



A SHORT COMMUNICATION ABOUT THE 1908 'BRAS LJONGS RGYAL RABS*

TASHI TSERING

Amnye Machen Institute, Dharamshala

This short communication is dedicated to the memory of my friends, Yapa Tashi Tobgye Tobden Wookja Lingpa IAS (1948–2009) of Libing Kazi¹ and to Yapa Tsering Wangchuk Barphungpa IAS (1953–2009) of Gyendzong Kazi. From 2002 onwards both of them told me constantly that after retiring from their government service, all they wanted to do was devote their lives to studying Sikkimese history and culture. They even asked me to come to Sikkim for 6 months or a year and help them carry out their projects. They planned to take a jeep or ride horses to the remotest corners of Sikkim and visit all the monasteries, *mani lhakhangs*, Khabi Longtsok and all the sacred and historical places, the Four Great Caves, and also Tashidhing and its environs. They wanted to make an inventory of their ancestral archives and to ask other Kazi families to share their documents with them. Every time I made the trip to Gangtok, we discussed all these future projects over a delicious lunch or dinner with fine home-brewed *toongpa*. Since their untimely demise, every time I visit Gangtok, I sorely miss my friends and their enthusiasm in disseminating and preserving their culture and heritage.

There is little doubt in Sikkim, among the aristocrats and learned people who are familiar with it, that the Tibetan original of the 1908 '*Bras ljongs rgyal rabs*² (Denjong Gyalrab) was the work of the 9th Chogyal, Maharaja Sir Thutob Namgyal KCIE (1860–5/12/1914) and Maharani Yeshe Dolma (Namgyal), née Lhading (1867– d. on the 30th day of the tenth month of 1910 according to the Tibetan Calendar),³ despite the text being without any indication of its authorship.

It was translated into English by Kazi Dousamdub (Dawa Samdup)

* I am most grateful to my friends Dr Roberto Vitali and Emma Martin for painstakingly editing this short communication. However, I take full responsibility for any errors that may be found herein.

1 '*Ug bya gling pa*'/'*Ug pa lung pa* are the descendents of the *Zur* lineage of the illustrious late 10th century Nyingmapa masters originally from Khams.

2 Dan Martin, *Tibetan Histories, A Bibliography of Tibetan Language Historical Works*, Serindia Publications, London, 1997, p.172.

3 See their Royal Highnesses' marriage contract in Sarat Chandra Das, *An Introduction to the Grammar of the Tibetan Language*, Calcutta, 1915, Appendix ii, pp.2–3; Alice Travers, 'Women in the Diplomatic Game: Preliminary notes on the Matrimonial link of the Sikkim Royal Family with Tibet (13th –20th century),' *Bulletin of Tibetology (BT)*, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology (NIT), Gangtok, 2006, Volume 42, No. 1 & 2., pp.98–99.



(17/6/1868–22/3/1922),⁴ a former Chief Bhutia Interpreter to the Rajshahi Commissioner and Head Master of the Bhutia Boarding School, Gangtok, under the title: *History of Sikkim, Compiled by their Highnesses the Maharaja Sir Thutob Namgyal, K. C. I. E., and Maharani Jeshay (sic) Dolma of Sikkim in 1908.*⁵ It still lies unpublished.

I Xeroxed the copy belonging to Burmiok Rinpoche Tashi Densapa in 1979. This volume consists of 216 typed foolscap pages with an additional 38 pages. The English version is more comprehensive than the Tibetan original. In the additional 38 pages, the work has sections dedicated to, “The Pedigree of Sikkim Kazis”; “Regards to the existence of the various races, tribes and castes of people of Sikkim, – their origin and how and from where and when they settled in Sikkim”; “Customs relating to marriage amongst Sikkim Bhutias”; “Pujahs for living persons for warding off evils etc.”; “The origin and history of Lepcha race” and “About the Tsong or (Limbu and Mangars)”.

4 Dasho P.W. Samdup, ‘A Brief Biography of Kazi Dawa Samdup (1868–1922)’, *BT*, Volume 44, No. 1 & 2, NIT, Gangtok, 2008, pp.155–158; W.Y. Evans-Wentz, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1960, pp.80–81.

5 A carbon copy of the History is kept at The British Library, London, in the India Office Library and Records, under the reference: MSS Eur E 78 and another copy is kept at the Manuscript Department Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University, reference: Ms 380072; also see Amar Kaur Jasbir Singh, *A guide to Source Materials in the India Office Library and Records for the history of Tibet, Sikkim and Bhutan 1765–1950*, The British Library, London, 1988, p.145. See Jo sras bkra shis tshe ring, ‘Sngon du gleng ba’i mtshams sbyor gyi gtam pu shel rtse sil ma’ in *Sbas yul ’bras mo ljongs kyi chos srid dang ’brel ba’i rgyal rabs lo rgyus bden don kun gsal me long zhes bya ba bzhugs so*, Gting skyes dgon byang mkhan po chos dbang gis brtsams, NIT, Gangtok, 2003, p.47.

Generally, the copy of the English translation was not readily available in other western libraries. For example, even Linda G. Schappert does not mention it in her *Sikkim 1800–1968: An Annotated Bibliography*, Occasional Paper No. 10, East West Center Library, East West Center, Hawaii, 1968 and neither does Julie G. Marshall in her, *Britain and Tibet 1765–1947, A Annotated bibliography of British relations with Tibet and the Himalayan States including Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan, Revised and updated to 2003*, Routledge, London, 2005. In his 1984 work, *Smash and Grab: Annexation of Sikkim* (Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi), Sunanda K. Datta-Ray demonstrates a great deal of understanding and sympathy for the Chogyal and the affairs of Sikkim. It is then somewhat surprising that Kazi Dousamdub’s English translation of the 1908 *’Bras ljongs rgyal rabs* is not included in his bibliography. Datta-Ray has been consistently reporting on Sikkim in the Indian media since 1960. During this long lapse of time he should have had opportunities to consult the works of a number of people who have quoted from Kazi Dousamdub’s English translation between 1960–1983.

