



The Founding Inscription in the gSer khañ of Lalung (Spiti, Himachal Pradesh)

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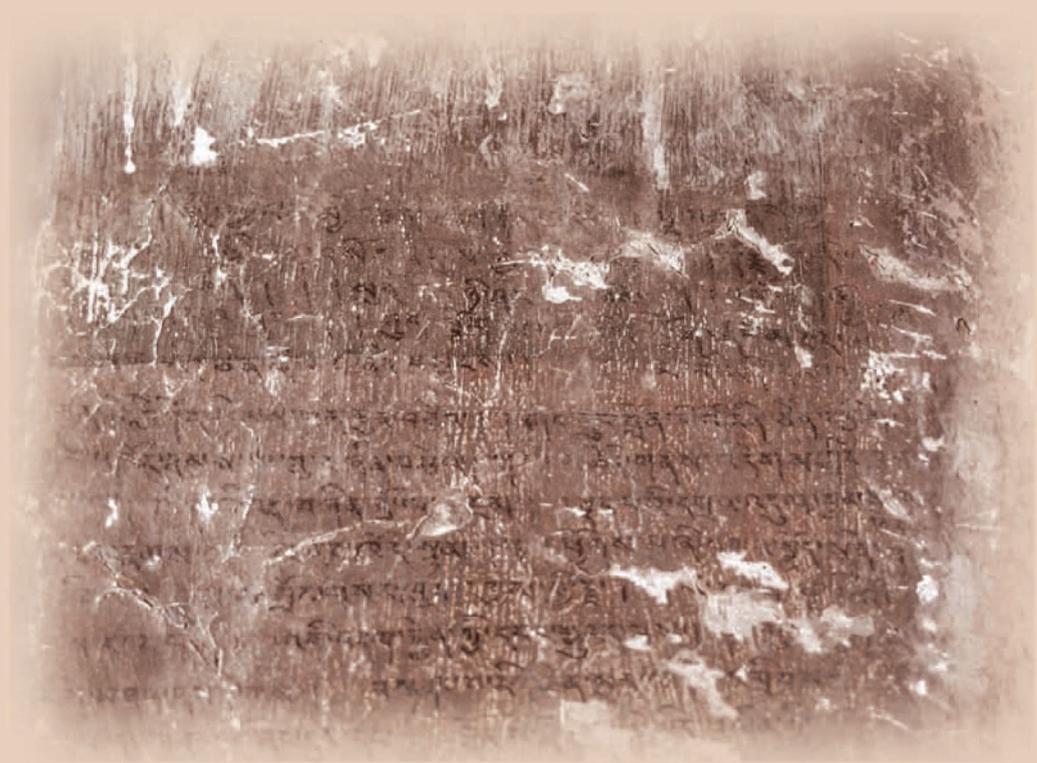
The inscription that forms the subject of this study ranks among the oldest extant literary documents from Spiti (Himachal Pradesh). It was already brought to the attention of the scholarly community by H.L. Shuttleworth in 1929, but despite several attempts to edit and translate the fragmentary epigraph it has hitherto remained unpublished. The present study provides the first edition and a richly annotated translation, thus establishing a basis for further research on this intricate document. In trying to unravel its contents, the author could rely on his detailed digital documentation of the inscription as well as on earlier transcriptions that were prepared in situ. The oldest of these were found among A.H. Francke's unpublished works and are reproduced in transliteration and as facsimile images in the appendix to this volume.



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Kurt Tropper





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of Lalung (Spiti, Himachal Pradesh)**

**Edition and Annotated Translation**

**Kurt Tropper**



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Lastly, my thanks are due to Lama Tenzin, resident monk at Lalung and “tallest man of Spiti” (his own words, but easily true) whose generous hospitality made my short visits to the temple in 2001 and 2002 a most memorable experience.



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# 1. Introduction

## *General description*

The inscription edited, translated and discussed below is located in the main chapel of the gSer khañ temple<sup>1</sup> in Lalung<sup>2</sup> (Spiti, Himachal Pradesh) where it takes up a space of ca. 60 x 22 cm (height/width) immediately to the right of the entrance.

