

# THE GREAT MAṆI WALL INSCRIPTION AT HEMIS REVISITED

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The inscription in the front of the maṇi wall at the entrance of Hemis monastery, Ladakh, was first published by Emil von Schlagintweit in 1864.<sup>1</sup> His publication was based on a copy which his brother Hermann von Schlagintweit-Sakülünski obtained on the occasion of his visit to Ladakh. This copy is not found among the works and unpublished papers of the brothers v. Schlagintweit kept in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek<sup>2</sup> nor among the texts bought by the Bodleian Library, Oxford from Schlagintweit.

Schlagintweit commissioned the firm of the renowned Munich lithographer Sebastian Minsinger to publish the text of the inscription in its original *dbu can* script.<sup>3</sup> The text was arranged into 33 lines, probably in order to fit the format of the publication (see specimen in Plate 1).

Luciano Petech (1977: 120, no. 1), having used an eye-copy made by Giuseppe Tucci<sup>4</sup> and having checked the inscription on the spot, “found that Schlagintweit’s text is on the whole correct; but the translation is not quite reliable and some personal names are not recognized as such.” Therefore he identified the names provided in the inscription and explained the historical context.<sup>5</sup>

However, a precise documentation of the inscription has yet to be made.<sup>6</sup> Therefore we are presenting here the text of the inscription based on our photographs<sup>7</sup> taken in 1981, together with our revised translation.

A comparison of the text published by Schlagintweit and our photographs shows a textual omission in lines 1-2. On the other hand, it can be observed that in general

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1 Schlagintweit 1864: 305-18.

2 See Grönbold 1985. Schlagintweit (1864: 305) described the paper used for the copy as being very greasy so that the ink did not stick to it evenly.

3 At that time hot-metal setting for Tibetan was not available in the kingdom of Bavaria.

4 Tucci’s eye-copy in *dbu can* made in 1930 and Petech’s English translation of the inscription are kept in the Petech archive, but it was not available to us when we were finalizing this article.

5 See Petech 1977: 120.

6 According to the communication of Ven. Ane Nawang Jinpa, Paris, who had been asked by the authorities of the Hemis monastery to record the inscription, it is nowadays hardly legible.

7 The best way to document an inscription is to do a rubbing. However, this requires experience which we do not have. Further, it is time-consuming, and it would perhaps not have worked in this case because the inscription is covered with a thick layer of blue colouring.

the copyist obviously had tried to follow the inscription, e.g. in cases where a dot separating the syllables (*tsheg*) is hardly visible or not visible at all. Further, the copyist followed the inscription in places where the narrowness of the line spacing makes it impossible to put a vowel sign correctly, because a ligature in the line above leaves no space.<sup>8</sup> It is evident that such textual inaccuracies led to misinterpretations in Schlagintweit's translation.

The inscription is set into the face (*gdong*) of the maṇi wall at the entrance of the monastery (see Plate 2). It shows 14 lines.<sup>9</sup> The long small stone is not well preserved. It is cracked from top to bottom in its first third. Another crack runs down from the last quarter of line one to the end of line five. Further, at the beginning of line eight the stone shows a natural unevenness running down diagonally from the left. The stonemason therefore placed a series of dots to mark such places where the stone could not be carved (see Plates 3 and 4).

The inscription is covered with bright blue paint throughout. There are some lighter parts where probably rainwater penetrated and washed away some of the paint. Above and on its sides, the inscribed stone is decorated with paintings of clouds in shades of ochre, white and blue. In the middle, there is a figure of a sitting monk.

The inscription was set up to commemorate the building of the Vihāra of Hemis, a monastery of the 'Brug pa bka' rgyud, in 1782-1786. The author of the inscription is Mi pham tshé dbang 'phrin las bstan 'dzin mi 'gyur rdo rje<sup>10</sup> *alias* rGyal sras Rinpoche, who was initiated and given his name by the renowned Bla ma of Khams, Kaḥ thog Rig 'dzin Tshé dbang nor bu (1698-1755). Tshé dbang nor bu had been sent - much against his wishes - to Ladakh in order to mediate in a complicated political conflict between Ladakh and Purig.<sup>11</sup> He turned out to be a gifted mediator, highly respected by the parties involved. During his stay in Ladakh he not only gave a great number of instructions to the people and to monastic communities but he also composed the *bca' yig*, which lays down the monastic rules and regulations for Hemis monastery.<sup>12</sup>