All these sections are missing in the Tibetan version. Today, no one in Sikkim has any idea whether these additions were originally penned in English or translated from Tibetan. I am inclined to think that they were first written in Tibetan and then translated into English for two good reasons. Firstly, in his translation, Kazi Dousamdub writes the words “Seal of Maharaja” at the end of the 38 additional pages to indicate that the Tibetan edition was officially issued by the ruler. This was the standard practice for the British in India when translating native languages. While the seal was not usually literally translated, its presence was always recorded by the British when it came at the end of a letter or document. This particular seal was appended at the end of the additional 38 pages and not at the end of the 216 pages (therefore this was not the end of the document). These words being present at the end of the additional section in the English version are proof that the sections were originally written in Tibetan.⁶

Secondly, given that the Sikkimese royal family was not happy with H. H. Risley’s (editor) *The Gazetteer of Sikkim*, (1894),⁷ the royal couple went on to write their own account. The Sikkimese royal family did not want to reinforce any lingering misunderstandings with the British India government due to the discord and intrigues of the Khangsar Dewan (Dronnyer Lhundrup) and his brother Phodang Lama (Khangsar) Karma Tenkyong along with two other Sikkimese dignitaries from Aden Butso families, Shew Dewan (Sholdron Phurbu) and Cheebu Lama (Tsidron Aden).

Another underlaying reason for writing the 1908 *’Bras ljongs rgyal rabs* was the uneven treatment of a number of the genealogies of certain Sikkimese Kazis in *The Gazetteer of Sikkim* (1894). The *Gazetteer* concentrates more on the Aden Butso families, e.g. the Garmipa Tendook—Gar mi Don grub dpal ’byor, later, Raja Tendook Pulger (?-1902)⁸—and Cheebu Lama family, and does not give details about the Barphung Butso,⁹ and other leading families. The intentions of the Sikkimese royal family with regard to those extra sections was to definitely set the record straight.

In my opinion, the most important reason or factor behind compiling the 1908 *’Bras ljongs rgyal rabs* was that both their Highnesses witnessed first–

- 6 It is tempting to suggest that the descendents of the Kazi Dousamdub in Sikkim and Bhutan may have the complete version of the 1908 *’Bras ljongs rgyal rabs*.
- 7 See also Sarat Chandra Das, ‘History of Sikkim’, *Journal of the Buddhist Texts Society of India*, Calcutta, 1896, Appendix 2, pp.vi-xvi.
- 8 *Family History of Raja Tenduk Pulger (Clan: Adenpuso)* by Yapa Dr Tsewang Tenduk Pulger (unpublished manuscript) p.12. I am most grateful to him for generously sharing his work with me before publication.
- 9 To the best of my knowledge, today the most senior patriarch of Barphung Butso clan is Yapa Jigdal Tenpe Gyaltzen Densapa (b.1928).



hand the 1888 and 1903–1904 Anglo–Tibetan Wars in Tibet. The Royal couple also suffered much hardship themselves, including maltreatment and detention, between 1887–1905. By 1908 they realised that the Tibetan government regarded them as *'Bras ljongs mgo gnyis pa* (two–faced) and mistrusted them. So, it was much more advantageous for them to whole–heartedly be a protectorate state of the British India government and cut off their relations with Tibet and remotely China too. In doing so the Royal couple wanted to demonstrate how sincere they were, they wanted to start a new relationship on a friendly footing with the Political Officer, Sikkim, the Commissioner of Rajshahi Division, the Commissioner for Darjeeling, the Governor–General of Bengal and finally, the Viceroy of India.

I assume that the Sikkimese Royal family did not keep their documents properly after 1908, and in addition to this, members of the Sikkimese Royal family and other leading Kazi families who received their education in India and abroad, in the 20th century had no interest in learning Tibetan or details about their heritage. They were rather busy pursuing Western culture, hence the loss of the original appendices to the 1908 *'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs*.

One or two page from the genealogical tree regarding Chogyal Tsugphud Namgyal (1785–1863) were also lost in the Tibetan original. In the 1908 *'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs* there is a sentence which says: “mi rabs kyi sdong bu dpe’u ris bkod pa ltar yin”, but the genealogy does not follow.

Kazi Dousamdud added notes for two purposes: to clarify certain points and to attest to activities in which he was actually involved. His translation in English contributes considerably to identifying all the foreign individuals and place names correctly. For example War Saheb is White Sahib (John Claude White 1853–1918) and Dpal Saheb is Paul Sahib (Mr. A.W. Paul d.1912).

In 1909 the Political Officer, Sikkim, Charles A. Bell, Esq., ICS reported: “His Highness the Maharaja and the leading kazis and lamas are writing a History of Sikkim, which Kazi Dowsamdud, the Head Master of the Bhutia Boarding School, is translating into English. This book is likely to be of some interest and to throw some light on the earlier history of the country and its relations with its neighbours, Nepal, Tibet and Bhutan.”¹⁰

Emma Martin of Liverpool’s World Museum who is familiar with Sir Charles Bell’s collection and his activities in Tibet, Sikkim and Bhutan observes

10 India Office Library and Records, The British Library, London, IOR/V/23/87 No 440 – Charles Bell, *Administration Report of the Sikkim State for 1908–09* (Foreign Dept serial no. 175). Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1909, Chapter 9, Miscellaneous, p.9. I am grateful to Emma Martin for bringing this to my attention.



concerning his private diaries and notebooks: “Bell had only come into the post of Political Officer, Sikkim in 1908 and in the early period of his tenure his notebooks particularly, but also his diaries, show him collecting intelligence on the Sikkimese Royal family and also the Sikkimese landlords and monastic leaders. He speaks to the Maharaj Kumar, Sidkyong Tulku regularly during this period, but there is not even one occasion that shows the conversation turning to the writing of the *'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs*. Bell was a diligent note keeper and diarist and so it would be highly surprising that if the writing of the *'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs* came up in conversation that Bell would not record it. I have no doubt if it had arisen in conversation that he would have made notes, as this would have been an important source of historical data for a Resident based in Sikkim and would also have been an interesting piece of intelligence to record for future notes to the Political Department of the Government of India”.¹¹

Yet again in 1910 Bell officially reports that the “The history of Sikkim, which is being prepared under the direction of His Highness the Maharaja, is not yet complete.”¹²

Much later Sir Charles Bell made detailed inquiries about the work. I append here three letters written by Rai Sahib (later, Rai Bahadur) Lobzang Chhoden (1871–d. on the twelfth day of the seventh month of 1935 according to the Tibetan calendar) for Sir Charles Bell, one written by request in 1916 and two in 1934.