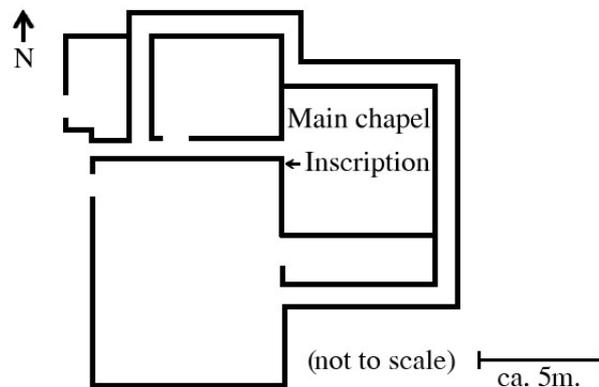


Fig. 1: Sketch plan of the gSer khañ temple (2002)<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> As has been noted already by Luczanits (2004: 100) the term gSer khañ “denotes both the whole complex as well as the small, nearly square temple room packed with sculptures”. For the sake of differentiation, I refer to the latter as ‘main chapel’.

<sup>2</sup> Klimburg-Salter (1994: 39) has stated that “beginning with Shuttleworth we find the Tibetanized ‘Lha luñ’ but know of no primary evidence for this spelling”. Note, however, that it also occurs several times, in Tibetan script, in bSod nams tshe brtan yo seb dge rgan 1975: 326f. and in bKra śis tshe riñ 2000: 31. In the summer of 2001 the official Devanāgarī-signpost at the entrance of the village read “Lālunḡ”, the *anusvāra* seemingly being a later addition. For convenience sake, I adopt the spelling Lalung, used by Klimburg-Salter (1994) and Luczanits (2004), which is also how the name of the village appears on most contemporary maps featuring place names in Latin letters. Similarly, all the other toponyms will be given in their most commonly used anglicised form (hence Spiti, Kinnaur etc.).

<sup>3</sup> According to several informants, major structural alterations have

While the inscriptional text is of a more or less uniformly black colour, the background against which it appears is divided into two clearly distinct areas of different hues. The upper left part of the inscriptional panel shows a green colouration, whereas the rest of the background is of a brownish tint (cf. fig. 2). The horizontal demarcation line between the two areas cuts through the middle of line 5, while the vertical one divides the last one or two syllables from the rest of the first four to five lines, respectively. This peculiar feature and the fact that there is no notable difference regarding the script of the two areas militate against the assumption that the inscription is a partial palimpsest, but it also seems highly unlikely that the different background colours were part of the panel's original design. As the inscription's left margin has been overpainted in more recent times and as its upper edge and the area above it are covered by a thick layer of whitewash and cement, the original extent of the green-coloured area cannot be determined any more. Perhaps the most plausible explanation that can be

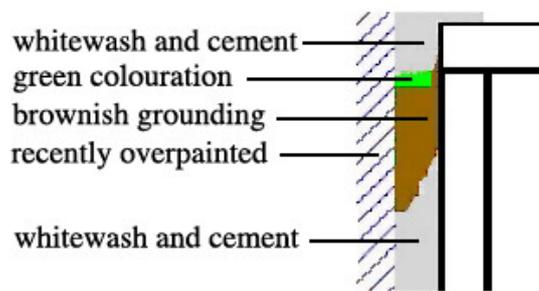


Fig. 2: The inscriptional panel and its adjacent areas

been carried out on the southwestern part of the temple since 2006. Because this section cannot be much older than 70 years (cf. n. 4) these changes are not of any particular importance for the topic at hand. It is to be hoped that the alterations will not eventually extend to the main chapel which constitutes the oldest part of the temple. As has been noted already by Khosla (1979: 49), such “constant adding and demolition of structures to the central temples is a permanent feature of every Buddhist monastery in the Western Himalaya, which makes the work of guessing the date of the original structure an extremely hazardous affair”. On the dating of the temple, see below.

offered is that the green colouration was caused by the lower part of a *thañ ka* or some similar object that hung there for a considerable period of time.

Overall, the inscription is in a poor state of preservation and the lower part of the panel is particularly damaged. The resulting difficulties in deciphering and understanding the contents of the text are considerably aggravated by a layer of dust and soot which covers the entire surface.

### *Present state of research*

The inscription was first mentioned by Shuttleworth (1929), who visited Lalung on August 18th, 1924. In his short report he provides a general description of the temple as well as a sketch of its ground plan.<sup>4</sup> Altogether he mentions three inscriptions, two in the main chapel and one in the adjoining small room to the northwest of it.<sup>5</sup> At the end of his paper he

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<sup>4</sup> As this plan shows, the structural elements that made up the south-western part of the temple in 2002, did not exist at that time. Instead, the delineations of Shuttleworth show a much smaller unit which is designated as “verandah” and adjoins the western side of the main chapel.

