

PROLEGOMENON TO THE BHUTANESE

RNAM THAR TEXTS ON ZHABS DRUNG

NGAG DBANG RNAM RGYAL (1594-1651).¹

BY

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Introduction

Zhabs drung ngag dbang rnam rgyal (1594-1651), universally spoken of as the founder of Bhutan, emerges from the pages of the history of the Himalayan region as one of the most fascinating personalities of his times. He was born at the ancestral monastery of *mgar grong* in Tibet into the *rgya* clan, as a grandchild of *mi pham chos rgyal* (1543-1606), the 17th prince-abbot of the '*brug pa bka' bgyud* school residing at its main seat of *rwa lung* monastery. Chosen by his grandfather to become his successor, he underwent from his earliest years a hard training to become a worthy replacement. However, political circumstances as well as a dispute over the rightful successor to the '*brug pa* throne threatened his life and gave him no choice but to flee from *rwa lung* to Bhutan at the age of 23.

There, while continuing his religious activities as a part of his high spiritual position, he managed to overcome conflicts with local strongmen as well as to defend his new territory against Tibetan invasions attempted by the king of Tibet, the *sde srid gtsang pa*. When the Tibetan civil war ended in 1642 with the victory of the *dge lugs pa* troops of the fifth Dalai Lama and his allied Mongolian army, various followers of the *bka' bgyud* schools and other non-*dge lugs pa* sects were persecuted and their monasteries converted into *dge lugs pa* property. During those difficult times, *zhabs drung* not only succeeded in stopping the conflict from spilling into Bhutan, but he also managed to secure the safe continuation of the '*brug pa bka' bgyud* tradition and to provide safety to Tibetan religious refugees. Eventually, in 1639, Bhutan was recognised as an independent kingdom

¹ This article could not have been written if not for the generous support of the Royal Library of Denmark, the kind hospitality of the National Library of Bhutan, the information provided by Dasho Sangay Dorji, C.T. Dorji, John Ardussi, and the unfailing help with deciphering the intricacies of the *chos skad* language by Dorji Wangchuk.

with *zhabs drung* becoming the first ruler of the larger parts of what is now known as Bhutan.²

The sources on the remarkable personality of *zhabs drung* are manifold, yet this essay is concerned exclusively with one type of source, namely that belonging to the genre of *rnam thar*. *Rnam thar* is a literary genre belonging to the field of *chos skad* literature.³ Cabezón and Jackson present *rnam thar* both as a separate religious genre and a sub-genre of history.⁴ It seems, though, that there is a general tendency from the side of Western researchers to treat it as a part of historiographical writings,⁵ while Eastern scholars tend to treat it as a type of religious literature.⁶

In general terms, *rnam thar* literally means 'liberation' (*rnam par thar pa*, Sanskrit *vimokṣa*) and when used in the title of a literary work means "the liberation of so and so", e.g. *mi la ras pa'i rnam thar* ought to be translated as "The Liberation of Milarepa". The usage of *rnam thar* in the title of texts, however, has evolved into a genre – a certain type of literature –

² For more on the life of *zhabs drung* and the founding of Bhutan, see Michael Aris: *Bhutan, The Early History of a Himalayan Kingdom*, Warminster: Aris & Phillips Ltd, 1979, pp. 201-254; John Ardussi: "Formation of the State of Bhutan ('brug gzhung) in the 17th Century and Tibetan Antecedents" in *Papers from the March, 2000, Lumbini Conference on 'The Relationship Between Religion and State in Traditional Tibet'*, Bhairahawa, ed. Christoph Cüppers, Nepal: LIRI, forthcoming (2003), pp. 5-16; and John Ardussi: *Bhutan before the British – A Historical Study*, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Canberra: Australian National University, 1977.

³ The term *chos skad* (lit.: religious language) is used here instead of 'classical Tibetan', since the latter expression has the fault of excluding Bhutanese literature. Beside a recent trend during the last decades to write books in *ndzong kha*, the national language of Bhutan, all Bhutanese literature has traditionally been written in "classical Tibetan", which in both Tibet and Bhutan is referred to as *chos skad*. It, therefore, seems only appropriate to refer to the classical Tibetan, Ladakhi, Sikkimese and Bhutanese literature as *chos skad* literature. Aris (fn. 2), pp. xi-xiii, on the other hand, chooses to refer to the study of Bhutanese literature as tibetology, although he too recognises the problem that the Bhutanese do not consider themselves Tibetans. The term *chos skad* further transcends the artificial separation between Tibetan and Himalayan studies.

⁴ José Ignacio Cabezón and Roger R. Jackson (eds.): *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*, Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion, 1996, pp. 23-28.

⁵ Cf. p. 40 in Leonard W. J. van der Kuijp: "Tibetan Historiography" in *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre* (fn. 4), pp. 39-56; Manfred Taube: *Tibetische Handschriften und Blockdrücke*, 4 heft, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1966; and A. I. Vostrikov: *Tibetan Historical Literature*, English transl. from Russian, reprint, Calcutta: Indian Studies Past & Present, 1970.

⁶ Cf. Tulku Thondup: *Buddhist Civilization in Tibet*, USA: Maha Siddha Nyingmapa Center, 1982; and Cabezón and Jackson (fn. 4), pp. 26-27.

and thus implies a particular kind of text giving the life-example of some spiritual personality with the underlying purpose of inspiring the reader in his own spiritual efforts.⁷ The *rnam thar* text is thus a Tibetan cousin of the Indian Buddhist religious story, *avadāna* (Tib. *rtogs brjod*). In the title of the *rnam thar* of *rngog lo tsā ba*, Jackson translates *rnam thar* as “the life of liberation”, whereas *rnam thar* according to Gyatso should be translated as “full liberation [story]”.⁸ Sometimes, the word is also seen translated as “hagiography”⁹ or “biography”.¹⁰ When a particular *rnam thar* is written by the concerned person himself, it has been referred to as “auto-

⁷ The definition of the word *rnam thar* given by *sa kya sde gzhung rin po che* supports this understanding of the word: “A *rnam thar* is the annalistic account of the life of the Buddha or of a Bodhisattva; the hearing of each (*rnam-pa*) word and its mental comprehension causes a seed of enlightenment (*thar-pa*) to be sown, which is why it is called *rnam-thar*” (quoted by John Ardussi: “Gyalse Temzin Rabgye and the Founding of Taktsang Lhakhang” in *Journal of Bhutan Studies*, vol. 1 no. 1, 1999, p. 41).

⁸ Cf. p. 373 in David Jackson: “An Early Biography of rNgog Lo-tsa-ba Blo-ldan-shes-rab” in *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 6th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Fagernes 1992*, vol. 1, ed. Per Kvaerne, Oslo: The Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture, 1994, pp. 372-392; Janet Gyatso: *Apparitions of the Self: The Secret Autobiographies of a Tibetan Visionary. A Translation and Study of Jigme Lingpa's Dancing Moon in the Water and Dākki's Grand Secret-Talk*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998, p. 6.

⁹ For further discussion on *rnam thar* as hagiography, see Janice D. Willis: “On the Nature of *rnam-thar*: Early dge-lugs-pa Siddha Biographies” in *Soundings in Tibetan Civilization: Proceedings of the 1982 Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies held at Columbia University*, ed. Barbara Nimri Aziz and Matthew Kapstein, Manohar, pp. 304-319.