[1] Gangtok
25.12.1916.

Sir,

In obedience to your verbal enquiry the other day, asking me, if I knew what were the authentic books, and other sources of authority on which the newly compiled Sikkim History was based, I beg to inform your Honor that to the best of my recollection and knowledge, the undernoted books, were the authorities cited to establish the ancestral line of the Sikkim Maharajas, and to trace it right up to the Sakya Race. But about the real history of Sikkim after the line of Maharajas had been established, old Sanads, letters, Deeds of Grant etc etc in the possession of every one in Sikkim were called up and returned after reference. For more recent events, several old people living (sic) were invited and asked to narrate what they knew personally in their times.

11 Email correspondence, “History of Sikkim Information” from Emma Martin on 11th February 2012.

12 The British Library, India Office Library and Records, IOR/V/23/88, No 446-*Administrative Report of the Sikkim State for 1909–1910*, (Foreign Dept serial no. 180). Superintendent Government Printing, Calcutta, 1910, Chapter 9, Miscellaneous, p.7.

The History of Sikkim was compiled by the late Maharaja, Sir Thutob Namgyal and the late Dowager Maharani, Yeshey Dolma, with permission of Mr. J. C. White, I think. I was then working in the Agency office.

The object of writing the History, I understand from the late Maharani, was to clear up some misunderstanding that was created by some of the old Kazis of those days, between some high British officials and the Raj family and also to remove some discrepancies in Mr. Resley's (sic) Sikkim Gazetteer in connection with the old history of the line of Raj family.

The materials of the history were gathered from some old books of Lhatsun Chemo and old records collected from different monasteries and people and also from oral information's gathered from old Sikkim folks.

The actual writing of the history was done by the late old Yangthang Kazi, Burmiok Lama and some Lamas of Phodang and other monasteries. The late Dowager Maharani herself also participating in it to a large extent.

I remain

Sir

Yours obediently

Lobzang Chhoden

Rai Bahadur

[3] Gangtok, Sikkim.

The 9th April 1934.

To

Sir Charles Bell, K.C.M.G.

Bellevue Hotel, Darjeeling.

Dear Sir,

Kindly refer your honour's letter of 29th March last. As far as I remember Their late Highnesses the Maharaja and Maharani took upon themselves to write the History of Sikkim primarily with object of supplying certain deficiencies in Mr. Resley's (sic) report in his Sikkim Gazetteer.

Your views about the Tibetan custom of writing any important report appears to be correct, and I have no doubt but that this custom was largely followed by Their Highnesses. From information gathered by me, it appears that Their Highnesses called up a meeting of some Kazis, Lamas and old folks in the big Durbar Hall of the old Palace, to examine old records and books dealing with scraps of historical events of Sikkim. These scraps were collected and put in historical form by the combined efforts of Their Highnesses and others gathered at the meeting, which was



continued for several days. The actual writing of the History was entrusted to the late Yangthang Kazi and Barmiok Lama, both Tibetan Scholars of repute, who had their composition corrected and approved by Their Highnesses from time to time.

I also understand that after the completion of the work in Sikkim, it was sent up to Tering Raja for further correction, before the History was finally accepted in its present form.

Thanks. I am much better now and have rejoined to my work from the 17th of March last.

With respects,

Yours obediently,

Lobzang Chhoden

9.4.34

(Rai Bahadur)¹⁴

In the first letter from Rai Bahadur Lobzang Chhoden, he mentioned nine sources for the writing of the 1908 '*Bras ljongs rgyal rabs*. Time and space do not allow me to discuss at length each of these sources but I can not help making a couple of remarks here. (1) *Bod kyi rgyal rab (sic) rnam thar* is a very generic title and it is not clear at all, which rgyal rabs and rnam thar he is referring to. Secondly, (4) *Bod gzhung yig tshang gi deb tho*, I think this is just an assumption. At that time the Sikkimese royal couple would have had absolutely no access to the Tibetan Government's official documents. Most probably it means all the proclamations/edicts from the Tibetan Government and copies of the petitions and letters were sent by the Sikkimese royal family to the Tibetan Government. Finally, (5) *Dgongs 'dus* (6) *Lun bstan gsal ba'i sgron me*. It is tempting to suggest that these two mean the *Bla ma dgongs 'dus lun bstan bka' rgya ma* of Terton Sanggye Lingpa (1340–1396) which has a sizeable account or guide book to the hidden land of Sikkim.¹⁵ In short if time permits someone should read the 1908 '*Bras ljongs rgyal rabs* carefully and find the sources they have used.

Again, in the letters of Rai Bahadur Lobzang Chhoden it says that while writing the 1908 '*Bras ljongs rgyal rabs* their Highnesses collected all the

14 'List of Authorities on which the Maharaja and Maharani of Sikkim's History of Sikkim is founded'. British Library, India Office Records, Mss Eur F80/28 and Mss Eur F80/158 1916 and 1934. My heartfelt thanks go to Emma Martin for supplying me with photocopies of these three letters. Also see *Tibetan Catalogue* by E. Gene Smith, Volume ii, University of Washington, Seattle, 1969, pp.189–190.

15 See Collected, Compiled and Edited by Tashi Tsering, *Collected Guides of the Sacred Hidden Land of Sikkim*, (Mkha' spyod 'bras mo ljongs kyi gnas yig phyogs bsdebs bzhugs), Published by NIT, Gangtok & Amnye Machen Institute, Dharamshala, 2008, pp.166–236.



available records, old Sanads, letters, Deeds of Grant in the possession of every one in Sikkim, which were then returned after they had been referred to. In the case of the archives from Phodang monastery, Densapa (Burmiok Kazi) and the Yangthang Kazi family, these can now be easily accessed using the facsimile reprint in Dieter Schuh and L. S. Dagyab, *Urkunden, Erlasse und Sendschreiben aus dem Besitz sikkimesischer Adelshauser und des Klosters Phodang*, published in West Germany in 1978.¹⁶

Five prominent personalities are mentioned in Rai Bahadur Lobzang Chhoden's letters. Maharani Yeshe Dolma (1867–1910) seems to be the main driving force behind the project to write the 1908 'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs. She was a person of letters and an astute politician. Burmiok Athing once told me that when the British Political Officer, Sikkim used to invite the Maharaja Sir Thutob Namgyal either to his Residence or his Office, the Maharani, busy doing the Maharaja's hair, would gently whisper in his ear enquiring about the reasons for the invitation and would advise her husband on political matters.