<sup>5</sup> The small chapel is referred to as “new temple” in Shuttleworth’s plan, but nowadays it is usually called Duñ ’gyur (lha) khañ or simply Duñ ’gyur. The appellations “*Tanjur* room” and “*Tanjur-khang*” which can be found in Khosla 1979: 49 and 50 (similarly, “the *bsTan* ’gyur” in Klimburg-Salter 1994: 40) are obviously the result of a *lapsus auris*. In Spiti and Kinnaur, the term Duñ ’gyur (lha) khañ is commonly used for a chapel that contains a large prayer wheel, i.e., the *duñ* ’gyur (for the likely etymology of the expression see Luczanits 2004: 312, note 284). This also applies to the small room in Lalung (cf. fig. 22 in Klimburg-Salter 1994: 43, where a small part of the prayer wheel can be seen on the rightmost side of the picture). In written form, the term *duñ* ’gyur occurs, e.g., in bSod nams tshe brtan yo seb dge rgan 1975: 327 and in two (as yet unpublished) 20<sup>th</sup> cen-

states (p. 7): “Directions were given by me through Joseph Gergan for the wall inscriptions to be exactly copied, but these copies did not reach me”. Yet in a footnote he adds that A.H. Francke had “copies of the inscriptions sent direct to him [i.e., Francke; K.T.] by Joseph Gergan” (*ibid.*). The transcripts of Gergan therefore appear to have been prepared sometime between 1924 and 1929.

Among Francke’s unpublished works kept at the *Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Handschriftenabteilung* I was able to trace records of two inscriptions from the main chapel of the Lalung temple. These records are distributed among four short articles forming part of the manuscripts catalogued as “Nachlaß August Hermann Francke (Tibetologe)”. The first two articles are to be found on pp. 14v–15v and 15v–16v in the last of nine consecutively numbered notebooks which make up section “VII. Inschriften”.<sup>6</sup> The other two articles account for pp. 7r–7v and 7v–8v of the single notebook that constitutes section “XI”.<sup>7</sup>

The inscription forming the subject of the present study was referred to as “No. 204” by Francke.<sup>8</sup> Slightly less than the

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tury inscriptions in the Duñ ’gyur (lha) khañ at Chango (Kinnaur). In all three sources it is consistently spelt as given above. Most regrettably, the inscription which once graced the walls of the Duñ ’gyur (lha) khañ in Lalung and which Shuttleworth (1929: 2) attributed to “the time of Señ-ge-rnam-rgyal (c. 1590–1635 A.D.)” is not extant any more.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. chapter “D. Nachlaß Francke in der Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Handschriftenabteilung” in Walravens and Taube 1992: 102f.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Walravens and Taube 1992: 105. I am grateful to Dr. Jutta Weber and Dorothea Barfknecht of the *Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin* for providing me with xerox-copies of all four articles.

<sup>8</sup> Perhaps in continuation of the numbering system used in Francke 1906 and Francke 1907. These two (self-published) monographs deal with 145 consecutively numbered inscriptions.

first half of its text is reproduced in both the second and the fourth of the above-mentioned articles which also contain rough drafts for an English translation and a few notes.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the other two articles each comprise preliminary sketches for an edition and a translation of another inscription in the main chapel<sup>10</sup> which Francke designated as “No. 203”.<sup>11</sup> As all four articles are written in Francke’s own hand, it is clear that he must have copied Gergan’s transcripts, and in the process – intentionally or by neglect – he might have altered them in some places. Unfortunately, the whereabouts of Gergan’s original copies are unknown.

The complete text of all four articles is provided in Appendix B at the end of this study. Here, Francke’s short introductory note to the second article deserves special mention:<sup>12</sup>

“This inscription was also [i.e., like inscription ‘No. 203’; K.T.] copied by Joseph Gergan on the West-wall of the Gser-khañ temple of Lha-luñ, Spyi-ti. He says that he copied 26 lines out

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<sup>9</sup> The Tibetan text in these two articles is virtually identical and it seems that they are successive drafts for an intended publication of the inscription. Responding to my enquiry, Dorothea Barfknecht has kindly informed me that the numbering was not added to the notebooks by the manuscript department of the *Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin* but that it most likely originates from Francke himself, as the numbers appear to be written in his own hand. Thus, the article in section “VII. Inscriptions” is probably prior to the one in section “XI”.

<sup>10</sup> Obviously, this must be the second of the two inscriptions in the main chapel mentioned by Shuttleworth. Like the inscription in the Duñ ’gyur (lha) khañ, it does not exist any more, but when Gergan copied it, it was apparently in a somewhat better condition than the one that is still extant now.

<sup>11</sup> Again, the wording of the Tibetan text in these two articles is almost identical.