¹⁰ “Biography” has, however, also been used as translations for *lo rgyus* and *chos 'byung*; cf. p. 61 in James Burnell Robinson: “The Lives of Indian Buddhist Saints: Biography, Hagiography and Myth” in Cabezón and Jackson (fn. 4), pp. 57-69, and p. 45 in A. M. Blondeau: “Analysis of the Biographies of Padmasambhava according to Tibetan Tradition: Classification of Sources” in *Tibetan Studies in Honour of Hugh Richardson: Proceedings of the International Seminar on Tibetan Studies, Oxford 1979*, ed. Michael Aris and Aung San Suu Kyi, Warminster: Aris & Phillips Ltd, 1980, pp. 45-52.

biography”, e.g. “The autobiography of the 5th Dalai Lama.”¹¹ However, if a *rnam thar* concerns not a human person but rather a Tantric deity, such as the *rnam thar* of *rdo rje 'chang* or *rdo rje phur ba*, the translation of *rnam thar* as “biography” is not appropriate, since the term here must rather be understood as “an inspirational example or story”. Thus, from the point of view of the *chos skad* literature, it does not matter whether a *rnam thar* is written by the concerned person himself or someone else, or whether it concerns a human being or a deity; what seems important is rather the fact that the text must reveal the special character of a spiritual undertaking. In this essay, the term *rnam thar* will be left untranslated to avoid confusion and to emphasise the liberating aspect of such a text.

In August-September 2001, the Royal Library of Denmark enabled me to visit the National Library of Bhutan in Thimphu to carry out fieldwork. During my stay, I became familiar with various *rnam thar* texts on *zhabs drung*. These texts contain a mixture of religious and historical elements, and are thus central sources for studying the person of *zhabs drung* and his time. Five of these texts are written in *chos skad*, while the sixth is written

¹¹ For a detailed discussion of autobiography in both *chos skad* and Western literature, see Janet Gyatso: “Autobiography in Tibetan Religious Literature: Reflections on its Modes of Self-Presentation” in *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 5th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, NARITA 1989*, vol. 2 Language, History and Culture, ed. Ihara Shō Ren and Yamaguchi Zuihō, Tokyo: Naritasan Shinshoji, 1992, pp. 465-478, and Janet Gyatso (fn. 8), pp. xi-xii, 6-11, 101-123. Gyatso (fn.8), p. 6, also translates the terms *rtogs b'jod* and *rang rnam* as “autobiography”. Havnevik (1997:357) uses all the words “autobiography, biography, *rnam thar*, hagiography and sacred biography” interchangeably and thus treats them as synonyms, although her source is autobiographical in nature; cf. p. 357 in Hanna Havnevik: (1997): “The Autobiography of Jetsun Lochen Rinpoche, a preliminary research report” in *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 7th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Graz 1995*, pp. 355-367. Karmay calls the fifth Dalai Lama’s work a “biography” and not “autobiography” even though the most of it was written by the concerned person himself; cf. Samten Gyaltzen Karmay: *Secret Visions of the Fifth Dalai Lama. The Gold Manuscript in the Fournier Collection*, London: Serindia Publications, 1988, pp. 13-18.

in *rdzong kha*.¹² The earliest text was written in Bhutan by a Tibetan-born author, whereas the remaining texts were written by Bhutanese-born authors. This essay aims at presenting a comprehensive survey of these texts. Some brief information on the author of each text will be given as far as possible and the character and contents of each work will be described. Comparison between the works and translation of passages has not been possible within the scope of this essay. Also, it has not been possible to undertake a more thorough philological study of the textual transmission of the early works. Each work will be dealt with in a separate section with a heading giving its shortened title and the name of its author. Historical research on the life of *zhabs drung* has earlier been presented by Michael Aris (fn. 2) and John A. Ardussi (fn. 2). From among the six *zhabs drung rnam thar* texts discussed here, both authors only make reference to two of these works, namely the *zhabs drung rnam thar* texts by *gtsang mkhan chen* and *shākya rin chen*. Therefore, it is hoped that this survey will stimulate further research into the life and time of *zhabs drung*.

1. *Chos kyī sprin chen po'i dbyangs* written by *gtsang mkhan chen*

The oldest *rnam thar* text on *zhabs drung* was written by the Tibetan scholar *gtsang mkhan chen* (1610-1684), who was a contemporary of *zhabs drung*. He was a great refugee scholar and in full was called *gtsang mkhan chen 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan rgya mtsho*.¹³ From the little that is known about

¹² Bhutanese researchers, such as Sangay Dorji (private communication, June 2002), would disagree with this number of *zhabs drung rnam thar* texts in that they also consider a passage on *zhabs drung* from a historical text entitled *lho'i chos 'byung* by *bstan 'dzin chos rgyal* (1701-1767) a seventh *rnam thar*. Further, DORJI (ibid.) suggests that part *ca* of *gtsang mkhan chen's rnam thar* could be considered as an eighth *rnam thar* text, in that it is a separate *rnam thar* on *zhabs drung* in a summary form. However, Ardussi (private communication, April 2002) disagrees with such a classification, in that *lho'i chos 'byung* is not a *rnam thar* but belongs to the *chos 'byung* literary genre. It is, though, important to underline that the work contains information on *zhabs drung*, which is not found in the earlier *rnam thar* texts. The full title and bibliographical reference of *lho'i chos 'byung* is: *lho'i chos 'byung bstan pa rin po che'i 'phro mthud 'jam mgon smon mtha'i 'phveng ba zhes bya ba'i gts'o bor skyabs mgon rin po che rgyal sras ngag dbang rnam rgyal gyi rnam thar kun gyi bde gsal bar bkod pa*, 1731-1759, written by *bstan 'dzin chos rgyal* (1701-1767), blockprint from the National Library of Bhutan, 151 folios.

¹³ Cf. Gene E. Smith: *Among Tibetan Texts: History & Literature of the Himalayan Plateau*, Studies in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism, ed. Kurtis R. Schaeffer, Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001, p. 336.

him,¹⁴ Aris (fn. 2, p. 228) describes his person as follows:

...*gTsang mkhan-chen* arrived [in Bhutan] soon after the dGe-lugs-pa triumph of 1642 because his monastery was besieged by Mongol troops. The *Zhabs-drung* received him at sPu-na-kha with great delight and tried to persuade him to take charge of a new college for philosophical logic attached to the main community. The study of logic was to be based on the teachings of Padma dKar-po, but the abbot declined and instead pursued a private life of teaching and meditation which brought him into contact with many Bhutanese disciples who would have important roles to play in the future.

This earliest source on *zhabs drung* in 312 folios and five sections (*ka-ca*) was written in c. 1675,¹⁵ and is entitled *dpal 'brug pa rin po che ngag dbang bstan 'dzin rnam rgyal gyi rnam par thar pa rgyas pa chos kyi sprin chen po'i dbyangs*.¹⁶ In the first section (*ka*), *gtsang mkhan chen* describes the background for the composition of this book. He writes that, while in Bhutan, he had a close exchange with *zhabs drung*.¹⁷ At some point, the latter suggested to him to write a *rnam thar* on his person and explained how he wanted it to be written. *Gtsang mkhan chen* agreed and what he wrote became the most important source for all the later *zhabs drung rnam thar* texts and Bhutanese historical works. It has also been referred to extensively in the research by Aris, Ardussi and Dorji.¹⁸ The text is unique, in that *gtsang mkhan chen* knew *zhabs drung* personally, was an eye-witness to several of the events, based his text on original documents given to him

¹⁴ There actually exists an undated *gtsang mkhan chen rnam thar* written by himself. Aris (fn. 2, p. 277) refers to it in his book. However, it is not translated. Its title is *bstan pa 'dzin pa'i shyes bu thams cad kyi rnam par thar pa la gus shing rjes su 'jug pa'i rtogs brjod pha rol tu phyin pa dang gzungs dang ting nge 'dzin gyi sgo mang po rim par phye ba'i gnam*.

¹⁵ Ardussi (fn. 2), footnote 4.

¹⁶ Blockprint from the National Library of Bhutan, Thimphu, 312 folios, call-no. 6606. For a discussion on the nature of this work, see Aris (fn. 2, pp. 203-204), Ardussi (fn. 2, footnote 4) and Sangay Dorji: *dpal 'brug pa rin po che zhabs drung ngag dbang rnam rgyal gyi rnam thar*, Thimphu: 'brug gzhung rdzong kha gong 'phel lhan tshogs (Dzongkha Development Commission), 1999, second revised edition, p. 2.