John Claude White, CIE., who was Political Officer, Sikkim from 1889 to 1908, has this to say about the Maharani Yeshe Dolma: "He (Maharaja Sir Thutob Namgyal) was entirely under the influence of the Maharani, his second wife. This lady, the daughter of a Tibetan official in Lhasa, is a striking personality".... "She is extremely bright and intelligent and has been well educated, although she will not admit that she has knowledge of any language but Tibetan. She talks well on many subjects, which one would hardly have credited her with knowledge of, and can write well. On the occasion of Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee, she personally composed and engrossed in beautiful Tibetan characters the address presented by the Sikhim Raj, which runs as follows:

To the most exalted and beautiful white lotus throne of Empress Victoria—the incarnate—Sri Devi—the glorious Goddess—who has been ruling and conducting the affairs of the great Empire, being Victorious in every quarter of the globe by the dint of her accumulated virtues and merits.

"The Memorial.

"Gracious Majesty,

"From the ocean of merits has sprung your glorious self, whose fame has spread all round the world like the rays of the sun. Your Majesty's reign in respect of Government, defence, of light, and in increase of prosperity has been perfect.

¹⁶ Monumenta Tibetica Historica, Abreilung iii. Band 3, VGH Wissenschaftsverlag—St. Augustin.



“It is our fervent prayer that Your Majesty’s glorious reign may with fame encompassing the world, extend to many happy years more.

“This humble vassal being extremely happy, with all his subjects, has been rejoicing at the Jubilees of Your Majesty’s reign, and prays that Your Majesty shedding lustre of good, just and benign rule, shall sit on the throne for a hundred great periods of time.

“With a pure white scarf, to represent the sincerity of wishes.”¹⁷

Her disposition is a masterful one and her bearing always dignified. She has a great opinion of her own importance, and is the possessor of a sweet musical voice, into which she can, when angry, introduce a very sharp intonation. She is always interesting, whether to look at or to listen to, and had she been born within the sphere of European politics she would most certainly have made her mark, for there is no doubt she is a born intriguer and diplomat” “Her common sense and clear-sightedness were on many occasions of the greatest assistance to me in my task of administering and developing Sikhim, and when I had various schemes before her she was quick to see the material advantages to be obtained and gave her support accordingly”.¹⁸

17 ཨྲཱུགས་ཐམས་ཅད་ལས་རྣམ་པར་རྒྱལ་བའི་བསོད་ནམ་ (ནམས་) དཔུངས་ (དཔུང་) བའི་སྟོབས་ཀྱི་ (ཀྱིས་) རྒྱལ་སྲིད་གསེར་གྱི་ཤིང་རྟའི་ལ་ལོ་བསྐྱར་བར་མཛད་པ་དཔལ་ལྷན་ལྷ་མོའི་རྣམ་པར་སྐྱུལ་པ་གཞུང་མ་རྒྱུ་ཉི་ལྷ་འདུར་ (རྒྱར་) ཆེན་མོ་མཚོགས་གི་རབས་ (རབ་) དཀར་ཀྱ་སྐྱུང་རྣམ་པར་བཟུ་བའི་སྲིད་པ་དུ། ལྷ་གསོལ། དང་བསོད་ནམ་ (ནམས་) རྒྱ་མཚོའི་རྒྱ་གཏེར་ལས་འཁྲུངས་པའི་མངོས་སྐྱུ་ཤེལ་གྱི་དབང་པོ་ཉི་གཞོན་སྟོང་གིས་འཁྲུང་པ་ལྷར་མཚན་དཔེའི་གཟེ་བྱིན་རབས་དུ་ (རབ་དུ་) འབར་བཞིན་མི་འཇིག་ (འཇིགས་) རྒྱལ་སྲིད་ཀྱི་ཁྲི་འཕང་མཐོན་པོར་འཇིན་སྦྱོངས་ (སྦྱོང་) སྤེལ་གསུམ་མཐར་ཕྱིན་གྱི་ལོ་གངས་དུ་མར་འཇིན་བཞུགས་ཀྱི་སྐྱོན་པའི་སྐྱ་དབྱུངས་ཀྱན་དུ་བྱབས་ (བྱབ་) ཅིང་བཞུགས་འཇགས་ནི་ཐུགས་རྗེ་དང་བཀའ་དྲིན་ཤིན་དུ་ནས་ཆེ། སྤན་ཀྱང་དགའ་བ་དཔག་མེད་བྱུང་བའི་སྐྱེད་ཆར་ཡང་ཞབས་པད་ལྷན་བཞུན་དུ་འཚོ་ཞིང་ཆབས་ (ཆབ་) འབངས་ཡོངས་ལ་དགའ་སྟོན་བདེ་སྦྱིད་ཀྱི་དཔལ་དུ་སྦྱོད་ཚོག་པའི་མཛད་འཇིན་བཟང་པོ་ཉི་འོད་ཀྱན་དུ་བྱབས་ (བྱབ་) ཅིང་གསེར་ཁྲིར་བསྐྱལ་བརྒྱར་འཚོ་བཞུགས་ཡོངས་ (ཡོང་) བའི་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་གྱིས། གཟེགས་རྟེན་རབས་ (རབ་) དཀར་ལྷ་ལོས་བཅས་སྐང་ཏོག་པོ་བྱུང་ནས་འབྲས་ལྗོངས་རྒྱལ་པོ་མཐུ་སྟོབས་རྣམ་རྒྱལ་ནས་མེ་བྱ་ལྷ་ ༡ ཆོས་བཟང་པོར་སྤུལ།

Many thanks to Emma Martin for locating this letter and procuring a copy for me. It is to be found in The British Library, India Office Records, Mss Eur G55. Addresses, on loan from the Royal Collection, chiefly to Queen Victoria on her Golden and Diamond Jubilee, and to George V on his visit to India. No.54. Diamond jubilee address in Tibetan to Queen Victoria from the Maharaja of Sikkim. 1897. Please see the facsimile of the said letter on page 61 of this volume.