### Text of the Inscription<sup>13</sup>

(see Pictures 3 and 4)

- 1 (om)<sup>14</sup> svasti / na mo gu ru bhya / mtshan dpes gsal rdzogs yang dag rdzogs  
sangs rgyas / bden pa ma lus ston pa<sup>15</sup> dam pa'i chos / grol ba don gnyer 'phags

8 These cases are noted in the transliteration of the text.

9 We did not take measurements of the inscription.

10 Line 8 of the inscription.

11 For the details see Schwieger 1999.

12 Compare n. 64.

13 Signs used are: ( ) letter contraction resolved; < > missing letters supplemented; { } emendation; (r.:) orthography corrected. S = reading in Schlagintweit's edition.

14 Letter highlighted in white colour.

15 S: *la*

- tshogs 'dus pa'i sde / mchog (gsum) bla ma'i zhabs la gus pas 'dud /<sup>16</sup> rab tu bsten cing mchod pa'i mod nyid la / 'dod
- 2 rgu'i dpal 'byor mchog mthun dngos grub kun / rtsol mdzad yi dam mkha' 'gro dam can gyi / chos srungs nor lha<sup>17</sup> rtag par skyong gyur cig / de yang / gsang (gsum) rgyal<sup>18</sup> ba kun gyis 'byung ba'i gnas / rgyal ba (thams cad) kyi mngon par dbang bskur zhing / srid {b}zhi kun gyis mchod cing mngon par mchod 'os chen po'i
- 3 bdag nyid dpal (mnyam) med 'brug pa zhes yongs su grags pa sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa'i snying po yang dag pas nam mkha'i gos can yangs por khyab cing lhag par 'dzam bu gling gi sa<sup>19</sup> gnas dang gnas khyad par yongs la dar zhing rgyas la / de snyed kyi gdul bya (rnams) kyang {smin} smin cing grol ba'i<sup>20</sup> (lam) la bkod pa'i mdzad pa<sup>21</sup> 'phrin las (bsam)<sup>22</sup>
- 4 mi khyab pas<sup>23</sup> sa (gsum) du bstan pa 'dzin pa kun las lhag par (bka' drin)<sup>24</sup> che ba'i<sup>25</sup> skyes<sup>26</sup> chen (dam) pa (rnams)<sup>27</sup> kyang ched du bsngags brjod bla na med par mdzad / zhing 'dir yang {b}rje 'gro ba'i mgon po'i thugs sras (rdo rje) 'chang rgyal ba rgod tshang pa yab sras gyis<sup>28</sup> byin gyis rlabs shing bsgrub pa'i (ting nge) 'dzin la bzhugs dus ma dang mkha' 'gro sprin
- 5 tshogs ltar 'du zhing mchod cing bstod par<sup>29</sup> dpal cā<sup>30</sup> ri tra (ye shes) kyi ('khor<sup>31</sup> lo) sogs gnas nyer bzhi dang mtshungs / rim pas<sup>32</sup> mtshan ldan gyi bla ma skyes chen 'ga' yang byon / khyad par mchog gi sa<sup>33</sup> brnyes<sup>34</sup> pa'i grub dbang stag tshang ras pa chen po'i zhabs la / chos kyi rgyal<sup>35</sup> po seng ge nam par rgyal ba yab sras rje blon 'bangs dang bcas pas mi<sup>36</sup>

16 S: The following text up to *de yang* in line 2 is missing.

17 r.: *lhas*

18 *rgya* written in *dbu med* style.