¹⁷ Aris (fn. 2, p. 203) is of a different opinion regarding the closeness of their relationship and writes that *gtsang mkhan chen* "was not personally very well acquainted with his subject and seems to have spent only short periods in his company."

¹⁸ Cf. fn. 2 and 16.

by *zhabs drung*,¹⁹ and, in book *ca*, directly quoted various oral statements made by *zhabs drung* himself.²⁰

The manuscript used for the following description (fn. 16) is a block-print on traditional Bhutanese rice-paper measuring 49x9 cm with seven lines of *chos skad* in *dbu can* script.²¹ Folio 1a of book *ka* contains a line-drawing of *zhabs drung* with the caption *mthu chen ngag dbang rnam rgyal la na mo*. The *zhabs drung rnam thar* consists of five separate books (*ka-ca*). Book *ka* (16 folios) is entitled *dge legs yon tan 'byung gnas dpal ldan bla ma rdo rje 'chang ngag dbang rnam rgyal gyi rnam par thar pa*. Its first part (*le'u dang po*) is a prayer (folios 3a-7a) expressing respect to *zhabs drung* (*mchod brjod*), the intention of composing the work (*brtsams par dam bca' ba*) and a detailed description of the circumstances that led to the composition of this work (*phun sum tshogs pa lnga*). Its second part (*le'u gnyis pa*, entitled *gang gi rnam par thar pa'i ring po'i gleng gzhi*; folios 7a-16b) describes how the *bla ma* as *spyang ras gzigs* generated *bodhicitta* and accumulated merit by incarnating in various ways in India (folios 7a-11b) and Tibet (folios 11b-16b) prior to his incarnation as *zhabs drung*. Book *kha* (11 folios), entitled *bar ma'i gleng gzhi padma dkar po'i rnam thar*, also called *le'u gsum pa*, contains a *rnam thar* of *padma dkar po*, the great Tibetan scholar of the *'brug pa bka' bgyud*, of whom *zhabs drung* is considered to be the immediate incarnation. It is a short account of his life and activities that includes details with regard to years and names.

With book *ga* (101 folios), called *nye ba'i gleng gzhi bod kyi skor*, begins the actual *rnam thar* of *zhabs drung*. Having first paid respect and described his sources, *gtsang mkhan chen* presents the youth of *zhabs drung* in Tibet, i.e., the period 1594-1616. He narrates his birth (*le'u bzhi pa*; folios 1b-10b), childhood and youth (*le'u lnga pa-bdun pa*; folios 10b-37a), enthronement (*le'u bgyad pa*; folios 37b-49b), monastic training (*le'u dgu pa-beu pa*; folios 49b-75b), and religious activities in *dbus* and *gtsang* (*le'u beu geig pa-beu gnyis pa*; folios 75b-101a).

Without any verses of respect or preface, *gtsang mkhan chen* continues narrating *zhabs drung's* life in book *nga* (124 folios). This part, called *nye ba'i gleng gzhi lho'i skor*, concerns his stay in Bhutan, i.e., the period 1616-1651. He describes his arrival in Bhutan (*le'u beu gsum pa*; folios 1b-14b),

¹⁹ Cf. Dorji (fn. 16), p. 2.

²⁰ Ardussi is currently working on a translation of the correspondance between *zhabs drung* and *gtsang sde srid* contained in this text (fn. 2, p. 7, and private communication, May, 2002).

²¹ The original woodblocks for *gtsang mkhan chen's zhabs drung rnam thar* were made in *spu na kha*, c. 1797-1802; cf. Ardussi (fn. 2), p.23.

his religious and political activities (*le'u bcu bzhi pa-bco bgyad pa*; folios 14b-73a), his defense against the *sde srid gtsang pa* (*le'u bcu dgu pa*; folios 73b-85a), his special protector deity (*le'u nyi shu pa*; folios 85a-96b), and his upholding of the doctrine as well as his character (*le'u nyer ge'ig pa-nyer gnyis pa*; folios 96b-123b). Book *nga* ends with a dedication and colophon, which might indicate the actual end of the entire *rnam thar*.

Book *ca* (35 folios), entitled *rdo rje 'dzin pa ngag dbang bstan 'dzin rnam rgyal gyi rnam par thar pa chos kyī sprin chen po'i dbyangs kyī snying po legs par bsdus pa bdud rtsi'i thigs pa*, begins with paying respect to all *bodhisattvas* and *zhabs drung*.²² *Gtsang mkhan chen* here summarises the *rnam thar* according to the words of *zhabs drung* himself. This part also contains an oral statement by *zhabs drung* that expresses his opinion on the 'brug pa *bka' bgyud* and the benefit it has for people. This summary contains no chapters and seems mainly to describe the worldly achievements of *zhabs drung*.

Even though, the actual *zhabs drung rnam thar* text consists of five books *ka – ca*, the National Library manuscript includes two further books, *cha* and *zha*.²³ Book *cha* (26 folios), entitled *chos kyī sprin chen po'i dbyangs kyī yan lag rnal 'byor gyi dbang phyug dpal rdo rje gdan pa'i rnam par thar pa*, is a *rnam thar* text on *mi pham tshe dbang bstan 'dzin*. The colophon (folio 26a) shows that its author was not *gtsang mkhan chen* but *dge slong 'jam dpal rgya mtsho*, who wrote it according to the words of *dpal rdo rje 'dzin pa sbyin pa'i rgyal mtshan*. This *rnam thar* does not concern *zhabs drung* but is a *rnam thar* of *tshē dbang bstan 'dzin* (1574-1643), or as *aris* writes, alias *rta mgrin rgyal mtshan*.²⁴ He was the grandson of 'brug pa *kun legs* and the father of the fourth 'brug *sde srid bstan 'dzin rab rgyas*; further, he was known to be

²² Sangay Dorji (private communication, June 2002) suggests to consider this as a separate *zhabs drung rnam thar* text. Ardussi (private communication, September 2002) thinks that this section was probably intended to be an insertion in a *gser 'phreng* (anthology), even though it contains some material not found in the parts *ga* and *nga*.

²³ Even though the added Western pagination continues through book *zha* (pp. 627-679), volume *zha* entitled *yi ge'i mdo* does not belong to the *zhabs drung rnam thar*, since it consists of a series of works on Sanskrit phonetics. In a *smoṅ lam* written in connection with the printing at the end of book *zha* (folio 27a), it is said that the woodblocks (*pa*) for this text are kept at *spungs thang bde ba can*, which is the *rdzong* in *spu na kha*. Neither the blockprint version published in India in the 1970's used by Ardussi nor the print mentioned by Martin contains the book *zha*, though they contain book *cha*; cf. Dan Martin: *Tibetan Histories: A Bibliography of Tibetan-Language Historical Works*, London: Serindia Publications, 1997, p. 109.

²⁴ Cf. *aris* (fn. 2), p. 277.

the main supporter of *zhabs drung* in Bhutan.²⁵ According to Ardussi,²⁶ he is referred to in the title as *dpal rdo rje gdan pa*, because he was the heir to the monastery called *rta mgo rdo rje'i gdan*, north of Thimphu. As the title indicates, the *rnam thar* is a *yan lag*, an annex, to the main body of the *rnam thar* of *zhabs drung*. Ardussi (ibid.) suggests that the reason for inserting book *cha* into *gtsang mkhan chen*'s work was to lend legitimacy for *bstan 'dzin rab rgyas* to be installed as the successor of *zhabs drung*.