18 *Sikhim and Bhutan*, Vivek Publishing House, Delhi, 1971, (first edition 1909), pp.22–24.

This short, positive evaluation coming from a late 19th century English colonial officer about a woman, and moreover a native Maharani is unusually bold.

Concerning the other four prominent personalities involved in the book, Yangthang Kazi should be identified as Yangthang Athing Namkha Gyatsho (1870–?) and Burmiok Lama as Burmiok Jedrung Karma Palden Choegyal/Banyak Tulku Kunsang Tenpai Nyima (b. on the sixteenth day of the sixth month of 1871 according to the Tibetan calendar–25/3/1942). The second letter also says that some Lamas of Phodang and other monasteries were involved in the writing. Among the Lamas of Phodang, the one who was most probably involved was Phodang Lama Tenpa Gyaltzen (?–1914) and it is also likely that Radugpa Sherab Gyatsho, the Council of Pema Yangtse monastery and Donsang, the Chikhyab of the Ralang Monastery were involved too. In the third letter from Rai Bahadur Lobzang Chhoden, he says “Their Highnesses called up a meeting of some Kazis, Lamas and old folks in the big Durbar Hall of the old Palace”. It is tempting to suggest that the following Kazis were involved: Burmiok Athing Tenzin Wangyal (1845–1926), Lasso Athing Donsang (?–22/12/1923), Big Zithang Yapa Dogyal, Maling Yapa Drukdrak, Maling Athing Rigzin Namgyal (?–1/11/1923), Namtse Yapa Tenzin Wangyal, Garmi Kumar Palden, Libing Athing Apo, Munshi Konchok Gyalpo, Enchay Athing, Yangthang Yapa Yishin Wangyal, Taten Athing Norsang, Garmi Yapa Apang, Libing Yapa Atob, Maling Yapa Rabten, Tsidrung Namnag and Yapa Chodrub. These dignitaries were photographed with Chogyal Tashi Namgyal after his coronation in 1916.

Terang Raja was none other than Taring Raja Tsodrak Namgyal (1878–1946?), elder brother of Maharaja Sidkyong Tulku (1879–1914). The Government of India conferred the title of Raja upon him in 1922. It is widely believed by the present older Sikkimese Kazis that Yangthang Athing was exceedingly dominant (*kha shugs*) in compiling the 1908 *'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs*.

There are two surprising aspects. Burmiok Lama was a close confidant, and a most able and resourceful advisor to Bell, but the British officer chose not to ask Burmiok Lama about the 1908 *'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs*. Moreover, Bell collected many Tibetan books, particularly those historical and legal, but he does not seem to have collected a copy of the 1908 *'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs*, in the original Tibetan, certainly he did not reference it in his published works.

On closer inspection, there is evidence that Bell did have access to the English version of the 1908 *History of Sikkim* as he quotes from it verbatim in a government memo the list of gifts received from the Tibetan government for the installation of Thutob Namgyal in 1874.¹⁹

19 See, NAI, Foreign Department, Internal June 1916, Nos 122-134 Part A and

However, despite this lack of referencing it seems he intended to quote from the English translation extensively in a typed book that he wrote towards the end of his life (undated). Within the pages of this manuscript he uses the *History of Sikkim* verbatim in his chapters on the Lepcha people. In addition, when discussing the Himalayas Bell notes, ‘But why attempt to describe the indescribable? in the history of Sikkim compiled partly by the Maharaja, but in great measure also by his talented spouse there is, indeed a long description’.²⁰

The original Sikkim Palace copy of the 1908 *’Bras ljongs rgyal rabs* was in *dbu can* script (the book being in the *lteb mgo ma* style), wrapped in yellow *mdzod gos* brocade is lost.²¹

The present Tibetan version of the 1908 *’Bras ljongs rgyal rabs* comes from the collection of Rai Bahadur Burmiok Athing Tashi Dadul Densapa OBE (14/3/1902–22/2/1988), Burmiok Athing had two different copies. The first one was inherited from Rai Bahadur (Tsidron) Yanggang Orgyen Gyatsho (1851–22/5/1915). At the bottom of that copy there is the signature of Rai Bahadur Yanggang Orgyen Gyatsho, dating to 1911. The copy is written in *tshugs ma ’khyug* script on a register/ledger book and was wrapped in Bhutanese paper.

The second one was copied in 1951 on a register book in *’khyug* script. It has 166 pages mostly with 32 lines.²² This is the copy I found in December 2002 rather than Rai Bahadur Yanggang Orgyen Gyatsho’s copy, which Yapa Jigdal T. Densapa wanted me to trace at that time from his father’s collection. He wished to pass it to HM the Royal Grandmother, Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck (b. 1930).

There are rumours that another copy of the 1908 *’Bras ljongs rgyal rabs* is with the Yangthang Yapa la family. Captain Yongda once told me that the late Chogyal secretly sent him a copy of the 1908 *’Bras ljongs rgyal rabs* in *dbu can* through a Palace butler, a Bengali, while the captain was in detention in 1975. Captain Yongda returned it to the palace after reading it.

History of Sikkim, p.101. I am grateful to Emma Martin for bringing this to my attention.

20 See, British Library, India Office Records, Mss Eur F80/218. Many thanks to Emma Martin for pointing out this reference to me.

21 Communication with Queen Dowager of Sikkim, Kunsang Dechen Tshomo (Namgyal) née Dhokhar (1905–1987), on 7th December 1982 in Dharamshala.