<sup>12</sup> Underlinings by Francke, who emphasised proper names, toponyms etc. in this way.

of 56. The thirty 30 [*sic*] remaining were probably too much destroyed for copying. It has not yet been published”.

In contradiction to this statement, the inscription comprises 54 lines and Francke’s manuscripts cover its text up to line 24, a discrepancy which is probably only due to an inaccuracy of Gergan or Francke. As has already been pointed out above, there are no signs indicating that major parts of the inscription have been rewritten and the assumption that the *entire* inscription is a more recent palimpsest embodying a more or less faithful copy of an earlier text-version also seems to be out of the question. For, the panel still features damages of various degrees in many of those places where Francke’s text has a *lacuna*<sup>13</sup> and the fact that the lower part of the panel is particularly damaged is in perfect agreement with Francke’s conjecture as to why Gergan only copied its upper section. I therefore do not see any reason to presume that the inscription in its present form is essentially different from the one that Gergan saw.

In the meantime the inscription has been briefly referred to in various publications,<sup>14</sup> but to my knowledge it has never been edited, translated or studied in its entirety. In 1991 Chris-

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<sup>13</sup> That this is not true in every case is in all likelihood simply the result of the problems one commonly faces in transcribing such highly obliterated inscriptions *in situ*. Inadequate lighting conditions, a limited amount of time and, not least, the physical inconvenience which is often involved are all factors which may contribute to a far from perfect or incomplete transcription. Apart from the existence of text in some of the places where Francke’s manuscripts show a *lacuna*, I also attribute most of the other divergences between Francke’s drafts and my own edition to these circumstances.

<sup>14</sup> Klimburg-Salter 1994: 44f.; Petech 1997: 252, n. 20; Thakur 1997: 976f.; Luczanits 1999: 122, n. 73; Luczanits 2004: 93f. Somewhat curiously, Tucci, who visited Lalung in 1933, did not mention the inscription in his report on the temple (Tucci 1935: 116–121).

tian Luczanits, Jampa L. Panglung and Ernst Steinkellner prepared a copy *in situ* and their readings were reassessed by Luczanits on subsequent visits to Lalung in 1994 and 1996. On his last visit he also took photographs of the inscription,<sup>15</sup> but unfortunately they only proved to be of limited use.<sup>16</sup>

In September 2001 I was able to record the inscription with a digital video-camera. Although the results are certainly not without blemish, they turned out to be a considerable improvement over the earlier photographs and the detailed documentation allowed for a reasonably certain reading of what had remained of the text at that time.<sup>17</sup> More than 350 single exposures were extracted from this video sequence and they can now be viewed at: <http://www.univie.ac.at/Tibetan-inscriptions>.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The photos and a first draft for an edition of the inscription (for which see below) were generously made available to me by Christian Luczanits.

<sup>16</sup> Again, the difficulties in preparing a photographic documentation of such fragmentary epigraphic sources are notorious and to some extent similar to those already mentioned in note 13.

<sup>17</sup> The camera allows for closeups of less than 2 cm and has a night-shot function of 0 lux. Both features proved to be particularly useful, as the letters of the inscriptions are on average smaller than 1 cm and as the use of an artificial light source is problematic for various reasons.

<sup>18</sup> Links: -> Spiti -> Lalung -> gSer khang -> Inscr. 01. There the pictures are arranged line by line with varying degrees of overlapping. In cases of doubtful readings it might thus be helpful to look at the pictures of the lines above and below the passage in question as well. A CD-copy (CD Lalung 1) and the video-documentation itself (DVC 10.2001) is kept at the WHAV (Western Himalayan Archive Vienna), presently located in the Institute for Art History at Vienna University.

## *Dating*

With regard to the foundation of the temple, the age of its art-work and that of the inscription, several arguments have been put forward which are partly inconsistent with one another.

Shuttleworth (1929: 1) reports that he “was delighted to find an almost perfectly preserved eleventh century temple” and makes the following statement relating to the local tradition (*ibid.*):

“The villagers and lamas say that there were originally nine temples of *Lo-tsa-ba Rin-chen-bzañ-po*’s time of which eight were destroyed by the *Sog-pos* (*i.e.* Mongols) in the seventeenth century. Now there is but one temple known as *Gser-khañ*”.

However, there is no compelling textual evidence that the temple was founded by Rin chen bzañ po (ca. 958–1055)<sup>19</sup> or during his times.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the oldest art-work in the main chapel tentatively has been dated to the second half of the twelfth century by Klimburg-Salter (1994: 46) and she is followed in this by Luczanits (2004: 106). Neither distin-

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<sup>19</sup> On these dates see, e.g., Petech 1997: 234ff. or Snellgrove and Skorupski 1980: 86.

