
The “*Yuán Zī Memorial Cliff Inscription*”

An Annotated Translation of the 《袁滋题记摩崖石刻》

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2023

The Yúnnán Papers

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1 Introduction

The “*Yuán Zī Memorial Cliff Inscription*” 《袁滋题记摩崖石刻》 is a carving into the stone at the cliffs at Shímén 石门, the present-day Dòushā pass 豆沙关 in north-western Yúnnán 云南, a historically important cliff path on the so-called northern road into Yúnnán.

It records the Chinese mission – led by the middle-ranking Táng official Yuán Zī 袁滋 – to the court of Nánzhào 南诏 to confer its ruler Yimóuxún 异牟寻 the title king of Nánzhào 南诏王, an official recognition as vassal after the submission of Nánzhào to the Táng in 794.

The stone carving corroborates the text of the ‘*Gazetteer of Yúnnán*’ 《云南志》. For more background on this mission see Backus (1981), pp. 96–98.

2 About this Translation

The text for this translation is sourced from Táo Xuéxiàn 陶学宪 (1979). Further background can also be found in Qín Píng 秦平 (2018). The multi-volume Fāng Guóyú 方国瑜 (1998) also contains a copy of this text, together with an introduction by Fāng Guóyú 方国瑜.

I am not aware of any previous translation.

3 Annotated Translation

大唐贞元十年九月廿日

云南宣慰使内给事俱文珍

判官刘幽岩

小使吐突承璀

持节册南诏使御史中丞袁滋

副使成都少尹庞颀

判官监察御史崔佐时

同奉恩命赴云南册蒙异牟寻为南诏。

On the 20th day of the 9th month of the 10th year of Zhēnyuán of the great Táng,

the pacification commissioner of Yúnnán, eunuch ceremonial secretary Jù Wénzhēn,

the administrative assistant Liú Yōuyán,

the junior commissioner Tǔtū Chéngcuǐ,

the envoy carrying the insignia of Nánzhào, vice censor-in-chief Yuán Zī,

the assistant envoy, vice governor of Chéngdū Páng Qí,

the administrative assistant and investigating censor Cuī Zuǒshí,

together respectfully carry out the command to travel to Yúnnán to confer Méng Yimóuxún the title of Nánzhào.

袁滋碑 5

袁滋碑 10

[1: 大唐贞元十年九月廿日] on the stone, after the character 年 and before the character 九 is an empty space that would have fit four or five further characters. The version of the text recorded in Fāng Guóyú 方国瑜 (1998), p. 389 indicates this with four □ place holders, suggesting text is missing. However, images of the stone suggest that an unevenness in the surface did not allow carving there. The text also does not seem to be incomplete. As Fāng Guóyú 方国瑜 (1998), p. 389 records the single character 廿 as 二十 (which of course does not alter the meaning), I speculate that whoever recorded the text for this edition did not have access to a photo of the text, but maybe just a rubbing (which would have not shown the unevenness of the stone) or merely a previous transcription (which would explain that an adjacent empty space in the next column was not recorded in the same way).

r1: On the 20th day of the 9th month of the 10th year of Zhēnyuán] 18th October 794



Illustration 1:
The 'Yuán Zǐ Memorial Cliff Inscription'

