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 Khiki Lhawang-drub-ltsan 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-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 Thod Jhangs Zhin Jug the discovery is reported and discussed at length by Chub-ser Tse Tashish Phun Thogs of two inscriptions on a rock face at Ki-ltan-ma brag-riia near the village of Ri-ma in the district of Byams mdun (Brang-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 valuable and the inscriptions are of considerable importance.

There is a carving on the rock face at Ramin-par Snang-mdzad accompanied by the Eight Spiritual Sons of the Buddha and below them is the figure of the Klu Mie-sog-dkar-po who is identified by Nebesky Wojkowitz as the chief of the m-he-leg—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 Phug-po bshyang-po spyos-po’s semin-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 new in the reign of Khi Hse-strong-dzayan, many great nobles, the queen Mehins-la, Leg-nu-britsian and many others were brought to deliverance by eminent monks as donors were (Bi?o) Zan Ge gyes Ioyang and other monks and the occasion was the opening of negotiations for a treaty of peace with China by the famous monk-minister Bran-la Yon-tan, the Chief Minister "bro Khi gzuu ram-shags, the Yang Blo Khi sum-bzhed and others. Finally the names of the supervisor of the work, the stone-carvers and other workers 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 britsian appears together with her two "Sister Queens" "Zho Khi-mo-legs and Cog-ns-britsian,974, as taking part in the vow of Khi Hse-strong-dzayan to preserve the Buddhist faith which is recorded in the Chos-bzang of Dpar-brdo Gti-sklang phreng-ba vol. ya f 128-130. The Yal-bzang Bran-la Yon-tan is the famous ban-de Chen-po Bran-la Dpal Chen-po Yon-ton who became Chief Minister of Khi Hse-strong-britsian's successor Khri Gugub Lde-britsian Ral-pa-nam 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 Khi Hse-strong-dzayan but had come to nothing at that time. The Great Minister Zhang yor Khi gzuu ram-shags was the general who subjugated the Yang (Nar-chub) in the reign of Khi Srong Lde-britsian and became Chief Minister about 794. He too was a participant in the religious vow of Khi Hse-strong-britsian, as was his minister Dpa's khsir sum-bzhed mo-britsian, have not been able to identify the dmut monks or the supervisor who all best Tibetan names; other foremen, stone-carvers and workers 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-ma, are further evidence of the spread of the Buddhist faith through all of Tibet after its revival by Khi Srong-Lde-britsian about the middle of the eighth century. When, however, Khi Hse-strong-britsian, 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 Pbo-cha (Gyal-tsal) and Zhang-strong in the west and to Mdi-mo and the government of the occupied frontier territories of the borders of China in the East. Documents from Turfan 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-mds', was found at Brag Lha-mo in Ldan Khog some 150 miles to the north by Geshe Pema Tsewang 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-mds' 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.