<sup>20</sup> In his preface to the study of Shuttleworth, Francke refers to a biography of Rin chen bzañ po which contains a list of temples that were founded by the *lotsawa*. Lalung is not mentioned there, but Francke offers the following explanation: “Three of the names of the list evidently refer to *Spyi-ti*; viz. *Pi-ti*, *Li-ri* and *Ta-pho*. *Pi-ti* stands apparently for the capital of *Spyi-ti*, *Grañ-mkhar*. Therefore, I suppose that it points to *Lha-luñ* a temple close to *Grañ-mkhar*. *Li-ri* may be a mistake for *Lha-ri*”. I am rather sceptical about the curious equation “*Pi-ti = Grañ-mkhar = Lha-luñ*” and my doubts are somewhat confirmed by Snellgrove and Skorupski (1980: 115) who collated three of the numerous biographies of Rin chen bzañ po and hold that “*pi ti / la ri / ta pho /*” in their “version C” should be translated as “Tabo and Lari in Spiti”.

guishes between the age of the art-work and that of the structure, thus imparting the notion that they are more or less contemporaneous. If the oldest building fabric should indeed date back to the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, this would of course not completely invalidate the local tradition and its attribution of the temple to the times of Rin chen bzañ po,<sup>21</sup> but it would constitute a rather obvious *terminus post quem* for the inscription.

According to Thakur (1997: 976f.), the inscription “may belong to the end of the eleventh or the beginning of the twelfth century A.D.”. In support of this, he refers to some of the inscription’s palaeographic and orthographic peculiarities as well as to a cursory comparison of the architecture, murals and clay sculptures of the Lalung temple, the gTsug lag khañ in Tabo and the ’Du khañ in Alchi. The above-mentioned studies of both Klimburg-Salter and Shuttleworth were known to Thakur, but he does not discuss their datings and arguments which are somewhat at variance with his own statements.<sup>22</sup>

Francke argues for an even earlier date than Thakur. In a long footnote,<sup>23</sup> he first establishes a connection between the events mentioned in the inscription and the famous story of Ye śes ’od being imprisoned by the Gar log.<sup>24</sup> He then

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<sup>21</sup> I.e., an original construction could have been entirely rebuilt, resulting in a temple that is structurally new but essentially still qualifies as dating back to the times of Rin chen bzañ po.

<sup>22</sup> While I am not in a position to confirm or to refute any of the attributions of the art-work and the architecture, the inscription’s orthography and palaeography will be discussed below.

<sup>23</sup> P. 16v in notebook 9 of section “VII”. For the complete text of this footnote cf. Appendix B below.

<sup>24</sup> For a summary of the story, a discussion of its authenticity and the earliest sources in which it appears see, e.g., Petech 1997: 236, 249f., 253, n. 41, Vitali 1996: 181–185, 281–291, and Tshe riñ rgyal po

tentatively equates the term *rin cen* in verse-line 11 with *lotsawa Rin chen bzañ po* and finally concludes that “[t]he inscription appears to be of the 10<sup>th</sup> century”. From the discussion of the relevant passages in the annotations to my translation it will become clear that some of Francke’s remarks are rather questionable, but the inscription does indeed provide a few clues suggesting that the main character of the text’s first half is Ye śes ’od. The evidence is far from being conclusive, however, and thus “the universal ruler of the black-headed (people)” (*{m}go <n>ag spyi rje*)<sup>25</sup> mentioned in verse-line 6 could also be one of Ye śes ’od’s successors like ’Od lde or rTse lde. In any case, Francke’s dating of the inscription into the *tenth* century is hardly tenable and perhaps just an accidental slip.<sup>26</sup> For even if the passage in question really refers to the much-disputed capture of Ye śes ’od by the Gar log, the twenties of the *eleventh* century would have to be regarded as the earliest date possible,<sup>27</sup> because the incident is generally reported to have happened towards the end of his life.<sup>28</sup>

As the contents of the inscription do not offer any cogent evidence and the reported opinions on the temple’s art-work and architecture are not unanimous, the orthographic and pa-

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2005 (*passim*).

<sup>25</sup> For the editorial signs see below.

<sup>26</sup> As, e.g., attributing the year 1789 to the seventeenth century.