2. *Ngag dbang rnam rgyal skabs* written by *shākya rin chen*

The second *rnam thar* text comes from the middle of the 18th century and was written by *shākya rin chen* (1710-1759). The author was born at *shar lung rud pa sems skyong* in the *dbang 'dus pho brang* district in central Bhutan.²⁷ At the age of thirteen, he became a monk in *se'u la* monastery in the *spu na kha* district, where he was recognised as a reincarnation of *gtsang mkhan chen*.²⁸ He studied with several great teachers, and in 1740, at the age of thirty, he was appointed the head abbot (*lam*) of *rta mgo* monastery in the vicinity of Thimphu. Four years later, in 1744, he was appointed to the highest ecclesiastical position in Bhutan, namely that of *rje mkhan po*,²⁹ and thus became the 9th *rje mkhan po*.³⁰ Eleven years later, in 1755, he retired as *rje mkhan po*. *Shākya rin chen* passed away in 1759 at the age of 49.

Shākya rin chen's 45 folios *rnam thar* text³¹ is entitled *dkar rgyud kyi rnam thar gser gyi 'phreng ba lta bu las dpal ldan bla ma mthu chen chos kyi rgyal po*

²⁵ Sangay Dorji (private communication, September 2002).

²⁶ Ardussi (private communication, September 2002).

²⁷ Cf. C.T. Dorji: *History of Bhutan Based on Buddhism*, Thimphu: Sangay Xam and Prominent Publishers, 1994, p. 160.

²⁸ According to the TBRC database (<http://www.tbrc.org/search/index.php?resource=P530>).

²⁹ The office of *rje mkhan po* or head abbot was initiated by *zhabs drung*, when he established the dual system of ruling called *chos srid gnyis ldan*. The position of *rje mkhan po* is the highest ecclesiastical position in the country, while worldly affairs were administered by the *'brug sde srid* or regent; cf. C.T. Dorji (fn. 27), p. 155.

³⁰ Aris (fn. 2), p. 233 and C.T. Dorji (fn. 27), p. 160.

³¹ The collected works (*gsung 'bum*) of *shākya rin chen*, vol. *ka*, pp. 403-491, Thimphu: Kunzang Tobgey.

ngag dbang rnam par rgyal ba'i skabs.³² The date of this work is unknown. *Ngag dbang rnam rgyal skabs* is found in the collected works (*bka' bum*) of the author, as the last in a series of nine *rnam thar* texts on the lineage holders of the 'brug pa bka' bgyud. All the nine texts have *dkar rgyud kyī rnam thar gser gyi phreng ba lta bu* as the beginning of their titles, which indicates that they probably were intended as a supplement to the larger collection of *bka' bgyud rnam thar* texts entitled *bka' bgyud gser 'phreng*.³³ The *bka' bgyud gser 'phreng* begins with the *rnam thar* of the Indian forefathers of the *bka' bgyud* teachings and continues with short, separate *rnam thar* texts on each of the *bka' bgyud* lineage holders.³⁴ It exists in several different recensions related to the various *bka' bgyud* sub-sects,³⁵ and *shākya rin chen* probably intended his series of *rnam thar* texts to be a supplement to the particular *bka' bgyud gser 'phreng* recension of the *rwa lung 'brug pa* lineage (*lho 'brug*), from which the Bhutanese 'brug pa bka' bgyud school stems.³⁶ The nine *rnam thar* texts written by *shākya rin chen* cover *tilli pa, na ro, mi la ras pa, ma cig grub pa'i rgyal mo, ras chung pa, phag mo gru pa, gling*

³² *dkar rgyud kyī rnam thar gser gyi 'phreng ba lta bu las dpal ldan bla ma mthu chen chos kyī rgyal po ngag dbang rnam par rgyal ba'i skabs*, 18th century, written by *shākya rin chen* (1710-1759), contained in the collected works (*gsung 'bum*) of *shākya rin chen*, vol. *ka*, Thimphu: Kunzang Tobgey, 1976, 45 folios, pp. 403-491. For an evaluation of this text, see Aris (fn. 2), pp. 204-205.

³³ According to Sangay Dorji (private interview, September 2001), *shākya rin chen* wrote his *zhabs drung rnam thar* as a continuation of the *rwa lung bka' bgyud gser 'phreng*, which finished with the *rnam thar* of *mi pham chos kyī rgyal po*, who was a student of *padma dkar po* and the grandfather and a teacher of *zhabs drung*.

³⁴ Smith (fn. 13), pp. 39-51.

³⁵ Smith (fn. 13, p. 39) mentions at least five recensions of the *bka' bgyud gser 'phreng* belonging to the 'ba' ra branch of the 'brug pa bka' bgyud, the *rwa lung* branch (*lho 'brug*) of the 'brug pa bka' bgyud, the *shangs pa bka' bgyud*, the 'bri gung bka' bgyud, and the *stag lung bka' bgyud*.

³⁶ A set of woodblocks of the *rwa lung bka' bgyud gser 'phreng* recension was later, in the years 1771-1772, cut in *spung thang* (*spu na kha*) amounting to four volumes. Volume one contains the *rnam thar* texts on *vajradhāra* till *gtsang pa rgya ras*; volume two on *lo ras pa* till *'jam dbyangs kun dga' seng ge*; volume three on *'jam dbyangs blo gyos seng ge* till *bde chen chos 'khor zhabs drung chos kyī ngon pa*; and volume four on *ngag dbang chos grags pa* till *padma dkar po* (information according to TBRC database, <http://www.tbrc.org/search/index.php?resource=W19222>). Cf. *rwa lung dkar bgyud gser 'phreng: brief lives of the successive masters in the transmission lineage of the Bar 'brug-pa Dkar-bgyud-pa of Rwa-lun, Reproduced from a set of prints from the 1771-1772 Spungs-thang xylographic blocks*, Palampur: Sungrab Nyamso Gyumphel Parkhang, Tibetan Craft Community, 1975-1978, vol. I-IV.

ras pa, dbon ras dar ma seng ge and *zhabs drung ngag dbang rnam rgyal*.³⁷

In the facsimile reprint by Topgey (fn. 37), the manuscript-folios measure 32x5 centimeters and have five lines of *chos skad* in *dbu can* script. As stated in the colophon (folio 45a) and on folio 44b, *shākya rin chen* wrote this *rnam thar* as an extract of the *zhabs drung rnam thar* by *gtsang mkhan chen*. It emphasizes the religious activities and attainments of *zhabs drung*, but does so in a respectful way without leaping into legends. The text contains no actual chapters or *sa bcad*, but is structured according to the age of *zhabs drung*, especially in the first part of the text. It provides good detail with regard to dates, names and places, and is thus very informative.

The text opens with paying respect to *zhabs drung* and expressing the intention to compose this work (folios 1b-2a). *Shākya rin chen* then narrates the birth and childhood of *zhabs drung* (folios 2a-4a) and how he was enthroned as the incarnation of *padma dkar po* (folios 4a-4b). It is told how *zhabs drung* received a great amount of *bka' bgyud* and *rnying ma* teachings as well as various general Mahāyāna teachings (folios 4b-8b). *Zhabs drung* then proceeded to the great *sa skya* center of learning, *gsang ne'u thog*, where he perfected his knowledge of Buddhist philosophy and various types of craftsmanship and arts (folios 8b-9a). It is also explained which *bka' bgyud* teachings he received from the *'brug pa* master *mi pham chos kyī rgyal po*, his tutor *lha dbang blo gros* and other teachers (folios 9a-12b). *Zhabs drung* established a new monastery with a very strict discipline, which he also adhered to himself (folios 12b-14b). His difficulties with the *sde srid gtsang pa* are then described until the point when *zhabs drung* left Tibet for Bhutan at the age of 23 (folios 14b-17b). It is described how he arrived in Bhutan, established himself there, and managed to defend himself against the *sde srid gtsang pa* (folios 17b-20a). He then went into three years of retreat and when he reemerged, he established Bhutan as his own kingdom (folio 20a sq.) It is, in particular, described how seriously he practiced meditation, recitation and study (folios 27a-30b). A list is given of the various texts he wrote (folios 30b-31b). It is then narrated how he built a number of fortresses (*rdzong*) and formed various alliances (folios 33a-39b), and it is told how he still received teachings and also himself gave teachings to various students

³⁷ These nine texts constitute the first volume (vol. *ka*) of the collected works (*gsung 'bum*) of *shākya rin chen*, which has eight volumes in total. According to Topgey, this *gsung 'bum* was carved at *shākya rin chen's* monastery *pha jo lding bya rgod phung po* after his death, and has been reprinted in a facsimile edition by Kunzang Topgey: *The Collected Works (gsung 'bum) of shākya rin chen*, vol. *ka-nya*, Thimphu, 1976.