22 I included this version in the revised catalogue of Burmiok Athing’s collection in 1979. Its accession number is Ka 30 and the tentative title is “’Bras ljongs rgyal rabs: Sbas pa’i yul mchog ’dir dge bcu’i khirms kyis skyong ba’i chos kyil rgyal po rim pa dag gi gdung rabs ’phreng ba tshar du dngar ba mams yig mying dang rgan rabs kyil gna’ gtam dag las ’thor bsdus kyil tshul du bkod pa”. The first inventory of Burmiok Athing’s collection at Cherry bank was compiled by Chodpon Lama Jamyang Lodoe of Jamyang Khyentse Chokyi Lodoe (1893–1959) in the early 1960s.

I have come to the conclusion that the 1908 'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs is rare and is owned only by elite and interested Sikkimese families. In 1983 Pema Rinzin Takchungdarpa wrote 'Bras ljongs chags rabs (for Bhutia Rapid Reader for class ix and x of the Central Board of Secondary Education, Delhi) in Lho skad. In the preface written by N. Tshering J. D. then the consultant for the text book it states that Takchungdarpa did a good job of translating the works of (phab bsgyur) Sikkimese history. I read this as the author only having access to some of the English materials and therefore only these were translated into Lho skad. In short the author did not have access to or make use of the original 1908 'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs.

The present Sikkim Palace copy of the 1908 'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs was scribed either in 1961 or 1962 by Drungyig Tenzin Namgyal and Lama Kyab from H. H. the 16th Gyalwang Karmapa's Rumtek Monastery after the Burmiok Athing copy at the behest of the Crown Prince (later 12th Chogyal) Palden Thondup Namgyal OBE, Padma Vibushan (22/5/1923–5/2/1982). This version was in 'khyug script and has 135 pages with 32 lines each. Sampho Jigme Rinpoche, the brother-in-law of the late Chogyal, proofread it.

The Tibetan version of the 1908 'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs was quoted for the first time as 'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs (Chronicles of Sikkim) in 1967 in Tsepon W. D. Shakabpa's (1907–1989) *Tibet: A Political History*.²³ Later it was again mentioned in his much enlarged Tibetan version, *Political History of Tibet* by W.D. Shakabpa.²⁴

Both Tibetan and English versions of the 1908 'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs are without a title. This is reported for the first time in the Tibetan version of Tsepon Shakabpa's *Political History of Tibet*. The work is referred to as *Mkha' spyod 'Bras mo ljongs kyi rgyal rabs gsal ba (bar?) bkod pa dwangs shel me long*²⁵

23 New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1967, pp.147, 160, 196, 210, 335.

24 Shakabpa House, Kalimpong, 1976, Volume i, p.551, and Volume ii, pp.89, 91, 113, 617. See the English translation, *One Hundred Thousand Moons, An advanced Political History of Tibet*, Volume 1 & 2 by Tsepon Wangchuk Deden Shakabpa, Translated and annotated by Derek F. Maher, Brill, Leiden, 2010. See the book review by Jamyang Norbu 'Shakabpa and the awakening of Tibetan History' posted on December 6, 2011 at www.jamyangnorbu.com.

25 *Political History of Tibet, Bod kyi srid don rgyal rabs*, Volume ii, p.617. An important point to note here is that when I saw the two different versions or copies of the 1908 'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs at Cherry Bank, Burmiok Athing's residence in Gangtok, both copies were wrapped in the Bhutanese paper ('Brug shog) and on the front cover of the books there was no title. I did not open the wrapping to see whether there was a proper title on the book itself, but probably there was a title beneath the wrapping. If one may suggest, did Tsepon Shakabpa coin the said title? After all, Burmiok Athing had generously shared with him many rare Tibetan historical and biographical texts between c.1956–75, which Shakabpa readily acknowledges. If at some point someone could see the Yangthang Kazi family's copy or the descendents of Kazi Dousamdup's

Burmiok Athing told me in 1976 that Rani Chonyi Wangmo Dorji (1897–26/3/1994) (Younger sister of the 11th Chogyal, Maharaja Sir Tashi Namgyal KCSI, KCIE 26/10/1893–2/12/1963) of Bhutan House (Migyur Ngonge Phodrang), of Kalimpong made a copy of the 1908 '*Bras ljongs rgyal rabs* from the Athing collection. I myself saw a letter from the Rani, addressed to Athing la thanking him for letting her copy the history. In her letter she also spells out her displeasure for the indiscriminating logging of the forests and the ubiquitous construction of roads, which were spoiling the sacred geomancy of Sikkim and adjacent areas.

Between March 1976 and March 1979, Burmiok Athing loaned many books to me but he did not let me either have or take notes from the 1908 '*Bras ljongs rgyal rabs*. He thought it was too sensitive at that time, so soon after the annexation of Sikkim into India. His two different copies were not kept with the rest of his collection. During more peaceful times, Burmiok Athing was happy to share both the original Tibetan and its English translation with the young Japanese scholar Chie Nakane (b.1926) sometime between 1955–1965.

The English translation of the 1908 '*Bras ljongs rgyal rabs* was updated in English up to 16th May 1975 by a son of Rai Bahadur Lobzang Chhoden (1871–1935) of Lingmo House, Yapa Dorji Dahdul Sangpodar (i.e. Zhang po dar) (?/7/1912–28/2/1990), former Chief Secretary of the Government of Sikkim, under the title: *Sikkim–The Hidden Land of Rice*, Lingmo House, Gangtok, 1979. It has 447 typed foolscap pages.²⁶ Lingmo Yapa la updated the genealogical tree of the Sikkimese Kazis and leading political families from 1908 to 1975 in a remarkably complete manner! His work still lies unpublished. A prompt publication of this work written by an author who was an especially keen observer of the events unfolding in front of his eyes is highly recommended. He was the witness of all the political phases in the history of modern Sikkim even after its annexation into the Indian confederation. He inherited written sources and oral accounts concerning secular Sikkim from his family records and this is why he was one of the most competent specialists in assessing the late events taking place in his land.

In the mid 1990s, Dr Michael V. Aris (1946–1999) of Scotland was interested in finding a copy of the original 1908 '*Bras ljongs rgyal rabs* and wished to work

copy, maybe then we will solve the puzzle once and for all.