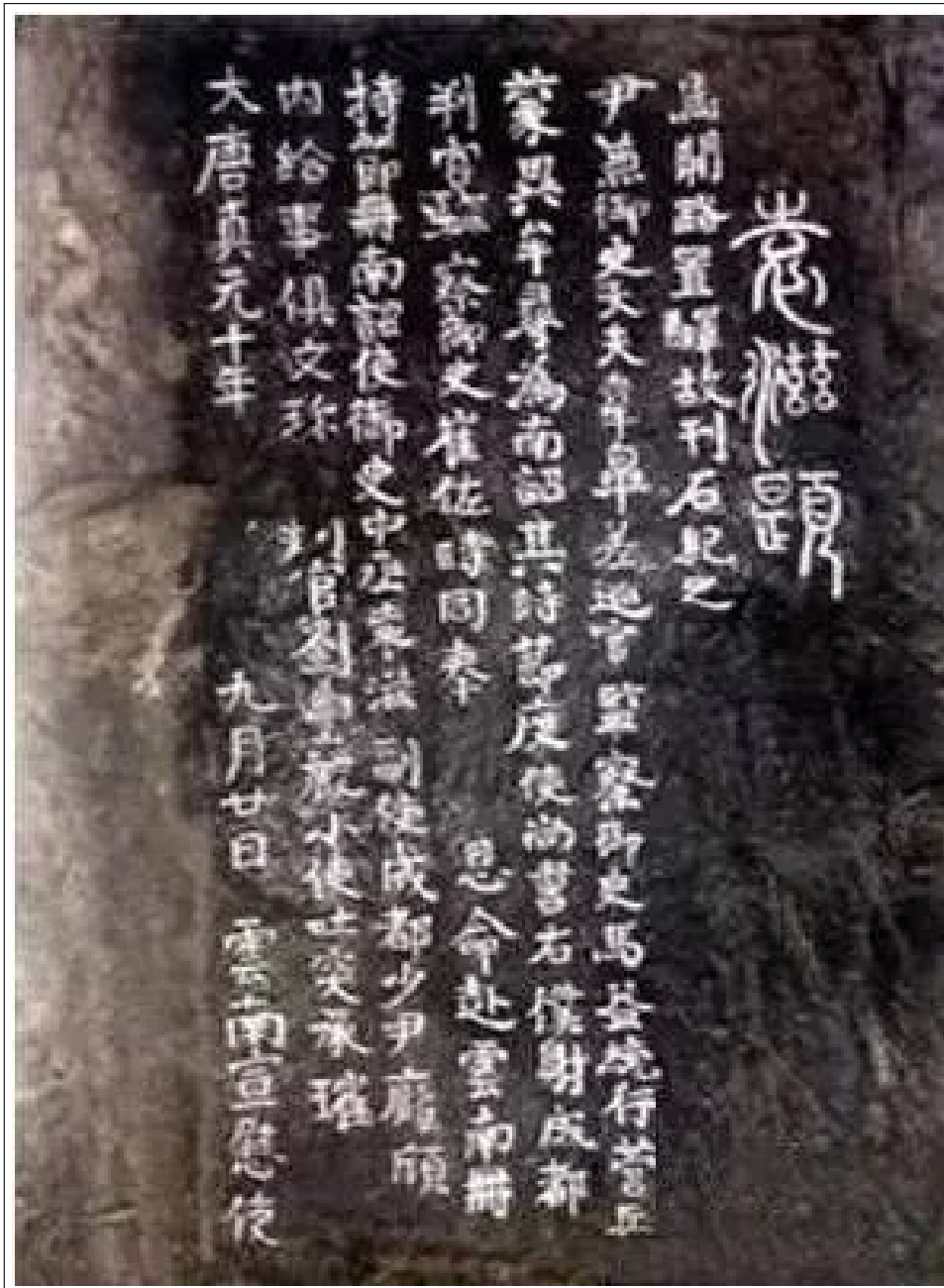


Illustration 2:
The 'Yuán Zī Memorial Cliff Inscription' with overlaid text

	其时	At same time,
	节度使尚书右仆射成都尹兼御史大夫	the military commissioner, minister, junior vice director,
袁滋碑 15	韦皋差	administrator of Chéngdū and censor-in-chief Wéi Gāo sent
	巡官监察御史马益	the inspector and investigating censor Mǎ Yì
	统行营兵马开路置驿。	to lead the headquarter's infantry and cavalry troops to open the road and establish a postal system.
	故刊石纪之。	On this occasion recorded on this stone.
袁滋碑 20	袁滋题。	Inscribed by Yuán Zī.

4 Glossary

- Chéngdū** 成都: capital of Shǔ 蜀, during the Táng dynasty center of administration for Jiànnán 剑南 – see page 5, 8
- Cuī Zuǒshí** 崔佐时: Táng dynasty envoy to Nánzhào in 794 – see page 5
- Ērhǎi** 洱海: lake Ērhǎi, highland lake in western Yúnnán with the center of Nánzhào on its western side. It was also called Xīěr 西洱, Xīěrhé 西洱河 – see page 9
- Fāng Guóyú** 方国瑜: eminent Yúnnán historian, 1903–1983 – see page 5
- Jiānchá Yùshǐ** 监察御史: investigating censor, ‘the most concentrated, broad-ranging investigative and impeaching officials, members of the Censorate’, see Hucker (1985), 795 – see pages 5, 8, 9
- Jiédù Shǐ** 节度使: military commissioner, ‘a military title of great historical importance’ ‘during much of the late T’ang period they were virtually autonomous regional governors’, see Hucker (1985), 777 – see page 8, 9
- Jù Wénzhēn** 俱文珍: name mentioned on the 《袁滋题记摩崖石刻》, see <https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/俱文珍> – see page 5, 9
- Liú Yōuyán** 刘幽岩: name mentioned on the 《袁滋题记摩崖石刻》 – see page 5
- Mǎ Yì** 马益: name mentioned on the 《袁滋题记摩崖石刻》 – see page 8
- Nánzhào** 南诏: southern zhào, regional power with its center on Ērhǎi during the 8th and 9th centuries – see page 5, 9
- Nánzhào Wáng** 南诏王: king of Nánzhào, official title conferred to some of the rulers of Nánzhào by the Táng dynasty – see page 5, 9
- Nèigěishì** 内给事: eunuch ceremonial secretary, palace title, see Hucker (1985), 4149 – see page 5, 9
- Pànguān** 判官: administrative assistant, ‘from the 700s the manager of official paperwork on the staff of a Military Commissioner (chieh-tu shih) or comparable regional dignitary, a duty undertaken by military officers as well as civil officials, apparently regardless of rank’, see Hucker (1985), 4425 – see page 5, 9
- Páng Qí** 庞颀: name mentioned on the 《袁滋题记摩崖石刻》 – see page 5
- Shàngshū** 尚书: minister, ‘minister, head of a top-level administrative agency in the central government’s Department of State Affairs’, see Hucker (1985), 5042 – see page 8, 9
- Shǎo Yǐn** 少尹: vice governor, ‘2nd ranking post in a Superior Prefecture (fu)’, see Hucker (1985), 5126 – see page 5, 9
- Shímén** 石门: pass along the road from Sichuan to Yunnan – see page 5
- Táng Cháo** 唐朝: Táng dynasty, Chinese dynasty, 618–907 – see page 5, 9
- Táng** 唐: Táng, Chinese dynasty contemporary with Nánzhào, 618–907 – see page 9
- Táng Dézōng** 唐德宗: Táng emperor Dézōng, Táng dynasty emperor, ruled 780–805 – see page 9
- Tǔtū Chéngcuǐ** 吐突承璀: name mentioned on the 《袁滋题记摩崖石刻》 – see page 5