(folios 39b-44b). In the concluding part of the text (folios 44b-45a), *shā kya rin chen* expresses his deep admiration for *zhabs drung* and explains how he composed this *rnam thar*.

3. *Rgya mtsho'i snying po rgyas pa by dge 'dun rin chen*

Besides the two older *rnam thar* texts, there exist three other texts that were written in modern times. In 1987, *dge 'dun rin chen* (1926-1997)³⁸ wrote two new *rnam thar* texts on *zhabs drung* after having been requested to do so by *jigs med sengge dbang phyug*, the present king of Bhutan.³⁹ *Dge 'dun rin chen* was a student of *ngag dbang 'phrin las* (1889-1956),⁴⁰ the 60th *rje mkhan po* (1940-1946),⁴¹ and was himself appointed as the 69th *rje mkhan po* in 1990, a post which he held till 1996. His collected works (*gsung 'bum*) were published in nine volumes in Rewalsar, India, 1985-1991.⁴²

The following description of the two *rnam thar* texts by *dge 'dun rin chen* is not, however, based on the texts taken from his collected works, but on editions published separately.⁴³ On the cover and at the beginning of both texts, the given titles are exactly the same, that is *dpal 'brug pa rin po che mthu chen chos kyi rgyal po ngag dbang rnam rgyal gyi rnam thar rgya mtsho'i snying po*. However, at the end of each chapter of the first text, the title is slightly changed and sounds *dpal 'brug pa rin po che mthu chen chos kyi rgyal po ngag dbang rnam rgyal gyi rnam thar rgya mtsho'i snying po rgyas pa*, while in the other case *dpal 'brug pa rin po che mthu chen chos kyi rgyal po ngag dbang rnam rgyal gyi rnam thar rgya mtsho'i snying po bsdus pa*. Thus, the

³⁸ The birth-date is according to Martin (fn. 23), p. 190.

³⁹ Cf. *rgya mtsho snying po rgyas pa* (fn. 42), folios 2b-3a and 221b-222a, as well as *rgya mtsho snying po bsdus pa* (fn. 42), folio 121a.

⁴⁰ According to C.T. Dorji (fn. 27). Ardussi gives the date of *ngag dbang 'phrin las* as 1916-1950; cf. John Ardussi: "The House of 'Obs-Mtsho – The History of a Bhutanese Gentry Family from the 13th to the 20th Century" in *Journal of Bhutan Studies*, vol. 2 no. 1, 2000, p. 12.

⁴¹ *Ngag dbang 'phrin las* belonged to the 'ob mtsho family and resided at *se'u la* monastery in *spu na kha*; C. T. Dorji (fn. 27), p. 187; TBRC database (<http://gamma.tbrc.org/search.php?do=single&resource=P755>).

⁴² *The Collected Works (gsung 'bum) of dge bshes brag phug dge 'dun rin chen reproduced with the permission of the author from his manuscripts*, Vol. 1-8 & 10, Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Literature Series vol. 125-129 & 171-174, Rewalsar, Distt. Mandi, Himachal Pradesh: Zigar Drukpa Kargyud Institute, 1985-1991.

⁴³ *dpal 'brug pa rin po che mthu chen kyi rgyal po ngag dbang rnam rgyal gyi rnam thar rgya mtsho'i snying po*, 1987, *dge 'dun rin chen* (b. 1926), blockprints, Thimphu, extensive version (*rgyas pa*) 222 folios, abbreviated version (*bsdus pa*) 123 folios.

author by adding the last two syllables intends to signal that the former is an extensive version (*rgyas pa*), while the latter is an abbreviated version (*bsdus pa*) of the same text. Therefore, to avoid confusion the first text that consists of 222 folios will here be referred to in short as *rgya mtsho'i snying po rgyas pa*, while the other having 123 folios as *rgya mtsho'i snying po bsdus pa*. As indicated by their title (*rnam thar rgya mtsho'i snying po*), these works are the essence (*snying po*) of the earlier *rnam thar* texts, which are compared to an ocean. Only a comparison with the earlier texts can reveal whether these works contain any additional information.

Rgya mtsho'i snying po rgyas pa has been published as an off-print or perhaps a block-print on green paper.⁴¹ The folios measure 37,5x8 cm and have six lines of *chos skad* in *dbu can* script. It has three line-drawings of *tshe dpag med* (folio 1b), *zhabs drung* (folio 2a) and a *byang chub mchod rten* (folio 222a). Its title and opening verse is ornamented with a literal Sanskrit translation in Tibetan transliteration and in *rañjana*-script, also called *lanja*-script. The text begins with paying respect (*mchod brjod*; folios 1b-2b) and explaining the condition and intention for composing this work (*brtsam par dam bca' ba*; folios 2b-3a). A preface (folios 3a-3b) explains how Buddhism never truly took root in Bhutan before the coming of *zhabs drung*. The first part of the text entitled *thog mar dge ba gleng gzhi 'khrungs rabs kyi rim pa* (folios 3b-36b) consists of chapters one and two. Chapter one (*le'u dang pa*; folios 4a-18a), entitled *ring ba'i gleng gzhi*, explains how *zhabs drung* formerly benefitted beings through various incarnations in India and Tibet. Chapter two (*le'u gnyis pa*; folios 18a-36b), entitled *bar ma'i gleng gzhi*, contains a brief *rnam thar* of *padma dkar po*, of whom *zhabs drung* was installed as the incarnation at *rwa lung* monastery in Tibet.

The second part of the text is called *bar du dge ba skyabs mgon chos kyi rgyal po'i rnam thar dngos* (folios 36b-218a) and consists of chapter 3-12. Chapter 3 (*le'u gsum pa*; folios 36b-57a), entitled *nye ba'i gleng gzhi bod kyi skor*, deals with *zhabs drung*'s childhood and youth in Tibet, and describes his monastic training in *rwa lung* monastery and elsewhere. Chapter 4 (folios 57a-79a), entitled *'dir chibs kha bsgyur nas gtsang pa'i g-yul las thog mar rgyal ba'i skabs*, narrates the event of *zhabs drung*'s coming to Bhutan in 1616 and how he took reign over Bhutan induced by various prophecies. It ends with his successful defense of Bhutan in the first attempted invasion by the *sde srid gtsang pa*. Chapter 5 (folios 79a-100b), entitled *chos srid bstan pa'i lam srol thog mar gtod tshul mdo tsam bstan pa'i skabs*, describes

⁴¹ It has no mention of publisher, date and place of publication.

the events around the death of the *sde srid gtsang pa*, how *zhabs drung* established his residence at *leags ri* and spent three years in meditation. It ends with his introduction of the doctrine of the dual system of the ecclesiastical-secular government (*chos srid gnyis ldan*) in 1626, which effectively established the state of Bhutan.

In chapter 6 (folios 100b-119b), entitled *gsang sngags zab don btab nas bla ma khag lnga'i rgol ba 'jom tshul mdo tsam bstan pa'i skabs, dge 'dun rin chen* describes how *zhabs drung* took the local deities of Bhutan under an oath of allegiance, how he built the *gsang zab* residence at *sems rtogs kha*, and how he overcame opposition from the five groups of lamas (*bla ma khag lnga*). Chapter 7 (folios 119b-140b), entitled *dbus gzhung phyogs kyī rdzong khag che chung rim par btab tshul mdo tsam bstan pa'i skabs*, shows how *zhabs drung* established various districts in central Bhutan and how he made pills and other blessed substances (*smān grub*) in *rin spungs* and *stag tshang*. Chapter 8 (folios 140b-158a), entitled *shar phyogs kyī rdzong khag rnam btab nas thugs dam la bzhuḡs pa'i bar gyi mdzad rnam mdo tsam bstan pa'i skabs*, depicts the gradual establishment of the Eastern districts and how the *'brug pa bka' bgyud* tradition spread throughout Bhutan. The chapter ends with describing how *zhabs drung* entered into final meditation (*thugs dam*) before passing away.

