

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 pillar; and new inscriptions from Lho-brag 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 **Bod Ljongs Zhib Jug** the discovery is reported and discussed at length by Chab-sprel Tshe brtan Phun Tshogs of two inscriptions on a rock face at Ldan-ma brag-rtsa near the village of Ri-mdal in the district of Byams mdun (**Brag 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 coherent and the inscriptions are of considerable importance.

There is a carving on the rock face of Ranm-par Snang-mdzad accompanied by the Eight Spiritual Sons of the Buddha and below them is the figure of the Klu Mi-mgon dkar-po who is identified by Nebesky Wojkowitz as the chief of the **sa-bdag** - Lords of the earth - of Mar-khams. The two inscriptions are a brief summary of the tenets of the Buddhist faith relating to the consequences of different actions, which is identified by the author as from the 'Phag-pa bzang-po spyod-pa'i smon-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-srong-brtsan, many great nobles, the queen Mchims-za Legs-mo-brtsan and many others were brought to deliverance by eminent monks. Its donors were (Ba?) Gar Ye shes dbyangs and other monks; and the occasion was the opening of negotiations for a treaty of peace with China by the famous Monk-minister Bran-ka Yon-tan, the Chief Minister 'Bro Khri gzhu ram-shags, the Nang Blon Khri sum-bzher 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 804 A.D.

Many of the persons named are known from early documents. The Jo-mo legs-mo brtsan appears together with her two "Sister Queens" 'Bro Khri-mo-legs and Cog-ro Brtsan-rgyal, as taking part in the vow of Khri Lde-srong-brtsan to preserve the Buddhist faith which is recorded in the Chos-byung of Dpa'-bo Gtsug-lag phreng-ba vol ja ff 128-130. The Dge-slong Bran-ka Yon-tan is the famous ban-de Chen-po Bran-Ka Dpal Chen-po Yon-tan who became Chief Minister of Khri-Lde-srong-brtsan's successor Khri Gtsug lde-brtsan Ral-pa-can 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-srong-brtsan but had come to nothing at that time. The Great Minister Zhang 'Bro Khri-gzhu ram-shags was the general who subjugated the 'Jang (Nan-chao) in the reign of Khri Srong Lde-brtsan and became Chief Minister about 796. He too was a participant in the religious vow of Khri Lde-srong-brtsan, as was the minister Dba's Khri sum-bzher mdo-brtsan. I have not been able to identify the donor monks or the supervisors who all bear Tibetan names; other foremen, stone carvers and workmen have apparently non-Tibetan names and some are described as Chinese.

These inscriptions and carvings from the Chamdo area, which indicate the existence of a religious community in the vicinity of Ri-mda', are further evidence of the spread of the Buddhist faith through all of Tibet after its revival by Khri Srong-Lde-brtsan about the middle of the eighth century. When his son, Khri Lde-srong-brtsan, 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 Bru-zha (Gilgit) and Zhang-shung in the west and to Mdo-smad and the governors of the occupied frontier territories of the borders of China in the East. Documents from Tunhuang give lists of many

monasteries in the neighbourhood and of religious teachers of the monastic centre of Mdo-gam, Kan-chou and Go-chu as well as in Central Tibet.

Evidence of another religious community in Mdo-smad, earlier than that at Ri-mda', 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-mda' 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.