- wáng** 王: king, 'King, title commonly used in reference to rulers of foreign states and alien peoples'. It is important to note that this does not have the meaning of a ruler equal to the Chinese emperor, it is a designation of a ruler below him, when used in titles conferred by China, the ruler of a vassal state, see Hucker (1985), 7634 – see pages 5, 9, 10
- Wéi Gāo** 韦皋: Táng dynasty general and military commissioner of 西川, 745–805, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wei_Gao – see page 8, 10
- Xīchuān** 西川: western part of Jiànnán –
- Xiǎo Shǐ** 小使: junior commissioner, Shǐ 使: 'one of the most common Chinese titles, almost invariably found with a prefix suggesting his function or designating the agency he headed', so this is a subaltern position, see Hucker (1985), 6017 – see page 5, 10
- Xuānwèi Shǐ** 宣慰使: pacification commissioner, in Hucker (1985) only documented from the Yuán 元 dynasty as 'one of the most prestigious titles granted aboriginal tribes in southwestern China and their natural, mostly hereditary chiefs', see Hucker (1985), 2682 – see page 5, 10
- Xúnguān** 巡官: inspector, 'inspector, a lowly official, functions no clear, found on the staffs of the T'ang Ministry of Revenue (hu-pu). Military Commissioner (chieh-ru shih)', see Hucker (1985), 2746 – see page 8, 10
- Yimóuxún** 异牟寻: ruler of Nánzhào, 754–808 – see page 5
- Yīn** 尹: administrator, 'Administrator of a Superior Prefecture (fu) and normally its active head', but also used as 'common element in merit titles', see Hucker (1985), 7969 – see page 8, 10
- Yòu Pūshè** 右仆射: junior vice director, – see page 8, 10
- Yùshǐ Dàfū** 御史大夫: censor-in-chief, 'head of the Censorate (yü-shih t'ai) and one of the most eminent officials of the central government, in administrative charge of Censors (yü-shih) of many sorts who maintained disciplinary surveillance over the officialdom, freely impeaching any official for public or private misconduct', see Hucker (1985), 8181 – see page 8, 10
- Yùshǐ Zhōngchéng** 御史中丞: vice censor-in-chief, '2nd executive official of the Censorate (yü-shih rhi), no longer having any special relationship with the palace but occasionally in T'ang and commonly in Sung serving as actual head of the Censorate when the post of Censor-in-chief was left vacant', see Hucker (1985), 8174 – see page 5, 10
- Yuán** 元: Yuán, Chinese dynasty, 1271–1368 – see page 10
- Yuán Zī** 袁滋: Táng dynasty envoy to Nánzhào in 794 – see page 5, 8
- Yuán Zī Tíjì Móyá Shíkè** 《袁滋题记摩崖石刻》: 'Yuán Zī Memorial Cliff Inscription', Táng inscription – see page 5, 10
- Yúnnán** 云南: at the time of the Táng dynasty the name for the geographic region south of its Jiannan district – see page 5
- Yúnnán Zhì** 《云南志》: 'Gazetteer of Yúnnán', Táng document detailing all aspects of Yúnnán – see page 5, 10
- zhào** 诏: zhào, term for a local ruler or his realm – see page 10
- Zhēnyuán** 贞元: reign period of Táng Dézōng 唐德宗, 785–805 – see page 5

5 References

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