By the ninth chapter (folios 158a-174a), entitled *bstan rabs sprul pa'i sku 'phreng rim par byon tshul gyi mdzad rnam mdo tsam bstan pa'i skabs, dge 'dun rin chen* has finished the part dealing specifically with *zhabs drung* and begins to explain how the legacy of *zhabs drung* was continued after his passing away. Chapter 9 thus provides an outline of the various incarnation-lineages of body (*sku sprul*), speech (*gsung sprul*) and mind (*thugs sprul*) that were established after *zhabs drung*. Chapter 10 (folios 174a-190a), entitled *mḡhan rabs gser phreng rim par byon tshul gyi mdzad rnam mdo tsam bstan pa'i skabs*, depicts how the secretary of *zhabs drung*, *dam chos rgyal mtshan*, supported the *saḡgha* and mentions the successive generations in the golden line of *rje mḡhan poḡs*. Chapter 11 (folios 190a-205a), entitled *sde srid khri rabs rim par byon tshul gyi mdzad rnam mdo tsam bstan pa'i skabs*, begins by explaining how the first secular ruler (*sde srid*), *dbu mdzad bstan 'dzin 'brug rgyal*, appointed heads for each district and defined the legal code, and ends by mentioning the successive generations of the *'brug sde srid*. Chapter 12 (folios 205a-218a), entitled *bgyud 'dzin gyi rgyal po rim par byon pa rnam kyī rtogs brjod mdo tsam bstan pa'i skabs*, presents the four kings of Bhutan, who ruled since the beginning of the 20th century, as the holders of the legacy of *zhabs drung*.

Finally, the third part of the text (folios 218a-222a), entitled *tha mar dge*

ba mjug gi don bsdu te bshad pa, consists of chapter thirteen (folios 218a-219b), which contains a summary of the preceding twelve chapters of the text. The author also gives references to other modern works on Bhutanese history. This is followed by a *bstan gyi smon lam* for the 'brug pa bka' brgyud tradition (folios 219b-221b) and the colophon (*rtsom byang*, folios 221b-222a). The colophon states that this work was written by the *shākya* monk *dge 'dun rin chen* in 1987, the year 961 of fire rabbit of the 17th cycle, 337 years after the demise of *zhabs drung*, on the request of King *jigs med sengge dbang phyug* at the *gro lung* hermitage (*ri khrod*).

4. *Rgya mtsho'i snying po bsdu pa by dge 'dun rin chen*

Having written the extensive (*rgyas pa*) *zhabs drung rnam thar*, *dge 'dun rin chen* produced a shorter version (*bsdu pa*) of the same work, entitled *dpal 'brug pa rin po che mthu chen chos kyi rgyal po ngag dbang rnam rgyal gyi rnam thar rgya mtsho'i snying po bsdu pa*, in brief referred to as *rgya mtsho snying po bsdu pa*. *Rgya mtsho'i snying po bsdu pa* (123 folios) was also written in 1987. It is published as a block-print on green paper measuring 37,5x8 cm with six lines of *chos skad* in *dbu can* script.⁴⁵

The text begins with paying respect and expressing the intention to compose this work (folios 1b-2a). Thereafter follows a preface (2a-3a) corresponding almost to the preface of *rgya mtsho'i snying po rgyas pa* (in the following referred to simply as *rgyas pa*). The first chapter (*le'u dang po*; folios 3a-9a, 7 folios), entitled *thog mar dge ba gleng gchi'i don mdo tsam bstan pa'i skabs*, gives an abbreviated version of the earlier incarnations of *zhabs drung*, which in *rgyas pa* were explained in chapters 1-2 (33 folios). The second chapter (*le'u gnyis pa*; folios 9a-24a, 16 folios), entitled *bod skor bsdu te bstan pa'i skabs*, explains *zhabs drung's* childhood and youth in Tibet (corresponding to chapter 3 in *rgyas pa*, 22 folios). Chapter 3 (*le'u gsum pa*; folios 24a-43a, 20 folios), entitled *kha bzhi'i ljongs su chibs kha bsgyur nas gtsang pa'i g-yul las rgyal tshul mdo tsam bstan pa'i skabs*, corresponds to chapter 4 in *rgyas pa* (23 folios). Chapter 4 (folios 43a-62b, 20 folios), entitled *lcags rir gdan sa btab nas bstan pa'i lam srol gtod tshul gyi skabs*, corresponds to chapter 5 in *rgyas pa* (22 folios). Chapter 5 (folios 62b-74a, 13 folios), entitled *gsang sngags zab don btab nas bla ma khag lnga'i rgo ba 'joms tshul mdo tsam bstan pa'i skabs*, corresponds to chapter 6 in *rgyas pa* (20 folios). Chapter 6 (folios 74a-89a, 16 folios), entitled *dbus gzhung gi rdzong khag btab tshul mdo tsam bstan pa'i skabs*, corresponds to chapter 7 in

⁴⁵ It has no mention of publisher, date and place of publication.

rgyas pa (22 folios). Chapter 7 (folios 89a-99b, 11 folios), entitled *nub phyogs kyi rdzong khag che chung rim par btab tshul mdo tsam bstan pa'i skabs*, deals with the establishment of various districts in the Western region, which was not dealt with in a separate chapter in *rgyas pa*. Chapter 8 (folios 99b-113b, 15 folios), entitled *shar phyogs kyi rdzong khag drug btab tshul mdo tsam bstan pa'i skabs*, explains the establishment of six districts in the Eastern region, which partly corresponds to chapter 8 in *rgyas pa* (19 folios). Finally, the ninth chapter (folios 113b-121a, 9 folios), entitled *thugs dam la bzhugs pa'i mdzad rnam mdo tsam bstan pa'i skabs*, describes *zhabs drung's* entering into final meditation (*thugs dam*) before passing away. This chapter partly corresponds to the end of chapter 8 in *rgyas pa*.

On the final folios of the text (folios 121a-123b), entitled *tha mar dge ba mjug don rtsom byang dang bsngo smon gyi rim pa*, there is a colophon (folios 121a-121b), a dedication and *bstan gyi smon lam* for the success of the *'brug pa bka' brgyud*. Both the colophon and the *smo lam* correspond to the colophon and *smo lam* found in *rgyas pa* (folios 219b-222a), although their order have been reversed.

Thus, when comparing *rgya mtsho'i snying po bsdus pa* with *rgya mtsho'i snying po rgyas pa*, it becomes clear that *bsdus pa* abbreviates chapters 1-2 in *rgyas pa* considerably and retains chapter 6-7 of *rgyas pa*, although these chapters have also been shortened down a bit. *Bsdus pa* then inserts a separate chapter on the Western districts not found in *rgyas pa*, and enlarges in the form of two chapters upon the material contained in chapter 8 of *rgyas pa*. *Bsdus pa* leaves out all the material on the legacy-holders of *zhabs drung* found in chapters 9-12 of *rgyas pa* and also leaves out the summary of the text found in chapter 13 of *rgyas pa*. The concluding part of both texts is almost the same.