<sup>27</sup> On the dates of Ye śes ’od cf. Petech (1997: 236) and Vitali (1996: 179–185). The former argues for 959–1036, the latter for 947–1024.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. the end of the above-mentioned summary by Petech (1997: 236): “Ye shes ’od told his nephew that, as he was an old man at the end of his life and was being severely treated by his captors, it was better to employ the gold [that had been gathered for his ransom; K.T.] for inviting an outstanding Indian master. His wish was complied with, and although the story ends at this point, it is assumed that he died in prison”.

laeographic peculiarities – although allowing only for a very fuzzy time frame<sup>29</sup> – should be considered in more detail. The following features<sup>30</sup> are of particular interest:

- 1) Consistent palatalisation of *m* before *i*<sup>31</sup>
- 2) Several cases of superabundant *'a rjes 'jug*<sup>32</sup>
- 3) Several cases of *da drag*<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The limited use of such features for dating purposes has already been discussed in several previous studies; cf., e.g., Steinkellner 1994: 124f., Tauscher 1994: 175ff., Scherrer-Schaub 1999: 24, Tomabechi 1999: 65.

<sup>30</sup> Apart from the “standard” cases of orthographic peculiarities listed under 1) – 4), the inscription contains other examples where the spelling is not in agreement with “classical norms” (for a list of these cases see Appendix A). While such a propensity for irregular spellings is a characteristic feature of early documents, these individual cases are even less conducive to a chronological attribution of the inscription than the peculiarities described below – at least until more studies on a much larger body of comparable material have been carried out.

<sup>31</sup> *myi* (verse-lines 1 and 86 [also cf. v.-l. 63, where the reading is somewhat doubtful]) and *m<y>ig* (v.-l. 31; the *ya btags* is almost entirely lost, but the conjecture is confirmed by Francke’s manuscripts). While these occurrences are certainly not numerous, it is significant that there are *no* cases of unpalatalised *m* before both *i* and *e*.

<sup>32</sup> *btse'* (irregular for *brtse'*], v.-l. 10), *brtse'* (v.-l. 12), *dgra'* (v.-l. 15 and 32), *gži'* (v.-l. 36). There are no occurrences of the spellings *btse/brtse*, *dgra* or *gži*, but other syllables like *brgya* (v.-l. 2) or *bcu* (v.-l. 64, 67 and 94), which frequently feature a superabundant *'a rjes 'jug* in early documents (cf., e.g., Tropper 1996: 36 and 2005: 94), occur without it.

<sup>33</sup> *gyurd* (v.-l. 20; also cf. v.-l. 88: *gyu=d*), *bstand [pa]* (v.-l. 22; but *bstan [pa]* in v.-l. 8), *rold* (v.-l. 77). Again, other syllables like *'khor* (v.-l. 12), *rkyen* (v.-l. 20) or *phyin* (v.-l. 77), which often occur with a *da drag* in early sources (cf., e.g., Tauscher 1999: 32, n. 6, Tropper 1996: 36 and v.-l. 6 of Francke’s inscription “No. 203”), are written

- 4) Two cases of 'a sñon 'jug instead of ma sñon 'jug<sup>34</sup>
- 5) Several cases of horizontal *sp*- and *st*-ligatures<sup>35</sup>
- 6) No occurrence of *gi gu log*.

Comparing these peculiarities with the classification scheme established by Scherrer-Schaub (1999: 25) and the evidence of other studies dealing with the orthography and palaeography of comparable early Tibetan documents,<sup>36</sup> dating the inscription into the tenth or early eleventh century seems hardly possible.<sup>37</sup> Concerning the *terminus ante quem*,

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without it.

<sup>34</sup> 'go (v.-l. 6), 'tshuñs (v.-l. 6 and 36).

<sup>35</sup> *spyir* (v.-l. 1), *spyi* (v.-l. 3), *bstan* (v.-l. 8), *bstand* (v.-l. 22) and – just slightly doubtful – *spyān* (v.-l. 66; also cf. v.-l. 61: <*s*>*pyod*). Moreover, the *sa mgo* in *sprin* (v.-l. 17 and 30) and *sprul* (v.-l. 62) is placed above the root letter, but with a considerable shift to the left, and the *ra mgo* is often executed in a similar way, most notably in *rje* (v.-l. 4, 6, 18), *brtse'* (v.-l. 12), *rdo* (v.-l. 31) and *rtsug* (v.-l. 40). However, except for the *st*-ligatures, none of these combinations have been used consistently. Thus we also find completely vertical *sp*- and *rd*-ligatures (e.g., *spyi* [v.-l. 6] and *rdo* [v.-l. 4]) and many other examples of perfectly “regular” superscripts like in *bskyañs* (v.-l. 8), *sdan* (v.-l. 15) *sdod* (v.-l. 17) or *rkyen* (v.-l. 20).