19 S: *gis*.

20 S: /

21 S: *pa'i*.

22 S: / *gyi*

23 S: *pa'i*.

24 S: *bkrin*.

25 S: *bar /*

26 S: *skye*.

27 Supplying *kyis*.

28 S: *kyas*.

29 S: *pa na*.

30 S: *tsva*.

31 S: *khor*.

32 S: *pa'i*.

33 S: *gis*.

34 S: *bsnyes*.

35 S: *rgya* written in *dbu med* style.

36 No script because of the crack in the stone.

- 6 phyed pa'i dad pas spyi bos mchod cing<sup>37</sup> bsten pas lugs gnyis kyi dpal 'byor phun (sum) tshogs par brten / gdan sa chen po ma bu (rnams) dang/ rgyal po'i pho brang (rnams) su yang sangs rgyas kyi sku gsung thugs kyi rten (<g>sum) (rin po che) gtsug lag khang sogs phyi nang du rgya<sup>38</sup> chen bskrun pas bstan pa nyi ma shar ba ltar byung / <sup>39</sup>skyabs rje yab (rin po che) mi
- 7 (pham) ('jam) dpal mthu stobs (rdo rje'i) sku ring la / rigs kyi bdag po dpal (mnyam) med rje 'brug pa (thams cad) mkhyen pa chen po rang phebs nas smin grol (dam) pa'i chos kyi (rjes su) gzung (r.: bzung) zhing byin gyis brlabs / rjes (mnyam) med bstan 'gro'i mgon po skyabs kun 'dus zhal dpal rig<sup>40</sup> pa 'dzin dbang chen pos rus / ris su ma chad pa'i
- 8 bstan 'gro spyi dang bye brag ljongs 'dir (sangs rgyas) kyi bstan pa dang 'gro ba'i bde skyid la dgongs pa'i bka' dang (thugs) rjes kho bo la'ang skal ldan gyi skyes bur (rjes su) bzungs nas mtshan mi (pham) tshe dbang 'phrin las bstan 'dzin mi 'gyur rdo rje zhes dbang bskur (gdams) pas byin gyis brlabs nas (sangs rgyas) kyi bstan pa dge 'dun la rag
- 9 las pa'i bkas / dgon phan tshun 'dus sde (rnams) la slabs (r.: bslabs) (gsum) kyi sdom khriims<sup>41</sup> la gnas nas dge ba bcu'i spang blang 'dzol med du spyod rgya'i<sup>42</sup> phyag rgya dang bcas (bka' drin) du rtsal zhing / der bsten (r.: rten) rang ngos nas kyang rje btsun dpal ldan rtsa ba'i bla ma yab sras kyi (bka' drin) yid la bcangs nas dgongs par rdzogs
- 10 phyr sngar ..<sup>43</sup> lo chu pho (stag gi) dbo zla nas 'go tshugs chu pho rta'i lor gtsug lag khang legs par grub rab gnas (bkra shis) mnga' gsol dga' ston rgya che ba grub pa'i thogs<sup>44</sup> lcags<sup>45</sup> pho khyi'i lor seng ge sgo mo 'i phyr rim pas man<sup>46</sup> thang so so'i ngos su ma ñi<sup>47</sup> ('bum) (gsum) yod pa spen spad dang bcas pa phyi nang kun tu bkod pa
- 11 po<sup>48</sup> phyag mdzod ...<sup>49</sup> bkra shis kyis bla ma mchog (gsum) la gus shing lhag pa'i (bsam) sbyor zla ba ltar dkar bas zhabs rtog phul du byung ba zhus shing / las su sbrel po lta bur shes rab tshe dbang (sogs) dang / las mi shing mkhan rtsig bzo ba (rnams) dang / mtha' na 'u (lag gi) las mi (thams cad) kyi kyang

37 Vowel *i* shifted to *nga* because of a ligature in the above line.

38 S: *rgya* written in *dbu med* style.

39 Sign of respect inserted before the name like in *dbu med* text.

40 Vowel *i* shifted to *ga* because of ligature in the line above.

41 Vowel *i* shifted to *ma*.

42 r.: *rgyu'i*.

43 Gap because of a deformity in the stone.

44 Letter *s* subscribed.

45 Letter *s* subscribed

46 Letter *na* inverted.

47 Letter *na* inverted.

48 Letter *po* highlighted in white colour.

49 Gap because of a deformity in the stone.

- 12 dad pa dang<sup>50</sup> ba<sup>51</sup> chen po'i (bsam) ...<sup>52</sup> sbyor (rnam) (dag gi) dang<sup>53</sup> nas  
bsgrubs pa yin pas / dge ba<sup>54</sup> rgya chen zag med nus pa'i mthus / skyabs kun  
'dus pa'i bla ma'i zhabs brtan cing / smin grol chos char 'dzam gling khyab pa  
dang / bstan pa'i sbyin bdag chos rgyal<sup>55</sup> rje 'bangs bcas /
- 13 bde skyid yar ngo'i dpal la spyod pa dang // dbus mtha'i dmag dpung bsam  
sbyor ngan pa'i tshogs / ma lus kun zhi phan tshun dga' bde'i<sup>56</sup> dang / thugs  
mthun chos bzhin {b}sgrub la brtson gyur nas / rgyu sbyor las<sup>57</sup> kyi 'brel thogs  
(thams cad) kyang / (rnam) kun chos spyod
- 14 bcu la 'bad pa'i mthus / phyogs bcur (bkra shis) char .....<sup>58</sup> chu dus su 'bab / lo  
phyugs rtag legs rdzogs ldan bzhin spyod nas<sup>59</sup> / sangs rgyas go 'phang<sup>60</sup> myur  
thob rgyur<sup>61</sup> gyur cig // sarba mangga (lam) / dza ya dza ya su dza ya / dza  
yantu //