5. *Ngag dbang rnam rgyal rnam thar by drag shos sangs rgyas rdo rje*

The third modern *rnam thar* on *zhabs drung* was written by *drag shos sangs rgyas rdo rje*, who is currently the secretary (*drug chen*) of the Government's Dzongkha Development Commission (*'brug gzhung rdzong kha gong 'phel than tshogs*) in Thimphu. The first edition was published in 1999, while a second revised edition appeared in 2001.⁴⁶ Unlike the other *zhabs*

⁴⁶ Fn. 16; for this presentation only the revised edition has been consulted. The author (interview, September 2001) has said that the new edition only differs with regard to errata and some minor points that have been changed after receiving feedback for the first edition. No new sources have been included in the revised edition.

drung nam thar texts, this book is academical in nature, since it is based on the author's own research and contains a critical apparatus. Moreover, it includes new information from the recently uncovered manuscript being a *zhabs drung nam thar* by *ngag dbang pun da ri ka*. What else is unique about the book is that it is written in *rdzong kha*, which in itself is a relatively new phenomenon. *Rdzong kha* is one of the nineteen languages spoken in Western Bhutan.⁴⁷ Until the 1960's, as Driem explains, the term *rdzong kha* did not denote the spoken language but rather *chos skad*, which was seen as the literary form of the colloquial dialects.⁴⁸ It was first in the wake of a new formal language policy in 1961, which had the aim of safeguarding the "national identity and social unity" by officially decreeing *rdzong kha* to be the national language of Bhutan, that the colloquial form began to be used in writing and the term *dzong kha* came to denote both the spoken and the written form of the Western dialect.⁴⁹

This 399 pages long monograph by *sangs rgyas rdo rje* is entitled *dpal 'brug pa rin po che zhabs drung ngag dbang nam rgyal gyi nam thar*.⁵⁰ It is published in book format (14x21 cm) and is written in *rdzong kha* script with Western pagination. The book is richly illustrated with mostly coloured photographs depicting places and artifacts associated with *zhabs drung*. One table (p. 18) shows *zhabs drung's* genealogy on his father's side and another table (p. 56) lays out the *'brug pa bka' bgyud* transmission lineage. There is also a map (p.103) indicating the route by which *zhabs drung* entered Bhutan.

The book begins with a foreword (*ched brjod*, pp. *ka-kha*) by *blon po sangs rgyas dngos grub*, who is the chairman of the Dzongkha Development Committee. After a table of contents (pp. 1-10), the author explains the background for this book in a preface (*sugon brjod*, new pagination pp. 1-11), including a list of sources that were used for this book. The author has made use of a hitherto unknown *zhabs drung nam thar*, entitled *rgyal svas gdung 'dzin sprul sku'i nam thar sa bon tsam mdo tsam bkod pa*, which he discovered in Eastern Bhutan during his research (see below).

The first chapter (pp. 13-24), entitled *sku 'khrungs shing mtshan gsol ba*,

⁴⁷ Cf. George van Driem: *Dzongkha*, Languages of the Greater Himalayan Region vol. 1, ed. George van Driem, Leiden: Research School CNWS, 1998, p. 1.

⁴⁸ Driem (fn. 47), p. 8.

⁴⁹ Cf. Sangay Dorji: "Preface" in *rdzong kha rab gsal lam bzang*, Thimphu: rdzong kha gong 'phel lhan tshogs (Dzongkha Development Commission), 1990, p. v, and Driem (fn. 47), p. 8. For more information on the languages of Bhutan, their history, and the development of *rdzong kha*, see Driem (fn. 47), pp. 1-37.

⁵⁰ Cf. fn. 16.

describes the paternal *'brug pa* family-line of *zhabs drung*, his conception, birth in Tibet, and being named. Chapter two (pp. 25-35), entitled *'brug chen lnga par ngos 'dzin gsol ba*, describes how he was recognised as the reincarnation of the *'brug-pa* hierarch *padma dkar po* as well as the background for this lineage. Chapter three (pp. 37-56), entitled *sku yon gsan bzhes dang gdan khrir mnga' gsol ba*, tells how he received his monastic training and was enthroned at *rwa lung* monastery in Tibet. It also briefly explains the history of the *'brug pa dkar bgyud*.

In the fourth chapter (pp. 57-79), entitled *'brug yul lu chibs kha bsgyur dgo pa'i gnad don*, the author explains the background for *zhabs drung's* coming to Bhutan. He explains the political situation in Tibet at the time and how the *'brug pa* sect became divided into two camps over the question of who were to be the legitimate lineage-holder. He tells how the *sde srid gtsang pa* got involved in the quarrel and how *zhabs drung* eventually had to leave *rwa lung*. Chapter 5 (pp. 80-120), entitled *'brug rgyal khab nang phyag phebs pa*, begins by explaining the political and religious situation in Bhutan at the time, and goes on to tell how *zhabs drung* was received by the local aristocratic families.

Chapter 6 (pp. 121-138), entitled *spa ro gi gzigs bskor dang bod dmag thengs dang pa las rgyal ba*, describes *zhabs drung's* tour of the *spa ro* region and the unsuccessful invasion of Bhutan by the *sde srid gtsang pa*. Chapter 7 (pp. 139-164), entitled *sku dgya sde srid gtsang pa bsgyal ba*, explains the defeat and eventual death of the *sde srid gtsang pa*, the protector-practices performed by *zhabs drung* at *rta mgo*, and how the *sde srid gtsang pa* and his wife died. Also, an explanation of the victory-seal called *sixteen I's* (*phyogs las rnam par rgyal ba'i phyag thams nga bcu drug*) is given.

In chapter 8 (pp. 165-184), entitled *gdan sa dang pa lcags ri rdo rje gdan*, the author tells about *zhabs drung's* first monastery called *lcags ri rdo rje gdan*, and the three years of meditation-retreat, which *zhabs drung* undertook at this place. Chapter 9 (pp. 185-213), entitled *rgyal srid bzung dgo pa'i lung bstan byung ba dang gdan sa gsang sngags zab don pho brang*, describes the introduction in 1626 of the Bhutanese dual system of governance, and how *zhabs drung* gave teachings and performed rituals. It is also told how he met two Portuguese missionaries, built the first fortress at *sems rtogs kha* called *gsang sngags zab don pho brang*, and overcame local opposition from the five groups of lamas (*bla ma khag lnga*). Chapter 10 (pp. 214-227), entitled *gdung bgyud 'jam dpal rdo rje 'khrungs pa dang bod dmag thengs gnyis pa las rgyal ba*, describes the birth of his son *'jam dpal rdo rje*, the cordial relationship between *zhabs drung* and head lama of the *sa skya* sect (*sa skya bdag chen*), his monastic ordination, the Bhutanese victory in the sec-

ond war with Tibet, and *zhabs drung's* activities in the *bya rog sgang* region. Chapter 11 (pp. 228-268), entitled *dpal ldan 'brug pa'i rgyal khab*, tells about the building of *spungs thang bde chen pho brang* in *spu na kha* and *'brug dbang 'dus pho brang*, the evolution of the dual government system (*chos srid lugs gnyis*), the beginning of the third war with Tibet, the submission of *rgyal ba dpag bsam dbang po*, how *sa skya bdag chen* mediated peace between Tibet and Bhutan, and how the Tibetan government finally recognised Bhutan as an independent country. It is also explained how *zhabs drung* extended his rule over the other regions of Bhutan, received the fortress of *thim phug* called *thim phug rdo sngon rdzong*, how the *'brug pa* sect grew in importance and its teachings were spread.

