-cho'i khrom-'dur* is also considered, not least of all to appreciate its relevance to the Upper Tibetan cultural context.

In Section 4, the religious origins and legendary history of the *Mu-cho'i khrom-'dur* are thoroughly explored through the surviving literary materials. The most prominent of the mythic forebears is *Mu-cho ldem-drug*, the namesake of the tradition. In the *Mu-cho'i khrom-'dur*, he is depicted as a disciple of *sTon-pa gshen-rab*, the founder of the Bon religion. This section ends with biographical accounts of *Mu-cho ldem-drug* and another important Bon funerary priest known as *'Dur-gshen rma-da*, who also appears in the Dunhuang documents.

Section 5 provides an all-inclusive review of the liturgical and eschatological fundamentals of the *Mu-cho'i khrom-'dur*. In this exercise, the complexity of the ritual performances and the philosophical profundity of the archaic funerary traditions are brought center stage. In order to construct a better understanding of the idealized ancient funerals of Bon literature, these ceremonial and philosophical elements are contrasted with Buddhist-inspired conceptions of death and salvation.

In the 15 subdivisions of Section 6, the work proceeds to focus on specific eschatological and ritual structures in more detail. This sets the stage for the examination of archaic funerary traditions encapsulated in older editions of Tibetan texts. A picture of the ritual provision for death emerges, which can be harnessed as a tool for comprehending mortuary remains in Upper Tibet (as well as other regions of the Plateau). While the results are not often conclusive, they provide the most plausible assignment of functions regarding burial phenomena. Further archaeological research is needed to confirm the cultural and historical significance of the various literary-based funerary traditions. Nevertheless, physical objects that appear to represent apotropaic implements, soul receptacles, gifts for the deceased, and sacrificial livestock among Upper Tibetan funerary monuments and artifacts are comparable to vital features of the *Mu-cho'i khrom-'dur*. These types of remains recovered from Upper Tibetan mortuary sites (as elaborated upon in Part I) reaffirm the applicability of Bon literature to the study of material culture.

Section 7 is dedicated to the archaic funerary traditions of the *Klu 'bum*, an important collection of texts containing cosmogonic, iconographic and ritual lore about the *klu*, a prominent class of Tibetan water spirits. More recitative and performative funerary materials are uncovered in

this literature, providing a fuller picture of the ancient funerary traditions set down in Tibetan texts. In addition to ritual and philosophical information, the *Klu 'bum* has preserved valuable ethnomedical and archaeological information, which is brought to bear on the Upper Tibetan cultural milieu of yore. One of the most curious monumental structures noted is the *tho*, which appears to correspond with funerary structures (pillars and minor quadrate constructions) that are widely distributed in Upper Tibet.

Finally in Section 8, having set out a compendious view of archaic funerary traditions in Bon works, I tackle the most abstruse of textual corpora, the Dunhuang manuscripts. Accurate study of the Dunhuang materials pivots on a lucid understanding of posterior Bon funerary traditions. These sequent sources have proven essential in the translation of Dunhuang ritual literature featured in this work. The Mu-cho'i khrom-'dur and *Klu 'bum* provide precious exegetical tools that facilitate a refined understanding of the non-Buddhist Dunhuang funerary texts, which heretofore have remained quite opaque to textualists. In addition to the decipherment of Bon texts, linguistic data from the sTod, Hor and Khams dialects have also been instrumental in making technically accurate renderings of Dunhuang writings. This is not to say that all the many mysteries surrounding the Dunhuang funerary manuscripts have been illuminated, for there are still very significant lacunae in our readings of them.

A rigorous investigation of the Dunhuang funerary manuscripts demonstrates that they are the forerunners of the Bon texts, which began to be compiled in their present form some two or three centuries later. The conceptual and thematic correspondences between these respective bodies of literature (from a philosophical, literary and procedural perspective) are unmistakable and all-embracing. This demonstrates beyond a shadow of a doubt that the systematized Bon religion drew inspiration from non-Buddhist religious traditions circulating around Tibet in the early historic period. The two bodies of textual tradition, however, are far from being copies of one another; they each contain features that are not found in the other (in addition to substantial grammatical differences). This indicates that the extant archaic funerary texts do not by any means provide a complete picture of the death rituals of ancient times. They are rather the remnants of a remarkably rich and intricate cultural tradition that has been mostly lost to the Tibetans.

The Dunhuang documents are of exceptional importance, not least of all because some of them are likely to have been written at the same time as the burials and tomb construction of the imperial period. These manuscripts are historical documents in the best sense, having been authored when archaic funerary activities were still flourishing. I shall argue on textual and archaeological grounds that the Dunhuang manuscripts are valuable indicators of prehistoric mortuary traditions as well. A prehistoric antiquity is claimed for narratives connected to sacrificial rites and livestock that transport the dead to the next life. As we shall see, these literary assertions are buttressed by cross-cultural archaeological evidence.

Section 9 returns to questions concerning the antiquity of the archaic funerary traditions enshrined in Tibetan literature. Cross-cultural archaeological and ethnographic sources are introduced, which help to quantify the ancientry exhibited by the ritual texts. Coming full circle, this work ends by joining together the textual, ethnographic and archaeological methodologies upon which it has been built. By moving outside the bounds of the Tibetan world to adjoining regions, the greater ethnohistorical processes that contributed to its cultural enrichment are brought into the spotlight. Archaeological findings indicate that certain funerary motifs in their essential form can be traced to the Inner Asian Iron Age context, raising intriguing questions about the ethnical and cultural origins of the Tibetans and their emergent traditions. These first glimmerings of the

Tibetan cultural record as chronological referents go hand in hand with the founding of elaborate burial and residential monuments in Upper Tibet, as explicated in Part I. The implication is that cultural currents originating in the Iron Age were actively propagated for many centuries in Tibet until being written down in her imperial period documents. These in turn acted as the paradigm for Bon texts that first appeared at the turn of the second millennium CE. By pushing back the chronological frontiers as far as is possible with the research materials currently available, one of the major aims of this work is realized.

Having laid out in an integrated fashion primary and secondary sources of data pertaining to Upper Tibet's distant past, this work leaves off with an exposition of kindred funerary cultures of Inner Asia and the Himalaya. The beliefs, customs and practices shared by diverse peoples illustrate the geographic and ethno-linguistic scope of common funerary motifs. This comparative study also testifies to how much there still is to learn about the way in which archaic death rituals of the Tibetan Plateau developed and spread over time. *Zhang Zhung: Foundations of Civilization in Tibet* rests there as a beacon, illuminating the way forward to a fuller historical and ethnoarchaeological understanding of the ancient cultural heritage of Upper Tibet.

The conclusion reviews the religious, social, political, and environmental elements that appear to characterize the archaic cultural horizon in Upper Tibet. This acts as an overview of the seminal themes and motifs that have recurred throughout the book and which have been the object of intensive archaeological and textual analysis.

