

2.1

Scale and

Cultural Evidence

One of the most fundamental

pieces of information that a geog-

rapher needs to know about a

map, to decide if it will make a

good source, is map scale. Map

scale, because it is inextricably

tied to detail, often determines

the type of cultural information

that can be extracted from the

map.

A large-scale map covers a small

surface area in high detail. A typi-

cal large-scale map might include

local roads, building footprints,

vegetation, or elevation.

A small-scale map is the opposite:

it covers a large surface area in

low detail. A typical small-scale

map would show major highways

as lines, towns and cities as

points, or whole continents or

hemispheres.

Scale can be represented on a

map with a bar for measuring

lengths, or as a statement, as in:

“one inch equals five miles.”

Scale can also be represented

by a representative fraction, or

RF, which tells you the ratio of

the relationship of the map to

earth. In other words, an RF

of 1:10,000 means that 1 length

of anything on the map equals

10,000 of those same lengths on

the earth: 1 inch on the map

would equal 10,000 inches on the

earth, 1 millimeter on the map

would equal 10,000 millimeters

on the earth, and 1 handlength

on the map would equal 10,000

handlengths on the earth.

In the language of the RF,

anything that is 1:25,000 scale

or larger is considered “large

scale.” Anything 1:250,000 scale

or smaller is considered “small

scale.” (And everything in the

middle is “medium.”)

The scale of a map, whether it is

large or small, can be a good indi-

cator of the type of geographical

information that you will find

in the map. Consider two exam-

ples from the Ordnance Survey

map series from the United King-

dom. The map below is 1:63,360,

which seems to be an odd RF,

until you translate it to the equiv-

alent verbal statement: “one inch

equals one mile.” A map of the

same area on the opposite page

is 1:25,000. Between 1:63,360

and 1:25,000, the difference in

the amount of geographical detail

that can be shown is great.

Question 1: Study the geographical

features of the 1:25,000 map. What

kinds of transportation routes are

depicted? What kinds of features are

named? Are there any indicators of

the type of economic activity in this

region?