<sup>36</sup> De Rossi Filibeck 1994: 139ff., Eimer 1991: 251ff., Luczanits 1999: 99ff., Steinkellner 1994: 124f. and 1995: 11f., Steinkellner and Luczanits 1999: 13f., Tauscher 1994: 175ff. and 1999: 31ff., Tomabechi 1999 (*passim*), Tropper 1996: 30ff. and 2005: 88ff. All of these studies discuss the orthography and palaeography of inscriptions or manuscripts in codex form from Western Tibet or western Central Tibet.

<sup>37</sup> Especially noteworthy is the complete absence of the *gi gu log*. According to Scherrer-Schaub (*ibid.*) the inverted vowel-sign occurs frequently in the earlier specimens of what she calls “Type I” manuscripts and defines as ranging from ca. 950–1200 A.D. Apart from this, the rather inconsistent occurrence of the peculiarities described under 2), 3) and 5) suggests that they had already started to

it is difficult to draw even a rough line, especially as one always has to account for the possibility of what Steinkellner (1994: 124) has called “archaizing mannerisms”, a phenomenon one meets with particularly often in inscriptions. Generally, however, features like the *ya btags*, the *da drag* and horizontal ligatures become increasingly rare from the early 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards,<sup>38</sup> and their comparatively frequent occurrence in the inscription would thus point to a considerably earlier date. Merely on the basis of its palaeographic and orthographic peculiarities I am therefore inclined to place the inscription somewhere between 1025 and 1250, nonetheless stressing the tentative nature of even such an imprecise dating.<sup>39</sup>

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fall out of use when the inscription was composed and thus also militates against assigning it to the earlier exemplars of Scherrer-Schaub’s “Type I” documents.

<sup>38</sup> Cf., again, Scherrer-Schaub 1999: 25 and the studies mentioned in note 36.

<sup>39</sup> While the last remark may seem overly cautious, I am generally under the impression that more than just a few datings that have been put forward with regard to Tibetan art, architecture and literary documents are fairly insubstantial. Considering the severe disservice of a wrong dating that becomes commonly accepted, I feel that exercising too much caution is preferable to creating a false impression of certainty.



## 2. Notes on the edition and the translation

### *General remarks*

The edition is mainly based on the video documentation prepared in 2001 and presents the text of the inscription as it appeared at that time. All conjectures and emendations<sup>40</sup> have been relegated to the *apparatus criticus*,<sup>41</sup> including adjustments of irregular spellings to “classical norms”.<sup>42</sup>

Due to the inscription’s numerous damages, it seemed to be useful to render even the *tsheg* as this can sometimes provide valuable information for the reconstitution of lost text.<sup>43</sup>

Where the inscription has become obliterated, the readings of Francke, Luczanits, Panglung and Steinkellner have only been quoted, if their text exceeded what remained of the

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<sup>40</sup> As the two terms are often not clearly distinguished, it should be noted that I use ‘conjecture’ for proposed readings where the text has become illegible, whereas I use ‘emendation’ if words which are still legible are altered.

<sup>41</sup> There the reading of the inscription is first repeated and then the respective conjecture or emendation is given after the colon, e.g., “=m : ’jam” or “cen : chen”.

<sup>42</sup> No emendations are provided for irregular “*sandhi*”-forms (“ba : pa”, etc.).

<sup>43</sup> The same approach was chosen by Luczanits in his draft for an edition (cf. above), whereas the evidence on the *tsheg* in Francke’s manuscripts is rather dubious. In one of his two articles on the inscription (section VII, notebook 9, pp. 15v–16v) the text is reproduced in Tibetan script and the *tsheg* just seems to have been placed habitually. In the other article (pp. 7v–8v in the single notebook of section XI) the text is presented in transliteration and the syllables are separated by what in most cases looks like a hyphen and also appears to have been used out of habit rather than in order to faithfully render the *tsheg* of the inscription.

passage in 2001.<sup>44</sup> In the better-preserved sections their divergent readings have been adduced wherever it seemed expedient.<sup>45</sup>

It goes without saying that every edition entails a certain element of subjectivity. What is still clearly legible to one

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<sup>44</sup> Because the two manuscripts of Francke agree with each other to a very large extent, their common readings are given only once, identified by the *siglum* F. In those rare cases where the two manuscripts differ, their respective readings are designated as F<sub>1</sub> (VII, 9, pp. 15v–16v) and F<sub>2</sub> (XI, pp. 7v–8v). The readings of Luczanits, Panglung and Steinkellner are marked with the *sigla* L, P and S, respectively. Note that those of the latter two are cited in the way they are given in the footnotes of L’s manuscript, that is, without renderings of the *tsheg*. Where no differing readings are indicated for P and S, it is to be understood that they agree with L.