### Translation of the Text

We respectfully pay homage at the feet of the fully enlightened Buddha who is endowed clearly and completely with the major and minor marks, to the Dharma which teaches the absolute truth, to the noble assembly of the Saṃgha, to the three jewels, and to the *bla ma*. (l.1)

May the *yi dam*, the *dāka*, the *dharmapāla* and  
The gods of wealth solely by our worshipping and offering  
Grant us all riches desired [and] ordinary and extraordinary *siddhi*  
And may they protect us permanently. (l. 1-2)

Furthermore, the renowned incomparable Śrī 'Brug pa [tradition], the origin of the three secrets of all Buddhas empowered by all the Buddhas, revered by all beings, is truly worthy of worship.

This pure essence of the teaching of the Buddha is spread in the wide earth overcast by the sky. It is especially flourishing in the region of Jambudvīpa and in all its holy places. (l. 2-3)

50 S: *dad*.

51 S: *pa*.

52 Gap because of a deformity in the stone.

53 S: *ngang*.

54 S: *di ge ba*

55 *rGya* written in *dbu med* style.

56 S: *bde*.

57 S: *yon*.

58 Gap because of deformity in the stone.

59 In *nas*, -s is not visible because a stone is placed in front of it.

60 S: *'phangs*.

61 S: *rgyud*.

[This tradition] led innumerable disciples to the path of maturity and to liberation. By the inconceivable activity [the 'Brug pa tradition] was especially highly glorified by the excellent great generous personalities among all the holders of the doctrine in the three worlds. (l. 3-4)

Also, this region was blessed by the spiritual son of rJe 'Gro ba'i mgon po,<sup>62</sup> the *vajradhāra* rGyal ba rGod tshang pa [1189-1258] and his disciples. At the time when he was practising meditation and remained in *samādhi*, the *ma mo* and *ḍākinī* gathered like an accumulation of clouds, made offerings and praised him so that [this place] equals the twenty-four holy places like Cāritrajñāna. (l. 4-5)

Gradually some authentic great *bla ma*, too, came [to this place], especially also the *siddha* who had obtained the highest grade (*bhūmi*), the great sTag tshang ras pa [1574-1651]. The *dharmarāja* Seng ge nam par rgyal ba, father and sons, king and councillors, together with the subjects, venerated him in undivided faith with the top of their heads and accepted him as their teacher. (l. 5-6)

Therefore the wealth of the two traditions (religious and political) became excellent. This is why in the great monasteries and its branches and in the royal palaces precious objects of the Buddha's body, speech and mind were extensively erected inside and outside of *vihāras*. Thus the doctrine of the Buddha was like the shine of the sun. (6)

At the time of the lord protector, the *rin po che*, the father, Mi pham 'jam dpal mthu stobs rdo rje the "lord of the family", the incomparable, omniscient great rJe 'Brug pa<sup>63</sup> arrived personally and taught him the Dharma which leads to maturation and liberation and blessed him. (l. 6-7)

Thereafter the incomparable lord of the doctrine and living beings, the embodiment of all objects of refuge, the great Rig 'dzin [Tshe] dbang [nor bu] acted in an unbiased manner towards the doctrine and the beings in general and particularly, in this country, he acted kindly in favour of the doctrine of the Buddha and the welfare and happiness of the people. He, too, accepted me as pupil (lit. 'fortunate person') and gave me the name Mi pham Tshe dbang 'phrin las bstan 'dzin mi 'gyur rdo rje, and blessed me with initiation and instruction. (7-8)

"The Buddhist doctrine depends on the Saṃgha", so it is said, and Rig 'dzin [Tshe] dbang kindly granted his seal<sup>64</sup> "to practise correctly the vows and monastic rules of the three trainings and the ten virtues of adopting and abandoning" to the community of the different monasteries. (l. 8-9)

