MORE EARLY INSCRIPTIONS FROM TIBET

— Hugh Richardson

Tibetan scholars in occupied Tibet and their Chinese colleagues have recently shown an active interest in searching for evidence relating to the early history of the country. Their researches have produced several valuable additions to the number of inscriptions of the 8th and 9th centuries already on record. The lower part of the pillar at the tomb (bang-so) of Khri Lde-srong-brtsan has been excavated, revealing the hitherto concealed part of the inscription and carved decoration on the sides of the pillars and new inscriptions from Lho-brgya have been recorded. I have discussed these discoveries in an article in the *Tibet Journal* Vol. XIII no 2 1987. Now, in a recent issue of *Thod Ljong Zhib Jug* the discovery is reported and discussed at length by Chab-gepai Tsho-brtan Phun Tshogs of two inscriptions on a rock face at ‘ldan-ma brag-tsha near the village of Ri-ma’ in the district of Byams mdun (Brkg g-yab) under the jurisdiction of Chamdo. There is a Chinese version of the article as well as one in Tibetan. Both record the texts of the inscriptions, the Chinese in Roman transcription, the Tibetan in Tibetan letters. There are several small differences between the two versions and in all such instances that in the Chinese version seems the better. Unfortunately there is no photograph of the inscriptions or the site but it is stated that some readings may be in doubt owing to the difficulty of copying the text from the steep cliff. Nevertheless, the texts are important and the inscriptions are of considerable importance.

There is a carving on the rock face of Rnam-par Snang-mdzad accompanied by the Eight Spiritual Sons of the Buddha and below them is the figure of the Klu Me-chog dkar-po who is identified by Neberksy Wojekwitz as the chief of the ne-bdag-Lord of the earth — of Mar-khams. The two inscriptions are a brief summary of the tenants of the Buddhist faith relating to the consequences of different actions, which is identified by the author as from the Phag-po bsang-po spyod-pa’s san’s-lam, and the other records the occasion for the making of this religious memorial and the particulars of the persons connected with the offering of the carving and the prayer.
The inscription relates now in the reign of Khri Lde-'song-brtsan, many great nobles, the queen Mchimsa-legs-mu-brtstan and many others were brought to deliverance by eminent monks. As donors were (Bal?) Gse. Ye dge loyang and other monks, and the occasion was the opening of negotiations for a treaty of peace with China by the famous Monk-minister Bral-'ba Yon-kan, the Chief Minister 'Bro Khri gtsun ram-shag, the Yang Blok Khri sum-bzhi and others. Finally the names of the supervisor of the work, the stone-carvers and other workmen are recorded. The inscription is dated in a monkey year which can only be 884 A.D.

Many of the persons named are known from early documents. The Jo-mo legs-mo brtstan appears together with her two "Sister Queens" 'Bro Khri-mo-legs and Cog-po-brtstan-rgyal, as taking part in the vow of Khri Lde-'song-brtstan to preserve the Buddhist faith which is recorded in the Chos-lugs of Dpal-po Gtsuglag phreng-ba vol. jaf 128-130. The Dge-lugs-bran-ka Yon-kan is the famous ban-de Chen-po-bran-kha Dpal Chen-po Yon-tan-whi who became Chief Minister of Khri Lde-'song-brtstan's successor Khri Gtsug Lde-brtstan Pal-je-ran and who was the principal Tibetan witness to the treaty with China achieved in 821 and recorded on the pillar outside the Jo-khang of Lhasa. That inscription shows that negotiations had begun in the reign of Khri Lde-'song-brtstan but had come to nothing at that time. The Great Minister Zhang Bro Khri gtsun ram-shag was the general who subjugated the Yung (Nor-chap) in the reign of Khri Srong Lde-brtstan and became Chief Minister about 796. He too was a participant in the religious vow of Khri Lde-'song-brtstan, as was the minister Dba's khri sum-bzhi mdo-brtstan, who have not been able to identify the rhinoceros or the supervis or who all bear Tibetan names; other foremen, stone-carvers and workmen have apparently non-Tibetan names and some are described in Chinese.

These inscriptions and carvings from the Chamo area, which indicate the existence of a religious community in the vicinity of Ri-ma, are further evidence of the spread of the Buddhist faith through all of Tibet after its revival by Khri Srong Lde-brtstan about the middle of the eighth century. When, however, Khri Lde-'song-brtstan, recorded his vow to maintain the faith he directed that copies be sent not only to temples and monasteries in Central Tibet but also to Rho-zha (Gis-gis) and Zhang-srong in the west and to Mdo-sum and the government of the occupied frontier territories of the borders of China in the east. Documents from Tsevang give lists of many
monasteries in the neighbourhood and of religious teachers of the monastic centre of Mdo-gam, Kan-chor and Go-chu as well as in Central Tibet.

Evidence of another religious community in Mdo-smad, earlier than that at Ri-mdas, was found at Brag-lha-mo in Ldan Khog some 150 miles to the north by Geshe Pema Tshering of Bonn who recorded and photographed inscriptions and carvings of Buddhist deities on a rock face there. These have been briefly discussed in my article mentioned above. It would be of great value if photographs of the inscriptions and carvings near Ri-mdas could be made available to allow comparison of the orthography and, to throw light on the development of religious art in Tibet.

The foregoing is only a preliminary note based on first impressions of an article which deserves much fuller examination.