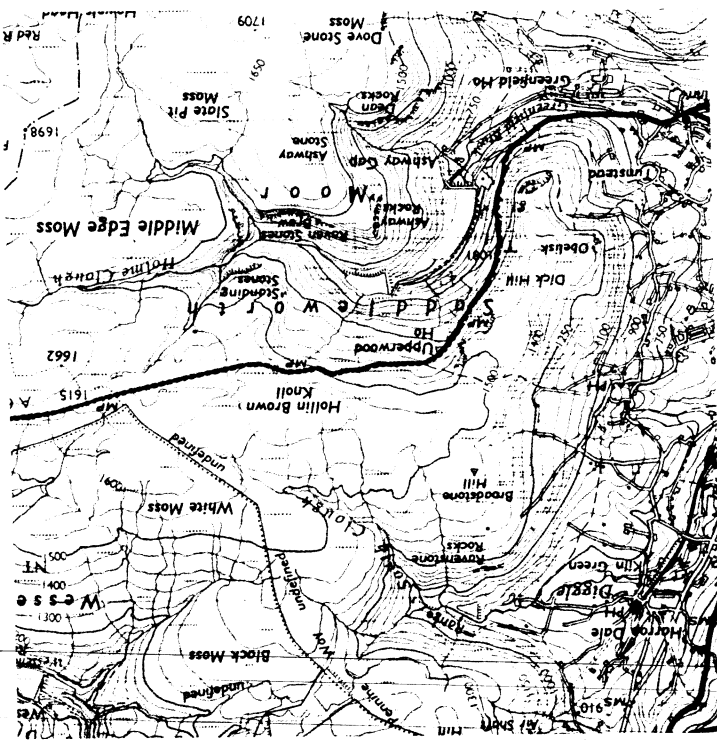
Question 2: Compare your reading

to the smaller-scale 1:63,000 map

below. What features are preserved in

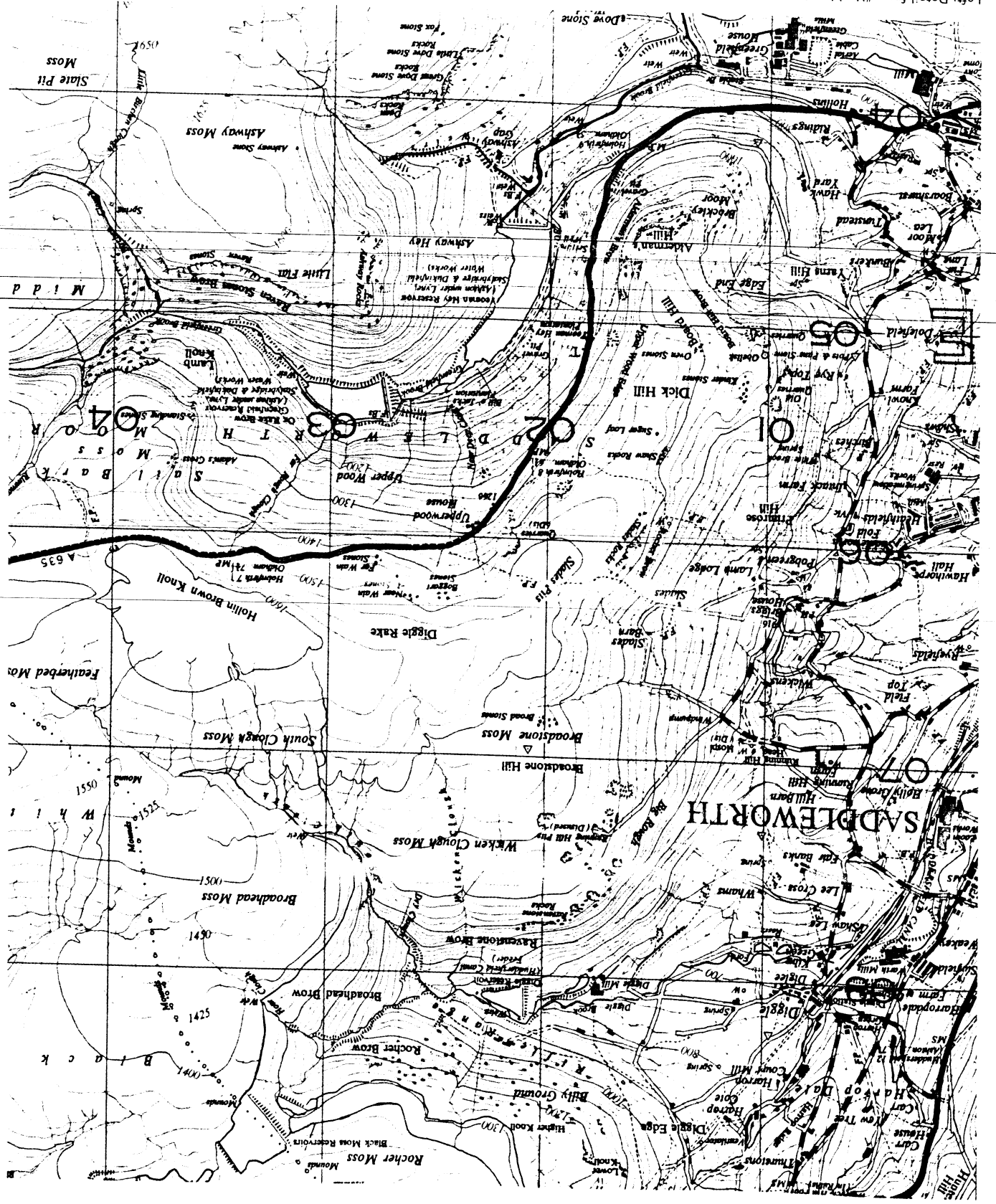
both maps? What information is lost

in the smaller-scale map?



Question 3: How would your impression of this region be different if you had only the 1:63,360 map to work with?

Left: Detail from "Huddersfield," 1961. Above: detail from "Saddleworth," 1957. Both images reproduced from Ordnance Survey mapping on behalf of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown Copyright. License Number MC 100037914.