26 I had heard of such a work back in 1979, but I did not try to get hold of it. Years later upon enquiring, Tenzin Chuki Tashi (Sem Tina la) showed me a copy of this unpublished document in December 2002. I am most grateful to Agya Sonam Wangdi, IAS (Retd.), former Chief Secretary of Sikkim for generously giving me a photocopy of this rare manuscript in October 2008. I am also indebted to Dr Khenpo Chowang for giving me in December 2003 a photocopy of the same history, which he painstakingly copied in his beautiful handwriting.

on it. He was most probably doing so at the behest of HM the Royal Grandmother, Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck.

In the early 2000s the 13th Chogyal Tenzin Wangchuk Namgyal (b. 1/4/1953) sent a photocopy of the Sikkim Palace copy to Bouddha, Kathmandu, and had this inputted into a computer by Amdo Gomang Computer Centre. It was finally published as *'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs*, Chos rgyal mthu stobs rnam rgyal dang Rgyal mo ye shes sgröl ma gnyis nas rtsom sgrig mdzad, Chief Trustee, The Tsuklakhang Trust, Tsuklakhang, Gangtok, Sikkim, First Published: 2003. This lengthy text (it counts has 391 pages),²⁷ is unfortunately marred by the publisher's censorship and inaccurate punctuation on almost every page, which makes this edition rather objectionable.

In 2003, Dr Khenpo Chowang of Tingkye Gonpajang, a Professor of the Nyingma Shedra in Gangtok, compiled a History of Sikkim in Tibetan, making good use of the 1908 *'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs* and its English translation by Kazi Dousamdub, plus the 1979 *Sikkim—The Hidden Land of Rice*. His book (in 402 pages) was published in the same year by the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok and is entitled *Sbas yul 'Bras mo ljongs kyi chos srid dang 'brel ba'i rgyal rabs lo rgyus bden don kun gsal me long zhes bya ba bzhugs so*, Gting skyes dgon byang mkhan po chos dbang gis brtsams.

27 Once the Sikkim Palace copy was published, scholars started quoting from it. Rigzin Ngodup Dokhampa, 'Sbas yul 'Bras mo ljongs: The Hidden Valley of Sikkim', *BT*, NIT, Gangtok, May 2003, p.86; Saul Mullard, 'Brag dkar bkra shis sdings kyi sku'bum: The text, the author, the Stupa and its importance in the formation of religious polities in Sikkim', *BT*, NIT, Gangtok, May 2003, Volume 39, No.1., p.22; Tsultsem (Tshultrim) Gyatso Acharya, 'A short biography of four Tibetan Lamas and their activities in Sikkim' *BT*, NIT, Gangtok, November 2005, Volume 41, No. 2., p.74; Blo bzang Shastri, 'Rgyal ba thams cad mkhyen pa sku phreng rim byon dang sbas yul kun gyi rgyal po mkha' spyod 'bras mo ljongs: dus rabs 17 nas 20 bar', in Tashi Tsering and Chab ngom Tenpa Nyima (eds.), *Buddhist Himalaya: Studies in Religion, History and Culture, Volume III: The Tibetan Papers*, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok 2011, pp.53–92 and Jo sras bkra shis tshe ring, 'A short note on the visit of Gter ston Rdo rje 'gro 'dul of Rgyal rong in 1880–1881 during the reign of the 9th Chos rgyal Maharaja Sir Mthu stobs rnam rgyal (1860–1914) K.C.I.E. and that of Mdo mang gter ston Bde chen rdo rje gling pa of Brag mgo, Tre hor, Khams in c.1925–1928 during the reign of the 11th Chos rgyal Maharaja Sir Bkra shis rnam rgyal (1893–1963) KCSI., KCIE of Sikkim', see 'Mdo smad rgyal rong gter ston 'gro 'dul rdo rje mchog dang Mdo khams tre hor brag mgo mdo mang gter ston bde chen rdo rje gling pa rnam gnyis sbas yul 'bras mo ljongs su zhabs kyis bcags tshul skor rags tsam gleng ba' in Tashi Tsering and Chab ngom Tenpa Nyima (eds.), *Buddhist Himalaya: Studies in Religion, History and Culture, Volume III: The Tibetan Papers*, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok 2011, pp.129–154.

In the mid 2000s Dr John Ardussi of America and Dr Per K. Sorensen of Denmark contacted me both directly and indirectly regarding the whereabouts of the original Tibetan sources of the additional pages from the English translation by Kazi Dousamdub's 1908 *'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs*. Later I found out both of these scholars were studying (retranslating it into English?) the History at the behest of HM the Royal Grandmother, Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck.

Kazi Dousamdub's English translation of the 1908 *'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs* is frequently used by foreign and local scholars. In 1953 Joseph F. Rock (born Austrian, naturalised American) wrote 'Excerpts from a History of Sikkim',²⁸ based on the English translation of the 1908 *'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs* and then three years later the Polish scholar René von Nebesky–Wojkowitz also made use of the English translation in his famous book *Oracles and Demons of Tibet*.²⁹ In 1966, a Japanese scholar Chie Nakane,³⁰ in 1974, Lal Bahadur Basnet,³¹ and in 1979, P. N. Chopra³² all had access to Kazi Dousamdub's English translation of the 1908 *'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs*. More recently, in 1998 Dr Brigitte Steinmann of France made use of Kazi Dousamdub's English translation of the 1908 *'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs* (a copy obtained from Captain Yongda's family) and wrote an article entitled: 'the opening of sBas Yul 'Bras mo gshongs according to the Chronicle of the Rulers of Sikkim.'³³

Since 2000, more and more western scholars and students have used and still continue to use Kazi Dousamdub's English translation: Dr Anna Balikci–

28 Revue Internationale d'ethnologie et de linguistique (Fribourg), *Anthropos*: 1953, XLVIII, pp.925–948.

29 *Oracles and Demons of Tibet. The Cult and Iconography of the Tibetan Protective Deities*, The Hague: Mouton, 1956, p.218; René von Nebesky–Wojkowitz, *Where the Gods are Mountains: Three years among the people of the Himalayas*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1956, p.118.

30 'A Plural Society in Sikkim, A Study of the Interrelations of Lepchas, Bhotias and Nepalīs' *Caste and Kin in India, Nepal and Ceylon*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1966, pp.215, 263.