Therefore, I too, having kept in my heart the kindness of the venerable glorious principal *bla ma*, the father and his spiritual son, and in order to fulfil his wishes,

62 This is 'Gro mgon gTsang pa rgya ras ye shes rdo rje (1161-1211).

63 This is the 7<sup>th</sup> 'Brug chen dKar brgyud 'Phrin las shing rta (1718-1766), see Petech 1977: 101.

64 This statement refers to the *bca' yig* of Hemis monastery composed by Kaḥ thog Tshe dbang nor bu published in his collected works, vol. 5: 661-81.

started building the *vihāra*<sup>65</sup> in the previous year, in the second month of the water-tiger year (1782). In the water-horse year<sup>66</sup> the *vihāra* was well accomplished, and also the consecration ceremony and a great festival was held. (l. 9-10)

In the iron-dog year (1790) there were 300,000 *maṇi* [written on stones] and placed successively on each *maṇi*-wall together with a parapet<sup>67</sup> outside the lion gate.<sup>68</sup>

The person responsible for all the interior and exterior construction work is the treasurer bKra shis who venerates the blama and the *triratna* and whose noble intention is clear like the moon. He served excellently. (l. 10-11)

As his assistant [acted], Shes rab tshes dbang etc. and the workmen,<sup>69</sup> carpenters, bricklayers and finally all the compulsory workers acted in the state of pure intention and motivation, in pure faith and interest. (l. 11-12)

May the Dharma-king and his subjects, the donors to the doctrine  
May they enjoy the happiness of the waxing moon  
The bad intentions of the armies of the centre and the frontier regions  
May they all be entirely appeased and in the state of joy and happiness  
May they be in harmony and strive according to the Dharma  
All those who contributed materially and manually, too (l.12-13)  
By virtue of their permanently applying themselves to the ten dharma activities  
May there be happiness in the ten directions and be timely rainfall  
May the harvest always be abundant and may one live like in the golden age  
May it be the cause of attaining Buddhahood quickly!

May there be bliss, victory, victory, great victory! (l. 14)

65 See also Gergan 1976: 366, l. 7.

66 Petech (1977: 120) already stated that the element 'water' is erroneous: "We would expect Fire-horse 1786."

67 *spen spad* = "parapet", made of tamarisk stems. In Picture 2 a layer of the thin round ends of the tamarisk stems is visible on the roof.

68 The lion gate refers to the entrance to the royal palace at Leh.

69 Here probably the stonemasons who produced the *maṇi*-stones are meant.

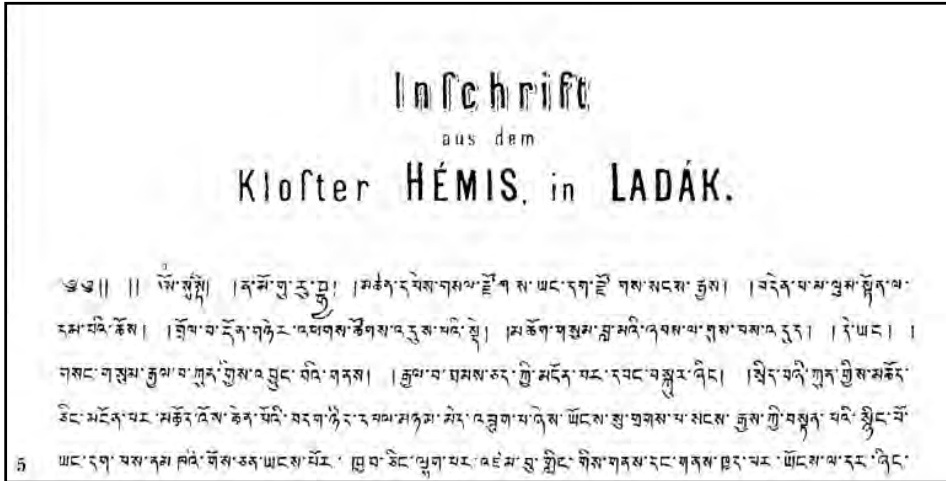


Plate 1: Specimen of the first publication of the inscription by E. von Schlagintweit in 1864.



Plate 2: General view of the inscription in the Mani wall.





Plate 3: Part A of the text of the inscription.



Plate 4: Part B of the text of the inscription.

(Note: The beginning of the text in B overlaps in part with the end of the text in A.)

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