<sup>45</sup> All of these previous efforts are more or less incomplete drafts, which makes it difficult to quote from them in a consistent manner – especially in those places, where the inscription had already become obliterated when F, L, P and S tried to establish its text. Thus, F’s manuscripts do not indicate the approximate length of a *lacuna* (they merely show a dotted line) and L, while generally trying to reproduce the inscriptional text in a very detailed manner (including, as a rule, the extent of a damaged passage) also has a number of completely blank spaces of various dimensions, most notably in the second half of his draft. These “readings” do not provide any information conducive to establishing a better text and in most cases quoting them would have made it necessary to refer to rather long segments. Apart from being impractical and not very reader-friendly, this would have inflated the *apparatus* for no good reason. Moreover, as can be seen from the complete text of Francke’s short articles provided in Appendix B, his renderings of the inscription contain a particularly large number of readings which are obviously not correct. In order to avoid overloading my own edition with unnecessary clutter and potentially misleading threads, I thus opted for the rather pragmatic approach of quoting all of these unpublished sources only if they provide some evidence that seemed text-critically valuable to me.

person may be rather uncertain to another. But even if there was a truly objective method to establish the probabilities of each and every reading, it would be very cumbersome, if not downright impossible, to replicate these figures by using a multitude of editorial signs. As such a method does not exist to start with, and as the subjective element increases with the order of differentiation, I did not consider it feasible to distinguish between, e.g., slightly, moderately and highly uncertain readings, particularly because the documentation of the inscription is made widely available (cf. above) and each and everyone may thus form their own opinion. On the other hand, I have described my perception of certain characters in more detail in order to explain and to support some of my readings and conjectures.

Lastly, the inscription's poor state of preservation, its metrical structure and the scarcity of other sources on the early history of Spiti make it rather difficult to interpret the text, and this is probably one of the main reasons why it was never published. The present study thus might be considered presumptuous or even naïve, and I am entirely aware of its tentative character. I certainly cannot claim to have solved all the problems that the inscription raises and it seems likely to me that a considerable number of them will never be solved. On this note, the following edition and annotated translation should be considered as nothing more than a basis for further research on an inscription that probably ranks among the oldest extant historical documents from Spiti.

### *Editorial signs*

{1}, {2}, {3} etc.	beginning of a line
*	<i>dbu</i>
	<i>śad</i>
·	<i>tsheg</i>
#	ornamental sign
<i>ṁ</i>	<i>bindu</i>
=	illegible ‘letter’ <sup>46</sup>
-	illegible letter
<u><i>a</i></u>	uncertain reading <sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Following Steinkellner and Luczanits 1999: 15 (n. 12) ‘*letter*’ means “any combination of letters in the Tibetan alphabet that occupy in vertical arrangement of the letter sequence the space of a single grapheme”, while *letter* “refers to the single signs for consonants or vowel modification only”. Thus a ‘*letter*’ can be composed of up to four *letters*.

<sup>47</sup> This includes letters which are partly damaged but still allow for a reasonably certain reading as well as those which are completely preserved but *both* graphically and contextually dubious (the latter case applies almost exclusively to the characters for *ṅ* and *r* which are often indistinguishable from one another but only rendered as uncertain readings if the context leaves some room for doubt). As a rough guideline, the reading of an underlined letter can be understood as being at least 50 percent certain. Where appropriate, possible alternatives (e.g., *k* instead of *g*, or *i* instead of *e*) are given in the footnotes.

Note that in Luczanits’ draft readings which he considered equally possible are presented by means of a slash, e.g., *b/s* or *s//b*. As this is sometimes not entirely unambiguous (in verse-line 40, for instance, “*rm/chad*” seems to indicate that the beginning of the syllable can equally be read as *rm* or *ch*, whereas in other cases the slash just presents single letters as alternatives) I have quoted such readings in the same manner as they are given by Luczanits rather than interpreting his specifications. In other respects, however, I have adapted his editorial signs to my own system and the same applies to the

⌈ ⌋	in potentially doubtful cases, letters constituting a ‘letter’ are grouped together by half square brackets (e.g., “==⌈ <u>s</u> - <u>ye</u> ⌋ <u>d</u> ====”)
xxx <sub>a</sub> xxx	insertion below the line

In the annotations to the translation the following signs are used for quotations from the inscription:

< >	conjectures
{ }	emendations
« »	deletions

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quotations from Francke’s manuscripts in the footnotes of my edition and translation. In contrast, the renderings of Francke’s articles in Appendix B are pure diplomatic transcriptions.