INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Tsaparang has turned into a major tourist hub that attracts not only numerous visitors from the West but also a rapidly increasing number of Chinese parties. With its art-historical treasures, its formidable past and its spectacular location amidst eroded sandstone cliffs, the appeal that the place exerts on modern-day travellers is hardly surprising, though. Moreover, the construction and constant

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1 For the many different spellings attested in primary and secondary sources, see Aschoff 1989: 38, n. 31. Here, I adopt the variant which is most common in contemporary Western publications and which was also used by Hedin (1912, 1922), Young (1919) and Tucci (1936). Recent Tibetan authors seem to prefer the spelling Rtsa rang; cf., e.g., Chos dbyings rdo rje 1996: 81, Tshe ring rgyal po 2006: 194 and Chos ’phel 2008: 88. In the most comprehensive map of Tibet with toponyms in Tibetan script (Bod rang skyong ljongs srid ’dzin sa khul gyi sa bkra 1994) the name of the place is given as Rtsa hreng.
upgrading of the road links between Central and Western Tibet have made Tsaparang increasingly accessible over the years, and thus the hardship and travail that earlier visitors had to incur are now mostly a thing of the past.

As is well known, the first Westerners to reach Tsaparang were the Portuguese missionaries António de Andrade and Manuel Marques in 1624. Andrade’s account of their arduous journey was published only two years later, but regrettably it provides hardly any in-

2 For the various translations of the rare Portuguese original (Andrade 1626), see Aschoff 1989: 8 and 169f.