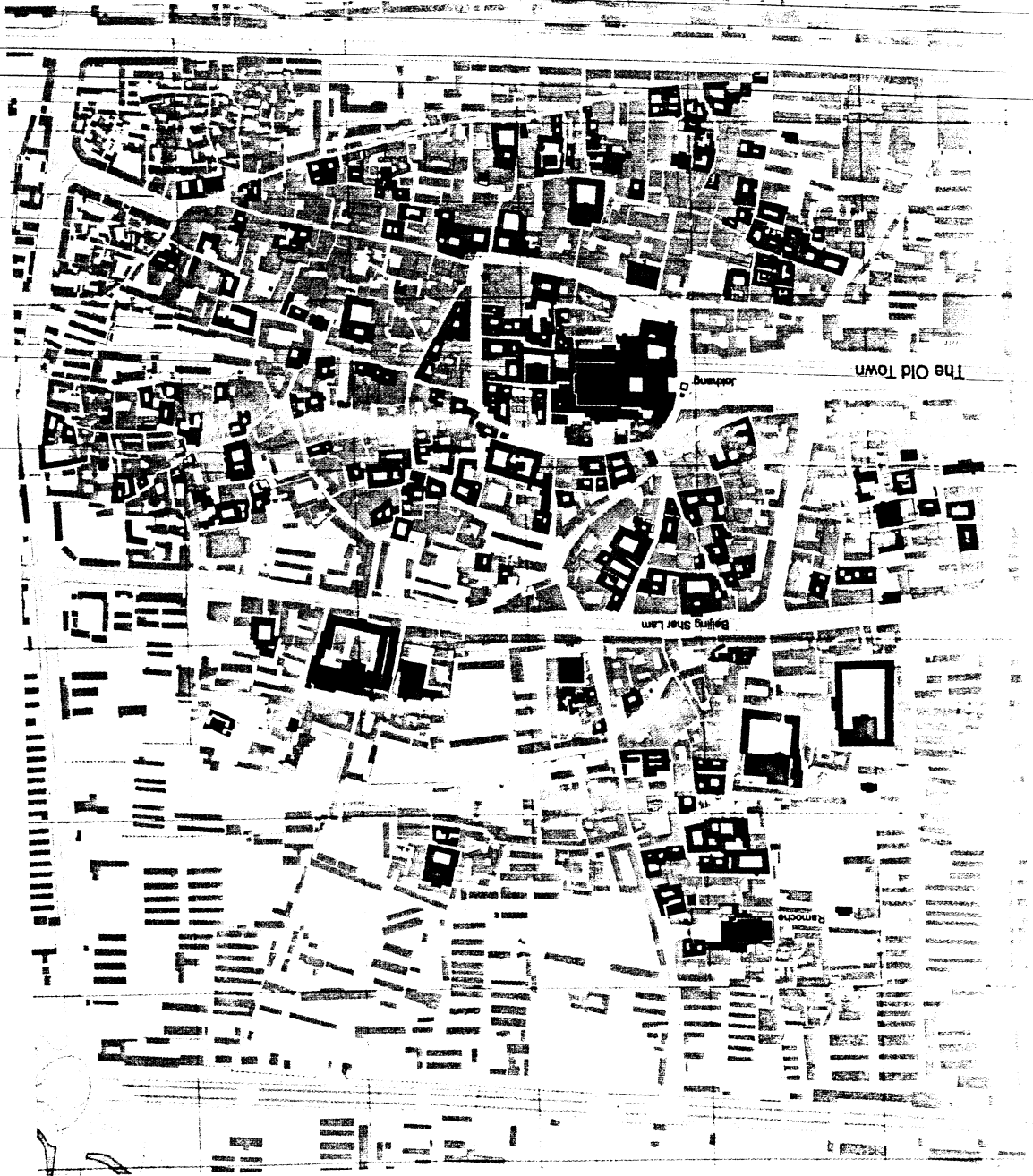
Finding Parallel Worlds in the Large-Scale Map

Large-scale maps are a useful way to look for examples of the parallel worlds of the folk and popular landscapes because large-scale maps have more potential to show material culture than do small-scale maps.

In this map of the ancient city of Lhasa, Tibet, we can explore these parallel worlds. Looking at the city at an RF of 1:7,500,

the patterns of city streets and buildings are clearly visible. Modern architecture is depicted in gray. Traditional architecture is depicted in dark orange, signifying religious buildings, and light-orange, signifying secular buildings. Tibetan urban form is different from modern city planning by certain characteristics, including orientation of buildings to the south; use of circular structure to emphasize a center focal point (rather than the Western structural tradition of a linear line of sight terminating at a focal point); and curved rather than straight paths and roads.

The map was compiled by the Lhasa Historical City Atlas Project as part of an effort both to document the rapidly changing Lhasa architectural pattern from traditional Tibetan to modern Chinese, and to establish a basis for Tibetan architectural preservation. In Lhasa, as in many of



Detail of "General map of the LHCA project, 1999," from *The Lhasa Atlas: Traditional Tibetan Architecture and Townscape*, © 2001 Knud Larsen and Amund Sinding Larsen. Used with permission of the author and the publisher.

Clockwise from top left: "New Cinema Building," "New Market Hall," and "Tsonak Lam," by Knud Larsen, © 2001. From *The Lhasa Atlas: Traditional Tibetan Architecture and Townscape* by Knud Larsen and Amund Sinding Larsen. Used with permission of the author and the publisher.

Much of the Lhasa folk landscape has already been covered over by modernity. For example, many of the ancient concentric pilgrimage routes, called koras, are now part of the relic landscape. The koras are the old circular paths that form concentric circles around the major temples.

Question 7: Where in the map can you find the relic patterns of the koras? What aspects of the built environment reveal the locations of these earlier paths?

Question 4: What differences in the shapes and sizes of the streets indicate differences between vernacular and modern?

Question 5: Are there differences in the orientation of streets and buildings, which would also indicate vernacular or modern landscapes? Explain why you think they are similar or different.

Question 6: The photographs on this page illustrate the differences in the two architectural styles. Can you also see differences between the two styles in the map? If so, how do these differences compare to what is shown in the photographs?

