

# THE LUMINOUS TEACHING STONE OF CHINA AND THREE SETTINGS: Preface to “Mar Iazed-buzid, the Great Donor”

FIRST SETTING: Mar Iazed-buzid, the Great Donor



Three men are mentioned in the Inscription on the Luminous Teaching Stone who are especially notable: (1) the old Syrian Church Father and historian who authored the text of the Inscription, (2) the talented young Chinese calligrapher who cut the words of the text into the stone of the Monument, and (3) the wealthy Turkic bishop who sponsored the Monument and its raising. The lives of these men suggest the three time settings for the Stone: (1) the Church Father/historian represents the past, from the origins of The Teaching in

Syria, nearly eight hundred years before the Stone was raised, and its spread across the Middle East to China; (2) the calligrapher represents the future, from the time the Monument was buried to hide it from destruction shortly after it was raised until the Teaching was finally and completely dissipated shortly before our time; and (3) the episcopal sponsor/donor of the Stone, who represents the time contemporary to the raising of the Monument.

The word *setting* is used in the title with a prescribed intention. The primary usage is obvious: the frame in which a precious stone is set. Each of the settings shares in this image. But the word *setting* holds at least three other usages: the setting of a dramatic scene, a setting of eggs for incubation, and a table setting. The literary image—the time and place of a dramatic scene—is enacted repeatedly throughout the narrative that is attached to Father Adam, the author of the Inscription, who is a historian and, however mediocre, a poet. This setting is an expansion of the historical Preface that Father Adam himself composed for the Inscription, embedded in the wider history of the Church and told from a millennial perspective. I hope the reader will recognize that the setting named for the calligrapher Lu Yen grows out of the nesting image: a batch of eggs for incubation. Lu Yen's story traces the development of new forms of the Luminous Teaching in China from their conception (when the seeds of Eternal Truth still remaining in the eighth-century Oriental Church animated a teaching of native Chinese stock), through their generations, and on toward our own time. The next setting is named for the celebrated Bishop I-ssu, who, in the Syriac portion of the Inscription, is called Mar Iazed-buzid; this setting partakes of the familiar banquet image—a table setting—but in an imperial manner. As the reader will see, this setting has much in common with the image of a table setting for a festal meal. Bishop I-ssu's story is an expansion of the seventeenth paragraph of the Inscription, fashioned from the time immediately surrounding the inaugural

raising of the Stone.

The tale of the past, "Father Adam, Author," and the tale of the future, "Lu Yen, Calligrapher," are not included here. These two narratives will be presented at another time. Only the biographical note "Mar Iazed-buzid, the Great Donor," originally completed in 1989 and recently updated, appears here.

One last word. It may appear that an element of fantasy enters the makeup of these stories, but they are in no way fictions. The stories are fashioned entirely out of commonplaces, but it must be remembered that what were commonplaces for people in their time are for us fantastic details. Whatever is factually accurate I owe to the work of historians and commentators who precede me; whatever color there is in the telling I owe to English renderings of the poets of the time. The narratives are limited by the amount and kind of information that was available to me at the time of writing. For this reason I am able to say of the verity of these stories only this: If these stories are not true, there are others like them that are true.

Explanations of political and cultural undercurrents, condensed but still too ponderous to find a place in the narrative, have been drawn out of the text and channeled into supplements at the end of each section. These are designed to assist the reader along the way.

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TABLE OF CHINESE PERSON AND PLACE NAMES (in alphabetical order)	
Wade-Giles transliteration	Pinyin transliteration

A-lo-pen	Alopen
An Lu-shan	An Lushan
Chang-an	Changan
Chang Kiu	Zhanggiu
Cheng-tu	Chengdu
Chia Tzu	Qiazu
Chou-chih	Zhouzhi
(Prince) Chung	Zhong
Chung-jen (Ward)	Zhongren
Feng-hsiang	Fengxiang
Feng Ming	Fengming
Hsi Jung	Xirong
Hsiu-shan	Xiushan
Hsuan-tsung (2)	Xuanzong
Hua-men	Huamen
I-ning	Yining
I-ssu	Yisi
Kuan-chung	Guanzhong
(Yang) Kuei-fei or (Yang) Kwei-fei or (Yang) Guifei	Yang Yuhuan
(Yang ) Kuo-chung	(Yang) Guozhong
Ko Shu-han	Ge Shuhan
Kuo Tzu-I	Guo Ziyi
Lao-tzu	Laozi
Li Fu-kuo	Li Fuguo
Li Kwang-pi	Li Guangbi
Li Lin-fu	Li Linfu
Ling-wu	Lingwu
Loyang	Luoyang

Lu Yen	Luyan
Ma-wei	Mawei
Pei Ti	Beidi
Ping Liang	Bingliang
Shih Ssu-ming	Shi Siming
Su-tsung	Suzong
Szechuan	Sichuan
Ta-chin	Daqin
Tai-tsung	Daizong
Ta-ku	N/A
Te-tsung	Dezong
Tu Fu	Du Fu
Uighurs (Uyghur)	Weiwuer
Wu-chun	Wuzhun
Wu-tsung	Wuzong
(Yang) Yu-han	Yang Yuhuan
Yin Hsi	Yinxi
Yu-hsien	Yuxian