31 *Sikkim, A Short Political History*, S. Chand & Co. (Pvt) Ltd, New Delhi, 1974, p.210.

32 *Sikkim*, S. Chand & Co. (Pvt) Ltd, New Delhi, 1979, p.98.

33 A. McKay (ed.) *Pilgrimage in Tibet*, Curzon Press, Surrey, pp.117–142.

Denjongpa,³⁴ Saul Mullard,³⁵ Heleen Plaisier,³⁶ Dr Mélanie Vandenhelsken,³⁷ Dr Alex McKay,³⁸ Jackie Hiltz,³⁹ R. Moktan,⁴⁰ Sophie Bourdet–Sabatier,⁴¹ Dr R.K. Sprigg,⁴² Alice Travers,⁴³ Dr John A. Ardussi,⁴⁴ Prof. Elliot Sperling,⁴⁵

- 34 'Kangchen dzo nga: Secular and Buddhist perceptions of the mountain deity of Sikkim among Lhopos', *BT*, NIT, Gangtok, November 2002, p.36; Anna Balikci–Denjongpa, *Buddhism and Shamanism in Village Sikkim*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis in Social Anthropology. London: School of Oriental and African Studies 2002 p.352. (published as Anna Balikci, *Lamas, Shamans and Ancestors: Village Religion in Sikkim*, 2008, Brill: Leiden).
- 35 'Brag dkar bkra shis sdings kyi sku'bum: The text, the author, the Stupa and its importance in the formation of religious polities in Sikkim', *BT*, NIT, Gangtok, May 2003, Volume 39, No.1., p.24.
- 36 *Catalogue of Lepcha Manuscripts in the Van Manen Collection*, Leiden, Kern Institute, 2003, p.252.
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- 41 'The Dzumsa of Lachen: An example of a Sikkimese Political Institution', *BT*, NIT, Gangtok, May 2004, Volume 40, No. 1., p.104.
- 42 'An appeal to Captain Lloyd by Kazi Gorok, of Ilam (1828)', *Sikkim: Darjeeling Compendium of Documents*, Compiled & Edited: R. Moktan, Kalimpong, 2004, p.226. There may be other local and western scholars who have worked with Kazi Dousamdub's translation in relation to Lepcha studies, but as I am not a Lepcha studies student, I do not have a bibliography for this. I am merely an infrequent student of Sikkim History, therefore there are likely to be other references to Kazi Dousamdub's translation within other articles and publications that I have missed, particularly in languages other than English and in disciplines other than History.
- 43 'Women in the Diplomatic Game: Preliminary notes on the Matrimonial link of the Sikkim Royal Family with Tibet (13th–20th century)', *BT*, NIT, Gangtok, 2006, Volume 42, No. 1 & 2., p.127.
- 44 'Sikkim and Bhutan in the Crosscurrents of Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Tibetan History', Anna Balikci-Denjongpa, Alex McKay (eds.), *Buddhist Himalaya: Studies in Religion, History and Culture, Volume II: The Sikkim Papers*, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok, 2011, pp.41-42.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p.43.



Pema Wangchuk Dorjee,⁴⁶ Sonam B. Wangyal,⁴⁷ John Bray⁴⁸ and Dr Tirtha Prasad Mishra⁴⁹, all of whom have worked on a wide array of topics concerning the culture and history of Sikkim.

In 2009, Saul Mullard of England (Oxford University) submitted his Ph.D. thesis, “Opening the Hidden Land: State Formation and the Construction of Sikkimese History” and published by Brill (Leiden) in 2011 with the same title as his Ph.D. thesis. In it he used the Tsuklakhang Trust, Tsuklakhang, Gangtok edition and Kazi Dousamdup’s English translation amongst several other rare texts from Sikkim.

In November 2008 the present 13th Chogyal, Tenzin Wangchuk Namgyal passed his palace archives to the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology. These records complement the 1908 *’Bras ljongs rgyal rabs* as they were sourced for the writing of that History. The catalogue of the palace archive has subsequently been published by Saul Mallard and Hissey Wongchuk in 2010.⁵⁰ Now we have access to the English and Tibetan *’Bras ljongs rgyal rabs*, the palace archive and other historical documents. There are many students, researchers and scholars now focussing their work on Sikkim and with the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology in place the future for Sikkimese studies looks bright.

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Chogyal Thutob Namgyal KCIE
27th January 1912, Th. Paar Photographer, Darjeeling
Charles Bell collection, 50.31.135
Courtesy of National Museums Liverpool







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Queen of Sikkim

Maharani of Sikkim, Yeshe Dolma
c.1900, John Claude White collection, possibly by Johnson and Hoffmann
Charles Bell Album, 50.31.149
National Museums Liverpool





Group at Hastings House, Calcutta, 1906

Back Row: Bhutan Soldier, Captain Henry Hyslop, Rai Bahadur Kazi Ugyen Dorji, Rai Sahib Lobzang Chhoden, Jerung Dewan, Burmiak Kazi Tenzin Wangyal, Bhutan Soldier, Sikkim Soldier.

Front Row: D.E. Holland, Sir Ugyen Wangchuk, K.C.I.E., J. Claude White, C.I.E., H.H. the Maharaja Thutob Namgyal of Sikkim, H.H. the Maharani Yeshe Dolma of Sikkim.

Photograph after *In the Shadows of the Himalayas* by Kurt Meyer and Pamela Deuel Meyer, Mapin Publishing, Ahmedabad, 2005, p.14.





མཚན་མཛུགས་ཀྱི་ལྷན་ཚོགས་ཀྱི་འཕྲོད་འཇུག་གི་ཁུངས་ལྟེང་དུ་མཚན་མཛུགས་ཀྱི་ལྷན་ཚོགས་ཀྱི་འཕྲོད་འཇུག་གི་ཁུངས་ལྟེང་དུ་

གསུམ་ རྒྱ་གར་གྱི་ལྷན་ཚོགས་ཀྱི་འཕྲོད་འཇུག་གི་ཁུངས་ལྟེང་དུ་མཚན་མཛུགས་ཀྱི་ལྷན་ཚོགས་ཀྱི་འཕྲོད་འཇུག་གི་ཁུངས་ལྟེང་དུ་