Chapter 12 (pp. 269-288), entitled *bod gzhung dga' ldan pho brang pa dang 'go dang pa'i 'brel ba*, explains the diplomatic relations between Bhutan and the new Lhasa government (*dga' ldan pho brang*) in Tibet. It also explains how *gtsang mkhan chen 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan rgya mtsho* came to Bhutan and how *zhabs drung* received teachings from *padma gling pa*. The construction of the great temple at *spu na kha* (*spungs thang mgon khang chen mo*) is also narrated. It is told how the new Tibetan government began an unsuccessful war against Bhutan and how *zhabs drung* invited *dpon slob rig 'dzin snying po* to Bhutan. In chapter 13 (pp. 289-304), entitled *nub spa ro phyogs kyi mdzad 'phrin*, the author begins by describing the building of the *rin chen spungs rdzong* in *spa ro*. He tells how a series of *dgongs 'dus* ceremonies were performed as a preventive measure against foreign invasions and how *zhabs drung* received prophecies at the *stag tshang* cave outside of *spa ro*. It is also told how *zhabs drung* reconciled his opponents and formally gave up his claim to the *rwa lung* monastery in Tibet. He also writes a clarification of the invasion attempted by the Tibeto-Mongolian army. Chapter 14 (305-325), entitled *lho 'brug rgyal khab kyi mnga' thang rgya bskyed*, describes the position of the governor (*dpon slob*) of *krong gsar* and how the Eastern regions came under the control of the central government. The final Bhutanese victory in the second war with the Tibetan government is also described, and the story of the first *sgrom mchod* festival in *spu na kha* is told. Chapter 15 (pp. 326-348), entitled *dpal ldan 'brug pa'i bstan srid gong 'phel*, describes how *zhabs drung* handed over the political and religious powers to his successors and how he entered into a retreat at the end of his life. It is also told how the passing away of *zhabs drung* was kept secret for a long time, and the incarnation lineages and family-line after *zhabs drung* are mentioned. At the end of the book are endnotes (pp.349-381), a chronological table of events (pp. 382-392), bibliography (pp. 393-399) and errata (pp. 400-401).

6. *Rgyal sras gdung 'dzin rnam thar by ngag dbang pun da ri ka*

Besides the two older *rnam thar* texts and the three modern ones, there is yet another old *rnam thar* text on *zhabs drung*, briefly mentioned before.⁵¹ It was found by Sangay Dorji during a research trip to Eastern Bhutan in the late 1990's and was composed by *ngag dbang pun da ri ka*, alias *ngag dbang pad dkar* (d. 1730)⁵². Dorji (fn. 16) identifies the author as the youngest brother (*gcung*) of *chos rje ngag dbang rgyal mtshan* (1647-1732) of *se'u la* monastery (also spelled *bse'u la*) in *spu na kha*. The latter was very active in the Bhutanese religious world,⁵³ and thus his younger brother *ngag dbang pun da ri ka* was also known as *gcung rin po che*.⁵⁴

Unfortunately, it is not possible to include here a description of the text and its contents. The newly discovered text is still a codex unicus being extant in only a single handwritten manuscript kept at the *dgra med rtse* monastery in *bkra shis sgang* district.⁵⁵ What is known is that the undated *chos skad* manuscript consists of 48 folios written in *dbu can* script on Bhutanese rice-paper.⁵⁶ As for the context and research done on the text, Sangay Dorji is the only person, who has made use of the material from this text, which amounts to around 60 references in his critical apparatus. The *rgyal sras gdung 'dzin rnam thar* is said to contain new information on *zhabs drung* not found in the other sources.⁵⁷

Conclusion

This essay has provided an overview of the extant *rnam thar* texts on *zhabs drung ngag dbang rnam rgyal*. The aim of the essay has not been to compare the texts, but rather to provide a survey of the extant literature as an

⁵¹ *rgyal sras gdung 'dzin sprul sku'i rnam thar mdo tsam brjod pa*, undated, written by *ngag dbang pun da ri ka* (d. 1730), codex unicus in *dgra med rtse* Monastery, 49 folios.

⁵² Date according to Ardussi (fn. 40), p. 19.

⁵³ For a brief outline of his life, see Ardussi (fn. 40), pp. 9-10.

⁵⁴ Cf. Dorji (fn. 16), p. 6 and Ardussi (fn. 40), p. 19. The name *gcung rin po che* for *ngag dbang pun da ri ka* is, for example, attested in *lho 'brug chos 'byung* (folios 198b-199a), which presents a very brief outline of the meditation-practice done by *ngag dbang pun da ri ka* referred to as *chos rje gcung ngag dbang pad dkar* (private communication from Sangay Dorji, May 2002); cf. *dpal ldan 'brug pa'i gdul zhang lho phyogs nags mo'i ljongs kyi chos 'byung blo gsar rna ba'i rgyan*, also referred to as *lho 'brug chos 'byung*, written by *dge 'dun rin chen*, Thimphu: *rta mchog chos dbyings pho brang* (i.e. *rta ngo* Monastery), 1972, 216 folios.

⁵⁵ Dorji (fn. 16), p. 6. A photocopy is also in the possession of Sangay Dorji (interview, September 2001).

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Private interview with Sangay Dorji (September 2001).

introduction to this field by describing the author and contents of each work. Section one presented the earliest *zhabs drung rnam thar* written by *gtsang mkhan chen* in the latter half of the 17th century. The manuscript was described and the contents of books *ka-ca* were summarised. Section two contained a description of the *zhabs drung rnam thar* by *shākya rin chen* written in the middle of the 18th century. A brief discussion of its relationship to the *bka' bgyud gser 'phreng* literature was given, and its contents were summarised. Section three dealt with the extensive *zhabs drung rnam thar* by *dge 'dun rin chen* written in 1987. The text was described and its contents summarised. Section four dealt with the abbreviated *zhabs drung rnam thar* also written by *dge 'dun rin chen* in 1987. The work was summarised and compared with the extensive version. Section five dealt somewhat more extensively with the new *zhabs drung rnam thar* by Sangay Dorji, because this work is the most recent and also provides new research material. The section also gave a brief description on the usage of *rdzong kha* and a summary of the contents. Finally, section six contained a short note on the codex unicus *zhabs drung rnam thar* text by *ngag dbang pun ḍa ri ka* written in the early decades of the 18th century. Since this manuscript is still not available in publication, a summary of its contents could unfortunately not be given.

As the texts described here were not compared, it is not yet possible to give any further evaluation of their significance for further research. The research by Aris and Ardussi provides summaries of *zhabs drung's* life, but not any thorough examination thereof. Although Sangay Dorji contributes with a thorough study, his work – written in *rdzong kha* – is still to be reviewed and discussed by other scholars, particularly by scholars outside of Bhutan. This essay has thus provided just a survey, but hopefully it is a survey that can be used for reference when doing further research on these sources.

Resumé

KATE KRAGH: *Indledende bemærkninger om de bhutanesiske biografier af zhabs drung ngag dbang rnam rgyal (1594-1651).*

Artiklen giver en samlet oversigt over de bhutanesiske *rnam thar* tekster (biografier) omhandlende grundlæggeren af den bhutanesiske stat, *zhabs drung ngag dbang rnam rgyal (1594-1651)*. Indledningen indeholder en kort opsummering af *zhabs drungs* liv og en diskussion af *rnam thar* genre. Artiklens hoveddel behandler seks *rnam thar* tekster. Den tidligste tekst om *zhabs drungs* liv er skrevet af den tibetanske forfatter *gtsang mkhan chen* i ca. 1675. Den næste tekst er skrevet af den bhutanesiske forfatter *shākya rin chen*, den niende *rje mkhan po*, i midten af 1700-tallet. Disse to tidlige tekster er fulgt af to moderne værker. Det ene er skrevet af *dge 'dun rin chen*, den 69. *rje mkhan po*, i 1987, og foreligger i to udgaver: en lang version (*rgyas pa*) og en forkortet version (*bsdus pa*). Det andet er en akademisk afhandling om *zhabs drungs* liv skrevet af bhutaneseren Sangay Dorji i 1999, som udkom i en lettere revideret udgave i 2001. Sangay Dorjis afhandling baserer sig bl.a. på en hidtil ukendt tekst, en *rnam thar* skrevet i begyndelsen af 1800-tallet af *ngag dbang pun ḍa ri ka*. For hver af disse tekster gives en beskrivelse af forfatterens liv, manuskriptet og dets indholdet. Den vesterlandske forskning af *zhabs drungs* liv og den tidlige bhutanesiske historie har hidtil kun anvendt de to tidligste værker, og artiklen bidrager således ved at introducere yderligere kilder samt ved at lette brugen af disse kilder, idet den grundige indholdsbeskrivelse af hvert værk er forsynet med detaljerede sidehenvisninger.