

A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Chesham Bois,
October 3, 1949

The Editor,
Asia Major

Dear Sir,

Yesterday I heard from Mr. Fu Lo-huan 傅樂煥 that he had just received a letter answering questions kindly sent by him at my request to Prof. Chang Chêng-lang 張政烺, Professor of Ancient History and of Palcography in the University of Peking. The questions concerned the three inscriptions of which inked-squeezes were reproduced (Figs. 1, 5, and 6) to illustrate my article, "A Datable Shang-Yin Inscription" in *Asia Major*, New Series, Vol. I, Part I.

These inked-squeezes, sent to me from Peking, had been taken from three bronze vessels of the *yu* 卣 class which were said to have been excavated at An-yang about ten years ago. Inked-squeezes from the three had been copied by Mr. Kuo-Mo-jo 郭沫若 who gave copies to Mr. Tung Tso-pin 董作賓. With these as his authority the latter issued in 1945 a corrective supplement to his large work on the Yin calendar which had appeared earlier that year (Nos. 44 and 45 in the Bibliography of my article). The inscriptions in question are dated, respectively, in the second, fourth, and sixth year of a king whose identity is indicated in the fourth-year inscription.

The gist of Prof. Chang's letter is as follows. In 1945 he had doubted the genuineness of the three inscriptions when in Chungking he saw Mr. Kuo's copies which served as a basis for Mr. Tung's correction of his Yin calendar. They struck him as concocted with material recognizable as derived from various sources of unequal age. Reproductions of inked-squeezes from the second-year inscription in two books (Nos. 10 and 24 of the aforesaid Bibliography) strengthened his belief that the inscription was faked. Inquiry among dealers elicited the information that the second-year and fourth-year vessels had reached Peking in fragments. The repairer is alleged to have added the inscriptions: on the second-year vessel presumably by engraving it, but on the other by superimposing a newly cast disk upon the exterior of its base. Prof. Chang had the opportunity of examining the fourth-year vessel, and noticed traces of the means used to secure the disk, the addition having been helped by the highness of the foot-rim. He remarks that he knows of between 300 and 400 *yu* inscribed within cover and body, but not a single one inscribed on the exterior of its base. Also he remarks that the style of the characters in the sixth-year inscription is typically early Chou, not Shang-Yin.

My obvious duty is to lose no time in acquainting readers of *Asia Major* with the opinions of so high an authority as Prof. Chang. Unfortunately, postal communication with Peking is now so slow that many months would elapse before further information could be got from him. I should like to ask, for instance, whether one may conclude from his letter that the fourth-year vessel was the only one of the three which was actually examined by him. Also whether, by mentioning that inked-squeezes of the sixth-year inscription are scarce, he implies that he has seen only a copy. Fig. 6 of my article shows that this sixth-year inscription has certain qualities of style that the other two inscriptions lack. Moreover, it appears in the customary positions inside cover and body. An inscription can be engraved inside a cover, but hardly one of this size inside a body, unless the body had been broken. To my eyes this sixth-year inscription appears to have been cast. If the other two inscriptions are false and this one genuine, perhaps it provided a starting-point for the faker, the name of the maker Yi being derived from it.

My article is concerned mainly with the second-year inscription. While it is true that the claim for "the surest date yet found on a Shang-Yin bronze" rests on the genuineness of the fourth-year inscription, the major part of the article treats of individual characters, a study independent of this exact chronological criterion. The designs of the thirteen vessels sharing the dog complex (the authenticity of which Prof. Chang does not question) accord with the alleged date; the evidence will be published shortly.

At the beginning of my article I wrote: "Competent Chinese critics have examined the vessel without doubting the genuineness of either it or the inscriptions, so I am assured by Prof. G. Ecke, of Peking, to whom I am

much indebted for information. The long inscription looks to me as if it may have been engraved, so far as can be judged from the inked-squeezes published in the two books and the one, reproduced here, kindly lent to me by Mr. Huang Chün 黃濬. But inked-squeezes often prove deceptive. Even had the long inscription been engraved, that need not condemn it, since it might have been added soon after the casting".

Among the "competent Chinese critics", the names of Kuo Mo-jo and Tung Tso-pin have already been mentioned. In his calendar supplement, the latter notes that Prof. Ma Hêng 馬衡 as well as Kuo Mo-jo vouched for the authenticity. He writes: "Both Shu-p'ing 叔平 (Ma Hêng) and Ting-t'ang 鼎堂 (Kuo Mo-jo) are experts. (Their opinion must be right.) Although the make of these three vessels and the place where they were found have not yet been investigated, the three offer genuine historical data beyond any possible doubt". Thus it transpires that neither Tung Tso-pin nor his two colleagues had seen the bronzes.

The veteran scholar, Ma Hêng, formerly was Professor of Paleography in the University of Peking, and now is Curator of the Old Palace Museum. Perhaps Kuo Mo-jo is even better known to Western students as a foremost expert on bronze inscriptions. No less famous in this field is Prof. Jung Kêng 容庚. He has expressed confidence in the second-year inscription, and so has Prof. Ch'ên Mêng-chia 陳夢家. Professor of Chinese Archaeology and Paleography in the National Tsing-hua University. On the available evidence, it was not for me to question such weight of eminent authority.

I am, etc.,

W. PERCIVAL YETTS